



UFM

UNIVERSIDAD FRANCISCO MARROQUÍN

ita

Impulso al Talento Académico

P R O F I L E

Evelyn's Story

What If a Hospital Was Your Classroom?



Evelyn grew up in a small town nestled in Guatemala's western highlands. The lives of Evelyn and her family changed radically when, at the age of three, she was diagnosed with leukemia. She recalls that much of her early education took place in a hospital bed.

"One year, I was in the hospital for five months. . . . My teachers came to give me my lessons bedside, and my classmates brought me school supplies and letters of encouragement."

Evelyn attended a private school with a scholarship; this advantage was not available to most of her childhood friends. Her scholarship only covered the cost of tuition, however, and Evelyn's family, strapped with hospital bills, relied on the donations of local nuns for books and school supplies.

When Evelyn turned fourteen, she entered what she describes as the most difficult phase of her life. Prior to this, her parents had concealed the nature of her illness from her, believing it might destroy her spirit.

"When I was little, I wrote letters to my parents, telling them that everything would be all right. Once I became aware that I had leukemia, and realized how much my treatment cost, I worried about whether I should drop out of school to help support my family."

Evelyn's parents encouraged her to stay in school and she graduated from high school with the highest academic distinctions. With her awards came information on universities and scholarships, one of which was the ITA scholarship.

Applying for the ITA Scholarship

Evelyn took a bus to Guatemala City to visit UFM only to discover that the admissions exams were just three days away. Her mother borrowed money to pay for the test fees and another bus trip to Guatemala City. After passing the exams and undergoing several rounds of interviews, Evelyn was one of five students awarded a full ITA scholarship.

“I will always remember what the ITA committee told me: They said that the decision to grant me the scholarship was not just based on my financial need, but because they saw something more in me.”

Studying at UFM

At first, her transition to the university was difficult. The other UFM students spoke two or three languages, and were often familiar with class material that Evelyn was encountering for the first time. She also had to bridge a wide social divide with her classmates.

“For them, buying a blouse was like buying candy. For me, buying a blouse meant there was less money for my family for basic needs.”

Nonetheless, she feels that the ITA students also brought something important to the UFM community, and that her wealthier classmates also appreciated their contributions.

“ITA students have a sense of the bigger picture in the country. They understand that an individual who is able to achieve something has an obligation to multiply the effect.”



Postgraduation Career

Evelyn began to volunteer for Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) during her last three years at UFM. SIFE, now known as Enactus, is an international organization that brings together the CEOs of Guatemala’s most successful businesses with students from eight local universities. Together, they work to develop business ideas that benefit local communities.

After graduating, Evelyn applied for the position of country coordinator for the Guatemalan division of Enactus. It was an ambitious aspiration for a twenty-two-year-old. Enactus offered

her a six-month trial period in a position with less responsibility that gave her the opportunity to prove her worth. Three months later, Evelyn was promoted to the position she had hoped for.

“Today, I have the opportunity to express my opinion to a CEO, even if I believe his idea is wrong. In the same way, I offer my experience to university students, but accept the legitimacy of their own ideas.”

Evelyn estimates that in 2012 more than twenty-five thousand Guatemalans benefitted from Enactus projects. She refers to the Carlos Jordán Library, in the forest-covered department of Petén, as a case in point. For this project, UFM students gathered books and magazines from the community and spent their free time sorting and classifying the donated materials. The municipal government provided the physical space, and the library is staffed seven days a week by volunteers from the local community.

“Even now, if the library isn’t open just one day, one of the former UFM students that worked on the project will receive a call from someone in the community. That’s how we know that our project is successful and that it is an important resource for the local population.”

Evelyn returns home frequently. There, her neighbors still refer to her by her childhood nickname, “La Chinita.” She works on committees and participates in local efforts driven by the young people there. She is aware that her unique academic success has made her a role model in her town; in fact, the local public radio station has interviewed her twice about her education and work experience.

“If a neighbor has a son or daughter who wants to attend a university, they will ask my parents, ‘When is Evelyn coming to town? We want to ask her some questions.’ I am still the same person, but now I have experience I can share with my community.”
