

PERSEVERANCE IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Many friends, family and sometimes complete strangers suggested on several occasions that I should write my story. My story of achieving my professional goals, my story of perseverance, that can also be called stubbornness and my story of dedication in everything I do. So here I am trying to summarize the last 15 years of my life.

My parent's were born in Venezuela in a small town called San Cristobal. They met in medical school and got married when they graduated. My younger sister, Karelyn, and I were born in a home dedicated to teach us hard work, honesty and perseverance. My parents showed us from day one, their love and dedication to their medical careers, to the community and to their daughters.

Early in my high school years I knew I wanted to follow my parent's steps and work in the medical field. However before deciding what I wanted to study, the opportunity to complete an exchange year in the United States came along. I had applied to the Rotary exchange program and was selected to go to Ravenna, Ohio. This experience was one of the most electrifying, scariest and rewarding experiences I had in my life. It taught me that once you make a decision and commit to it you can't go back, it taught me how to be strong while being away from family and friends, how to be appreciative of my home country, how to understand other cultures, how to be independent and of course how to speak English.

I returned home after a year and started my dental schooling at Universidad de los Andes in Merida, Venezuela. During my first year I fell in love with Dentistry and met wonderful friends from all over Venezuela. My first two years were challenging not only because there was a lot of studying and very little practicing of dentistry but also because of university strikes which obligated the dental school to close for extended periods of time. The eagerness of a young, enthusiastic student was being held back by all these circumstances. So I made the decision to transfer to a different dental school, in a different country.

I gathered all the information I needed from an international speaker that came to Merida from Bucaramanga-Colombia. Less than a year later I had to say good bye to good friends and family and headed to Bucaramanga to start my sixth semester of Dental school at Santo Tomas University. My decision was seen with hesitation by my family because of the perceived unrest in Colombia. Just as the rest of the world viewed it, my family used to see Colombia as a dangerous place. It didn't take long to appreciate the other side, the real Colombia, the hardworking, peaceful, friendly Colombia. I enjoyed finding the origins of my ancestors and reuniting with Colombian relatives. During the following three years I made wonderful friends, enjoyed vallenatos, understood a little bit more about Bolivar's dream of forming La Gran Colombia and found my passion for Pediatric Dentistry.

My first pediatric clinic

I sat there with a scared 3 year old patient. It was one of the most frustrating days for me in the clinic. I tried to get the patient anesthetized and among possibly many other rookie mistakes, I showed the needle to my patient and from there it went down hill. Thank you to Dra. Rodriguez for giving me the guidance to overcome this challenge and many more. Since that day I knew I wanted to be the best pediatric dentist ever. The next three years went by fast. I graduated from Santo Tomas University Dental School and had a long journey ahead of me with many dreams and expectations to conquer.

Within a few days of my dentistry graduation in 2004, I was on my way back to the United States with a good friend from my exchange year that later became my husband. At a young age I knew I could conquer anything, reach all my goals and naively thought "it can't be that hard". Soon, I found out that it was going to be very difficult, but I had already committed to my family, to myself and as I always say "once you make a decision you can't take it back" you have to give all you have.

I have never been too religious of a person but I believe now that I have had a guardian angel with me for the last seven years. Late in 2004, I found out that I didn't have to go back to dental school in the States in order to get my dental license so I applied to a general practice residency in Dayton, Ohio. I was selected to be a resident for one year, during this time I gained experience in general dentistry and learned the steps I would need to take to be able to practice as a dentist in the U.S. Thanks to my peer residents and friends who helped guide me through the different dental tests!

After one year of residency at Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton-Ohio, two years of General Practice Dentistry at The Ohio State University in Columbus-Ohio and after passing two written tests (National Dental Boards Part I and Part II) and the practice Patient-Mannequin test, the North East Regional Board (NERB), I obtained my Ohio Dental License in September of 2008.

I can't believe it only took me three minutes to type the last paragraph, it seems like it was a straight shot. However, these four years were long, stressful and frustrating. I was anxious with not knowing if I was ever going to make it but also inspired as I was able to pass one test (Part I), then another. It gave me strength to take the next one and then the next one. I knew I could not give up, I needed to keep trying and achieve every goal I had set for myself.

One piece of advice I can give is if you are looking to specialize in the United States, study as hard as possible and obtained good grades on your Boards Parts I and II. These two tests would play a major role not only in getting into a specialization program but also will determine the quality of program you get into.

During these years of studying and doing residencies, I had the opportunity to meet wonderful people that encouraged me and cheered me up during my days of disbelief. My friends, my family, and my wonderful husband were/are always on my side. One more inspiration was the many international dentists that had come to the United States that were in the same situation as I, a little further ahead in the process or had already achieved their dental professional goal to practice dentistry in this country. All of them were a great help.

After all these years, I thought I was done but I continue to have this passion for working with the kids. I knew my ultimate goal had always been to be a pediatric dentist. I continued to apply to pediatric programs; in the meantime I did two years of pediatric dentistry fellowship at The Ohio State University, which did nothing but increased my desire to work with children. The amazing pediatric dentistry professors, Dr. Kumar, Dr. Thikurissy, Dr. Cassamassimo and Dr. McTigue reminded me of the valuable lessons I learned with Dra. Rodriguez in Colombia. One quote from Dr. Kumar I will never forget "*It is all about the kids*" has been my and will be my work philosophy as a pediatric dentist.

As stubborn as I am, after 6 years of applying for a pediatric dental specialization I was accepted into the Lutheran Medical Center Pediatric Dental Residency in Massachusetts. I will be done next year June, 2012! With struggles and a lot of sacrifices I will be done with my studies for a while. Finally after achieving most of my professional goals I will be able to think about starting a family, enjoying life and hopefully sit back and relax a little; however I know I will find some other goal to conquer...

I wish I could tell what to do every step of the way. Unfortunately, every situation plays out differently for everyone. I have friends that had to go back to dental school for two years, others were accepted directly into the specialization they wanted without going back to dental school and so on...

One thing I can tell all, if you really want something keep trying, be perseverant, find the strength, the inspiration, the dreams in you and also the psychological support from your family and friends. I could never have achieved my dreams if it were not for them. There were countless days when I wanted to go home, to be with my family, eat some of Mom's cooking, to be with old friends, have a couple drinks and listen to my favorite music (merengue, salsa). Those are the hard days... and I continue to have days like this, however, my final year of Pediatric Residency is upon me. I can foresee my goal and this helps ease these struggles.

Lastly don't get discouraged when things don't always work out, I have found that when one door closes, another door opens! Work hard and do the right thing always and remember perseverance is the key to success...

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These links may be helpful:

North East Regional Board Website: <http://www.nerb.org/b/nerbb.html>

National Board Dental Examinations: <http://www.ada.org/110.aspx>

American Dental Education Association: http://www.adea.org/DENTAL_EDUCATION_PATHWAYS/PASS/Pages/default.aspx