



Barriers & Possibilities

Julieta Langarica sets
her sights on a Ph.D.
accounting degree

By Donna Pineseault



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN LEWIS





Julieta

Langarica has been looking forward to May 2010 for some time now. That's when she'll graduate with a master's degree in accounting from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

But Langarica doesn't plan to stop there. Her goals include passing the CPA Exam and landing a full-time accounting job. Ultimately, she hopes to add either a Ph.D. in accounting or J.D. designation to her resume.

However, reaching such heights wasn't easy.

In 1993, just before Langarica's 13th birthday, she moved from Mexico to Milwaukee. After arriving, she faced her first and biggest barrier: the English language.

"At that age, I was embarrassed about a lot of things, especially about my accent and not being able to speak English," she said.

Langarica studied English as a Second Language at a south side Milwaukee middle school, but wasn't really challenged to learn the language well because most of her teachers and friends spoke Spanish. Later, she enrolled at South Division High School in Milwaukee where she took a variety of courses. But nearly every school and social activity involved speaking Spanish.

"I think that was a big mistake," she said. "The bilingual system doesn't give us enough exposure; it keeps us behind."

That fact became clear when Julieta transferred to St. Joan Antida High School in Milwaukee where everyone was expected to participate in English.

"(At St. Joan Antida), my GPA dropped from 3.5 to 1-point something," she said. "It's not that I was studying any less, it's just that I had to learn English a few years after I got to the U.S. instead of right from the beginning."

While at St. Joan Antida, Langarica worked half days at an insurance company as part of a co-op program. An agent there noticed that Julieta needed help with English and paired her with a tutor, Mary Johnson.

"I'm amazed at what Julieta is able to accomplish," Johnson said. "She is a very special young woman and, as a tutor, it's been really wonderful to have a student who turns out to also be a friend."

Langarica later transferred to Pulaski High School where she met the guy she would marry right after graduation. Their relationship boosted her English skills dramatically, which in turn strengthened her determination to enroll in college.

"What helped me most was that he didn't speak any Spanish so I practiced English more," she said. "I always wanted to go to college, but since we were both very young, we both had to work full time. After we married, I took one class per semester at Milwaukee Area Technical College, then (I) started an English major at UWM. My dream was to go to law school and become a judge one day."

Langarica dropped out of school for a year when the couple's son was born in 2005. The marriage also ended in 2005, but her dream of college survived with some adjustments.

"I wondered what I would do with an English major if I couldn't go to law school, so I decided to study something more practical," she said. "I love numbers; I love math. So I took finance and found I love finance too."

An accounting professor sparked Langarica's interest in accounting, and since a double major required only four additional classes, she decided to go for it.

"I realized I liked accounting a lot, and that getting a CPA would give me lots of credentials that would be beneficial," she said.

Although Langarica had learned English and selected a career, she still had to find time for other responsibilities. In addition to being a single parent of a 5-year-old son, she typically takes four graduate-level classes, works part-time and earns additional money tutoring other students.

Langarica appreciates help from her mother and sisters but admits she doesn't have much of a social life. Instead, she makes sure her son can participate in activities she missed, like sports, swimming or learning a musical instrument. She serves on finance committees where he takes lessons or goes to school.

"I want him to see me involved," she said. "When he grows older, becomes a teenager, he knows that I will be around too."

A 2009 WICPA scholarship winner, Langarica is also a member of the WICPA Young Professional Committee. She represents WICPA by doing presentations at area high schools, encouraging students not to let barriers get in the way of their dreams.

"There have been a lot of people who have made a difference in my life," she said. "When I was facing all the challenges, they had hope in me that I couldn't even see in myself."



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