

My Life: A Total Certainty

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BEGIN THE STORY ABOUT HOW I FOUND my life purpose...!

I wasn't sure if I should share the story of my professional life. I didn't know if I could tell my story in such a small space, because my story has been long, full and deep. I am ready here to bring back those experiences which show who I am.

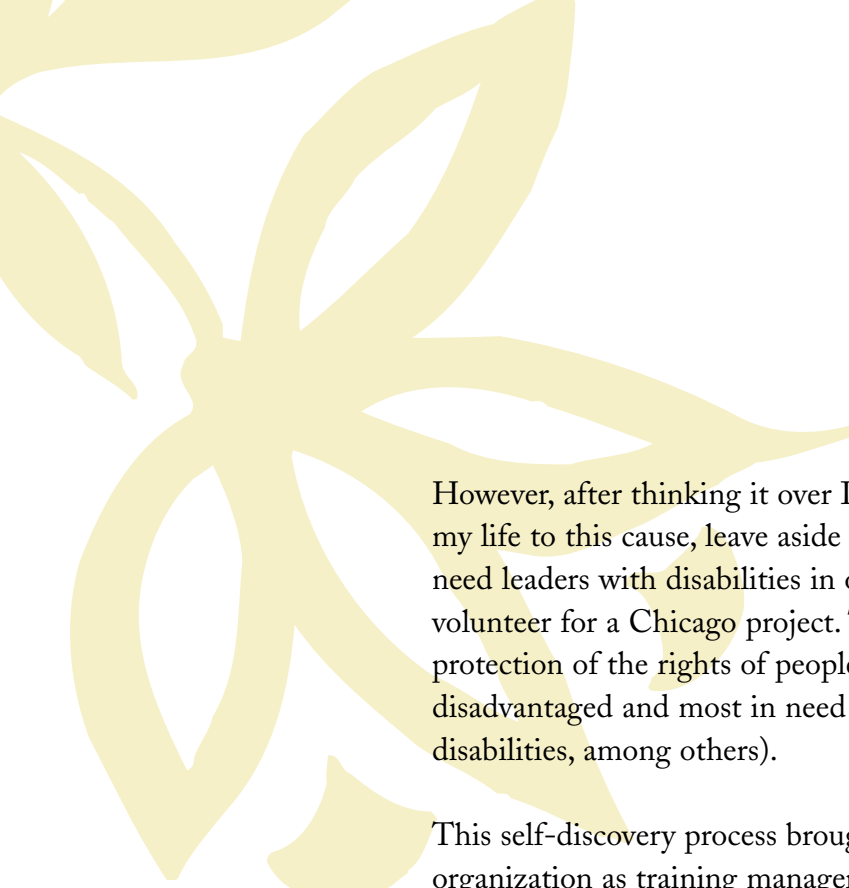
I have always known that I was born with the purpose of protecting our rights as human beings and teaching those who don't understand it, that we, the disabled, are human beings just like everyone else, who sometimes, have to do things differently.

I would like to share with you how I committed myself and followed a difficult but wonderful path. I am that little girl who left her country to settle in the United States, without her family, in order to make the most of the wide range of opportunities provided by this country.

I am a Latin woman with disabilities who belongs to a group of people growing at an exceptional rate in this country. I firmly believe in my community and I want all for all us to have the same rights and accomplishments as the rest of society.

This path has not been an easy one. Why? Because, since I was a little girl and I became conscious of my physical disability, I wanted everyone else to see me as a complete person. I thought that if I worked in this field, people would think of my disability first, making it more obvious.

I asked myself many questions, and came to realize that I had preconceived opinions and that I was concerned about "what people would say," and above all, about attracting more attention towards my disability, something I have always tried to avoid.



However, after thinking it over I came to the conclusion that I was going to devote my life to this cause, leave aside my preconceived ideas and focus on the fact that we need leaders with disabilities in our community. I started working in this field as a volunteer for a Chicago project. There, I learned about my passion: to work for the protection of the rights of people with disabilities, particularly for the most disadvantaged and most in need (Latino, ethnic, cultural minorities, adults with disabilities, among others).

This self-discovery process brought about a big change in me. I worked for a small organization as training manager, which defined my calling in life and my professional future. I became acquainted with the needs of children and adults with disabilities, whose families came mainly from Mexico and Puerto Rico. I learned about the huge cultural and language barriers affecting our community, where people want to have access to an adequate education and services that help people with disabilities reach the same level as people without them.

In light of all that, I felt I had a big challenge ahead of me: to try to change society in order to understand a disability as something that should not limit people's lives, but facilitate their full integration without differences.

During the next chapter of my life, I was able to learn a little more about intellectual and developmental disabilities. Because of this work, and keeping in mind one of the conversations I once had with Blanca Isabel, my mom; I realized that life is a continuous cycle. From my mom, I learned many things, such as the importance of fostering independence, self-esteem and working together with their parents or relatives. Years later, I worked mostly with parents of children and youth with disabilities, counseling them on how to defend their rights, coordinating workshops related to areas of inquiry such as legislation and special education.

Thus, I went through the different stages, many institutions and experiences which taught me the importance of acceptance, the struggle for equality, and how we can all do our share in order to achieve a total change of attitude towards those with disabilities.