



“WHY WE WALK STORIES”

Inspirational stories about domestic violence survivors and their tales of success

ALICIA VARGAS



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Courtesy of The Miami Herald, Wish Book

Over the scent of sautéed onions and bubbling black beans on the stove top, Alicia Vargas, 31, listens to her 10-year-old daughter list the things she'd like to be when she grows up. “A veterinarian, a dancer, a singer . . . that’s all I can think of for now,” Luz says. Vargas assures the fifth-grader that she can be anything she puts her mind to.

“She’s like an adult,” Vargas explains. “She had to grow up real fast.” It was Luz who had to run out of the house for help when her father beat her mother. It’s Luz who serves breakfast or afternoon snacks to her three younger brothers. It’s in Luz that Vargas sees bits of herself as a child, only with the promise of a better future. “I may not have much, but for my children I want the world,” Vargas says as she stirs the black beans.

Twice a day Vargas cooks up typical Mexican meals from her Oakland Park home and sells them to neighbors, friends and local workers as a way to stay financially afloat. After finally fleeing her abusive ex-husband, Vargas tries to make ends meet by hawking homemade breakfast burritos in the morning, plates of rice and beans at night, and taking special orders for her signature tamales. She also works side jobs cleaning houses.

The financial burden of raising four children fell on Vargas after her husband was deported to Mexico on charges of domestic violence and battery. "He would find the cell phones I had hidden to call the police and smash them on the floor," Vargas recalled. "He would hit me so hard sometimes, that my blood would stain the walls and furniture."

This holiday season [2009], Vargas hopes for items that can help with her fledgling business and also bring some happiness to her children. She'd like a microwave, pots, pans and cooking utensils to replace the worn-out few she uses twice a day, and toys for her children. For her first-born and only daughter, Luz, she hopes for a computer to help her get ahead in school.

"Alicia has been working hard cooking meals and going out with her kids to sell them," wrote Luz Ramirez, Vargas' case worker at the Broward-based Women In Distress, which nominated Vargas for The Miami Herald's Wish Book series. Vargas says for now, side jobs and cooking will have to do, because if she were to take a job elsewhere she's not sure she could afford to put Jose, 6, Henry, 2, and Diego, 4, in day-care while she worked.

Still, selling as a means of survival is not uncommon for Vargas. As a child growing up in a tiny town of Mexico's Guanajuato region, she often sold homemade candy to help her family after her father died. When her ex-husband would disappear for weeks during drunken binges, she would sell some of her clothes to help buy food. "I always leave the door with the mentality that I have to make sure my kids have what they need," Vargas said. "I may not be able to give them all the material things they would like," Vargas said. "But I can give them the encouragement and the example to work hard, to use their education as a way to a better life. It's all a mother can do, hope that their kids have more than they ever had."

MONISE CHERFRERE



Dear Supporter,

I AM LUCKY TO BE ALIVE. I arrived at Women In Distress on December 2008 battered, bruised and afraid. I was facing a spiritual and physical battle. I knew to pray in wait for God to heal me, but I also needed help and a place where I could gain some stability in my life. This is my story.

When I decided to increase our income by going back to school and picking up a trade, I started to see another side of my husband of 8 years. He became a sexual predator and threatened to burn the house down with me in it. I started speaking to family and friends and discovered he had a history of domestic violence and had even possibly killed people. I filed a restraining order, left the house and avoided all his attempts to contact me.

On October 13, 2008 he had been watching me and crashed his truck into mine. I rushed out of the car and ran for help but was rejected by a witness who was also scared for his life. My ex-husband then stabbed me 19 times in front of my 11 year-old daughter and also punched her a couple of times. He left to get a machete to attack me again but another witness ordered him to stop. He would have killed me otherwise.

I spent almost a week in ICU and two days in a coma. It was then that I got referred to WID. At WID I was able to learn about many forms of abuse, where to get help and, most importantly, how to start over. I gained the courage to tell my story and determination to get back power over my life. I truly believe that I survived because I have a purpose to make a difference.

When God gives me my financial breakthrough I promise to donate to Women in Distress to promote awareness and help other women before it is too late. We can all make a difference for these women by donating to Women In Distress.

Sincerely, Monies

YOUTH AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE GROUP



Being four teenage girls in high school, many don't think of how much we can accomplish, but thanks to Women In Distress, we have been able to prove how much we can! The SAFEWALK-RUN 5K is a great way to form a strong group that delivers a powerful message: STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. We walk together with our friends and family because we know that it helps others, we know that it makes a difference, and we know that we are making a change. For years to come we will keep participating in the SAFEWALK-RUN 5K because not only does it help Domestic Violence Victims, but it helps us spread awareness!