

Carolina

After leaving a shelter for victims of domestic abuse, Carolina found support from friends and community members. They provided a place to stay for Carolina and her baby. They also assisted her in starting a business and establishing residency in South Carolina. "They saw the medical examination records that were done after a month and a half that showed that I still had bruises on my ribs. They had pity for me. God touched their hearts, and they paid for my residence. I kept the residence for five years and after five years, I decided to take the citizenship test." Carolina was born in Mendoza, Argentina. She was thirty-five years old at the time of this interview.

C: How did I stand up? With the help of humanitarian people, two good friends who when I first came out with my baby, Abigail who was six or seven months old, in my arms—said to me, "Do not hesitate to come home." They offered a room for me and for Abigail.

ML: Are your friends from Argentina?

C: They were friends from Argentina. We attended college together the three of us. They made room for me. They opened their doors. They backed me. They even saw me crying at night, but then my good friend Carina told me, "Mommy, one day, the baby will stop breastfeeding, so you have to pull yourself together," and "I know that you are depressed and that many things have happened to you in a short time, but you have to move on." Even when I felt I had no strength, I got a job cleaning at Saint Francis at night and then over time, Javier, Carina's cousin, introduced me to his employer's wife and I started to clean her house.

And I remember that she was wary because of her experience with another girl that had treated her badly or had not been very loyal to her job. So she put me to the test for a year. I remember that after a year she saw that I really wanted the money and that I wanted to work and go home and make a living like everyone else.

She shared my name with other people and I remember that within the first week that she gave my name away, I got three new clients in a week. And I said, "If this is how it is now, how will it be later?" Little by little, I did it myself, I got more houses to clean and today, this is my business. I'm self-employed and I have a business, a small housekeeping business that I have had since that time I'm talking about, when Abigail was a baby, maybe 2005.

ML: Has this been your livelihood, have you worked independently all this time?

C: Yes, thank God, and the only thing I did—if you will, humbly speaking—was to do things the right way. It was because I understood and respected her decision not to recommend me to other people at first, that once she opened the doors, customers started flowing from wherever I wanted. I did not call them, they had my number.

And after a while, I remember that I left the night job because there were too many houses and it was not worth leaving my daughter alone for so long because she was little. I remember that I stopped taking her to a babysitter and, since I was financially able, put Abigail in a daycare so that she could socialize and deal with other children. She was little, about a year and four months at the time. She was little, but it was still hard for me.

The first week they told me, they were people of color and they told me, "She's going to cry, but she'll be fine." They were super motherly and they impressed me as very protective.

I cried the first week taking her to daycare; with her little hand she would say goodbye to me and I would go to work, but I was able to overcome the obstacles and move ahead, and today, after seven long years, I have my own business. Humbly I can say, I have my house, I have my car parked outside. I paid for it. It took me five years and I paid for it. I have gone back twice to Argentina, and I was able to get my residence thanks to donations from people with good hearts who understood that my only smart option was to stay with my little American girl here, and not return to Argentina.

ML: What do you mean by donations?

C: When I started all the papers for the process, I was not working; I was in very bad shape. I had just left My Sister's House and I remember that I immediately grabbed the phone book and the phone and started making calls. There were people who gave me suggestions and Saint Vincent de Paul was one of the associations that helped me pay for the papers, which cost just over one thousand three hundred dollars.

The Pauline Sisters donated, the Johns Island Sisters donated. I think there was another association—and there were two associations, that came and met me in person, and they fell in love with Abigail. They saw that what I was saying was true. I did not lie when I called them. They saw the papers that documented the abuse. They saw the reports. They saw the medical examination records that were done after a month and a half that showed that I still had bruises on my ribs. They had pity for me. God touched their hearts, and they paid for my residence. I kept the residence for five years and after five years, I decided to take the citizenship test.

Carolina, Interview by Marina López, May 2, 2012