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Mujeres en Red - Iglesia, San Juan

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PROLOGUE

The Mujeres en Red program was born as a gender-focused initiative by the company, as part of our commitment to integrate transparency and corporate governance with the social performance that Vicuña proposes. Through concrete actions, we seek to contribute to sustainably improving the quality of life of women in the Department of Iglesia, in the Province of San Juan, Argentina.

Inspired by other social investment programs, Mujeres en Red seeks to reduce the gender gap in women's economic participation and opportunity, which, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2023), is estimated to take 169 years to close under current conditions.

Through a partnership with the NGO "Criar, Comunidad de Emprendedoras" and its Entrepreneurship Training Program, we launched this proposal, which was later joined and nurtured by various professionals and specialists in gender issues in the province. Among them are Vicuña's Community Relations depart-

ment, Cinthya Barbara Montoro R., EfiSol Human Resources, chef Mauricio Savoca, Pablo Ariel Montemurro A. (training and development), and Lic. Valeria González.

With Mujeres en Red, we propose and facilitate a set of tools such as training, technical assistance, and financial support, aimed at strengthening leadership, learning, incorporating new knowledge and best practices in business management, financial inclusion, communication skills, and entrepreneurial marketing. The program provided an opportunity to boost the economic development of women-led ventures in Iglesia, producing multiplying impacts on the personal autonomy and dignity of the participants. However, the true essence and magic of the program are revealed when women take ownership of the proposal. With visible leadership, they have formed a social support network that makes them visible, gives them a voice, and allows them to be heard. In this sense, it is a platform for social and family recognition.

These qualitative impacts are most likely the greatest asset of this program.

Today, nearly 70 entrepreneurial women have more training and personal security, are proud to contribute to the family income, and are better able to provide educational opportunities for their children and grandchildren, as well as explore new opportunities for their own growth.

In its third year, Mujeres en Red in Iglesia is fulfilling its purpose of being an accelerator of change for a better quality of life for brave, creative, and resilient women in this corner of the province of San Juan. And along the way, we also learn and grow together.

WHO WE ARE

In a town in San Juan, very close to the Andes mountain range, live women of different ages, ways of thinking, and ideas. Despite their differences, they unknowingly share something in common: they all fight for their dreams. They say it was in March 2022 when a company called Josemaría identified the common factor that united them and invited them all to be part of a women's gathering

to be held in an old wagon.

On the day of the event, they gradually arrived at the venue with fears, uncertainties, and expectations. Through a series of dynamics and activities, they broke the chains that bound them to their fears and doubts. In a short time, they found themselves sharing different but very similar stories. They decided to reunite, and at each meeting, they began building a tower of Legos of different colors, assembled in a common project: to create a network of entre-

preneurial women who fight together for their dreams.

The path they embarked on is not easy; it is a significant challenge for all of them. Sometimes they will have to leave their children and their families, arrive home tired, and resolve differences within the group. However, in the network of women, they have found a place of support to progress, learn, and succeed in their endeavors. They know that each step taken will not be a false one because it will bring them closer to the satisfaction of achieving their goals, reaching the top, and living a life of fulfillment.

“The connection between women is an indestructible fabric that sustains the world.”

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

These women, who now live in the town of San Juan, are no longer the same; they found other ways to be reborn.



INTRODUCTION

Northwest of the city of San Juan, the Iglesia Valley invites us to lose ourselves in its nooks and discover a mountain landscape steeped in history. When you immerse yourself in its charms, you'll find all kinds of elements that will make you never want to leave. There are indigenous archaeological sites, an 18th-century Jesuit chapel, the San Guillermo Biosphere Reserve (the largest non-forested paradise in South America), healing hot springs, and the Cuesta del Viento dam, among other must-see attractions. However, there is something that sets it apart from other places in the world: the strength and constancy of its wind. For more than 300 days a year, it blows at over 20 knots and modifies the morphology of its landscape day after day, playing with the earth, as if it were a child. The Iglesia Valley wind is a wind that speaks, sometimes furiously, other times whispering, but always leaving its mark on the lives of the people who live there. Above all, the power of the wind has blended with the women of the department, with their dreams, longings, and silences. The women of Iglesia are women of the wind, who consistently navigate the

difficulties of their environment and shape their lives day after day, in pursuit of fulfilling their dreams.

In this book, we invite you to immerse yourself in the stories of brave and powerful women who believed in themselves and dared to challenge stereotypes, breaking barriers, transforming adversity through hard work and effort into opportunities to grow, learn, and overcome any obstacle to improve not only their lives but also those of their loved ones.

The stories have one thing in common: their protagonists had happy childhoods and, despite their material shortcomings, grew up in loving families who knew how to instill in them a love for their land, for education, and for honest work.

They are inspiring women, building together an empowered, strong, and united community, achieving goals with dedication and tireless effort. They are an example of how hard work and passion can transform dreams into concrete realities. Every step they take, every challenge they face, is a manifestation of their unwavering will, leaving

an indelible mark on their community and lighting the way for future generations with their perseverance.

They are women who learned to express themselves and listen to the needs of their community, who decided to acquire new skills, who built a solid network to feel supported and inspired along their path, and who have achieved a balance between their work and personal lives, fulfilling their dreams without ever neglecting their families.

The women of the wind always find ways to be reborn. This book is one of them.

STORIES



ANGUALASTO

It's a corner of San Juan where its arid landscapes and starry sky transport you to an ancient time, while its artisans keep their ancestors' traditions alive. This place is known for its pottery workshops, where unique pieces are created using ancient techniques.

An interesting fact about Angualasto is its rich indigenous heritage, with several archaeological sites that reveal the presence of ancient Native American peoples.

RUDA HEMBRA

Iris Vega's Story

The venture: Ruda Hembra

My parents, José and Josefina, or Pepe and Pepa, as we all affectionately call them, were pioneers here in Angualasto. He is from San Juan, Jáchal. She is Italian and came to Argentina at age eight. When they met, they stayed together forever. They were both teachers in the town. Even our house, where I live today, served as a school for a time. They are now seventy-six and eighty years old, respectively.

Sometimes, what we so desperately seek is so close that we don't even realize it. It's not easy to change your life in midlife, but at just forty, I can say with satisfaction that I've achieved it. I returned to the sources, to my hometown, to pursue a creative, and sustainable agroecological project on my family's farm.

Before making this decision, I worked for a consulting firm in San Juan, where I spent the mornings and nights processing surveys. One day I said enough and returned to Angualasto.



My childhood home was unoccupied, and returning meant having a choice. I'm very grateful to have a place and a job to do. I live on the farm with Tita, my faithful dog, and Gatita, who is as affectionate as ever.

When I returned home, I decided to restore the farm, so I cultivated the plants agroecologically, which means giving each plant its time and care, pruning them carefully and without chemicals. The farm is an orchard, with a shade that seems like something from another planet in such a dry environment. The water comes from the spring and arrives through the irrigation ditch. In Angualasto, each producer has assigned irrigation shifts. On the farm, we only have two hours every two weeks. But since the soil is clayey, it retains plenty of water, and we're doing well. It looks dry, but if you dig a little hole, you'll find its damp underneath.

I began working with the 45 quince trees my father planted half a century ago, with which my mother made the most delicious sweet in the world.

Using the tried-and-tested family recipe, I started with the most traditional San Juan recipe: solid quince bread. Then I decided to diversify production, recruiting other women from the area. With Silvana, my twin sister, who is a winemaker, we bought grapes from the area and began to make vermouth, macerated with wormwood, lemon verbena, rue, and other local

herbs, and it turned out magnificent.

Vermouth is an aperitif made with white wine macerated with herbs. We use more than 20 herbs, all from the Andean foothills: wormwood primarily, but also chamomile, mint, lemon verbena, and rue.

My sister and I started thinking about how country life toughens women. Although the men are in charge of the farming work, you always have to be there with a strong temperament. Later, during the preparation, when we work with the girls, everything flows more relaxed; we chat, we hold each other back, we help each other. Girls with tough jobs, vermouth has rue in it... the name was a given.

We started our venture, Ruda Hembra, almost two years ago, and it has so much personality that it became the umbrella brand for our other products.

Everything we do is very artisanal, with great care. Always committed to diversifying, we will soon have our first vinified quince, a kind of cider. Plus, we have a top-quality wine and tons of plans for the future. It's a lot of work, but it's worth it.



“As entrepreneurs, we know that hard work and perseverance are our essential foundations, allowing us to turn every challenge into an opportunity and every aspiration into a concrete reality”.

Iris Vega

MOM, I WANT TO BE LIKE YOU

Soledad Díaz's Story

The venture: Los mestizos

I was born in Rodeo and grew up in Anguasto. My father worked in the Hydraulics Department. When he went to work, we stayed with my mother in our house, which they built with great sacrifice from adobe and rammed earth.

I didn't spend much time with my sisters because of the age difference. I spent more time with my brothers. Although I sometimes preferred to play alone or with some neighbors. I built a small house out of adobe to store my toys, gathered dirt, and made small meals out of mud and leaves.

My mother taught my siblings and me how to knead dough and cook so we could survive when we grew up.

I finished high school with great sacrifice, hitchhiking to get to Rodeo, where we lived in a shelter during the week.

My parents didn't have the money to pay for college. I was able to take a hotel management course in Mendoza, where I learned about

cooking and cleaning. I also met my husband, originally from Tucumán, the love of my life. He had also led a very demanding life.

At one point, the ATA company decided to call a group of people who had taken the hotel management course. They called me to work in Mar del Plata as a waitress. After a while, they called my boyfriend, who would later become my husband, and we decided to start a life together. Later, I became pregnant with my first child. It was quite a challenge because it hadn't been in our plans yet. However, his arrival was perfect for reestablishing ourselves in one place and having our own home. At twenty-four, we decided to come live in San Juan, where we rented a house. As time went by, and with great sacrifice, we were able to build our home, something we never imagined.

We started a business, baking cakes and offering food in general. People liked it and began asking us for more and more. It was then that they called me to join the kitchen at Rodeo Hospital.

Three years later, I found out I was pregnant again. I decided to resign to dedicate myself to my children, very happy. Later, Josemaría called me to take a course, where I learned a lot. They helped me put together a project, and I began to value our products and services. It was a great achievement for me.

My business is called "Los Mestizos" because her parents, my husband and I, are from different provinces, and my children, one was born in Mendoza and the other in San Juan.

It makes me happy to cook and know that people like and value my product.

This business isn't just mine; we're a team, my family.

My daughter tells me, "Mom, I want to be like you too," and that's my greatest achievement.



CHILDHOOD INFANCIA

Violeta Diaz's Story

The venture: La casa de Lucinda

During summer vacations, my mother sent me to the large house in my grandparents' killalles. In the mornings, I woke up to the early song of magpies. From my bed, I could smell the aroma of saffron and anise coming from the kitchen. My grandmother Lucinda cooked the most delicious pastries in the world in her clay oven, while my grandfather Salvador watched and made jokes to make us laugh from the early hours. When they were ready, before my grandmother could place the tray of pastries on the table, I would steal one from her. We would accompany breakfast with freshly milked milk from the cows they raised in their field. Those childhood days were full of good memories.

Nowadays, when I make pastry, I try to fill it with moments that made me happy, to convey the flavor of my childhood days at Lucinda's House.







BELLA VISTA

The harmony between man and nature is evident. This place is a paradise for the senses, where the aromas of the local flora and the songs of birds accompany every step of the way. Bella Vista is known for its nature trails and viewpoints, offering spectacular views of the mountainous landscape and opportunities for birdwatching.

DAILY BREAD BRINGS BACK SWEET MEMORIES

Carmen Mesina's Story

The venture: Dulce recuerdo

From a very young age, our parents taught my siblings and me to work to earn our daily bread. My father sowed a lot of crops on large farms, which the owners gave him to share. That's how we learned to plant beans, potatoes, corn, and lettuce. He made the furrows with a plow pulled by a horse or mule, and I trailed behind, scattering the seeds. When the plants grew, we weeded them, and then the harvest came. Afterward, we cleaned the lettuce and bean seeds to bag them and sell them. With the money we earned from the year's harvest, we bought enough merchandise to last a few months. My father went to the city to pick up the merchandise, and since there was no transportation at that time, he traveled by cart or wagon, pulled by horses or mules. So, the years passed.



Then I went to live in the mountains, to a place called Bauchazeta, where we began raising goats, sheep, and cows. We made cheese, quesillo, and goat butter, and sold it in town or traded it for merchandise.

Later, I got a contract at the local boarding school where my children attended. There, I cleaned and washed clothes for the children who were from different posts (Chita Post, Pismantita). There, with my coworker, Manolo, I learned to cook for many people, both children and teachers, who lived at the boarding school. From then until now, I have loved cooking. I do it with great passion, and wherever I'm called, I'll help.

What marked my life was the arrival of my twins. I didn't know there were two of them until they were born, so I only took clothes for one baby to the hospital and ended up with two.

When I returned home with the children, my family told me I wouldn't be able to raise them both and that I would have to give them up for adoption. I carried on, raising them as best I could, without looking back or listening to anyone. Today my children are grown, doing very well, and I am very happy with them and my eighteen grandchildren, who brighten my life when they visit.

Today I continue with my business, and thanks to the help of the Josemaría company, I am growing day by day with the sweet memory

my mother left when she taught me how to make the tablets I sell today.

"Dulce Recuerdo" is the name of my business, which stems precisely from the memory of a summer afternoon when my mother was preparing dough to make some delicious pastries. The aroma of cinnamon and anise enveloped me completely.

I watched her make the dough, how she heated the clay oven, and the ingredients she used, to learn from her, to be like her. That afternoon, once the pastries were baked, she invited me to help her for the first time with the sweet alcaiyota filling, while my older sister made the meringue by the light of the candle. That day was the first time I made a tablet, but not the last. That sweet memory of my childhood has remained in my heart, and I have been able to pass on the pastry tradition to my children, making and teaching them how to make them, because they have not only fed us, but, today, they have also become the economic support of our family.

At Dulce Recuerdo, we make tablets like Mom's, sweetly unforgettable.



THE RECIPE FOR ALL PROBLEMS IS ALWAYS WORK

Sabina Cabello's Story

The venture: Lavadero Bella Vista

As a child, I loved playing with my siblings, my cousins, visiting my grandparents, spending time in the countryside with the animals, but what I loved most was my grandparents telling me their stories. I always asked them, "Why?" "Why?" "Why?" And so, they would talk for hours, telling me stories about their childhood, the countryside, the village. Telling me about the wonderful life they had.

I loved helping my family and spending time with them. I also loved going to school, spending time with my classmates, studying, and keeping up with my homework.

When I was home, I helped my mother. The conversations we had shaped a part of my life. Understanding and listening to each other was a wonderful pleasure.



I also remember when it was time to play with my siblings and cousins—who hasn't? —it was spectacular, although sometimes we didn't understand each other or we got tired, and then we'd argue. We'd go home, and the next day we'd get back together as if nothing had happened.

My longed-for childhood, sometimes good, sometimes not, children who at times wanted to be grown up without realizing how beautiful that stage of our lives was. I have beautiful memories and others not so much, but being with my family was worth enjoying.

Growing up, I encountered life and its real difficulties. My biggest challenge was being a mother. When I had my son, we were both hospitalized. When I recovered, I spent day and night praying and fighting for his recovery. I was far from home, alone, and that made me stand on my own two feet. I learned a lot from people who were in the same situation as me—the struggle to keep their child safe. That time was crucial in strengthening my character and becoming the resilient and resilient woman I am.

Today, I am delighted to share my life with my son, take him to school, and watch him grow, and that is priceless. I want to be the best positive role model I can be.

That's why, when the pandemic began to complicate the family's finances, I proposed to my son's father that we start a new business: a

car, motorcycle, and bicycle wash in Bella Vista.

We started with cars from acquaintances, and through word of mouth, we grew until it became a significant source of income for the household.

Like any business, it has its ups and downs. However, the recipe for all problems is always hard work. That's what I learned from my mother, and to this day I continue to practice it in my life, seeking to be an example for my son as well.

Today, looking back, I recognize that every experience, every challenge, and every moment shared with my family has been fundamental in my life. From the laughter of childhood to the struggle to overcome adversity, everything has contributed to shaping me into the person I am. I am grateful for every lesson learned and for the love that has always been present, and I move forward with the firm conviction that, through hard work and resilience, I can build a bright future for my son, honoring my grandparents' heritage and the family legacy that has always inspired me.

MY CHILDREN ARE MY SWEETNESS

Vanesa Espejo's Story

The venture: Mis Dulzuras

I remember having a very beautiful childhood. Since I was very little, I've loved baking and cooking. I remember playing with my

cousins and an aunt, making them clay cakes and decorating them with quince and acacia flowers.

Now that I'm older, I still love baking and pastries. I have a business, Mis Dulzuras, named after my children. Here I make the famous pastries with dulce de leche and alcayota, croissants, homemade bread, and semitas with pork rinds. In addition to baking and pasties, I also make sweets and salsa.





"Being an entrepreneur is not an easy path; it involves working long hours, facing uncertainty, and overcoming numerous obstacles, but the satisfaction of seeing your dreams come true makes it all worthwhile".

Vanesa Espejo

MOM, LET'S MAKE TABLETS

Viviana Mondaca's Story

The venture: La casita del sabor

My childhood wasn't the best; it was very difficult. I didn't have time to play or spend time with my family.

My mom abandoned us one day, leaving us with my grandmother, who, unable to care for us, left me with a family to work. I was five years old. I lived with them until I was twelve, because my mom came to get me. For me, they were my family, so I suffered greatly when I had to leave them. My mom sent me to work for different families. Some employers sent me to school, and others didn't.

When I cooked, I forgot about everything bad.

I finished elementary school when I was older, when a teacher helped me.

When I was eighteen, my first daughter was born.

I hold my children dearly. There are those who tell me: Send those girls to work. I never

wanted to because I wouldn't want them to go through what I went through.

One of my daughters taught me how to make tablets and cakes.

At fifty years old, on a beautiful summer afternoon, we were at home with my daughter Vanesa and my grandchildren. "Mom, let's make tablets," she said. At first, I refused, but the aroma wafting from the kitchen called me to join them and wanted to know how to make them. She taught me all afternoon, and by nightfall, I had already made my first tablets.

Since that day, I bake tablets at home and sell them. They are my livelihood and my passion. I love my business, food, and sweets. Baking allows me to spend time with my children and grandchildren.

When I make pastry, I remember that it's never too late to learn and that our children always come to teach us. When my customers try a tablet from La Casita del Sabor, I would like them to feel the value of their childhood and the love I have for my children.

I love baking, and thanks to the encouragement and support of the Josemaría company and the network of entrepreneurial women, I started my food and sweets business.

What I enjoy most right now is spending time with my children and grandchildren. With them, I've recaptured a part of my childhood.





LAS FLORES

It welcomes you with its fertile fields and the hospitality of its inhabitants. The local flavors are a testament to the love of agriculture and tradition. Las Flores is famous for its fruit and vegetable production.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S TEACHINGS

Analía Espejo's Story

The venture: Doña Lucila

I was born in Tambillo, a small town in Bella Vista. I was raised by my grandmother, and from a very young age I was taught the craft of weaving because, "this wool thing is very beautiful," she would say. At home, we had to clean the wool and then go out to play. We had to help with the family's finances. My whole life was a job. When I was older, to earn my own money, I spun the wool with my grandmother, and she wove.

After I got married, I inherited the tools and the loom, which is over a hundred years old. It's very homemade, all made of common wood, but it's invaluable and today it supports our family.

At first, I started weaving alone, following my grandmother's advice, but one day my husband became unemployed. This led us to get closer and find a family passion. He is the one who today, along with my daughter, helps me weave, and together we formed our business, Doña Lucila, in honor of the grandmother who raised me and taught me this beautiful craft.

Despite life's ups and downs, I feel very happy about my childhood, about being able to maintain this tradition and make a living from it. Even more so about being able to share it with the people I love most. Furthermore, some time ago, after the approval of a national project, they recognized our work as a national master artisan with a scholarship to teach our craft. This shows me that we are on the right path and that my grandmother Lucila's teachings continue to reach more people. She would be proud of me and of where her precious craft has gone. After so many years, I can say that I am a persevering, hard-working, patient, collaborative, beautiful, and willing woman. Much of this is due to the legacy my grandmother left in me and in my work, a legacy I hope to share with future generations.





MY WORK WAS HIDDEN IN THE CORNER OF MY DREAMS

Estela Carbajal's Story

The venture: Cotillón y artesanías Rincón de Sueños

I was born in Mendoza. I had a happy childhood, spending time playing and doing fun things I loved, like skating, studying, and reading books. We lived in a neighborhood in Luján, where I had many friends. I remember the carnivals, chatting with the neighbors. My father passed away when I was six years old.

At that time, my mother started working, supported us, and instilled good values in us.

Unfortunately, during the 1985 earthquake, our house collapsed, so we had to leave it. My uncles and grandparents came to get us, and we lived for a while at my grandmother's house in San Juan. Then they offered my mother a job in the Iglesia department, and we moved again. Over time, my siblings and my mother returned to the city.



I didn't return because during that time I met my current husband. We decided to get married and live in this apartment, which I love and where my two children were born.

I studied industrial arts with the idea of teaching. However, I never found work in this field in Iglesia. I started making cake toppers for my children and some relatives, and then, since I realized people liked them, I started making them to sell. The truth is, I'm doing very well; I have many clients. I also work a lot with kindergartens, doing different projects for their end-of-year parties.

I also studied salt art, painting, and event decoration. Then I studied graphic design. I started making piñatas, party favors, and gift bags—all handmade, personalized, and designed by me from scratch. I also make printed cards and design logos for companies.

And, when I grew up, I started making crafts, something I love.

The Josemaría company really opened my mind, helped me think differently, and taught me many things, such as how to price my products. It also connected me with new people, entrepreneurs with diverse life stories, and helped me form alliances with other entrepreneurs, for which I am very grateful.





THE ART OF DECISION-MAKING

Laura Aciar Ruiz's Story

The venture: Atelier Las Flores

As a child, I greatly enjoyed the company of my paternal grandmother. At home, with great love and dedication, she taught me how to crochet small chains or cast on stitches. She couldn't stand me doing nothing, and that was

her way of keeping me busy.

I enjoyed being at her house; it was a celebration knowing that on Fridays I was going to her house, 20 km from the main city of San José de Jáchal.

With her, I learned, along with my sister, the art of weaving and also the process of making jam. I remember with a certain nostalgia when, with my siblings, we harvested the fruit that was later transformed into quince bread or jam; the enormous copper pots on the fire with long wooden spoons, working their magic.



I am convinced that the things that happen to us in life do not happen by chance.

Three moments marked my journey to where I am today: the first, when I started working at the restaurant located inside Bodega Escorihuela, Restaurant 1884, owned by Francis Mallman. At that time, I didn't realize the magnitude of the place where we were working. Over time, I realized he was a super-renowned chef not only provincially, but also nationally and internationally. He had many restaurants all over the place.

Those were wonderful times when we worked from dawn to dusk, so to speak, because we would arrive late, early in the morning, return to my house, while we showered, our uniforms were washed in the washing machine, we would hang them up, spin dry, pack our backpacks again, and then go back to the restaurant because we had another event. If we had to carry, run, and we did it with pleasure and satisfaction, not only because of the pay, but because we loved it.

The second moment is when I decided to leave Mendoza. I went to Uruguay to a restaurant owned by Francis, called Garzón. I stayed at an inn in Garzón, a small town near José Ignacio, and I went with the man who was the head chef at 1884 at the time. After the season, before returning, I stopped by Rio de Janeiro, where my brother lived, to take a vacation. That vaca-

tion turned into a year of experience working in the pastry shop he owned in Rio. It was beautiful, it was an art school where he had opened a cafe. I had breakfast with Christ the Redeemer in front of the windows, and I fought every day with the monkeys, who would climb down a cable to the window and steal my food. For a year, I had an experience that would mark my life. I lived on hills full of trees, in a jungle area, I made Brazilians love homemade bread, and I tasted some of the best coffee in the world.

The third moment is when I decided to come and live in Iglesia. I left my whole life in Mendoza, I dismantled the entire apartment because at the time I was living alone, and I came. I arrived at my parents' house looking above all for emotional and mental peace, because I wasn't well. Many years living at a frantic pace of work. I am a person who makes decisions and doesn't look back; I move forward. And so far, thank God, I haven't made a mistake.

My dad owns a campsite, so I started managing it, trying to keep it nice, and that's where I met the man who is now my husband and with whom I started my family here.

From the first day we arrived at our house in Las Fores, I said to myself, I want to open a coffee shop here.

Once I moved here, after some jobs in hospitality and tourism, I decided to leave my comfort zone and take on everything I'd learned in life. I created Atelier Las Flores, a café that welcomes its customers with love and offers them a moment of relaxation. An important part of my business is that I have experience in service, as a barista and pastry chef. There's also a corner where you can take home the products, I learned to make using the skills my grandmother taught me: weaving and jam-making. My husband was a very important part.

He helped me build it, he accompanied me throughout the entire process with patience and love, as well as with the faith he always had and still has in me. Then Josemaría appeared, women in the network appeared, training sessions appeared, the mining fair appeared, Soledad Méndez appeared in my life, and she is also an architect of my ability to move forward. The EfiSol girls appeared, and they helped me gain more confidence. There is a Laura before I came to Iglesia and a Laura now. A Laura who trusts what she does, who is more self-assured, who knows that what she does is good, because I began to discover many skills and attitudes within myself, qualities that had been closely guarded.



BEYOND THE TANGIBLE: A LEGACY OF FLAVORS AND COLORS

Iris Nancy Muñoz's Story

The venture: Arco Iris

During my childhood, I lived with my mother, my grandmother, and my siblings, sharing happy and not-so-happy moments. I also had many cousins with whom we shared many things, like going to school. As a child, I have my best memories with them. My mother was a beautiful, strong, and determined woman. She raised her six children and my grandmother, who was already elderly and blinded due to an accident. Juliana, my mother, always got up very early, especially at the time of year when we had



to go to school, because it was very, very far away: a two-hour walk, because there was no transportation. She worked hard, suffered, and made sure we lacked nothing, and, from a young age, she raised us to be honest and good people. My three brothers were older. Seeing our mother work and struggle so hard, they began working at an early age to help with the household finances, working in the fields, particularly, and doing other chores. I helped take care of my grandmother as much as I could,



combing her hair, and sleeping with her.

I remember that every evening she taught me to pray. We would go to a small grotto, under a carob tree, with an image of the Difunta Correa. I have my best memories with her. Although we lacked many material things, we were very happy. Unfortunately, one day, a very sad day for me, God took her to heaven, leaving me with a deep sorrow and absence that still moves me today. My consolation is that my grandmother watches over me and accompanies me from wherever she is. Shortly after her death, as the eldest of the sisters, I began working in family homes, eventually becoming the town's nanny, caring for thirty-three children.

I thank God for having been able to meet and care for all those little ones. I am also grateful to their parents for the trust they placed in me. A few years later, I met my life partner; we became a couple and had three children. Our family went through many beautiful moments, and there were also difficulties, but we always tried to move forward. Our children grew up, and we supported them through the different stages of their lives as best we could, because as parents, we have our ups and downs. We received the gift from God of our first granddaughter, Luna, who brought great joy to our lives; as did our second grandson, Valentino, who was born two years later. . However, four years ago,

life presented us with a difficult test. My husband's passing was a moment of great sadness and pain. It also brought with it much uncertainty and the emergence of several questions: Why was this happening to us so suddenly? What should I do? How could I continue in life? Although it was difficult for me to find the answers to these questions, I drew strength from the fact that I had my children and grandchildren to carry on. Since life and God compensate for our sorrows and sadness, a year ago I had the joy of the birth of my third granddaughter, Galilea.

Three years ago, I received a call asking if I made tablets. I immediately remembered my childhood. "Today we're going to make tablets," my mother said one afternoon, and my siblings and I watched attentively as she began to prepare everything to make them. My grandmother, sitting in her chair, guided her from a distance.

My mother placed flour, water, lemon and orange zest, sugar, and saffron in a bowl to give the dough its yellow color. In a pan, she had prepared some alcayota paste. Once she prepared the dough, she let it rest and rise. Then she placed them in the clay oven to bake them.

The final step was the meringue: sugar was poured into a pot until it became a syrup, then egg yolks were added and beaten until the mixture was white and thick. The dulce de leche was placed in between, painted with meringue,

and left to dry. Then, I could taste this delicacy.

I said yes. I was invited to participate in a meeting of women who, like me, make these preparations. I began participating in these gatherings, where I met, and continue to meet, women with different stories and ways of thinking, all with a desire to excel and a great deal of perseverance. I also had the opportunity to meet various professionals specialized in different areas, who shared their knowledge with us so we could use it and carry out our ventures, using new tools that allowed us to perfect our products.

Today, I continue to make them and am grateful to those who taught me how to prepare them, because I share them with my clients, and they have become a great contribution to the household economy. I enjoy making them because every time I prepare a tablet, I feel my grandmother's words in the distance, I see my mother's hands guiding me to give my best, and the day is filled with colors, like a rainbow.

"Being an entrepreneur requires courage, perseverance, and a lot of hard work, but the excitement of seeing your project prosper makes up for all the challenges faced".

Nancy Muñoz

A SWEETER WORLD

Rosa Margarita Flores' Story

The venture: La Margarita

I was born in Bella Vista. I lived with my great-grandmother, who raised me and taught me everything I know because, although my mother also lived with us, she worked a lot. We had a very humble home: the small ranch, located right next to a stream where my siblings and I would go play. My grandmother raised goats. I helped her with everything she did: making socks, preparing cocho (a kind of porridge) with finely chopped and ground wheat. We would later have cocho with milk, and I would also accompany her to the fields to gather firewood. At that time, we traded firewood for food.

When I was twelve, everything changed. She developed throat cancer, and we had to move to the city. She became increasingly ill until she passed away. At that point, I was left alone and began to move between relatives' houses. This was the case for a long time, until I was able to become independent and start a



home. I had my daughter first, and then four sons and another daughter. Their births are the happiest moments of my life. I really enjoy celebrating their birthdays. That's how I started making tablets for the dessert table at their celebrations. I learned to make tablets so my children would see a sweeter world. People liked them so much, so I started selling

them. Today, they're my children's favorite food.

My business is called La Margarita, after my middle name. There's also a saying that says, to clear up doubts in love, there's nothing better than plucking petals off a daisy.

To clear the craving for something sweet, there's nothing better than trying a La Margarita product.





RODEO

The sky meets the mountains, and the Cuesta del Viento Dam reflects the grandeur of the San Juan landscape. This place is a haven for lovers of adventure and serenity. Rodeo is known as an ideal destination for water sports such as windsurfing and kitesurfing due to the strong winds that blow in the area.

DECISIONS THAT INVITE US TO GROW

Carla Andrea Meglioli's Story

The venture: Mamacha, natural textiles - Finca El Martillo

I come from a large family, so my fondest memory is of the Sundays when we would meet up with my cousins at my grandmother Clotilde's house. The table was very long, and the children were sent to eat at a separate table from the others because we couldn't fit in, and that's when the chatter and laughter began. We would sneak out before they finished lunch to jump in the pool. When they noticed, they would scold us, telling us we had to wait to get in because we had to digest first. I think it was because the adults wanted to go for a nap and not have to stand around watching so many children, haha.

My parents had a space for rent in downtown San Juan. One day I went with my mom to collect the monthly rent, and on the desk was a small card: "LOOM WORKSHOP," private lessons, the teacher's name, and a phone number (landline, obviously).

"Can I write down the information on this card?"

"Yes, of course! The teacher is a friend, I

recommend her. She came from Río Cuarto to live in San Juan.

She's very good at weaving!

Within a week, I was enrolled and attending the weaving classes, which opened up a whole new world for me. My sister Carola and I signed up, and we immediately began wrapping ourselves in warps, threads, and wool that Inés taught us with all her love, patience, and the wisdom of a country weaver. I was amazed! I knew how to knit, but this loom thing was something else. The endless possibilities for creating, the materials, the sizes, the colors of the yarns, the frames. My passion since I was twenty!

The biggest challenge I had in my life was overcoming my shyness. I was always withdrawn and tearful. People spoke to me loudly and I would burst into tears, perhaps because I was very sensitive. My mom always says I used to hide behind the door when guests came to the house. I overcame this over the years by doing countless activities. Perhaps it's my Moon in Gemini that awakens my curiosity and my love for learning new things. I realized that if I didn't overcome this, I'd miss out on a lot of experiences I didn't want to miss. I studied dance, guitar, mountaineering, English, cooking, I was a promoter, a teacher, a catalog salesperson, a model, an event planner, a university student four times, and a ton of other things, all of them, absolutely all of them, activities that



that scared me!

Now I look back and I'm grateful that I didn't give up trying to overcome my shyness. We're now very good friends.

Today, my success comes from waking up every day and seeing that my children and I are happy, that my parents are still alive, and I have

a large, peaceful family.

The same family that for twenty-two years supported me in running my country restaurant on Finca El Martillo, of which I am very proud. I had to overcome countless obstacles of all kinds (floods that wiped out my trout production, arguments with employees, unruly custo-

mers, difficulties collecting payments, irresponsible suppliers, etc.), but I knew how to cope, and that allows the restaurant to continue today in the hands of my eldest son, Juan Francisco, with the same dedication and passion we've put into it since day one.

Today, my house is always full of young friends of my three children, the table is still very long on Sundays, and although there's no pool, the affection between cousins persists, along

with the memory of my beloved grandmother, Clotilde.

My daughter always says that her friends wish I were their mother. This is because I advise her to extend her college years as long as possible because life changes afterward, we are forced to make many decisions that are sometimes difficult, and we have no choice but to grow up. Right?



EDUCATION IS THE SOLUTION TO ALL PROBLEMS

Cecilia Vedia's Story

The venture: Instituto Educativo Iglesia

I was born in Angualasto, where I lived until I was twenty-three with my parents and two older sisters. There was a significant age difference between them, so as a child, I always played with my cousins, Andrea and Mariela.

My parents' house was located at the entrance to a large farm with several vineyards, where my father harvested grapes and then made wine. In addition, we often had all kinds of pets at home, which we had to help take care of. In my free time, I could play with cousins my age.

When I was in sixth grade, a classmate was going to study in Jáchal and invited me. I asked permission to go and there I began a different life.

In those years, secondary school wasn't as important, so my sisters didn't have the opportunity.

The only secondary school in the department was in Rodeo, and my father didn't allow them to attend.

I was lucky enough to be able to attend high school. I only traveled home a few times during the school year. I was only able to visit my family on weekends. There, in Jáchal, I lived with my uncles and attended the Teacher Training School, in the commercial section.

When I was in fifth year of secondary school, my father, who had always worked as an employee on a farm, developed heart disease, requiring surgery, and his recovery took a long time.

At that difficult time for my family, the owner of the farm died, leaving his children in our care. A conflicting relationship began with my father. Unfortunately, since he couldn't work as he had before, they took away the house where I grew up, and we had to live in a house lent to us by a relative.

I was planning to pursue a university degree, but with the events that had happened and no money, I decided to continue teaching at the primary school at the Jáchal Teacher Training School.

There, I graduated as a grade school teacher in June, and the following year, I took a substitute teaching position at the Paso de los Andes Shelter School in Malimán. After two months of working there, I became a temporary

teacher. There, I worked on a 20-day schedule with 10 days off.

I began my teaching career at 19, spent seven years at the shelter, and when I started a family, I decided to transfer to another school so I could spend more time with my twin sons and my husband.

I managed to transfer to the main school in the Santa Cruz Province in Rodeo, where I worked for 21 years.

In my final years as a teacher, I began helping children with their homework, until I retired in October 2020. I continued working at home, teaching tutoring classes. That's where the idea of setting up a place for this type of work was born with two fellow teachers. I called the institute "Camino Libre" (Free Path) because it was like paving the way for children who had learning difficulties with our help. Later, I changed it to Instituto Educativo Iglesia (Iglesia Educational Institute) because it was the first in the department.

Today, the institute has grown significantly, and we hope to soon offer English for all ages and, why not, in the future, offer private primary education in the department.



I WANT, I CAN, AND I DESERVE IT

Cristina Palacio's Story

The venture: El Palacio de Cris

As a girl, I thoroughly enjoyed my childhood, playing with my friends and neighbors my age, where creativity in games was always present. Laughter filled our afternoons.

I loved and enjoyed playing in the backyard of my house, among a leafy green willow tree, where I spent many hours with my dollhouse, jars, boxes, and a few toys, which were the perfect incentive to be happy.

The challenge I faced at the time was to escape during the afternoon nap to play with my friends, and when life got complicated, I would hide in a hole in the green willow tree, which served as a home and sheltered me. When I returned, I began to fear finding my father scolding me.

My father, a man of strong, structured, and very upright demeanor, was old-fashioned; he didn't want me to finish high school because in those days, women were dedicated to the home.

Even though I had all the means, he didn't

help me financially. So, I went out selling cosmetics, at school, everywhere, and with the money I earned, I bought books, my smock, and supplies.

I completed high school; it was very difficult, but I managed. Along the way, my mother became ill. My siblings had families, so I had to take care of them. Those were years of great sacrifice, but I graduated with the highest average in my class. Thanks to that, I received a scholarship to study at the Catholic University of Cuyo, but my father didn't allow it because he wanted me to continue taking care of my mother. Losing that opportunity was a huge pain for me.

However, that made me stronger. The following year, I saved money by doing some odd jobs and told my father: "I'm leaving. I want to be a teacher, and I'm moving to Jáchal to study."

I left one morning with the bare minimum: some sheets, some clothes, some notebooks, and without my father's greeting, but with the most I could afford: my mother's blessing. She always supported me so I could continue studying. She told me: "I'll be with you from a distance; you can always count on me." Besides, I knew God would help me.

I didn't have money to rent a room. The first year, my uncles hosted me. The second year, I was able to rent a precarious adobe room



with a friend from Rodeo who went to study in Jáchal. It was cracked, full of holes in the walls that we covered with paper balls to keep the cold out. The door had several cracks that we covered with a nylon bag tacked to the walls. Many times, we had food to eat, other times we didn't.

During that year, I became good friends with Betty Rubia. When she saw how I lived, she gave me shelter at her parents' house.

I finished among the top grades and was offered a residency. I became the first female kindergarten teacher in Iglesia. When I graduated, I returned to my apartment. I had a teaching career that lasted more than 20 years, and I've been retired for 11 years. I have a great partner and two wonderful children.

Socrates said, "Knowledge leads us to evolution, to awareness of the reality in which we live, and is the first step toward individual and therefore collective freedom." In it, I see myself represented thanks to my perseverance, turning my life around, and having studied despite many adversities: my health, my father's opposition, and my mother's illness.

Much of who I am and what I have is because I resolved to study despite everything and never give up. And that's something I pass on to my children: to study and improve themselves day by day, so that this gives them the freedom they need for their lives.

"I want it, I can do it, and I deserve it," a

phrase I repeated to myself constantly.

In 2020, accompanied by a pandemic that swept through us, a challenge arose for me without even realizing it. I had to rethink my ventures, as I realized that the current situation wouldn't allow me to sustain jewelry and travel for long. Little by little, that hollow in the willow tree that served as my home transformed into El Palacio de Cris, a handmade crochet, loom, and felt embroidery business. It's gradually growing, allowing me to put the creativity I've had since I was a child to work.

Today, seeing my weavings perfected, El Palacio de Cris growing, and many of my projects being marketed outside of the Iglesia department are things that give me great satisfaction. My strong suit? Crocheted nativity scenes, which, with much love in every stitch, I'm sure bring peace and tenderness to every home.

Now, in my role as an entrepreneur, I continue to weave dreams with threads of experience. The work of teaching never stops; it only takes on new forms. May each thread of this story continue to weave a legacy full of love, creativity, and lessons for those who come after us!



CUTTING, SEWING, AND SURPRISING

Deolinda Esquivel's Story

The venture: Maemig

When I was little, I had a very happy childhood, playing outdoors, catching butterflies with my siblings, and feeding a pony my dad had. We lived in difficult financial circumstances. My mom received donated clothes, and since she was growing up, she recycled them and dressed us. She modeled our clothes and used me as a mannequin. That's where my passion for sewing was born, seeing the love with which my mother sewed to dress us and give us the best.

She learned from her grandmother; I learned from my mother, who was my first teacher. However, I was fortunate enough to be able to study and graduate in dressmaking.

Throughout my career as a seamstress, I have had to face several challenges. I remember once having to make a dress for a quinceañera. It was hard because it was the first time I'd made something so beautiful with my own hands and

imagination. At the time, I doubted my ability to make it. However, at that moment, I learned that even things that seem enormous aren't feared when our inner voice tells us: "You are capable, and you will achieve it." It taught me to see myself as more powerful and more confident when facing a challenge of that magnitude.

Today, I enjoy being with my children, cleaning my house, getting outside to get some fresh air and walking long distances, enjoying the love of my partner, and enjoying being well.

It energizes me to know that my children depend on me. My clients' perception of my work sparks my interest; it helps me realize that they like what I do.

My life has always been focused on what I learned as a child: to cut, make, and surprise, first myself and then others.





MATERNAL INHERITANCE, A LEGACY OF LOVE

Elsa Raquel Varela's Story

The venture: Más que un objeto

When I remember my childhood, I go back to that time when I helped with the housework; one of them was taking care of the sheep. So, at just seven years old, when I came home from school, I would change my clothes and go take care of them. I have many anecdotes, like when I helped them give birth when they couldn't do it alone, or when I carried their newborn lambs from the pasture to the corral. Some ewes wouldn't accept their babies, so I fed several of them with a bottle of milk; obviously, they ended up being the most mischievous and spoiled sheep in the flock.

When the days were warm and they fell asleep for a siesta, I was the one who skipped it and instead lost myself among the threads and treads of my mother's loom while playing at being a craftswoman. I still remember the tangles I caused on her loom, her quilts, or her

ponchos. It was like this one day, which I remember as if it were yesterday, that Mom woke up and found a huge tangle in her wefts. She didn't scold me but instead asked me if I wanted to learn to weave. Quickly and without hesitation, at only seven years old, I said yes. She explained how it was done: cross, weft, uncross, without pulling the weft so as not to shrink it, but without leaving too much slack so it wouldn't look bad. Then she showed me how to place the heddles, for which she made a reed compass so that the weft would come out even, and, very little by little, I acquired the technique until I was doing it well without using a compass.

As time went by, I helped out and acquired new skills, such as making simple drawings, my first complete project on some rugs, and later, a sash.

When I entered high school, everything fell by the wayside. I needed to focus on my studies. After finishing them, I became a kindergarten teacher. At the end of the course, I received the news that I was going to be a mother. It was hard; I was far from home, but I firmly believed I would give everything to finish my studies. That was a moment in my life that marked me and taught me that even on my own, I can achieve my goals, and my goal was to graduate, for my son and for myself.

My first substitute position came, then my

interim position, and years later, a transfer to another school where I was able to increase my position, with many children and, obviously, a lot of work. It was there that my moment of success came, a touch of joy, a reward... being chosen in 2018 as an Illustrious Teacher of the Province of San Juan, traveling to Buenos Aires and sharing such a beautiful recognition with teachers from all over the country, with whom, to this day, my friendship remains. In one of the many interviews I conducted with the media in the province and the country, I was asked what I would do when I finished teaching, and with the same certainty with which I told my mother to teach me to knit when I was seven, I replied that I would continue the legacy and teachings my mother left me: WEAVING ON THE LOOM.

My curiosity didn't end there, as I was deeply intrigued by Mapuche weaving. And when you pursue your dreams, they eventually come true. Online, during the pandemic, there was an announcement from the National Arts Fund for scholarships for Mapuche weaving training. I signed up immediately, of course, and months later, when I had already forgotten about that form, I received an email informing me that I had been selected, one of ten nationwide, to take the online course.

Today, I feel proud of knowing how to weave two completely different techniques and being able to "play" with mixing threads, with



mixing threads, with the firm goal of consolidating craftsmanship as a cultural asset, respecting the way weaving is carried out using artisanal procedures and techniques, both those inherited from my mother and those I learned.

In my workshop, next to the finished garments,

a photograph of my mother hangs in the display case, perhaps seeking her company or perhaps also her approval of the work I do.

Next to her photo is her spindle, with an unfinished vicuña yarn.



NEVER A NO AS AN ANSWER

Giselda Castillo's Story

The venture: Luly, comidas y repostería

I remember the year 1992, when I was only six years old, and an event occurred that would change my life completely and forever. At that moment, my parents decided to move from the



city to a small town called Rodeo, where everything was different.

One day, we arrived at a house with a huge yard and many rooms surrounding it—it was fantastic for playing! At that time, there were three of us sisters. The two oldest took care of the youngest, as our parents had other responsibilities. Two years later, our brother was born. At that moment, our parents decided to start a business to cover the household expenses. My mother made bread, semitas, and tablets, and my father was in charge of baking and going out to sell to the neighbors. My older sister and I helped with the preparation of the products and also with all the chores around the huge house we lived in.

At thirteen, I not only took care of my three younger siblings, but I was also able to run the enormous dining room my parents had set up when they had other responsibilities. When the dining room got full, I remember running to my grandmother, who lived there, to ask for help. She was the one who helped me every time I was in charge of that gigantic dining room.

When I started high school, which only had afternoon shifts, my mother made sweet pastries in the mornings, and I sold them during every recess. They were a hit; I never had anything left over.

At eighteen, I decided to marry a wonderful person who also loved to work to improve



herself every day. A few years after we were married, and already with two young children, we decided to start our own business. At that moment, I realized it was time for me to start preparing the recipes I learned as a child, and I began selling bread, semitas, and the famous pastries my mother made. From that moment on, we didn't stop. We've gone through difficult times, because being an entrepreneur isn't easy, but we're clear that we'll never let a "no" stop us.

For twelve years now, "Luly," our family business, has been growing steadily. Now we have our own storefront, and we continue to plan for the future, always with my three fundamental pillars: my husband, who never said no and always supported every idea I had, and my two children, who also became part of this wonderful project.

Today, at thirty-seven years old, I can reflect on my present, look back, and say that everything I've experienced since I was six has been worth the learning curve for who I am today. A woman capable of taking a "no" for an answer and still never giving up, because I'm convinced that dreams are pursued and achieved when we believe in them.

DREAMS OF AN ASTRONAUT GIRL

Gabriela Lauz's Story

The venture: Gea biocosmética

I close my eyes, and, like a déjà vu, I see myself in my childhood, with my family, smiling, happy, surrounded by unusual animals. At home, I had a farm where "Tobby" lived, the rabbit who loved grass; a canary, "Pipo," who roamed free and wouldn't leave; and a very restless little mule who got caught in the drainpipes because she couldn't get in. Meanwhile, in the shed, I lived with a dog, who was a sweetheart, and a baby capybara who liked to suck his thumb and drink from a bottle. In short, my house was a kind of Noah's Ark.

I was born in Montevideo, Uruguay. I was always a very dreamy girl. I wanted to be an astronaut, I talked to the moon, and I knew there was something out there. I thought aliens would come looking for me. I was lucky that my parents encouraged my crazy ideas and let me create and be free.

One day, the astronaut girl who lived in the clouds had to come back to reality. At twelve, I had to face the loss of my father and had to let





go of my magical, dreamy side, and became a slightly more serious girl, with more responsibilities.

My mother had to go out to work more, and I had to take on and help with basic housecleaning. We stopped visiting the ocean on a camper like every summer, which was something I loved, and we started spending less time with friends.

I grew up, and despite life's difficulties, I have been a lucky person. In searching for meaning in my path, I went through many experiences that were transcendental in my understanding of myself. Following the curiosity of that little girl who wanted to be an astronaut, I decided to travel, to discover incredible places, and to enjoy experiences of spiritual and mea-

aningful searches.

When I grew up, with a family and living in the noisy, fast-paced Buenos Aires, we decided to change our surroundings, to seek a better quality of life, and we moved to a small town in San Juan.

I've always been a guardian, a caretaker of nature and animals. When I moved to Iglesia, I discovered, among other very positive things, my inner child. The one who was born and lived surrounded by nature and peace. Wherever I go, I make that place my home. I love being surrounded by nature, sharing simple moments, being in silence, listening to the wind, watching my children grow, and knowing that they are people pursuing their dreams.

In this contact with nature, my need to contribute to my environment was born. I decided to create my own natural soaps with what the nature of Iglesia has to offer. This is how Gea (Greek for earth) was born. This is a unique product, with the added bonus of contributing responsibly to the care of nature and the community.

I choose this path every day. I know who I am, and for that reason, life leads me to share this dream and also to create a skill that my parents cultivated in me since I was a child. They say that in life you have to have a child, write a book, and plant a tree. I am fortunate to have been able to do it all.

LATHE TASK IS COMPLETED

Johana Pick Pontoriero's Story

The venture: Ukara cerámica

I look through the glass, holding the mate in my hands. I sip it slowly and enjoy my gaze penetrating the surroundings. I see that talkative, friendly, outgoing girl I once was, arriving here with a shell of self-confidence and courage, which weren't really there.

Rodeo... My place in the world.

This world of mine, which costed so much effort, tears, laughter, and sighs, doubts and uncertainties.

My place in the world that, unwittingly, I found here.

During my childhood, I went back and forth between Córdoba and San Juan. In Albar-dón, the hubbub of summers and vacations awaited me. San Juan already awaited me back then with the house full of grandparents, cousins, and aunts and uncles. Every summer, I felt the pull of affection, laughter, and games.

So many memories, experiences, laughter, encounters, and goodbyes, learning that child-

hood dreams are the journey that accompanies, marks, pushes, motivates, and strengthens. Accepting that not all goodbyes are until next summer, some leave us with a great void that is difficult to fill.

And in this journey with the urgency of adolescence, still without understanding the extreme, concrete, and confusing nature of certain words like time, future, and profession. When I finished my degree in Bioimaging Production, a cousin worked at Rodeo and told me there was a position opening at the hospital. I decided, uncertainly, but without a doubt, to send everything necessary to come to this place, this corner on the map that saw me grow up, sustained me when it seemed I was about to fall, encouraged me through tears, when love appeared at my door and entered uninvited. Even with the strange feeling of not being able to stand, of not feeling complete, it accompanied me over time, to the rhythm of the ticking of the watchful clock, guardian of the hours, to keep my gaze steady and my step strong, marking the mark.

Through the window, I can see with great satisfaction how much I have accomplished, while the laughter of childhood echoes in my memory, memories that strengthen my soul. I feel my chest filled with pride and love.

I'm where I wanted to be. A whirlwind of conflicting feelings shaped, almost without realizing it, the story of my life.



And here I recognize how I achieved everything that seemed impossible, yet day after day I continue to overcome every moment of anxiety and insecurity.

Thus, growing and accepting, I recognized in my life partner that everything ahead of me could be achieved together. When the fear of motherhood descended upon our lives, I immediately knew that my story had another meaning. Months that passed fleetingly at times, eternal at others, brought, along with the arrival of our daughter, the joy and fear of being parents, of starting a family of their own, of the fear of making mistakes, of repeating stories, of not knowing how to calm that little one's cries.

I started a crafts business with the idea of selling local things. It was very difficult. Until I started doing it on my own. Today I make ceramics and glass fusion.

Here and now, calm, sitting in a comfortable chair, holding the mate in my hands, the same mate that for long nights became my companion, I can raise my voice and say without fear of being wrong,

"THE TASK IS COMPLETED."

Every step, every mistake, every success keeps me firm, haughty, proud, seeing my reflection through the glass, smiling.

Satisfactorily, I say yes, life... what cost so much, how tremendous the decisions seemed then, today are the best successes.

And... Yes... This is me.

A brave woman, a proud professional, an imperfect and loving mother, understanding that life is nothing more and nothing less than looking at the path traveled through time, behind the glass of the window, holding the mate in my hands and a smile on my face.



LIFE IS IN THE JOURNEY

Lala García's Story

The venture: El Viejo Carretón

Every time I travel from Iglesia to San Juan or vice versa, at some point along the way I get emotional, a few tears fall, and I'm overcome

by a feeling of being a little bit from there and a little bit from here, of a life that became a constant journey.

I had a happy childhood, a large family, six siblings, a very close-knit family life. I remember moments that bordered on perfection: family trips to the beach, building castles and shapes in the sand until the sun set, playing as if there were no tomorrow. But sometimes tomorrow comes and isn't as idyllic



as we'd like.

We had a difficult time. My father fell ill, and I spent many years supporting him. When I grew up, I wanted to study to be a kindergarten teacher. Despite the expectations of others, I resisted the obligation and trained myself in what I enjoyed, which was my calling from a very young age. I graduated as a kindergarten teacher and soon got my first job.

In that fantastic, dynamic, and fun life I was leading, my boyfriend, now my husband, began to dream of a beautiful project to build cabins on his grandparents' abandoned farm in Rodeo.

So, one weekend, he took me to a large vacant lot filled with weeds and an old, abandoned wagon. There he told me: "My grandparents used to travel to San Juan in that wagon. We're going to build our dream in this place they left me."

He brought a tractor and a weed whacker and started the project. The dream began to take shape, and he came to live in Rodeo. I continued working in the city and came on weekends to help him. Until one day in 2000, I said: "I'm leaving." And I came, we got married, and I got pregnant.

That's when the constant uprooting began. The fact that I feel more from here, the city, and little from there, Rodeo. However, despite the difficulties, little by little we built our home. That old wagon was filled with hope, turning

into a beautiful cabin complex, where we strive to make time stand still for those who visit us, so that, despite being from there, they also feel like they're from here, like us. Today, the old wagon also carries each and every person who passes through the complex. Many have stopped being customers and become family. From this small place in San Juan, we feel connected to the world.

I can say I live a life in motion. That I'm neither from here nor from there. That's why the road, for me, is like a magical feeling that continues to move me even today, because each trip to the city has a different meaning.

Life is in the journey. Today I know I want to grow old here, in the shelter of the home my husband and I built, with the love of my children, and why not, dream that one day my grandchildren will become part of this traveling family that lives in an old wagon.

“Although an entrepreneurship entails risks and moments of doubt, the gratification of building something of your own from scratch and watching it grow is a reward worth every effort.

Believe in yourself and your vision!”

Lala García

BROTHERS UNITE

Laura Ramos's Story

The venture: Almacén Ramos

I'm thirty-three years old. I live with my husband, a miner and worker at Veladero, and my two children, ages sixteen and six.

I grew up watching my mother run a business for many years. I also saw my grandmother María, a merchant and owner of Casa Ramos across from the boarding school. I think I inherited this passion for commerce from them.

I'm a teacher, although I don't practice the profession because I chose to work independently. I like it and it works very well for me, so I'm sure I'll continue in this field.

Sixteen years ago, my brothers and I started a business, with whom I worked for eleven years until I decided to go independent, and each of us took on a different line of business. Almacén Ramos currently offers food and household items. I also make and sell handmade party favors for various types of events.

Together with my brothers we faced a new project, which unites the three of us, we bought a piece of land, built stores and created Paseo

Ramos, where each brother has his or her own business.

My goal is to continue growing, moving forward with the support of my family.







THE OWNER OF THE ROAD

Maggy Durán's Story

The venture: Remisera

I had a happy childhood. Very happy. A huge house, with large, tall rooms, with grapevines and fruit trees, always with children inventing games by the irrigation ditch. We made long race tracks, doll houses, had childish fights, and long, innocent conversations with a family shared with uncles and cousins.

We spent ten hours in school all day, we had all the subjects: music, crafts, carpentry, gymnastics, and the best part was the long recess. What wonderful memories!

Years passed, and with the innocence of a helpless girl, who didn't have the necessary advice or the confidence to ask, I fell into a dead end: at fifteen, I was carrying a very small and innocent being in my womb. Together, we began another stage, growing and maturing, I took on the responsibility of a son, a husband, and a home.

When I was two, a little brother arrived, my two treasures, to whom I clung to keep from

falling. I jumped over many hurdles; it was very difficult.

As time passed, my outlook changed. Deep down, I wasn't happy. Everything I did was to cover up my sadness. I wanted a better future for myself and my children, for them to have an education, knowledge, and new experiences. I thought the only way to achieve that was to leave town, even though I had nothing in my hands to start over.

I embarked on a path full of dreams and hopes. At thirty-five, I started over in a different city, with a new job, neighbors, and friends we weren't used to. My children were studying, and so was I, finishing high school and taking various courses. My certificate as an Esthetician was my first great achievement. I worked in offices, with doctors and seniors. I was fortunate to meet an unforgettable friend who helped me, listened, and taught me her values and her work as a podiatrist.

I also knew love, without knowing it existed. It taught me to mature, to see things differently, to follow my values with respect and admiration.

My goal was always to not depend on anyone, to get ahead through my effort, hard work, and ingenuity. Since I was fifteen, I've had stable and unstable jobs, sold clothes and shoes, participated in fairs, painted crafts, and now I'm the town's taxi driver, traveling both within and

outside the province.

I'm fifty-six years old, have four grandchildren, a loving eighty-year-old mother, friends, a little house with plants, two cats, a dog, ARGUITO, who changed my routine.

I continue to reinvent myself every day, and when I wake up, I ask myself, "Was this journey worth it?" And the answer is always the same: Of course it was!



THE SECRET IS IN NUTRITION FROM CHILDHOOD

Margot Cortés' Story

The venture: Loreta

I was born and raised in this town, alongside a wonderful, hardworking family.

My father worked on waterworks, and at the same time farmed the land, planting corn and wheat. I remember his grandmother grinding the wheat on a stone to obtain cocho, a delicious grain.

My beautiful and beloved mother, María, a homemaker, worked hard, caring for the entire family with great love. She made sweets of different varieties as well as tomato sauce.

She enjoyed watching the town's products being worked on, surrounded by the smoke rising from the oven where the homemade bread was baked, mixed with a gentle breeze that came from the stream and smelled of mint.

I remember my beloved School No. 751, which marked my first steps in life, where I learned and met classmates and great friends. I will never forget the moment I arrived at school and the caretaker was waiting for us with a cup of warm yerbeado (a type of yerba mate).

I've been very happy walking the streets of this town, playing and skating on the ice that formed in the irrigation ditches with Carmen, my close friend.

Those are the moments I wanted to capture, trying to work again with products from my land, so that they wouldn't remain just a dream and, as happened to me, someone else would be marked in their lives and hearts so that tomorrow they could continue this beautiful legacy.

This venture began when I remembered moments from my childhood, when I would



wake up with a feeling of happiness reminiscing about that rustic life with my grandparents and parents.

When I grew up, I started a family with four children blessed by God. The road wasn't easy; I fell and got back up with great effort on several occasions. In 2000, my oldest son passed away. At that moment, I dedicated myself deeply to the church. I told myself, "I have to keep going because I have a family." I got up and continued.

I decided to finish high school, and Margot was revived again. To do something for myself.

To smile inwardly.

Now I'm in the food industry. I love everything about cooking. Preparing a dish with every detail for someone fulfills me. In the end, you come into this life to try to be

HAPPY!!! But it's also good to be remembered for a particular reason, for something that makes us stand out.

Today, through my products, I try to convey in their flavor the love of my family, the work, the effort, and the values that I carry in my heart with great sacrifice.



DRESSING DOLLS

María Manuela Castillo's Story

The venture: Manuela, confecciones

It was a very hot morning, January 6, 1978. I remember the year well because a few months earlier we experienced an earthquake that was etched in the memory of the people of San Juan, on November 23, 1977. This event caused us to sleep in the garage for fear of it happening again.

That morning was very special; the Three Wise Men arrived, and once again I couldn't see them. I tried not to sleep that night, but of course, they are the Three Wise Men. I woke up to the rays of the sun and perhaps a little to the heat, and there was the skinny, articulated doll that I had asked for so much and that cost me so much merit. She was the most beautiful doll in the world, wearing a green dress and very high sandals. I went everywhere with her.

As time passed, her dress began to fall apart, so I learned to use thread and a needle to mend her clothes. Suddenly, I found myself asking my mother for scraps of fabric to make clothes for my doll, and without realizing it, it became my favorite game. With a lot of imagi-



imagination and finger pricks, I learned to make all kinds of clothes.

Time passed, and I don't remember what happened to my skinny doll; perhaps my younger sister took her over. I entered my adolescence, high school, and the typical rebelliousness of my age in the 1980s, when everything was evolving by leaps and bounds, and kids no longer had strict control of our parents. When I was seventeen, I became pregnant with my first child. It was a huge shock for me; it made me mature and leave my rebelliousness behind.

At twenty, I married the father of my first child, and my second was already on the way. Since then, I dedicated myself to being a mother. Six boys filled the house with love, happiness, sadness, moments I long for today. Without thinking twice, at forty-two, I became pregnant again. It was a huge surprise to learn it was a girl! With her, the dream of creating clothes reappeared. I had never stopped sewing, but with the birth of my daughter, the dream of being a seamstress was reborn. I already had my doll for whom I could create unique garments. Now that she's older, she comes to me asking me to make her that fashionable garment and, at the same time, she joins me in learning how to sew.

Today my business is called Manuela, Confections, and it's my greatest desire to see it grow. It may not be a big dream for some, but it

is for me. My legacy lives on in my daughter, in people I can teach to sew, or in those who wear one of my clothes.





EMPENTREPRENEUR IN LIFE

María Cristina Ramos's Story

The venture: Ramos, viveros y artesanías

When I was little, I enjoyed games and mischief, like any child. I liked riding my bike and horseback, especially with my dad. It was my great passion. I had a wonderful childhood. I remember one day, when we were very young, my best friend Vanina Godoy and I found a recipe for a sponge cake and made it. We baked it in a can of sweet potato jam. When my mother arrived, she got angry and scolded us. It turned out quite delicious, so they forgave us. At that time, even though we were seven years old, we were already thinking about making sponge cakes to sell at school to our classmates; in other words, we were starting our own business. At that time, my parents owned a grocery store, and so did my paternal grandmother. My grandmother ran her business until she was eighty-six. She never missed a day. As the daughter and granddaughter of great entrepreneurs, I grew up with their example.

There were two major challenges that greatly influenced the course of my life. I

became a single mother at twenty, still studying at the tertiary level. I decided to have my son and start earning my own income so I wouldn't depend on my parents or anyone else. At that time, I was already making hair bows for the girls, which attracted a lot of attention, so I sold quite a bit. I also made and sold baked goods. I finished my studies and started working at CESAP, the police mutual insurance company, and also as a teacher. That income undoubtedly paved my way. However, I continued my entrepreneurial journey and began making all kinds of costumes for rent, for different events and ages. Those costumes, which my sister Laura now has at the party favors, continue to generate income for us today.

The second challenge I had to face was the death of my father, at a very young age, when my siblings were still young. We had to keep the family going, both financially and spiritually. It was quite difficult for me, and it left its mark on me, even though both my mother and my siblings did their part, and we managed to get by as a united family, to this day.

When the pandemic began and we had to be confined, a new challenge arose because I was going through a rather complicated kidney failure; my health wasn't very good. Shortly after, I had to undergo surgery to remove a kidney, so today I live with only one.

During the pandemic, I couldn't do



anything, so I returned to one of my old passions: being in contact with nature, growing my plants, and gardening. At that moment, I realized the short-term economic potential of this activity.

With the help of my sons, Cristian and Valentino, we began to develop this activity. They were very enthusiastic about helping me produce all kinds of plants—trees, ornamental plants, vegetable plants, a little bit of



everything—so we could go to market and see how we were doing. In October, a week before Mother's Day, we formalized the business, doing a lot of advertising. We opened on a Friday, and the anticipation generated in the community was so great that we were out of stock by Saturday.

We traveled to the city, visited nurseries, and conducted an accelerated market study to compare prices and continue with the activity, which had far exceeded our expectations. Since then, production has not stopped. We are constantly adding new products and facing new challenges.

As I'm about to retire as a teacher, I consider myself a successful woman, beyond just financially, because I enjoy what I do, I learn new things every day of my life, I continue to study whenever I can, and I take advantage of every opportunity life gives me.

I'm grateful to the people who saw the potential we Iglesian women have, the passion we put into everything we do to achieve the best results. Meeting these people changed the paradigm of my life and that of many women who, like me, grew tremendously. We learned to value ourselves more every day, we value what we do, and the fact that so much importance is placed on our work inspires us to do more and better things.

A PASSION THAT IS INHERITED

María Carrizo's Story

The venture: Ania Pastelería para eventos

I was only two years old when my paternal grandfather brought me a cooking pot as a gift. A real one, not a toy. My mother always tells me that she could have used it perfectly; I was a little girl who didn't understand anything about cooking, but she decided to save it for when I grew up.

As time went by, she taught me the basic recipes for some dishes. At just eight years old, when she wasn't feeling well, I would tell her, "Don't worry, Mommy, I'll cook today." I loved playing with the seasonings and different flavors.

When I visited my grandmother's house, an excellent cook, she would let me choose what I wanted to eat, and I would help her prepare it. I loved her stews and, above all, the unfailing aroma of the bay leaf, which grew in the backyard of her house. She had been a cook for the grape harvest crews for years. My love for cooking grew within me abundantly.

My aunt Susana attended a tertiary school; our conversations were always about a recipe, and she would save me newspaper clippings with new inventions.

When I turned fifteen, my father enrolled me at the IGA (Argentine Gastronomic Institute). I felt like my dream was beginning to come true. Several people tried to dampen my spirits, commenting on how little I'd earn from this career and that I'd be better off doing something else, but I knew deep down that I loved cooking, that the only thing that mattered to me was seeing the happiness on my family's faces when they tried my dishes.

I trained for three years in professional, international, and national gastronomy, working as a nanny to help pay for my studies. Fortunately, my employers gave me the opportunity to work and study, for which I will always be grateful.

After a while, with my fears in tow, I embarked on a journey to Rodeo, leaving many things behind.

I started working at La Morada restaurant as the head chef, where I had an incredible experience. Then I worked at Finca el Martillo, and from there I moved on to Panadería Santo Domingo, where my boss, Maxi Esquibel, gave me the freedom to create, play with recipes, invent new desserts, and enjoy what I love so much.



Over time, I became the mother of a little girl, whom I named Anastasia, which means "the best is yet to come," and, without a doubt, which was the case.

Life brought me a job at El Viejo Carretón, which allowed me to go beyond what I had ever imagined.

I met many beautiful, kind-hearted people who encouraged me to start my own business, Ania Pastelería para eventos.

Today I work and make a living from what I love so much. I bake my pastries at home, which allows me to take care of my little one.

The good thing I take away from this is that, despite some difficult things that happened to me in life, obstacles I had to overcome, illnesses of loved ones, even though I sometimes wanted to give up, I always gave my best. That's why today I can say that I make a living from what I love and that I would choose it a thousand times over because this profession represents the love, support, and culinary heritage of my family, my blood and history.

And yes, that pot I received when I was a little girl was a sign of what my path would be like.

"As entrepreneurs, we know that constant work and perseverance are our essential foundations, which allow us to turn every challenge into an opportunity and every aspiration into a concrete reality."



“Entrepreneurship is an exciting journey full of challenges, but the joy of seeing your passion become something tangible and successful will fill you with pride. Keep fighting, every effort counts, and your dream is worth living!”

María Carrizo

IN EVERY BRAID, A STORY; IN EVERY LOCK, A WISH

Nancy Brizuela's Story

The venture: Peluquería Nancy

I grew up in a very small town called Angualasto with my extended family: my parents, my older sister and younger brother, my

grandfather, my grandmother, my great-grandfather, my uncles, and cousins. I had a very happy childhood because I grew up surrounded by love.

My father worked as a bus driver, so he spent a lot of time away from home, but when he was home, he gave us his full support and love. My mother took care of us all the time, looking after us and giving us her unconditional love, along with the best cook and friend in the world, my grandmother, with whom I shared the most beautiful





moments that I hold dear to my heart. My grandfather remains a role model, a hardworking and honest man who, along with my great-grandfather, taught me my tricks, letting me sleep in his arms every night.

With my siblings and cousins, we shared countless hours of laughter, games, and sometimes fights, but we always ended up making up. We all went to school together, sharing everything we had. My uncles were very supportive, and even though there were a lot of children in the house, each one was always treated in a special way. And how can I forget the person who never missed a school event, no matter how simple it was? She was always there for anything. My grandmother, who never told me I couldn't attend; she was always willing to share every moment with us.

I began my adolescence full of uncertainty and change. I was growing up and had to leave home to continue studying and complete high school because there wasn't one in my town. I went to Rodeo to study at the Cornelio Saavedra Agricultural School. My sister helped me a lot to adapt because she was already studying and it was her last year. I met some really good people who stayed with me for almost three years. We became friends and were roommates. In the last few months, they decided not to continue their studies.

It was very difficult for me to continue

because I was alone. I struggled to attend classes. But thanks to my mom, who was always there to encourage and listen to me, I was able to continue. Also, thanks to my boyfriend, who was there for whatever I needed and always supported me. When I graduated, it was a very happy moment because only I knew how much it had cost me.

Now I had to think about what I could do with my life...

One day, my aunt came to me, very excited, to tell me that they were opening a hairdressing course, and that I should take it because it could be useful to me someday. Even though I wasn't entirely convinced, with the support of my family, I did it. My grandfather took me to classes without complaining; my sister was the first person to offer her a haircut; my grandmother was always willing to serve as a model, accompanying me, and my cousins helped me practice. My parents bought me my first tools. My boyfriend gave me my first pair of professional scissors. Everyone was there for me when I needed them. I managed to finish, with great regret because at the time, we had to say goodbye to my grandmother.

After a while, I put hairdressing on hold; my grandmother was very ill; she was hospitalized, and I needed something stable to help the family. I started working at my town's elementary school as a secretary. I was very happy

because it was my first full-time job, but unfortunately, I couldn't stay long because I started being bullied. It was hard for me to leave my job, but I had to leave. I felt useless, and I shut myself away in my house and within myself. My family and my partner were a great support to help me get ahead. I began to trust myself and the people around me, and overnight, people in my town started asking me to cut their hair, and little by little, through word of mouth, I was able to start my business.

Today I run the salon... I enjoy spending time with my family, watching my nephews and godchildren grow, sharing endless conversations and drinking mates with my mom, and making crafts to disconnect from the world.

My greatest success is having started a family with my partner. He's the person who's always there, the one who supports me, motivates me, and helps me succeed in each of my projects.



EVERY DAY A DIFFERENT DAWN

Selma Poblete's Story

The venture: Comedor La Roca

I lived with my family in El Chinguillo until I was six. Then we were sent to boarding school in Malimán, and we only saw our parents twice a year. There, we were taught how to clean, make beds, knead and bake bread, set a table, and peel vegetables. We took turns helping the cook in the kitchen. My childhood was very demanding. From a very young age, I was taught to work and struggle.

When I turned twelve, my mother decided to come and live in Rodeo. I was in sixth grade. We moved in November, and school had already ended.

My mother quickly found jobs for my siblings and me in family homes. I worked for two women from Córdoba, whose husbands worked on the Cuesta del Viento Dam. My job consisted of cleaning, running errands, and taking care of the family's children.

Then my mother sent me to the city of San Juan to work in another house as a nanny,



where I got used to being away from my family and where I stayed for many years.

I found work as a maid at the Hotel Termas Pismanta, so I returned to the apartment, where I met my first boyfriend, with whom I had a long relationship.

A year after working in Pismanta, my employers, with whom I had worked since I was very young, came to look for me. I returned to the city with them until I turned twenty. At that time, I went to Mendoza to visit an aunt, who got me a job as soon as I arrived in Chacras de Coria, where I had to cook. I didn't know how to cook; the meals I made were very simple: milanesas, puchero, boiled vegetables. However, when I worked in San Juan, the family often had people over, and when the lady cooked, I always watched her closely. In Mendoza, I had to put into practice everything I had learned from my former employer. I also began to practice with cookbooks. At one point, my employer told me, "You're a great cook who was in hiding." Both they and I were amazed at how delicious the meals I prepared turned out.

After a while, I returned to Rodeo, where my partner and I got married. We returned to Mendoza together, where I worked cleaning homes, making clothes in sewing workshops, and in canning factories, always struggling to get ahead. On weekends, I made homemade bread and semitas and sold them in the neigh-

borhood where I lived. I was very good at homemade bread; my sisters and I learned how to do it from a very young age, just by watching my mother knead the dough. Then I started making churros, pastelitos (cakes), and tortas fritas (fried cakes), and my daughter, who was already eight or nine, sold them around the neighborhood.

Looking back on my life, I see that our parents raised us with this spirit of struggle and hard work.

At one point, we decided to return to Rodeo, intending for my husband to work at the hospital. However, neither he nor I found work. That's when I started cooking again. At first, I made empanadas, and on Sundays, I put a blackboard on the door of my house that said: EMPANADAS FOR SALE. At that time, there weren't many food vendors in Rodeo, so tourists always bought everything I produced.

One day, a tourist from Córdoba, passing by on his way to the hotel in Pismanta, asked me why I didn't offer other foods, like baked or grilled chicken. From then on, with that idea in mind, I started selling chickens as well. Sometimes, fishermen or greengrocers, the street vendors we had in town, would come by, since there weren't many stores where they could buy goods, and they would ask me what I had to eat besides empanadas.



So, I started selling the food I had prepared for my family. I would set up a small table outside my house and buy drinks at a kiosk across the street. When my husband came home and asked what there was for lunch, I would tell him there was only tea because I had sold the food.

As the years went by, and I had several children, I started making pastries, in addition to the empanadas and everything else I made and sold door-to-door. With the money raised, I began to build a children's soup kitchen, where I cooked twice a week for the poorest neighborhood children, who at one point numbered thirty-five. When I returned, after selling everything I had, I would go back and buy the meat, vegetables, and everything I needed to cook and feed the children who attended the soup kitchen, where we would also eat.

Then I came up with the idea of celebrating the children's birthdays, including my own children's. Every two or three months, I would gather everything I needed, make cakes, pastries, hot chocolate, prepare some food, and we would have a big celebration. To this day, they haven't forgotten those experiences.

I always asked God to give us a place to start a business. I remember one day, selling door-to-door, I managed to make some money that allowed me to rent a small house with one bedroom and a dining room. I went to a radio station and told them that a new sun was

coming to Iglesia, that a new light was coming. That's how La Roca diner was born.

I think that, thanks to all the experiences I've had, today I have a wonderful business, where we continue selling empanadas and all kinds of homemade meals, reaping the rewards we earned with so much sacrifice.

Today I feel like my goal has been achieved. I have seven children: Selma Paola, Giselda Estela, Ruth Elizabeth, Luis Daniel, Emilce Johana, Sara Noemí, and Yamila Esther. All of them have studied and are currently employed. Through our work, we have managed to own a home and also a vehicle, which is our work tool. I never thought it was possible to achieve so many things.

I had the opportunity to represent the province of San Juan as an empanada champion, which has brought me much success and many blessings, for which I thank God every morning when I wake up. Every day there is a different story and a different dawn.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S HANDS

Soledad Castillo's Story

The venture: Mis dulzuras

In a large, old house, cooking was done with the most beautiful love, that of my grandmother. Arriving at her house and smelling the aromas mingling with fruit jams and the finest cooking sparked my curiosity. I wanted to know how to make the richest pastries, like grape cake, my favorite. I also wanted to learn how to make sponge cakes, always at her side as her helper. My saying was: "I'll add sugar, Grandma." And she would tell me: "Okay, daughter, make sure it's well-filled, don't be stingy." While the clay oven was heating, I greased the mold: a can of sweet potato jam. She sent me to do this task so I wouldn't have to watch the sponge cake so much. "If you watch it too long, it will collapse," she used to say (grandmother's beliefs). When the cake came out of the oven, we would sit and wait for it to cool while chatting next to a brazier. Today, every time I remember that ritual and the taste of the most delicious cake in the world, I can't help but shed a tear.

From then on, I knew that my love for baking went beyond blending the ingredients well; rather, what mattered was the love I put into every bit of them. Whisking, mixing, kneading, and baking was a challenge that drove me every day to struggle through ups and downs with the conviction of following my dreams.

The years spent baking gave me the learning and perseverance to fulfill the dream of that little girl who is still inside me, giving me the strength to achieve that dream: to continue pursuing my dreams and loving this satisfying activity more every day.





TEACHING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Vanesa Barrios's Story

The venture: Alpa creaciones

On January 7th, five decades and a bit ago, a young couple welcomed me into their lives with great excitement and love. They named me Urbelinda Vannesa.

In my paternal family, I was the first granddaughter, the first niece, so love and affection abounded. In my maternal family, I was also welcomed with great love by my grandparents, aunts, and uncles, and cousins.

I was the first child of my mother Bernardita and my father Washington, both teachers. I had the joy of having three brothers, Daniel, Luis, and Cristian, so there was always play, laughter, crying, and, why not, fighting at home. The first three siblings were only a few years apart in age; we were almost triplets. The youngest brother arrived eight years later, so we grew up as close friends and acquaintances.

I spent my early childhood in the Las Flores district, where I have very fond memories of





playing with my cousins, Eliana and Anibal, school friends in the town square. The square was only grassy flowerbeds, but for us it was a world where we invented a thousand adventures. I also remember playing house and dolls a lot.

A very vivid memory that comes to mind is my time in kindergarten (as it used to be called), when I was only three years old. It was at Presidente Mitre School, where my father, a teacher, worked. He used to carry me around in his arms, or "petequito," as we say here, because the family didn't have a car.

I think all of this sparked my enthusiasm for

reading, for writing, for learning everything. Since I was a child, I've always been very curious, and I attribute that to my love of reading, for reading all kinds of texts.

When I write and recall my childhood, I also recall the memory of a very dear aunt, her affection, and her rounds of mate. She taught me how to drink what is now a custom, mate. Aunt Olinda, from whom I may have also inherited my entrepreneurial genes, because without knowing it, she and her daughter had a business. They knitted, crocheted, sewed, and embroidered beautifully. They also grew flowers in their garden.

I did part of my primary schooling at a boarding school in Guañizuil, a farm located before reaching the district of Tudcum. In the past, married couples often worked in these kinds of schools, so when it was proposed to my parents, they accepted. This gave my siblings and me the opportunity to share and live as a large family with children from the La Alfalfa, Rodeo, and Pismanta areas, since they were housed at that school. Today, this institution is closed. It was a very beautiful time, where I had a very healthy and cared-for childhood. I finished elementary school at School 51, in the Province of Santa Cruz, in Rodeo.

I began my secondary education at the Cornelio Saavedra Agricultural School, where I completed my second year. Then, at the request of my parents, and with my consent, I moved to the department of Jáchal to finish high school. This was my greatest challenge. The uprooting from my family, being away from home Monday through Friday, was very difficult for me, but I also found many friends, a lot of support, and a lot of family who weren't my blood relatives, but who welcomed me as such. There, I completed my secondary education at the Fray Justo Santa María de Oro School, and upon graduation, I decided I wanted to study Spanish Literature, which meant emigrating to the city of San Juan. Now, the time away from home was going to be longer, but I had the care and love of my

grandmother and aunt. I think being away from home made me more independent. This didn't last long, as I had to return because my mother fell ill.

But I think this was because God had other plans for me.

I began teaching elementary school at the same school where I finished high school. At twenty-one, I graduated as an elementary school teacher. At the end of that year, I married Dionisio, and now...

thirty-two years have passed! We had two beautiful daughters, Pamela and Aldana, who are our pride and strength, because we raised two beautiful, self-sufficient, empathetic, active, and hard-working people. But the best part is that we managed to instill values in them and give them the best inheritance: education. Aldana has a degree in Nursing, and Pamela has a degree in Safety and Hygiene, just a few subjects away from graduating.

In these thirty-two years of marriage, twenty-seven have been shared with me as a teacher. I started as a substitute teacher at the Dalmacio Vélez Sársfield School in the town of Colola, not knowing that this would be my destiny

for twenty-seven years! They were years of great sacrifice, dedication, joy, and sorrow. But I am certain that the most rewarding profession is that of a teacher, because you receive the purest and noblest love: that of your young students.

Hearing them read for the first time, writing, watching them grow, is truly very comforting. Meeting them today and being greeted with a "HELLO, TEACHER!" or knowing that they are useful people to society is the most gratifying thing.

For many years I was a catechist, so my life is tied to the parish's activities, which we currently do alongside my husband, working side by side on whatever is needed.

In 2017, I received my retirement benefit and decided to unleash my entrepreneurial spirit. I've always loved crafts, painting, and sewing—any manual labor has always been a wonderful challenge for me.

I started in 2010, making hand-painted fabrics, making children's pillows in various shapes, machine-stitched, and with hand-made details.

In 2013, my father unwittingly gave me (I say this because he passed away in January of that year) what would truly be the beginning of my business: my first embroidery machine. With it came countless opportunities, constant learning, researching new techniques, and receiving orders! I believe I was a pioneer in the field of computerized embroidery, and so many proposals for work began to arrive, all in embroidery, until I started with my first smock, and after that, many, many smocks arrived. Also, everything related to accessories for the

baby's layette and the house, always with the unconditional support of my husband, who is the one who helps me in this venture, to which we added sublimation.

Today, I look back and see that I've come a long way without even realizing it. I set up a workshop with almost all the machines with sheer effort, which makes me proud of where I am now, and I know I'm capable of going further with the help, as always, first and foremost of God and my family.

Along this path, I've made many friends whom I love and for whom I always try to be there, even if it's just with a quick message.

Finally, I know I have a long way to go in what I've set out to do with my business, which is to continue growing as such. Economic times in the country aren't the best, which affects us all, but I know that with help, especially from God, we will get through this.

I would like to thank my husband Dionisio, my beloved daughters, Pamela and Aldana, for always being my rock, for accompanying and encouraging me every step of the way with ALPA Creaciones, and my clients and friends for trusting in my business.





TUDCUM

Hidden among the mountains, it is a treasure of tranquility and beauty. Its streets and panoramic views invite you to lose yourself in time, while its inhabitants welcome you with a smile that speaks of generations of shared stories.

Tudcum is the birthplace of gaucho traditions, weaving, and sweet making.

TO THE BEAT OF MY DREAMS, I FOUND MY NORTH

Ana María Rivas's Story

The venture: COMPASS - Dulces Artesanales

There were many beautiful moments in my life, and others not so much. My childhood was very happy, or at least that's how I lived it. I was the oldest of five children, with parents who were always present and hardworking in education, so I often had to take care of my siblings, whom I lovingly took after as my dolls. We played house, but the children were my little brothers. I felt important because my mother trusted me, like the sister she never had. I was very close to my maternal grandmother. She worked as a baker, making cakes and dessert tables for large weddings. She also taught baking and cooking at a secondary school in Villa América. I often accompanied her and listened passionately, especially when she taught about sweets.

As I grew older, I went through my adolescence, which was the stage I enjoyed most and was very happy, surrounded by many friends.

I shared outings and get-togethers with them at home, with a guitar, bass drum, and piano accordion. Confidants, always together. I went to high school dances and some college dances. We were only allowed to go out in groups or with my brother, with whom I shared many naughty adventures. Even so, I accompanied my mother through her terminal illness. I was a great outgoing and party-goer, and although I had to ask permission, I never got a "no" for an answer. Thus, I received from my father, a very demanding but also very liberal father, a model of freedom, but with responsibility.

After finishing high school, I entered university, which due to life circumstances I had to drop out of. At twenty, more mature, I began working as a teacher; I always fulfilled this job, always striving for perfection, with great commitment and working double shifts, for more than forty years, until my retirement.

I lost my mother at a very young age, but a few months later I got married; It was a very happy moment! My dreams came true... My three children were born, and with each of them, I felt incredibly happy as a woman and mother.

Like everything, life had its ups and downs, with raising my children, being a wife, and working inside and outside the home. Belonging to associations or service institutions



Now, in my later years, with a broken marriage, I have three wonderful children leading their own lives, grandchildren with projects and goals appropriate to their ages, and very close to me.

An important challenge in my life was

making the decision, shared with my sister, to live in Tudcum, Department of Iglesia, since we have a house bequeathed to us by our parents.

In these years, during which we strengthened long-standing friendships, my sister, also retired, dedicated herself to tutoring high school



students, and I was invited to participate in Mujeres en Red (Women in Network), with my fledgling artisanal candy business that I started with my oldest son. It so happened that one day, he lost his job and came back to live with me. In one of our conversations, he told me he needed to find his direction again and asked if I would help him make candy so he could make a living. I said yes, and we began our project. I brought everything I learned to produce in my childhood, with my grandmother, a pastry chef, and I added everything I've learned with Mujeres en Red (I learned about clients, costs, marketing, photography, videos, baking, and much more). This has led me to take on new projects and take on challenges that, at my age, I would never have considered.

I feel very happy at this stage of my life, with new projects and also participating in my children's projects, always being there where I'm needed and where they need me.

Our venture is called COMPASS - Dulces Artesanales (Artisanal Sweets). We named it after the compass that sailors carry. The compass revolves like a wind rose inside a sealed bubble. In the middle, you can always see a mark called the "line of faith," which shows us the magnetic direction we're sailing on. With this venture, my son and I have found our bearings, and we don't want to lose them.

"Believe in yourself, even when others don't. Belief in your own ability to overcome challenges and achieve your goals is essential. The road to success can be lonely, but your belief in yourself will take you further than you ever imagined."

Ana María Rivas

BEING LIKE A MOM

Ayelén Ávila's Story

The venture: Delicias Aylen

I'm thirty-three years old and live in the Tudcum district. However, my story doesn't begin here. I was born in the capital city, where I lived with my parents and two siblings.

When I was four, I suffered the loss of my

father. It was very difficult for my mother to be alone with three young children. When I turned six, my mother decided to return to her hometown, Tudcum. If there's one thing I remember about her, it's the cakes she made for us and for important events. She put so much effort and love into them; it showed in every bite and in the flavors.

I have to admit that at first, I didn't like the idea of living in Tudcum. I was used to city life and had my friends there, but as the years went by, I got used to it. I had a wonderful childhood,





with lots of games with my siblings and my mother.

Adolescence brought a radical change. At seventeen, I had my first daughter. She was a girl who was going to raise another girl. I wanted to give her a good future, so I focused on finishing high school at the CENS in Rodeo. At that moment, my life changed; I had to grow up suddenly and began to start my own family.

My passion for cooking began one day when I was at home taking care of my first two children (now five), while watching *Cocineros Argentinos*. I liked the show and began learning recipes until I decided to make one. I made a lemon pie using the few utensils I had, but with an immense desire to be a little like my mom.

Love grew stronger, and during the pandemic, it found its way. One day in June, with Father's Day approaching, I suggested to my sister that we offer snacks for fathers. She accepted, and *Delicias Aylen* was born. A business dedicated to selling breakfasts that today allows me to financially support myself and my family.

KEEP YOUR HANDS AND MIND BUSY

Cristina Brizuela's Story

The venture: Tejiendo esperanzas

In my childhood, there was no television, no electric light, only an old radio that played Chilean radio stations. In my town, one of the oldest traditions to shorten the night was to take a piece of wool from the aliñar (a traditional weaver's yarn) and, with a spindle, play with our hands.

I dreamed of learning how to spin strands to transform into blankets that would serve as warmth. That's where my love for weaving began.

In my youth, the love of starting a family arose, and faced with the need to have something to keep my children warm, I wanted to advance my learning. Once I had a family, with the help and magical teaching of my mother-in-law, Doña Margarita, my dream of becoming a great weaver began. Between plain threads, comb, and shoulder straps, I learned from her the best weaves, ponchos, mattresses, and saddlebags to decorate the gaucho's saddle. With love, I learned to weave a warm coat for my children, a finely woven poncho so they



could proudly wear what their mother was able to make for them. With the sale of my creations, I was able to help my husband with the household expenses. When my son finished school, he dreamed of traveling with his classmates. Since I didn't have money for the trip, I sold a mattress so he could make the trip. Thus, my love for this noble, untitled craft grew even more. It allows me to make wonderful things, and it's profitable,

although very demanding.

Weaving on a criollo loom doesn't have many secrets; it just keeps my hands and mind busy. Today, I continue dreaming, I continue working, and I will do it as long as my body can take it. Natural dyes allow me to color San Juan ponchos, and colored dyes allow me to play with them in a gradient of thoughts.



FROM SHEPHERDESS TO WEAVER, A STORY OF OVERCOMING

Emérita Flores's Story

The venture: Yuli, tejidos al telar

My name is Emérita Flores. I live in Tudcum, although I'm originally from Angualasto. I spent my childhood with my parents and siblings in that beautiful town, where my parents were in charge of managing and caring for a farm, while my siblings and I were in charge of herding and tending sheep. My greatest joy was that every day we had to cross the river, and we did it barefoot, always staring straight ahead, because if we did it downwards, we would get dizzy. Our life went on like this every day. In the morning, we went to school, and in the afternoon, we spent time herding and tending sheep.

All of this happened until I turned 16 and we came to live in Tudcum. My life was very hard. I had to go to the city to work as a domestic worker, where I wasn't very lucky, so I traveled to Mendoza, where it was very difficult for me, not being able to spend time with my parents and siblings.





Then, a few years later, I met my husband, with whom I've shared my life for over forty-five years, and with whom I had four children, all grown up now.

When my children grew up, I began to feel like something was missing in my life, that I needed to find something to occupy my mind. I began crocheting in my free time, using the skills I learned from my cousin when she lived in Mendoza. I began crocheting shawls for my nephews and some babies born in Tudcum.

Time passed, and with the help of my mother-in-law, I learned to weave on a loom. Every afternoon, I went to watch and learn as she weaved, under a hut in her house.

I wove my first garment on her loom, a lilac square blanket that turned out very beautiful. Over time, I learned techniques and color combinations, until I started making black saddlebags, the most requested by the gauchos in the area.

My greatest pride was making a bedspread in the brown range. At that time, there was a shop that sold the garments of most of the artisan women, and tourists visited it frequently. On one of those visits, a couple from the US were delighted with the bedspread and bought it. At that moment, I felt very proud of my work and the value they placed on that garment.

I really like what I do. I've had my business for twenty-five years, and I still enjoy this activity as much as when I started.



THE ARTISAN OF FLAVORS

Edita Ramona Aguilera's Story

The venture: Sabor Artesanal Repostería

I am fifty-six years old, married, and the mother of three children.

During my childhood, I remember being

raised with my cousins because my mother lived with her sisters. We played tag and played house with dirt and mud in the backyard. As time went by, my aunts went their separate ways. I stayed with my mother and my younger sister, whom I cared for while my mother worked. At that time, we went to school until seventh grade.

At twelve, I started working in a family home, cleaning, washing, and kneading dough to make ends meet.

I enjoyed spending time with my mother,



since she worked hard to raise us. She was happy being at home.

The hardest thing I had to experience was the loss of my mother, which left me with the challenge of facing life alone at a very young age. At eighteen, I faced the challenge of becoming a mother. This defined me as a person and marked a turning point in my life. I got married and started living with my mother-in-law, who very graciously opened her home to me so I could start my family. From her, I learned many

things that helped me get ahead, including teaching me how to prepare the tablets to sell. One autumn afternoon in 1989, we were sharing some mate around the fire with my mother-in-law Hilda. Easter was approaching, and we wanted to offer tourists something unique, different, that represented our town. The idea arose to make tablets with homemade alcajota. Over the following weeks, my mother-in-law taught me how to make them using the recipe she had inherited from her grandmother. I discovered my passion for baking. From that moment on, every year during the tourist season, we began making tablets to offer to visitors who are familiar with our town. Over time, I've gained a lot of experience and clients from all over the province. I no longer just offer pastries; I also make cakes, cornflakes, croissants, sweet bread, and pastries in general. I enjoy this activity, which I now carry out with more modern tools and top-quality raw materials. It fills me with joy that tourists can enjoy my products and take home a souvenir full of artisanal flavor.

My husband and children describe me as a person who likes to learn and improve every day so that the product I offer is of the best quality and flavor.

THE TASTE OF HOME

Fanny Pizarro's Story

The venture: La Ñatuza

I am sixty-six years old, married for forty-seven years, have five children, and am the grandmother of twelve grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and one on the way.

My story begins in Tudcum, on the main waterfront street next to my parents, Doña Hilda and Loco Pizarro. Surrounded by my siblings and neighbors, I lived in a humble and charismatic environment.

My childhood was very beautiful and healthy. I played with empty jars, using my imagination, and spending time with my siblings. Playing on the hill was memorable. For us, technology didn't exist: no phones, televisions, or electronic games.

Playing payana or tejo was healthy play. My grandmother and my mother made us dolls stuffed with wool. I was the second daughter of eight siblings, whom I cared for, played with, and still keep company with.

From a young age, my mother instilled her teachings in me.



Time passed, and in my adolescence, I had to migrate to the city of San Juan to work as a childcare worker for a family who lived downtown.

As a result of life's twists and turns, at almost eighteen, I had to return home to Tudcum, and there a great love was born with Roberto Maza, El Rábano, my life partner, who is still by my side today.

We fought and progressed together in life's battles, with love always prevailing. We started our home on the same coastal street, at the same one many people always came to for a favor or help. There, our first three children arrived: Alejandra, Marcelo, and Mario; later, Enzo and Victoria arrived.

I am a very family-oriented person; I enjoy gatherings and family celebrations. Something I identify with is the Christmas holidays, a valuable celebration because of my religion and because of what I instilled in my family: the unity of the family.

My personal success lies in feeling empowered, having achieved and diligently carried out what I'm passionate about. I feel grateful, especially to Mujeres en Red, who allow women like me to gain knowledge and give us courage and confidence.

A challenge that marked my life was the arrival of my first daughter, Alejandra, at eighteen, my first granddaughter, Florencia, and the

arrival of my first great-granddaughter, Emilia—events that shaped my life and filled me with happiness.

Today, my challenge is a daily one; my family is my priority: entrepreneurs, colleagues, and united. Always overcoming every setback together.

Personally, I believe my challenge has always been to instill the core values in my children and their generation. I am proud of what I have achieved to date.

My business is called La Ñatuza, as my friends call me. It's made of church tablets because in my family they represent unity, work, tradition, and love. My tablets, without a doubt, taste like home.





"Hard work, perseverance, and passion for what you do are the pillars of success. There will be times when you feel overwhelmed and want to give up but remember that every sacrifice and every effort is worth it. Keep your vision clear and never lose sight of your dreams."

Fanny Pizarro

CREATIVITY HAS NO LIMITS

Fátima Díaz's Story

The venture: Frida Nail

When I was a little girl, I loved spending time with my family, my parents, and siblings, with whom I had a great time. I loved playing with my sisters, and I enjoyed organizing our birthday parties. We played house and made clay potlucks.

My biggest challenge was becoming a mother at only fifteen years old. It wasn't and isn't easy for me, being a single mother, but here we are, always trying to do our best, facing life's trials. My son changed my life completely. I learn new things every day; I'm very happy with him.

Since I needed to work and didn't want to leave my baby, I started thinking about what I could do at home to earn a living. Since I always liked having my nails nice and neat, my mom thought I could take a manicure course and bought me the basic supplies I needed. Then, I started working on my business, which from the start already had a name: Frida Nail, because Frida Kahlo represents a source of inspiration and strength

for me. She faced a series of adversities throughout her life, including a serious car accident that left her with permanent physical injuries and chronic health problems. Despite these difficulties, she never let her circumstances limit her creativity or determination.

For a woman like me, who balances the responsibility of caring for her son with the desire to pursue her professional dreams, Frida is my role model in terms of perseverance, creativity, and authenticity.

That's why my determination doesn't end here. My goal in the future is to have my own business.





A WOMAN WHO FIGHTS FOR HER DREAMS

Flavia Pizarro's Story

The venture: Confecciones Allingara

My story isn't complicated, quite the opposite.

I had a very beautiful childhood, filled with love, games, laughter, and simple things, like wearing new clothes only for birthdays. Everything was simple but sufficient.

My parents were always there, offering advice, a touch, and, from time to time, a challenge, things for which I am immensely grateful today.

I was able to attend high school, where I learned to survive on my own, far from my family, which led me to value even more the affection and things I had as a child.

I went to San Juan to study social work. My family's financial situation was very precarious. My parents managed to pay my rent, and I worked to pay for food and transportation. Due to life circumstances, I couldn't finish my university studies, something that still pains me, but the path led me, without me realizing it, to





entrepreneurship.

I worked many jobs and finally realized that painting, sewing, and crafts are the things I love.

It started as a hobby until I realized that everything I made sold very quickly. So, I thought I could hold a fair, which would help me sell my products. I could invite other people to do the same, and as the icing on the cake, it would be a tourist event. So, we started; several people joined and, to this day, continue with this activity.

Everything began to take shape, to the point that today I have my own workshop, with industrial machines that I use to work for mining companies and individuals in many places. I also give several women in the department the opportunity to work, which is very rewarding for me. I am constantly training myself and I encourage the women of my town to do the same.

My life story has made me a fighter, with a lot of empathy for others, and a lot of strength to achieve the dreams and goals I set for myself throughout my life.

I'm sure you'll find many stories similar to mine in this book, but each with its own unique twist. I would simply tell anyone who reads this: "Fight for your dreams."

THERE ARE ALWAYS OPPORTUNITIES

Isabel Taillant's Story

The venture: Familia Taillant Resto Bar

I was born on November 26, 1966. My childhood wasn't easy, but I always tried to enjoy it. I played with my friends, we were the housewives, and we made empanadas with poplar leaves and filled with clay.

At eighteen, I got married and had three children: Milagro, José María, and Rubén. I dedicated my life to taking care of them and my home, always making things to sell and contributing to the family income. I grew seedlings of oregano, basil, rosemary, and other spices. I also knitted, which is my lifeline. I also sewed and embroidered. Today, my specialty is making empanadas, Peruvian churros, cakes, hamburgers, and sopaipillas.

Then came my grandchildren: Guillermina, Mariano, Thiago, Rafael, and Adriano. The love I feel for them is inexplicable; they make my days brighter, happier.

I also experienced the greatest pain: I lost my grandson Mariano. A sword pierced my heart. I felt like I couldn't go on for about three months, but God always gives us the strength to

continue and accept his will. I learned to live again. I learned that there are always other opportunities to move forward, that people always come into our lives to give us knowledge and the tools so we can be empowered women, willing to turn our goals around. That's where I feel that Mujeres en Red comes into my life. Together with the Josemaría company, Criar, and Efsol, they have encouraged us to achieve the long-awaited successes.

My children say I'm a fighter and the best mother in the world. If they think that about me, what more could I ask for?





IT'S A MATTER OF BELIEVING IN YOURSELF

Lorena Ponce's Story

The venture: Lobasama Peluquería

I was born on July 27, 1988, in the Iglesia department, surrounded by a family consisting of my parents and siblings. We lived in my maternal grandparents' house, a large house with several rooms. Some of my maternal aunts also lived there. Although we all shared the same space, each of us lived differently and had a different outlook on life. I have many fond memories of my childhood, always surrounded by many people, and especially of my Aunt Betty, whom I saw as a mother, who showered me with love and support. I played a lot with my siblings and cousins. When I started kindergarten, my aunt accompanied me every day and went to every event held at the school. She didn't have children of her own, so we supported each other and never lacked love.

When I turned seven, Betty had to go to the capital to work. I couldn't go with her. That was very difficult for both of us. From that moment on, I stayed with my parents and siblings. The years went by. I went to school with my siblings,



and I enjoyed going on weekend hikes with my cousins, and in the summer we all got together to swim in the river. Everything I experienced in my childhood will remain forever in my mind and heart.

I started high school and, unfortunately, couldn't finish. At twenty, I decided to move to the capital, where my aunt Betty lived. It was something new for me, both in terms of living there and in every way, since I was moving from a small apartment to the city. I had to get used to many new things; it was a new challenge I had to face if I wanted to achieve my goals. I stayed there for several years and met a friend, who would later become my husband and the father of my children. He helped me a lot from the moment I arrived. He was studying to become a math teacher at university. We kept each other company since we were far from home. We became a couple, and when I was twenty-five, I got pregnant with my first child, and that's how our big little family began. Things were difficult for us in many aspects of life at first. My partner continued his studies, never stopping because he wanted to give us a good future. He never gave up on his dreams, and I learned that from him: you have to keep going no matter how difficult things are.

Our son was born, and a year later, I decided to attend a job training school where they taught hairdressing.

I went in the afternoon and returned at night. It was close to where I lived, so I didn't have to take buses, and when I finished, my partner and my son would pick me up.

When our son turned three, he had to go to school, and that's when we decided to move back to our apartment. My partner found a job as a math teacher. The following year, we moved to Tudcum, the place where my partner grew up and found his job. Things improved for us, as the previous years hadn't been easy at all, but we were always close, and after six years, our second child arrived, and we decided to get married. At that moment, I felt like I had it all. All I needed was to dedicate time to my passion, and now I had it.

I had experience in hairdressing, but I still wasn't confident in doing the jobs. I didn't feel capable of achieving them. I was missing the most important thing: confidence. I started cutting the hair of my partner, my son, my siblings, and my dad, but I wasn't encouraged to do more. One day, I remember it very well, someone asked me to give her straightening treatment. I knew the techniques, but even though I wasn't very confident yet, I decided to do it and was amazed at my excellent work. It was then that the client told me to post it on social media, so I took pictures and started sharing them. I didn't expect to receive so many positive messages and so many requests to do

different types of work.

From that moment on, I improved further and found the confidence I once lacked. That confidence my clients and family gave me.

Now I can say I'm almost complete in that sense, as my dream is to have a physical space to do my work better, with more comfort, not only for myself, but also for my clients.

If I think about all the things I've been through in my life today, I'm happy. I believe that the things you set out to do can be achieved

whether you have a lot or a little. When you want to get ahead, if you do it with attitude and a lot of desire, it doesn't matter how difficult the road is, the important thing is to enjoy it, and sooner or later we'll get there. You have to believe in yourself, even if they tell you that you can't achieve it.

I'm grateful for all the good and bad things God put in my life because you should never ask yourself, "Why do things happen to me?" If not, why would they send me?



TAKE THE FIRST STEP, THE UNIVERSE WILL TAKE CARE OF THE REST

Marisa Flores's Story

The venture: Primeros Pasos

I am the youngest of nine siblings. I grew up in a town called Tudcum, in my paternal grandparents' house, where I spent my afternoons playing with dolls, building dollhouses, and sewing clothes for the dolls.

When I was only ten years old, I accompanied my father while he sewed on a pedal-powered machine he inherited from his grandmother. I was curious to learn how to operate it, thinking that this way I could sew more clothes for the dolls, more quickly, and without pricking my fingers. I wasn't lucky at the time, as I didn't have the strength to do it, so I continued sewing by hand.

As time went by, I grew older and put dolls aside, having become a woman with responsibilities. One of them was finishing my studies. I had one year left until I finished high school and began to walk a different path. I dreamed of being a lawyer. That's when I started to feel

different, weak. My energy wasn't that of a seventeen-year-old girl. My hands began to swell, and I began to feel pain. In search of an answer to these symptoms, I was diagnosed with a little-known disease. I was going through the most complicated stage of a condition called lupus.

It was then that my life, filled with dreams and hopes, stopped for a moment. My heartbeat felt weaker and weaker. I needed a miracle. It was in God's hands that my body would accept the treatment.

Days passed, and I regained my strength. The joy was overwhelming because my body had accepted the treatment. However, I faced a different reality. My dreams had to be put on hold until I could recover, recharge with energy and strength to continue with my life. With the help of my family, I succeeded and was able to finish high school. At that moment, I resumed my dreams and made it to my second year of law school when the disease struck again, this time not as severely, but it was enough to make me question how to proceed. My health was at risk, and I had to make a decision. This led me to return to the town where I grew up, with the pain and sorrow of not being able to fulfill my dream.

Time passed, and I couldn't find anything that could get me out of the state I was in, because not being able to achieve my life plan



left me without strength and without hope. One day, my sister invited me to a dressmaking school. Before I knew it, I was sitting in a classroom in front of a sewing machine. In that moment, I went back in time and met that little girl who had once wanted to learn to sew on that heavy machine at home. This time, the machine was more modern. I realized that life was once again giving me the opportunity to learn. Despite all my fears, I attended that school for three years and one day, I earned my degree in dressmaking. Happiness filled me. I had managed to finish a project without having to abandon it, even with the complications that arose, including a pandemic. But this time, I wasn't about to give up. I already had the degree, but I still needed a sewing machine. I started working and, with great effort, I was able to get one. I worked as a childcare worker, and in my free time, I connected with the machine and created. That way, I forgot all my problems.

One day, someone suggested I make clothes to sell, but I didn't have enough confidence in myself. I thought I couldn't do it, until I took the plunge and started creating accessories for my nephews. In my quest to generate income to help cover the family's expenses, I started altering clothes, then creating baby clothes, and finally, I started selling my products.



IN HONOR OF ME

Marisa Aguilera's Story

The venture: AGMA Gastronómico

When I was a girl, I liked to go to my grandmother Felipa Rojas's house. They called her the "alfalfa doctor." People from all over the world visited her to have them healed from their illnesses. I loved walking behind my grandmother, watching and learning what she did. I liked serving her tea while she cared for her patients. She would tell me, "My daughter, you have to learn many things because life isn't easy." She would make me stand on a small stool where I could reach the table, put a pan of flour on it, and taught me how to knead the dough. She made bread, semitas, pancakes, and other delicacies. On the farm she had in the back, we harvested apples, pears, grapes, and peaches. I remember that many people came to visit her by bus and car. There I learned to sell the fruits we harvested. Since that day, the saleswoman's job has been with me. I had a very happy childhood. I never knew what fear was.

I've been through many difficult times in my life, but luckily, I learned many skills from

my grandmother to help me cope with life's difficulties. At twenty-one, I had three children and was unemployed at the time. I started working washing and ironing clothes for different people. One day, I was offered an internship at a school. I was very happy and accepted. This job changed my life. I worked for eight years and remained a permanent employee until today, after twenty-four years of service.

To improve my income a little, I started selling prepared meals, empanadas, and pizzas, and I also took semitas to the school, where I sold them to the children. That's how my business began.

My business is called AGMA Gastronómico, in honor of myself, for my great efforts to face life's challenges, and for raising my children to be good people. I continue to offer my meals, prepared with much love, so that tourists and the people of my town can enjoy something delicious.

I would like my children and grandchildren to continue this work in the future, which is very beautiful and satisfying. Currently, I only sell takeout food, but the idea is to have a dining room at home where I can entertain people.



BETWEEN GRANDMOTHERS AND GRANDDAUGHTERS

Paola Sánchez's Story

The venture: La Morenita

As a child, I lived with my maternal grandparents. My grandmother raised me with much love, care, and respect, just as I do now with my granddaughters. She taught me to cook. At night, she would put on her little scarf and cover my head with it. I would play with a can of ground beef, pretending to cook, and making little meals.

When I turned twelve, my grandfather fell ill with that terrible disease called cancer. When I was thirteen, we stayed with my younger sister and my grandmother. I spent a lot of time with them cooking, trying to fill our house with love.

When I was sixteen, I got married. Today, I've been married for twenty-eight years. I have six children, four girls and two boys. I lost my first son eight months into my pregnancy. It was a very sad time in my life.

When my children grew up, I found time again to do what I love; I started making pasta-



frolas. I work as a janitor at a school, but I started my business, La Morenita, as a kind of grounding ground, as a way to feel better.

La Morenita tablets taste like family. The first tablets I tried were made by my maternal grandmother. I learned and began preparing them until I found the perfect recipe and was able to satisfy my favorite customer: my father. We spent many years sharing tablets and moments

until his dying day. Today, I share the recipe and my time with my grandchildren. The youngest, Delfina, is two years old. She lives with me. She's very bright, she fills us with love, and anyone who listens to her is amazed. We call her La Negrita (The Negrita). We named this business after her, because anyone who tries our products is filled with love and amazed.



TEACHINGS OF OUR PEOPLE

Rosa Aguilera's Story

The venture: Delicias Tita

Thirty-seven years ago, I started making tablets. At first, I made them for family consumption on special occasions, such as the feast of our patron saint, San Roque. Over time, my neighbors began to request them, and so I began selling them.

Since it's a sweet pastry, it's ideal for breakfast and snacks, as well as for tourists to take home as a souvenir when visiting our town.

To make this recipe, I use fresh, artisanal ingredients: local alcayota sweet, eggs, dulce de leche, among others. But what makes them special is that they're baked in a clay oven, just as our ancestors did.

Each tablet I make maintains the traditional values of the Iglesia department and the town of Tudcum, thanks to its connection to its history and the people who passed on the recipe. In my case, my mother-in-law taught me the recipe.

My family and I lovingly make this product because we want everyone who tries a tablet to always remember the teachings our elders left us, which represent the traditions of our family and our people.



"Entrepreneurship is an act of integrity and passion. Honesty with yourself and dedication to your vision are essential to building something truly meaningful."

Rosa Aguilera

LOVE CAN DO ALL THINGS, IT IS ENGRAVED IN EVERY CELL OF THE BODY

Sandra Muñoz's Story

The venture: Aromas de Montaña

“There are words that paint a vivid picture; that give meaning to life stories.”

I draw on my memory and let myself be carried away by memories that nest in my mind, fleetingly returning to that past, where I was a fortunate and very happy child. I was born, raised, and lived surrounded by many loved ones; with Rosa and Augusto, my parents, and Marcelina and Máximo, my maternal grandparents, in a small town in the Iglesias region called Tudcum. I belonged to a humble family, but with values deeply rooted in a culture of work, who knew how to earn their daily bread.

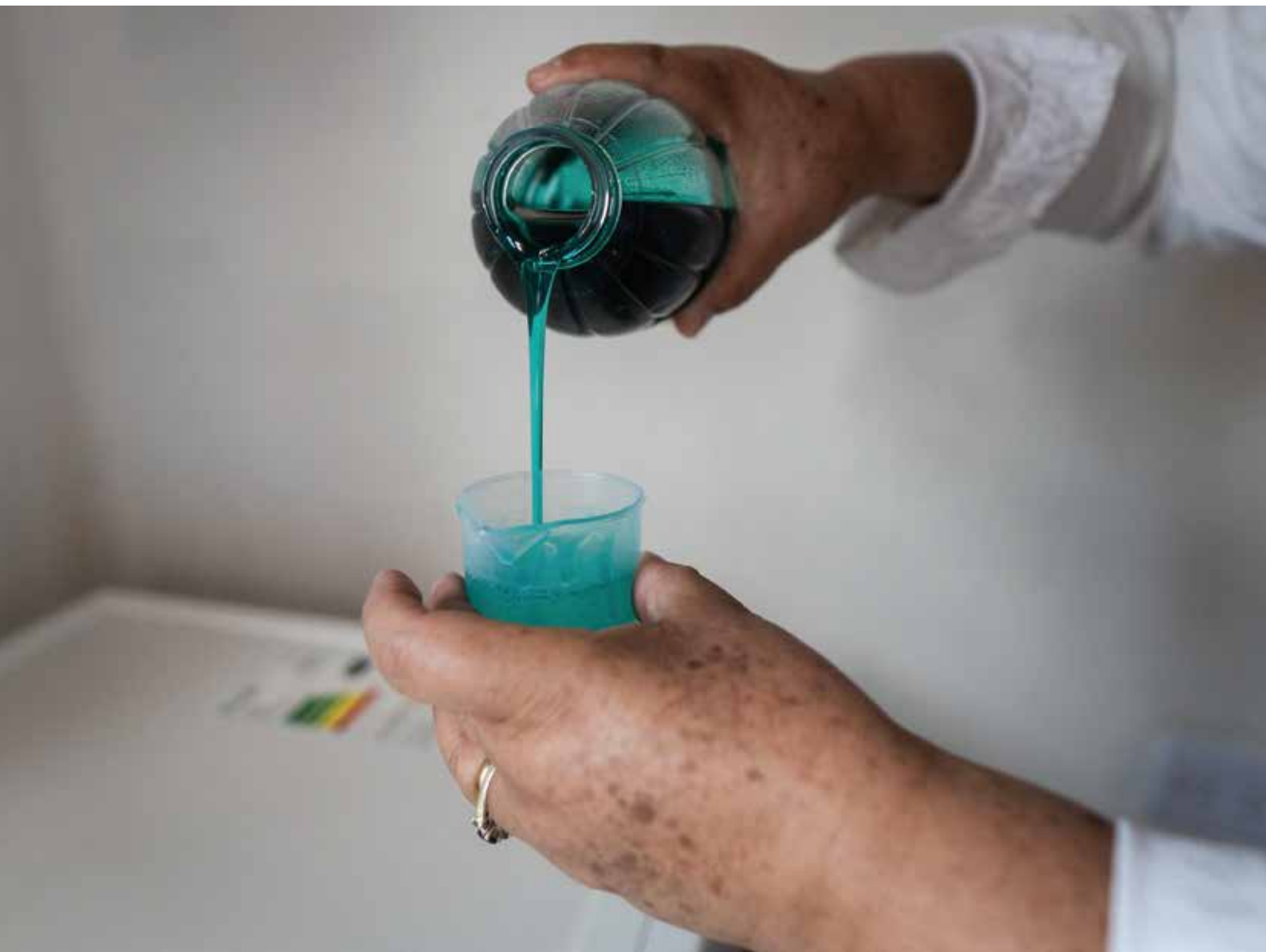
At the age of five, I started elementary school at the Ricardo Güiraldes School. The teaching revolved around the traditional model, with engaging classes where chalk and the blackboard were the available resources. I learned a lot from teacher Carlos, who taught with such passion and was very demanding. I

I also enjoyed recess, which was a lot of fun. I played tejo, tag, duck duck goose, farolera, and payana, among others. As a child, I had a vocation to one day become a teacher.

At home, we studied first and then went out to play. My father had several jobs. In the afternoons, he fixed shoes, and I sat next to him to review the multiplication tables and read aloud. Afterward, I went to play with my brothers. I loved riding donkeys. Several times I fell as they galloped off. After drying my tears, the pain from the fall would subside. I would approach the donkeys and talk to them. I would tell them that it had hurt, while biting their ears and asking, "Did it hurt?" My brothers would laugh and tell Mom, who would advise me not to do it again, because I had escaped unharmed this time, but that I could break a bone. But I didn't care and kept trying.

I grew up listening to tales, legends, and anecdotes on long winter nights by the wood stove. My mother, a very hardworking woman, did all the housework. One thing that caught my attention was how she washed clothes on her wooden chores board. I wanted to help her, and I started washing my socks while playing.

Then I started high school and achieved my goal of graduating as a General Agronomist. I loved studying, so I told my parents that I wanted to be a teacher, and they were very happy. In July 1989, I graduated and registered



for my degree. And on December 23rd of that same year, I married Marcelo, with whom I have four sons: Gerardo, Maximiliano, César, and Luciano. They made me the grandmother of four beautiful granddaughters.

Very little time passed; On April 18, 1990, I taught my first class to seventh-grade students at Ricardo Güiraldes School. It was a day my parents had long awaited and one of the best of my life. I dreamed of working, and I embraced teaching with great respect and dedication. I worked in all elementary grades and also taught secondary school students. We faced many challenges with the students, so much so that we began celebrating Tudcum's birthday. We managed to highlight the culture of an entire people.

I completed various courses and diplomas related to the requirements of the educational system, such as: Diploma in Education and Society, ICT Management, Specialization in Rural Education in Multi-Grade Studies, and Diploma in Leadership and Social Innovation. I have to thank my parents and my husband, who always took care of my children so I could continue studying. Then my father died, and it was very hard for me and my children, who loved him.

Despite everything, I never gave up; I always set high goals and worked to achieve them.





I aspired to be the Principal of Güiraldes School, which I called my second home, and in 2013, I took over as Interim Principal of the school.

My mother began to have many health problems, so I brought her to live with us. She had advanced osteoporosis. In a lot of pain and trouble walking, I talked to her and suggested I wouldn't work anymore and would dedicate myself to her. Obviously, she didn't like the idea, as she knew my passion for teaching. I began the retirement process to receive my retirement benefits. They weren't delayed, and the telegram arrived on February 1, 2018. I retired, and Mom and I spent a year chatting, sharing anecdotes, praying the rosary every day, singing our favori-

songs, learning recitations, traveling, and doctor's appointments became more frequent. Her health deteriorated every day, and on March 20, 2019, she passed away.

I devoted myself fully to my home, doing all the chores and having time to spare. I read, watched TV, and the days seemed endless. I began to dream of being an entrepreneur and remembered my mother, who taught me how to wash. I went out to explore my town and said to myself: "What we need here is a laundromat." I researched this service, and it seemed viable, but I was afraid of failing. Although I never gave up, that's when I received a call from Josemaria's Community Relations department. I agreed to be part of the Mujeres en Red program, went to all the meetings, and had various training sessions that strengthened us as a team and individually. We learned about legal issues, taxes, costs, public speaking, marketing, and merchandising.

Now I can say that my dream was born in my mother's heart, that she navigated in my mind and grew stronger with my actions. Love conquers all things, even when we teach or learn, it remains engraved in every cell of the body.

The Aromas de Montaña laundry is metaphorically the scent of my Rose, my mother. My challenge will be to make her grow.

THE WORK OF LISTENING WITH YOUR HANDS

Verónica Rivero's Story

The venture: Vr Masajes

I was born in the town of Tudcum, in my grandmother's house, with my father and some neighbors acting as midwives.

I have three brothers. When I was a little girl, I shared many special moments with my sister. We went out to play in the fields, made little houses out of tree branches, played tag, and caught butterflies, competing to see who could catch the most. We had a clay oven where we made bread with clay, and the candy wrappers were used as money. Later, when we were tired of playing so much, we would go home for a snack.

On weekends, I would go to the soccer field to watch my dad play soccer, something I loved. As time went by, I started playing the sport. I always loved going to the field, cheering on the team, getting covered in dirt, and being hot or cold, spending time with my friends and family; all of that made it more interesting.

I had a very happy childhood and adolescence. At nineteen, I grew up suddenly, and

became pregnant with my first child, Aaron, so I couldn't continue studying. I had to take care of my son and started working. Those were very difficult years, reaching their peak in my 20s when I had to make the saddest decision of my life: leave my two-year-old son with my parents and try my luck in Buenos Aires.

In the city, it was hard for me to adapt because I missed him so much, but I knew I was doing it for my son's sake. I started working in a spa, specializing and advancing in my chosen profession, as a massage therapist. When I felt I was settled in my new life, I returned to look for my son. It was very hard being without him, but it was worth it because it helped me become the person I am today and to know that with great sacrifice, you can overcome any obstacle. We lived in Buenos Aires for eight years, where I worked in a spa that helped me get my life back on track so I could later return to my homeland.

Today I have three children, who are the love of my life, my world, and it's because of them that I continue learning and moving forward.

I do massages at home, as I don't currently have a suitable place. I go to my neighbors' houses, and they tell me their stories while I give them massages. It's so nice to feel useful, to help people.

My current aspiration is to have a spa where I can offer my services.





VILLA IGLESIA

It's a place where peace can be felt on every street and history resonates in its ancient walls. The warmth of its people envelops you and invites you to be part of their legacy, where every day is a celebration of simple and authentic living.

DESIGNING DREAMS

Anahí Pereyra's Story

The venture: Santos Home & Deco

I am an only child, from a humble, hard-working home. My mother, Rosa, was a seamstress and dressmaker. My father, Santos, was a construction worker, foreman of civil works, and very talented. From them, I inherited the restless creativity to build and shape my future. Their advice still remains etched in my memory: Always do your best and find the solution to everything.

Since I was little, I have worked hard in my studies. I dedicated myself completely to it because my father always encouraged me (even though I was a woman) to find ways to understand the value of building and creating, in the broadest sense, my life.

As a teenager, I became interested in design and architecture. I dreamed of being able to create unique and welcoming environments, of being able to touch the hearts of others with my designs, just as my parents did when they designed my childhood with limited resources. It was very hard for them to make my studies possible, and that's why I always gave my all, to show



them that their efforts hadn't been in vain.

Just when I thought life couldn't get any better, my partner appeared. The ideal companion came into my life, a fighter and determined like me. As John Ruskin says, "When love and skill work together, the result is a masterpiece."

Together we are an unstoppable machine with two thrust engines and four wheels (our

four beautiful children), and with the firm objective of always moving forward.

The road has been difficult, hard, and the distances to acquire raw materials and supplies are long, since everything comes from the city of San Juan and/or Buenos Aires. It was also difficult for us to obtain the necessary machinery, which is expensive. But, despite everything, we have been able to start our small business.

Today, my designs adorn homes, and that's a tribute to that dreamy teenager who shaped the beginning and essence of who I am and what my factory, SANTOS HOME & DECO, is all about. A small tribute to my father, who is no longer with me. We are a small company with enormous potential; the trust and acceptance of the people who choose us to design the place they will inhabit for the only life they have.

Today, my parents, I'm sure, would be proud of the woman I've become. I owe a large part of this to their ability to clothe me with love and dreams.

Now it's my turn to guide them. My most precious legacy is my children, who live our daily lives and whose paths are well guided, based on responsibility and commitment. They will be the ones who continue in our footsteps and make this thing that is growing today to be great.



"Entrepreneurship is a journey of creativity and discipline. Creativity allows you to innovate and find new solutions, while discipline ensures that your ideas are translated into concrete achievements".

Anahí Pereyra

THE SECURITY OF CHOOSING OUR PATH

Celeste Rodríguez's Story

The venture: Consultora Azuleste de Higiene, Seguridad y Medio Ambiente

What I remember as a child is that I lived a happy childhood, surrounded by family, by people who showered me with love every day. I became not only the daughter of my parents, but also the heartfelt daughter of my aunt Juana and my godfather, Victor, who cared for me and spoiled me at all times. There was also my brother, two years younger than me, with whom we were very close and companions throughout our childhood. A father who always worked hard and a mother who also worked. Of course, at bedtime, my mother's stories were a must; she always had a new story.

As a child, I dreamed of being a singer. My godfather made me a wooden microphone, carved with his own hands. I loved reading a lot, studying, listening to music, dancing, and, above all, singing in my own way.

Then, in my teens, I had new experiences. High school started with classmates and friends,

I knew from elementary school, but also new people. I have such wonderful memories. I think high school is the best experience, or at least for me, it was one of the best. The group projects, learning new things, the field trips, the graduation trips—what fond memories.

Once I felt settled in with my friends and acquaintances, back in my daily routine, I traveled to the city with my cousin and friend Daniela, started working at a social work center, and stayed to live in the city.

My cousin and I became close friends and always spent a lot of time together. When the opportunity arose to study for a degree that seemed interesting to me, Occupational Health and Safety Technician, I told her about it, and we both signed up. The space was only for thirty people, and the highest GPAs from high school were evaluated. We waited, very nervously, hoping to both be chosen. So, the days passed, I continued with my job. I remember one morning the phone rang, and when I answered, my mom said, "Daughter, you were selected." I felt so satisfied that I decided to dedicate a lot of effort to what I was choosing to study at the time.

Once I graduated, I began working as a teacher at a high school in the Jáchal Department, with many students. It was a very interesting experience.

I had to live through a very sad situation:



the loss of a family member. Although we all lost a loved one, my aunt was more than that; she was my second mother, whom I loved and continue to love so much. Her leaving this world was something that marked and changed me greatly.

At the end of November 2011, they called me for a job interview. I was living at my parents' house. I traveled to the city for the meeting. During the interview, they told me what it was about and that they were evaluating the best candidate. The job was to work as a high-mountain safety officer.

Days and weeks passed, and in the first days of December, I received a call confirming that I had been selected for the position. I was due to go up to the mine in a week. I went and accepted the job because I wanted to forget, to stop thinking that she was no longer there.

On my first day of work, I was filled with emotions, feelings, nerves, and fears about what I was facing. The good thing is that I'm a woman who adapts quickly, I enjoy new challenges and experiences, and I always give my best.

Time passed, as I became familiar with each file that needed to be developed, with each of the workers, receiving training every day, monitoring and implementing each of the systems and regulations that had to be followed. I became a supervisor, managing five contracting companies. This allowed me to advance and strengthen the role of a professional woman in

the mining industry, feeling the satisfaction of doing what I love.

With the arrival of my first child, I was no longer allowed to go into the mine for my safety and that of the baby. Immediately, the company decided to give me a job in the city of San Juan, where I performed tasks related to my profession while also supporting my colleagues, always respecting my breastfeeding periods. When the time came to go back into the mine, my son was my priority and came before anything else. For that reason, I decided to resign and dedicated myself to taking care of my little one.

When my baby turned one, I submitted my resume to two companies, and they immediately called me. I was hired. I dedicated myself to providing various training courses, obviously related to workplace safety. I also offered the new employee induction course, a 4- to 5-hour course for all personnel entering a mining project. I was the only person in charge of teaching it in both the Iglesia Department and Jáchal.

With the arrival of the pandemic, I could no longer teach those courses because meetings with multiple people were impossible.

Many questions arose in my head: How would I continue from then on? I had no shortage of offers to go high into the mountains, but my decision remained the same: to continue dedicating myself to my profession in my place,

close to my family, and even more so in 2020, to my husband, who was always my pillar in every decision I made, my son, an example of pure love, and a new treasure in my life, a little girl who needed me above all else. So, the idea of climbing, no matter how tempting, was out of the question. Whenever I could advise clients, I did so by phone, and if I had to send documentation by email, during the pandemic, my helmet was on standby, and my faithful work companion was my computer.

I've always been a brave and daring woman. My profession taught me that safety is paramount. That's why I created my own consulting firm, AZULESTE. It caters to both public and private companies, as well as individual clients, and provides advice on hygiene, safety, and the environment. The services it offers include training, reports, Policy No. 5, ATS, ERNT, among others, issues that are very important for all types of activities. AZULESTE differentiates itself from the competition because, above all, its first priority is for everyone to return home in the same condition as when they arrived at work. We are here to take care of our staff at all times.

My life has had many good points and others not so good, however, as I sang as a girl:

Maybe I cried or maybe I laughed
Maybe I won or maybe I lost
Now I know I was happy

That, even if I cried, I also loved
I can conti-

nue until the end
In my own way

Don't let anyone stop you, nothing is impossible and always prove that you can achieve what you set out to do.





THE FLIGHT OF THE BUTTERFLIES

Elizabeth Poblete's Story

The venture: Mariposas y el colibrí

I grew up in this town surrounded by mountains, breathing the fresh air. We lived for a time with my maternal grandmother, a skilled seamstress, who passed on her skills to her daughters, including my beautiful mother, Lucía, a seamstress and designer, who made clothes for her six children. I played with her machines, and my curiosity, typical of a child, led me to always be among threads and fabrics. I dressed my dolls, and later, back in the city of San Juan, I played making clothes for my sisters' dolls. In my teens, I even started making my own party clothes. When I grew up, I decided to study dressmaking with a specialization in tailoring, and later, I earned a degree in beautician. During the pandemic, after thirteen years of work, I was laid off from the company where I worked. The pandemic not only left me unemployed, but it also dealt me the worst blow a human being can receive in life: the death of my younger sister and my mother, just two months apart.



My life took an unexpected turn: unemployed and devastated by the loss, not knowing what to do, with a degree in hand, I packed my life in a suitcase and decided to return to Iglesia to find peace and new job opportunities. I knocked on thousands of doors, which were either closed or never opened, until one day I was invited to join a network of entrepreneurial women.

I trained, first in public speaking, since

I always struggled to express myself openly, and then in all the courses I was invited to.

The Josemaría group provided us with training, and I entered a program to finance my project.

It was very difficult for me to find a formal job with a steady income, but I found a temporary job. When the project was finished, I was unemployed again. Feeling very discouraged, and just as I was about to head back to the city, I received word from Josemaría that my project was approved, and my long-awaited dream realized: my machines were on their way.

Today, I see my dreams come true, with my love for fashion flowing through stitches and fabrics and the spark of creativity, in a new chapter of my life.

The company not only provided me with the necessary tools but also offered me ongoing training and support.

Isn't it easy? Of course not, but today my dream is that, over time, my fashion and beauty studio will become a benchmark for style and personal care for the women of Iglesia.

With determination, gratitude, and attitude, I want to become an entrepreneur and an inspiring example in the community, and for my space to be a place to create, beautify, and empower the women of my beloved town.



ADDING SWEETNESS TO LIFE

Macarena Cuevas's Story

The venture: Dulce tentación

I was born in my grandparents' house, where I lived until I was one year old. My parents decided we should move to another house, where I spent a lot of time alone with my mom while my dad worked.

My business venture began one day when, while talking with my sister, we came up with the idea of selling something during Sweet Week to cheer people up after what we'd experienced during the pandemic. We offered small boxes of candy, which were very successful, so friends of my parents and relatives encouraged us to continue with this idea.

With the help of our parents, we bought molds and chocolate and began producing. We created a website, and little by little, people got to know us, and we grew as a business. We called it Dulce Tentación, sweet because of the chocolate and its fillings, and temptation because when people see them, they are tempted.

Our current project is to find a place where we can make and sell our products.





NO ONE IS BORN KNOWING IN THIS LIFE

Silvia Eda Álvarez's Story

The venture: Mis dos estrellas

I lived with my grandmother Julia, my second mother. She dressed and wove the wool from the local sheep to survive on the fruits of her labor. It was also her hobby in the afternoons and evenings. At thirteen, I began to be intrigued by what my grandmother did with the wool by the side of the hearth.

One winter afternoon, I decided to sit next to her and asked if she could teach me how to do what she did with such pleasure. She replied: "Yes, my child, I'd be happy to teach you so that one day you'll be able to knit your own coat."

From that moment on, my grandmother and I began dressing the sheep wool that a man who lived in the area had given us. I began stretching the wool and removing all the trash from the field where the sheep were feeding, and at that moment, I began to write my story.

I wondered how it was possible to turn sheep's wool into yarn with a stick. My grandmother told me at that moment: "No, daughter,

it's not a stick, it's a spindle with a distaff. The wool we clean with our hands becomes yarn by making a rope and making the spindle dance with that rope, and that way we'll get a very fine and firm thread so you can weave a blanket on the loom." I told my grandmother that I couldn't do that because I didn't know how to do it. She told me: "Daughter, no one is born knowing everything in this life. I'll be here to teach you every step of the way what you need to do to turn it into a blanket." That's how I wove the blanket for my bed.

As the years went by, my love for the loom grew. When I turned eighteen, I became a single mother. At that point, I had to go out to work to raise my daughter. On my days off, I knitted and learned more and more.

Soon after, I met the man who would be with me for the rest of my life, the father of my other four children, the pillar of the family. We both worked side by side to raise our children, he as a bricklayer and I with my weavings on the loom. I wove shawls, blankets, saddlebags, and anything else I could think of.

My weavings began to gain more and more recognition, and, of course, sales grew.

However, in 2010, I was diagnosed with an illness that prevented me from knitting again. I had arthritis and lupus, so I had to take great care of myself. It was the greatest pain I ever endured regarding my health. I spent entire days



bedridden, unable to move my joints; I suffered greatly. One of my daughters had to help me bathe, since I was unable to move. Until we

found a doctor who helped me, little by little, began to improve.

Two years later, I began to recover and returned to knitting. I remember the first thing I made was a saddlebag that I embroidered with flowers.

A year after I started knitting again, I received an invitation to participate in the Rural Expo in Buenos Aires, selling one of my handicrafts to be taken there. At the time, I was in San Juan for a health check, so I called my husband and gave him the price of the saddlebag I had knitted some time ago.

The selection process was scheduled for December of that same year. We sold it in March, and in June, my husband passed away. My world was falling apart because my partner, the one who helped me work the wool, season, spin, and even twist the thread—he who helped me support my family—no longer existed.

In December 2019, I received great news: my saddlebag had been selected for the Rural Expo. A friend had read the news in a newspaper and told my daughter about it. I cried with happiness because I thought that finally, this thirteen-year-old girl could see her knitting grow.

Today, at fifty-eight, I participate in every fair in and around my beloved department, proud also because my business has its own name and logo: Mis dos estrellas. (My two stars).



"Entrepreneurship requires courage and honesty. Being brave in the face of challenges and being honest with yourself at every step are the keys to building a solid path to success."

Silvia Eda Álvarez



ZONDA

It is a picturesque village located in the southern part of the Iglesia Department, 5 km from Rodeo. It is made up of a few families who are primarily dedicated to agricultural activities, cultivating the land with care and tradition. Zonda is a haven of peace and authenticity, where the simplicity of rural life combines with the warmth of its people.

FAMILY FIRST

Alejandra Vanesa López's Story

The venture: Artesanías Alfrangeles

I was born and raised in the Iglesia department, the oldest sister of five boys. With my mother, Marys Riveros, my father, Oscar López, and my brothers, Daniel, Ricardo, Raúl, Carlos, and Mario, we lived in a small town called Campanario, in the house of my paternal grandparents, my mother, Chela, and my father, Segundo. I had a childhood full of shortcomings that were never noticed because of the love my family put into raising us. On hot summer nights, we had no way to cool the house, but my parents would playfully suggest sleeping under the starry sky. We would take the beds out onto the patio and all sleep outside. It was on those nights, by the fireside, by candlelight, that my grandmother taught me to crochet with her special and unique needles made from bicycle spokes. Our breakfast was freshly milked cow's milk and homemade bread with butter made from the cream. I also remember Sunday dessert, milk and flour, like flan with caramel.

When I was nine, we received two big pieces of news: a new brother and my parents'

long-awaited home. It was a radical change for the whole family. The new house was ten kilometers from the school. My father, in time, prepared our carriage for us, a horse-drawn sulky. At first, nicknames began to be given; we were called "little Indians" by our new classmates. We didn't care. We arrived at the new school on a beautiful ship; we were happy traveling in our sulky. It didn't matter if it rained or snowed, was windy, or was hot, we never missed school.

At seventeen, I became pregnant with my first child. Many changes, very sad, hard moments, and much suffering, but nothing changed my decision to continue the pregnancy and be a single mother.

At twenty-one, I got married and received the wonderful news of the arrival of my second child, a daughter. At twenty-three, my third was born.

A few months later, I discovered an ectopic pregnancy, the greatest pain, a C-section that marked me for life. A baby that would never be born, and the sad news that I would never have any more children.

Then came the worst news: the damn illness, cervical cancer. Those were months of great pain and sadness, but thank God, everything turned out very well.

I've experienced both good and bad times in my life. But I've always been able to face them with love, knowing that love is the only magic



that transforms a pumpkin into a carriage. Little by little, I've managed to improve day by day and never give up, no matter how hard it is.

Today, at forty-eight years old, I am proud to be the mother of three beautiful children, Exequiel, Melisa, and Aldo, whom we affectionately call Tito, and the young grandmother of Jazmín, Francisco, Luana, Ciro, and Valentina.

My motto has always been: my children and my family come first. That's why a few years ago, to help support the family finances, I took

up my grandmother's craft and started crocheting again. This is how Artesanías Alfrangeles came to be, named after the initials of my first three grandchildren and the Archangel Chamuel, the angel of love, whose work is to foster gratitude and unconditional, selfless love for others. Today, I have been working on my crochet business for four years. This confirms to me that when you love and do it with love, you will reap good results. I thank God for everything I have.



IN LIFE, YOU SHOULD NEVER GIVE UP

Marcela Viviana Díaz's Story

The venture: Delicias Candelaria

My mother, Ángela, gave birth to me in 1977 at Rawson Hospital in San Juan. My godparents, Lidia and Manuel, welcomed me into their home with great love. Then we traveled to Iglesia, to my grandparents' house, in the countryside called Pismantita. There I had a very happy childhood, learning to live with nature and the animals my grandparents and aunts and uncles cared for. It was wonderful to watch the sunset and the stars on the dark nights in Pismantita. Early in the morning, my grandparents milked the goats to enjoy that delicious milk with mint, homemade bread, and the quesillo with sugar that my grandmother Rina made. After that, my grandfather would chop wood to cook the delicious lunch in the iron pot over the fire. My mother watered the yard and helped my grandmother with the other chores. We children would gather the chicken eggs in a basket that they placed under the rockrose and the fierce nettles.

In the afternoons, Grandpa would saddle our horse to ride through that beautiful green meadow, the "vega," as they called it. When I was five years old, my mother met my father wholeheartedly, married her, and acknowledged me as his daughter. He gave me his last name, and it was at that moment that I realized my biological father had simply abandoned us. Today, my father, Carlos, is my love; I love him with all my heart. When we decided to come to Iglesia, my father had a beautiful house, and he was waiting for us with all the love in the world.

I remember one winter morning, when I was only five years old, sitting in a chair, watching my mother knead some tablets. She looked at me lovingly as she cooked. I remember the stove smoking and warming the hearth. The aroma of toasted sugar perfumed the entire house. That day I began to love cooking.

I started elementary school at five years old and successfully completed it, getting to carry the national flag and achieving the highest average in seventh grade at Manuel Alberti School in the town of Zonda.

My parents and sisters were proud. At twelve, I started middle school, and it was a wonderful stage of my life.

When I turned fifteen, we went out dancing with my friends. I love dancing, listening to music, riding my bike, and visiting my grandmothers on the weekends.

Around that time, I found out I was going to be a mother, while I was in my fourth year of high school.

It was a time of great anguish and sadness, having to drop out of school because my mother couldn't take care of my son, and neither could his father because he wouldn't take care of him. I felt so much pain because history was repeating itself.

It was at that moment that I decided not to give up and move forward. I started working in family homes, babysitting children, washing, ironing, and doing everything necessary to help out at home. When my son started kindergarten, I decided to sell homemade bread, semitas, and tablets—that legacy from my grandmother and my mother who, thank God, is still with us today to give us all their love and affection.

Life wasn't easy for any of us. My father had a stroke and was paralyzed. How painful it was to see such a beautiful, active, and vibrant person confined to bed!

Today I continue moving forward, being part of a project of entrepreneurial women with my artisanal baking. Knitters, seamstresses, pastry chefs, as much or more courageous as I am, a beautiful group that decided not to give up in the face of life's adversities.

Thanks to my efforts, I received funding to present a project about what I love: artisanal baking.





I never imagined I could obtain.

I am very happy because I managed to move forward with the people I love most by my side.

I created Delicias Candelaria in honor of my daughter and her life because, since she was born, I have celebrated her; she is the joy of our home. When I cook, I seek to imbue my products with the deepest love that exists, the love we feel for our children. I would like that when people try a Delicias Candelaria product, they feel the gratitude, respect, and love that

was instilled in me from a very young age and that I try to pass on.

With sacrifice, setting goals, and never giving up, we can go far and achieve our dreams.

Today, my dream is to own my own business and be able to move forward with my partner, a wonderful man, my eight children, and my three grandchildren, whom I love more than life itself. I would also like to be able to help those in need, because if there's one thing that defines me, it is, above all, respect and solidarity with those who have less.

INDEX

Prologue	7
Who We Are	9
Introduction	11
Stories	13
ANGUALASTO	15
Ruda Hembra - Iris Vega	16
Mom, I Want to Be Like You - Soledad Díaz	20
Scents of Childhood - Violeta Díaz	22
BELLA VISTA	25
Daily bread brings back sweet memories - Carmen Mesina	26
The recipe for all problems is always work - Sabina Cabello	29
My children are my sweetness - Vanesa Espejo	31
Mom, let's make tablets - Viviana Mondaca	34
LAS FLORES	37
My Grandmother's Teachings - Analía Espejo	38
My Work Was Hidden in the Corner of My Dreams - Estela Carabajal	40
The Art of Making Decisions - Laura Aciar Ruíz	42
Beyond the Tangible: A Legacy of Flavors and Colors - Nancy Muñoz	46
A Sweeter World - Rosa Margarita Flores	50

RODEO	53
Decisions that invite us to grow - Carla Andrea Meglioli	54
Education is the solution to all problems - Cecilia Vedia	57
I want, I can, and I deserve it - Cristina Palacio	59
Cut, make, and surprise - Deolinda Esquivel	63
Maternal inheritance, a legacy of love - Elsa Raquel Varela	65
Never a no for an answer - Giselda Castillo	68
Dreams of an astronaut girl - Gabriela Lauz	70
The task is accomplished - Johana Pick Pontoriero	72
Life is in the journey - Lala García	75
Brothers unite - Laura Ramos	78
The owner of the road - Maggy Durán	80
The secret is to nourish ourselves from childhood - Margot Cortés	82
Dressing dolls - María Manuela Castillo ⁸⁴	
Life entrepreneur - María Cristina Ramos	87
A passion that is inherited - María Carrizo	90
In every braid, a story; in every strand, a wish - Nancy Brizuela	94
Every day a different sunrise - Selma Poblete	97
My grandmother's hands - Soledad Castillo	101
Teaching and undertaking - Vanesa Barrios	103
TUDCUM	109
To the beat of my dreams, I found my direction - Ana María Rivas	110
Keeping my hands and mind busy - Cristina Brizuela	116
From shepherdess to weaver, a story of overcoming - Emérita Flores	118
The artisan of flavors - Edita Ramona Aguilera	120
The taste of home - Fanny Pizarro	122
Creativity has no limits - Fátima Díaz	126
A woman who fights for her dreams - Flavia Pizarro	128

There are always opportunities - Isabel Taillant	130
It's a matter of believing in yourself - Lorena Ponce	132
Take the first step, the universe will take care of the rest - Marisa Flores	135
In honor of me - Marisa Aguilera	138
Between grandmothers and granddaughters - Paola Sanchez	140
Lessons from our people - Rosa Aguilera	142
Love conquers all things; it is engraved in every cell of the body - Sandra Muñoz	144
The Craft of Listening with Your Hands - Verónica Rivero	148
VILLA IGLESIA	151
Designing Dreams - Anahí Pereyra	152
The Confidence of Choosing Our Path - Celeste Rodríguez	155
The Flight of Butterflies - Elisabeth Poblete	160
Adding Sweetness to Life - Macarena Cuevas	162
No One Is Born Knowing What to Do in This Life - Silvia Eda Álvarez	164
ZONDA	169
Family First - Alejandra Vanesa López	170
In life, you must never give up - Marcela Viviana Díaz	173

Being an entrepreneur is much more than simply starting a business; it's a journey of self-discovery and courage, where every challenge becomes an opportunity to grow. It means having the courage to follow our dreams and the determination to turn every idea into a tangible reality, facing uncertainty with passion and perseverance.

In this process, as you've seen in our stories, we've found invaluable allies. Their constant support and training have provided us with the tools and knowledge necessary to strengthen our ventures. Their contribution has not only enhanced our skills but has also illuminated our path, allowing us to move forward with confidence and hope toward a future full of possibilities that will undoubtedly be networked.

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