**South Texas College**

ARTICLE

*NOTE: Gonzalez & Elizondo-Weber have reviewed this article, and all changes have been incorporated.*

Heading options:

Rosario Gonzalez Finds Her Wings

A Fresh Start on a Path to Success

Rosario Gonzalez came to this country illegally at the age of 15, not understanding a word of English. She married young and had six children. She spent 26 years in an abusive marriage.

Rosario Gonzalez has had the cards stacked against her in so many ways. Now, she’s trusting South Texas College to help her put the past behind her and get a head start on a better future.

“I had wanted to leave my marriage years earlier, but my husband threatened to take away my kids. He said he’d kill me,” she says now in perfect English, echoing the same thread of threats heard by so many women like her. “I was not a citizen at the time and I didn’t know my rights. I had a fear of speaking about him to anyone.”

Things came to a head several years ago when Gonzalez and her daughters went to Mexico to visit her sick mother—against her husband’s wishes. “We had a huge blowout when I came back three days later, and my oldest son ended up calling some friends in law enforcement. When they came to the house and asked what I wanted, I said I wanted him to leave. My husband then said I was worthless, that he would never waste his life on someone such as me,” Gonzalez recalls.

**A Promise Made**

Without her husband’s approval, Gonzalez had already passed her GED exam. With the freedom of being newly separated, she enrolled in South Texas College in 2017 with the goal of becoming a nurse.

“My mom did not have an education, but she used to help out at [a] doctor’s office in Mexico, so I was familiar with what she did,” says Gonzalez. “The neighbor who gave me my first dictionary when I came to this country was a nurse. She became a wonderful friend and I was inspired by what she did.”

Gonzalez is still mourning the death of her mother, who died in 2017. She’s proud that she’s keeping the pledge she made to her before she died. “She made me promise to leave my husband and continue my education. She would tell people ‘I know my daughter will be a nurse even though I won’t be there to see it.’”

When Gonzalez graduates, she says she will “graduate for her.”

**Going Back to School**

Although the separation was the turning point for Gonzalez to move on with her life, she admits it has been very difficult. She has full custody of her children: four are minors and live with her, and her youngest has cerebral palsy. “She has nightmares that I will die,” says Gonzalez. “She’s become my shadow and won’t let me out of her sight.”

Adjusting to going to school again has presented some challenges, too. “The computer is my number-one enemy!” she says with a laugh. “I was terrified of Blackboard, and I felt ridiculous asking how to submit my homework on the site. But one thing I learned as a survivor is how to talk to people. I realized that my professors are not just there to teach, they are there to guide.”

The staff, administration, and faculty at South Texas College have always made the process so easy, Gonzalez adds, whether she was signing up for classes, seeking financial aid, or dealing with the computer. “All I had to do is ask,” she says.

In particular, Gonzalez cites her anatomy instructor, Dr. Dan Murray, with inspiring her to want to learn more. Her history professor, Dr. Rainlilly Elizondo-Weber, taught with such a passion that she felt she was present in the historic moment she discussed.

Gonzalez still has to battle inner demons that tell her she’s a failure—a legacy of so many years of emotional abuse. “I have a terrible fear every time I take an exam that I won’t pass it, that I don’t know anything. It’s a severe anxiety that tells me he [ex-husband] still has control over me. But I see my results and I have nothing less than a B, so I know he’s wrong.”

The people around Gonzalez recognize that she is drawing on her inner strength and determination to restructure the path of her life. “I have great respect for the strength that Rosario has displayed in overcoming the obstacles that prevented her from getting an education earlier in life,” notes Dr. Elizondo-Weber. “While unfortunate, she appears to have thrived despite her experiences. It’s clear she’s not going to allow past, current, or future barriers to get in the way of achieving an education.”

Currently, Gonzalez is taking classes for both her associate degree and her bachelor’s degree. In a few months, after she takes the HESI entrance exam, she will be able to enroll in nursing school. “I’m hoping to begin my nursing classes next spring,” she says, adding that she has posted her goals in her home so her kids can see them. “They know that things will be easier for us once I graduate in 2021.”