

Servio Palacios - Autobiography

It was a beautiful January night in the capital, a valley surrounded by mountains, with its colonial buildings, paths, and narrow streets. He had met the city a long time ago, when Tegucigalpa was not crowded or polluted. There he was, laying on a bed, the one who used to be strong, smart, hilarious, and exemplary. He was now going back and forth to the emergency room. Nonetheless, he always had a hand to hold. He deserved it. He had earned it. Suddenly, suffering transformed to relief when happiness reached his soul. It was over. He was gone, and with him part of my life had just vanished.

I was born in Copan Ruins, Honduras; Copan is an archaeological site of the Maya Civilization located in Honduras' western region. During my childhood, there was only an elementary school at Copan, so my parents decided to come to the capital (Tegucigalpa) to give their children better opportunities toward obtaining a college degree. The two of them managed to raise their children with less than \$100 per month. Their great effort inspired a tremendous sense of responsibility in me to earn a gold medal as the best student in the largest public high school in my country. That honor helped me to obtain a scholarship from the most prestigious private university in Honduras. During my college education, I struggled with a new and sometimes hostile environment. People were not friendly anymore, at least not to the extent I was used to. Many believed that I was not supposed to be there because I was a poor guy from an underprivileged neighborhood, but that was fine because it gave me an extra motivation to overcome some of the challenges. For instance, I did not have a computer, despite being in the computer science department. I learned how to write and test code on sheets of paper since I

just had a couple of hours a week to finish lab assignments. Borrowing books to read overnight was a constant activity. It was all worth the effort. I attained my Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science. Now it was time to help others.

As an engineer, I had the privilege to help my parents while working on what I liked the most with well-known companies. After some years in the industry, I started to ask myself, "Now what?" I did not want to spend the rest of my days behind a desk or as a slave. I decided to learn the English language by myself because I wanted to apply to foreign universities. I tried the TOEFL for the first time. Sadly, I fell 10 points short of the requirements. I felt like the universe was telling me something. Precisely when I was getting the sense that girls were not worth the time, she appeared. Proud, smart, beautiful, she was perfect. We married, and after a couple of years, I started pursuing my dream. I studied hard, with two jobs and lots of responsibilities. Then, the universe slapped me again. I was diagnosed with Bell's Palsy after a tremendous amount of stress. Thank God it happened, because later that year a little egg hatched and made my life a lot cuter. I became a father. With my boy, a new set of responsibilities came into consideration and the pressure to become an example to my newborn was inherited. Nonetheless, the hardest punch was approaching.

My father was diagnosed with Glioblastoma multiform, the most common and most malignant of the glial tumors. In those days we dedicated most of our time to taking care of him. I still missed our poker nights. It was impossible to beat him. The moment arrived. My dad was gone. It hurt so much that I isolated myself, and started studying in a cold corner of a computer servers'

room. He always wanted me to study outside of Honduras. I earned sufficient TOEFL exam and GRE scores, and I applied for a Fulbright Scholarship. Later that year, I became a Fulbright grantee. With the Fulbright scholarship many doors opened; thankfully, Purdue was one of those.

Life as a Fulbright grantee was not easy at all. For instance, people assumed that I had some special super power to get good grades. However, I struggled with the first couple of semesters at Purdue. Coming from a developing country with a completely different educational system was taking its toll. Moreover, the environment was so competitive, because I was surrounded by beautiful minds. Interestingly, after three intense semesters, I became accustomed to the workload, and in fact, I started to enjoy graduate school. In my last period as a Master's student, I applied to the Ph.D. program. One month had passed, and the good news arrived right on my birthday. I had become a Ph.D. student in Purdue's Computer Science Department.

My new research activity is so interesting and rewarding. I barely sleep, but I love what I do so much. Therefore, it is my role to look for better opportunities and demonstrate that in spite of limitations, with passion and effort, we can reach our goals. Moreover, I will continue honoring all the sacrifice of those who have supported my family and me.