**Gloria Rico**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Colombian author and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for literature, declared, “It is not true that people stop pursuing dreams because they grow old; they grow old because they stop pursuing dreams.” If this is true, then Gloria Rico will never grow old.

Gloria began her life in modest surroundings on the outskirts of Bogota, Colombia. Although her family did not have much money, they were close-knit and Gloria has happy childhood memories of family celebrations and playing outside with her two brothers. Because they lived far away from the crowded city, Gloria’s mother taught her about the plants and animals that lived around them. Thus, Gloria learned to appreciate nature. These humble beginnings also instilled in her a sense of imagination and the capacity to dream.

One of Gloria’s first dreams was to enter the medical field. After receiving her nursing degree, she was employed as a nurse for eight years. During her last year as a nurse, she worked at a high school where one of her responsibilities entailed directing a group called “The Young Brigade of the Red Cross.” The function of this group was to promote principles and values related to alleviating human suffering under adverse conditions.

Gloria’s creative mind began getting restless, however, and she began to focus on a new dream. She earned a degree in architecture, but shortly after graduating, her husband was accepted into a master’s program in petroleum engineering in Oklahoma. Gloria’s small family stayed in Oklahoma while her husband continued his education, eventually earning his Ph.D. Afterwards, he found employment in Texas, and in 2006 Gloria enrolled in ESOL classes at Lone Star College-CyFair.

She was eager to return to the world of architecture, but she knew that she needed to improve her English first. Although Gloria believes that each of her classes and teachers at Lone Star College-CyFair gave her different “gifts,” she remembers her first teacher in the ESOL program with fondness. Adjunct Professor Nancy Christian gave Gloria “the gasoline to start” learning English because she felt she “was empty at that time.” Gloria felt too old to be thinking about starting a new career in a new country, but Ms. Christian made learning fun. Ms. Christian remembers Gloria as “the type of student who makes me feel as though I am doing an excellent job as a teacher. She often gave me feedback on those activities that helped her learn English. These were invaluable to me. I admire her so for tackling a new degree in a new language as an older adult.”

Another instructor who motivated Gloria was Adjunct Professor Jan P. Brown, whom Gloria refers to as her “spiritual support.” Gloria felt as if Ms. Brown could read her mind and was able to understand even if Gloria’s English was not perfect at the time. Ms. Brown had noticed Gloria’s work ethic and stated, “I was continually inspired by the manner in which she addressed each task – from everyday homework to her formal presentations. Her attention to detail and commitment to quality in all she does has become Gloria’s trademark.”

Indeed, Gloria was one of the first brave pioneers who enrolled in the ESOL department’s new service-learning class taught by Professor Sharon Bippus. In this class, the ESOL students visited a retirement community on a weekly basis and were each paired with senior partners. Based on what they learned during their weekly conversations, the ESOL students were responsible for presenting their senior partners with written biographies at the end of the semester. The biography that Gloria wrote for her senior partner was a testament to her diligence and determination, and her senior partner could not stop smiling as he looked at it. At the end of that semester, Gloria thanked both her senior partner and Ms. Bippus “who were like my bird parents; they gave me wings to fly outside of Lone Star College-CyFair.” Ms. Bippus considers Gloria to be “one of a kind. Not only is she a hard worker who always gives 100%, she also has a generous nature and a kind heart. I know that she will be successful in whatever she chooses to do.”

Now a graduate student at Prairie View A&M University, Gloria has moved one step closer to fulfilling her dream. She plans to earn her master’s degree in architecture in May, 2011, and in the future she would like to open her own architecture firm. One day she hopes to put her architecture skills to use by developing housing for the poor in Colombia so that she can give something back to her beloved homeland.

In the meantime, Gloria advises all ESOL students to maintain positive attitudes and to never give up on their dreams. Success may not come quickly, but it will come. The key is to “study, practice, and try to do better every day.”