

ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Faizulis Vides Beleño

Faizulis Vides Beleño is an ESOL student from Cartagena, Colombia. She came to the United States three years ago. Faizulis spent two years in Cleveland working as a nanny. Ten months ago, she and her husband moved to Rochester. She hopes to one day become a Physical Therapist because she loves the idea of helping people to recover and being part of their physical success.



Faizulis Vides Beleño, 2015

My Husband, My Hero

I could not stop looking at him. He still keeps that part of his life attached to him. I guess that is something I will never understand, or it is just the way it is supposed to be. There is no doubt that he will always be one of them, and I can't be more proud of him.

On a Sunday night, my husband and I were watching one of those American movies about the war. While lying on the couch, I came up with the idea of interviewing him and started to ask him questions about his military experience. Of course, he tried to avoid me, but I insisted until I got him to tell me almost everything I wanted to know. I grabbed some paper and sat at the dining room table. He remained sitting on the couch.

"How was your life before you joined the Army?" I asked.

Without hesitation he said, "I was lucky for some things, but not so much for others."

David was born in El Paso, Texas; he grew up in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico with his mother,

grandmother, and uncle. His childhood wasn't the happiest, but his family gave him all the love that an only child could get. Later, he studied mathematics at the University of Texas at El Paso. He was 22 years old when he decided to join the Army. For him, joining the Army gave the opportunity that he always wanted to travel, know about different cultures, and expand his knowledge. He was looking for independence.

While talking about his past, his face changed from excitement to sadness. I asked him, "How did you feel about entering the military; were you afraid, proud, or perhaps excited?" David told me that he was afraid, proud and excited at the same time. For him, joining the Army was a new experience. It was the first time he was away from his family. He was also proud because he thought that he was being part of something bigger than himself, and excited because he likes challenges and military life was the biggest challenge he ever faced. It

wasn't just about the wish of traveling and seeing the world. The military became more than that for him. It was the toughest challenge, and he wasn't prepared for it.

Basic training and Advanced Individual training were pretty hard. He had no idea about the military life and during the first six months he had to get used to following rules. He missed his family all the time. The transition from civilian life to military life was tough, but training became such an amazing experience. He traveled to exciting places like Thailand, Israel, Colombia, and the United Arab Emirates. He was living the dream in some way. He was seeing the world he knew he would not be able to see if he hadn't joined the Army.

"What was your most frightening experience?" He looked up and lifted his eyebrows. I guessed there were more than just one. For a moment, I felt guilty for bringing those memories back, but after seeing the

excitement in his eyes, it made me smile. "My first Airborne Jump. That was something I had never done before." He went to Fort Benning, Georgia for Airborne school for two weeks. During the classes, they did jumping simulations from towers for the first week. The next week, the experience got real. They were up in the air ready to jump from an airplane. "Some people were crying like babies. I was so nervous thinking about my turn. My hands were sweating. My heart started to beat so fast that it almost got out of my chest," he said, laughing nervously like he was on that airplane again. When the doors opened, it was like the wind slapped him on the face. He jumped out and screamed all the way down. I think I would have done exactly the same thing.

After training, it didn't take long for him to be deployed to Iraq where he would experience the war for the first time in his life. "Can you tell me how it was going to combat zones?" I asked.

"The most shocking experience of my life." His involvement in war zones brought sadness to his life. Seeing people die from his team was horrible. His melancholy eyes transported me to that horrific scenario. I felt the weeping of his soul through his words. It was such a strange sensation, but I started to understand him.

He went to Iraq for 15 months. Then, Afghanistan for one year. He was awarded the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the American Defense Service Medal. These medals represent the sacrifices all the soldiers make when they go to combat, lose friends, are away from home, and risk their lives for their country. David told me that in the war, it gets to the point where it is no longer about your country; it becomes something personal, between you and your enemy. I cannot even think about having to decide between my life and somebody else's. "If you die in combat, you will be remembered,

but at the end, these metal disks do not mean anything because the only thing we wish the most when we are in combat is to come back home alive."

He added, "There are also some funny moments that I will always remember, like wearing fighter masks at the end of our training. We loved to wrestle with each other just for fun. It was very relaxing to do things like this after the hard work."

He looked at me and hugged me. We have been married for almost three years now. It has only been 11 months since he was discharged. I feel so relieved that he is no longer in the military. I was always afraid of losing him, even though I knew he was doing something that he liked so much. I kissed him and thanked him for his trust. I was very touched by everything he told me. I admire him now more than I did before because of all the sacrifices he made. Since the day I married him, he has always been not only my husband, but my hero.