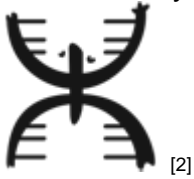


More than Science: Beautiful Life of a Borinqueña, Mother and Engineer ^[1]

Submitted by [Marvi Ann Matos](#) ^[2] on 6 May 2014 - 11:13am



With Elena and Sofía

It is 9:00 AM, I get a call from the school saying: "Please come to pick up your child who is not feeling well and is throwing up". My place of work is 45 minutes away, I call my spouse. "Can you pick up Sofia? She is not feeling well" I say. My spouse is in the middle of presentations with her students. We calculate together what is less damaging: to cancel my day meetings which can be postponed or to cancel the student presentations with more complicated logistics. We decide is better to postpone my meetings, I move all the meetings and jump on the road. I call the doctor for an appointment and we go from school, to home, to the doctor in less than 30 minutes. First mistake, I do not bring extra clothing for her. Second mistake, I do not bring a bucket. During our way to the doctor my daughter blesses the car with the rest of her breakfast and I can only console her by telling her it will be alright and we will figure it out once we are at the doctor's office.

What does an engineering mother do in such case? At the doctor's office we clean her clothes in the sink, but now they are all wet, I tell my daughter to use her jacket as a shirt and I make a skirt out of my jacket. "There, my baby is warm", I think to myself. We see the doctor, take the anti-vomiting prescription, go to the pharmacy, go home and have her rest until whatever is upsetting her stomach goes away. I spend the rest of the day giving my daughter tiny sips of water and very mild pure food. The next day Lilo (spouse) stays at home with Sofia and I resume my work week.



About ten years ago when we decided to have a child while still undergoing our PhDs in Chemical Engineering, it would have never occurred to me to stop school or work to have a family. This is a personal choice and my choice was not to drastically change my life or myself as a result of becoming a mother. The worst advices I got when I was pregnant was (1) to "go home and rest for the rest of your pregnancy", even though at the time I was only three months into the pregnancy, I was completely healthy and it is medically advised to continue to be active and (2) to "start changing your personality and life because it will happen anyway once the baby is born". Interestingly, both advices came from other women, men research peers did not dare to say something like this to me and my character. Of course, life changes, but when you can have control over your life and a profession that allows you to be flexible, many things are possible. My spouse and I completed both of our PhDs at the expected time and Sofia Guadalupe was in our arms during the graduation ceremonies. We continued our careers with post-docs and during that

time, we had our second daughter, Elena Isabel.

When episodes like the one described above happen, I always wonder how mothers without the resources, the flexibility at work and a supporting partner or family do this. One of the many advantages of being an Engineer, Engineering Manager, Scientist or Professor, is the fact that you learn to have a better control of your life and your priorities. When duty calls and you have to change your work plans to attend your sick child, you are generally able to do this because you have both the resources and the flexibility. The work place is also slowly evolving to be more accommodating to family oriented mothers and fathers. Our work teams are adapting as more single parents or working couples with children are open about their needs and employers discover that happy employees are more productive workers. By far, many companies are not perfect and there is still a lot of biased anti life-work balance policies and rules.



I will always remember when a supervisor asked me that if he worked from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM, how come I started that day at 8:30 AM?. Typically I start at 7:00 AM, but that day I could not. I told him: "It must be nice to have a housewife, but in my situation and while my partner is traveling, I cannot start earlier, leave my girls in the car and crack a window. I need to take care of my daughters in the morning." I am not always quick to answer and I am not advising to respond this way necessarily. In this case however, while working as a scientist, my starting time was

completely arbitrary. It makes me feel better though that as I move forward there are many other women and men like me who are revolutionizing the work place to better accommodate working parents.

The best advice I heard when I got pregnant was: “You will write your own story Marvi”. The best advice I can give you is to choose your partner wisely, if you choose to have a partner and you choose to be a parent. Your partner choice will propel you or drag you and life will unfold as a result. Working a full time job and being a mother is not an easy task, but when accompanied by a loving and supportive partner, it is possible to attain your personal goals while still enjoying a family life. The second advice is to think clearly how you want to contribute to society and in what capacity. As an Engineering Manager, people’s development, technology and innovation are at the forefront of my work. It is possible for me to help others and to work hard because my partner shares with me all household and parent responsibilities. It is possible for me to dream high professionally and have a family because my profession today enables me to grow and still have a life-work balance.



As a mother, my responsibility is to care for my girls, nurture them, provide for them and help them to develop emotionally, mentally and physically. We are fortunate to have two healthy and happy young girls and their happiness fulfills my life. My girls are inquisitive and naturally curious, so what do I do to nurture their inquisitive nature? We run experiments at home almost every weekend in chemistry, biology, physics and engineering. Together we have built a hydraulic arm model, have made artificial clouds and have worked on water remediation, polymers, structures, circuits, robots and soils. The girls and I also run experiments at school every two weeks with other children; Sofia and Elena are my assistants. I share these experiences in Facebook as a way to motivate other parents and disseminate science and engineering interest.



Our Experiments in Science and Engineering



People ask me if I am trying to persuade my daughters to be Engineers, but this is not the goal. Life experiences are always learning opportunities and I would like my girls to discover Science, Technology, Engineering and Math as they also discover Art, History, Humanities and Social Sciences, to mention a few disciplines. My goal is to nurture their development and foster their creativity and adaptation skills. My goal as a mother is also to raise open minded revolutionaries who are not afraid to speak, to help and to serve. I absolutely love being mother and I absolutely love my work. I hope that with my actions I can help to seed and cultivate the next generation of well-balanced, critical thinking and happy women, women who when challenged they see opportunity, even when this means improvising a fashionable skirt; women mothers and women leaders who are courageous to reach higher and to fulfill their dreams.

Borinqueña emphasizes on the contribution of Puerto Rican and Hispanic women in science and technology and provides a space to discuss topics of interest about the empowerment of women. In 'More than Science' we will share stories about Borinqueñas that are scientists, but also spend part of their time doing other activities and creating a balanced life free of stereotypes.

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