**My Story So Far**

I grew up in a small city in the Caribbean region of Colombia, one of those you rarely hear it on the news because nothing ever happens, but where people still believe that solar eclipses are supernatural. My school, which was supposed to be the best in town, was still quite far from good schools in Colombia. At some point, they wanted to set English as the official language of the school, but as they could not find English-speaking teachers for most of the subjects in our little town, they decided to teach the teachers a handful of prayers in English that we would have to repeat before class and that was it.

Against all odds, my parents managed to teach me to be curious about that part of the world that surrounded me and the world that I had yet to see, and provided me with some tools that I still carry with me: a love of learning and the value of hard work.

This was key for me as when I was a senior in High School thinking about college applications, I decided that I wanted to study economics in the best university of the country so I could combine my passion for math and need of understanding the social issues I constantly watched on TV. I dreamed big as being admitted to the Econ program at Universidad de los Andes was hard, but I dreamed even bigger when, during my second year of college after doing some RA work for a couple of professors, I said to my parents that I wanted to study abroad and pursued a Ph.D. in Economics.

Even though I had somehow a privileged upbringing, I did not meet a single person with a Ph.D. degree in my city nor in my family, but thankfully they supported me and encouraged me to work hard towards that goal. After I graduated from college, I applied to a job as an economist at the Central Bank of Colombia because I knew that they had a scholarship program for their employees who got admitted to PhD programs in Economics in top schools world-wide. At the time, around 2010, it was not easy at all for Colombian students to get scholarships abroad, so this was my best chance at it.

Moving fast forward, in 2013 I started a Ph.D. in Economics at UNC-Chapel Hill, graduated in 2018, and moved back to Colombia to work as a researcher at the Central Bank as part of the scholarship deal. I still work at the research unit of the Central Bank of Colombia, but in the branch located in Cartagena, which is a beautiful coastal city, with cobble-stone roads and a downtown full of history and a vibrant nightlife.

Even though, my day-to-day is filled with lots of work, I like to go for morning runs by the ocean, cook healthy meals at home during the week, and go out with my friends to enjoy all the great restaurants and bars on the weekends.

I do research on labor economics with a special interest on labor informality in developing countries, and I recently started working on crime and violence. I am very excited about all my research projects as I have been gathering great administrative data and looking at policy changes to answer the research questions I am interested in. For example, I am studying if allowing for a more flexible scheme for pension contributions in countries like Colombia, which have a stringent labor code and a large informal labor market, could reduce informality. On the more crime-related side, I am working on evaluating if a government-sponsored CBT-like intervention on teenagers aimed to reduce crime incidents have any effect on school outcomes and teen pregnancy.

I am still that little girl who dreams big, but my dreams are now in the shape of good papers. I hope to end 2020 with first versions of two new papers I am working on right now and to be able to present in some good conferences in 2021. I want to produce high-quality research so I can get to publish my papers in good journals in the next 5 years.

I also hope that, in the future, my research can have some real policy impact as that was my main reason for studying economics: I wanted to learn some tools that could help countries like Colombia to eradicate poverty and violence, fight social injustice and provide a brighter future for younger generations, and I have learned that education and good labor institutions are two of the most important tools we have for that.

I will work hard and stay true to my goals and dreams as they are my driving force. I am excited as ever about the future, all the things I will learn from and teach to others, and all the people I will meet in my journey. I hope to become a better version of myself every day.