

La Palomita Blanca Scholarship Entry
for
Laura D. Hernandez Vergara

July 10th, 2023

Dear *Palomita Blanca* Scholarship Committee,

First and foremost, I would like to not only thank you for the opportunity to submit such letter but also for your time in reading and taking it in consideration for your first ever *Palomita Blanca* Scholarship. I would also like to congratulate you on such an accomplishment, in putting all that effort together with the help of the community, what an inspiration you are to those here in Delaware. I wish you all the success in future endeavors and may there be many more scholarships like this one.

As you may already know, my name is Laura, and I am 25 years old. I was born in Toluca, Mexico. When I was just 2 years old when my mom, older brother and I came to the U.S. in search of the American Dream. To repay my mom for all the sacrifices she has made, at the age of 22, I bought my mother a house.

I currently work as an accountant for a financial consulting firm in Pennsylvania and I'm currently enrolled as a Graduate student at Wilmington University where I'm working on obtaining my master's degree in accounting. I'm expected to graduate in June of 2024! I graduated from the University of Delaware in 2021 with my bachelor's in accounting as well. I aspire of becoming Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and working in my dream job as an auditor. However, if that wasn't enough to juggle, I'm also an *adoptive* mother to a 10-year-old boy, which we will get more into detail later in this letter.

Now, to get into the answer of the purpose of this letter. Why do *I* deserve to win this scholarship? I think like many other applicants there's definitely a financial need for sure. When I attended UD, I had a scholarship that paid some of my tuition and whatever it didn't, I paid out of pocket. I was working three jobs at the time in order to afford to pay that remaining balance. Even though that was extremely difficult, I am very happy and proud I did that. Not only was I able to graduate in 2021 debt free but the satisfaction of knowing I truly worked my butt off for that degree is like no other. Now, for my master's degree I went in knowing that I was going to have to work twice as hard for it. Not only is a master's degree a lot more expensive, but there are also not many scholarships for graduate students. Especially, when you're an undocumented student or DACA student like me. However, I was ready to put in the effort or so I thought.

However, aside from the financial need, there is one other reason I feel I deserve this scholarship and in order to explain why, I need to go back in time and relive the year 2021 through this letter. So, grab a seat, have some tissues ready and make sure to keep along. It was definitely a wild ride, a ride that changed my life forever.

Like I mentioned earlier, I graduated from UD in June of 2021. I had begun applying for graduate programs in early January of 2021. At that time, life was great. I had started the year very happy knowing I was graduating that summer, and I was happily in a relationship with the world's greatest man, who was a father to an 8-year-old boy at the time. On February 17th, 2021, around 3pm. I had gotten an email with my acceptance to Wilmington University, I sent a screenshot to my boyfriend that same afternoon, and I got a reply saying, "*I'm so proud of you*". Later that day, I continued to talk to him about how I wanted my class schedule to be among other things. Little did I know that was going the last conversation I would have with him.

Towards the end of the night, he had suddenly stopped replying. I went to bed thinking he had fallen asleep. The next morning, I woke up to still no response from him. I continued to reach out and still nothing. So, I decided to take matter in my own hands and go look for him in his apartment. Unfortunately, that morning I went in and faced the biggest heartbreak and trauma I would have ever imagined. As I opened the door to his bathroom, I found his lifeless body on the bathroom floor. I quickly tried to wake him up, but it was obvious he was no longer alive. You can imagine everything that occurred after that, police, medical examiners, and everything that you see in those crime shows, actually happened.

Since that day, my life was flipped upside down, I got into a really bad depression. For months I was having PTSD, I wouldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, I stopped going to work and I even stopped attending to classes. I had hit a point where I didn't want to live anymore. I wanted to drop out of school (even with one semester left of me graduating with my bachelors). Until one sleepless night, going through my phone, looking at pictures of us and re-reading old messages. I came across this text message from him from a while back that said the following "*No matter what happens to me, or to us. I want to ask you to never give up on Junior. He needs you more than you would ever know*". Junior as you can guess is his son that he left behind, his biological mother suffers from substance abuse and had never really been in his life. So, when Junior's dad died, he went to live with his paternal grandmother who for the record was not taking care of him as she should.

Remember that adoptive son I have? Well, you guessed it, that's Junior. That same night I went through my phone and found that message, I decided to get up and fight for that one last wish he had. I decided I needed to get my life back together, I went to therapy to deal with the grief and trauma of having to find his lifeless body, I went back to work, I emailed my teachers and asked them how I could save my degree, it wasn't easy, but I did it. And once I had gotten stable enough, I went to Family Court in the State of Delaware and filed a petition to get guardianship of Junior. I could honestly write a whole book on that journey. Junior's grandmother made my life impossible because she didn't want me to have him but then again, she wasn't taking care of him, he was being neglected in all aspects and not to mention, she doesn't speak the same language as he does. It was obvious he needed me just like I needed him. On July 31st, 2021, I was granted full guardianship of Junior. Since that day, I have devoted my entire life to this kid and loving, caring and providing for him and with the help of those around me he has grown and advanced so much academically that it's crazy to believe. Fast forward to 2023, I have filed a petition in court once again to legally adopt him as my son and that is scheduled to be finalized in October of 2023!

Now how does all this tie back to the reason as to why I deserve this scholarship? Well, in plain language I have been through it all. I literally had every reason to quit but I had one very important one to keep pushing through and that was my own *palomita blanca* in the sky. I went through the toughest time after his death, but ironically his death also pushed me to become this version of myself that I probably would have never been, I mean I'm a mom now! He taught me self-love, to get out of comfort zone and most importantly he taught me true love. Not a day goes by that I don't miss him, but I get comfort knowing that his son is with me today. I promised him I would never give on his son and in order to do so that meant never giving up on myself either.

Since getting custody of Junior, I have changed my life in a matter that benefits Junior. I found a job that is flexible with his schedule and decided to go back for that master's degree that I once talked with his dad before passing. For those few years in between, I had put going back to school off because it brought back so many emotions and scary feelings, especially since that

was really the last conversation, I had with him before he took his last breath. However, I know that he would have wanted me to accomplish that goal, and honestly If it wasn't because I took Junior in with me, I don't think I would have gone back to school. Having him has motivated me to be resilient to show him that no matter how hard life has been, it's always brighter on the other side. But first, you must pass the darkness in order to get to the light.

If I were to be selected for this scholarship, I would like to receive it in honor of my own *palomita blanca* in the sky named **Noel Torres**. God knows that everything I do, is for his son, his memory and the love he had for me. I appreciate your time in reading this letter, *y que sea lo que Dios quiera*.

Sincerely,

Laura D. Hernandez Vergara