

## Maybe This Can Save a Life, Like It Did For Me

Pedro Quesada

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It was almost midnight. I was sleeping when heard a couple of knocks on the wall behind my bed, from the next room. My mother was having a heart attack that took her life that night. She died at the age of 51. This event and the way it happened, changed my personal story in so many ways.

Since I was a little kid, my mother was my eyes, her wellbeing was the most important thing for me. She suffered terribly from arthritis, since she was 15 years old. She had to finish high school studying from home, lying in bed. She managed to go to college, where she studied English and Secretarial duties. I remember her stories of how my grandmother had to carry her in her arms from the bus station home, when coming back from college each day. Throughout the years, my mother developed several serious collateral illnesses, as a result of taking strong pain medications. I grew up seeing her battle against sickness, between many nights in public hospitals and doctor appointments. I often prayed to God to heal her and return her home.

My dream as a kid was also my mother's dream. She wanted to see me graduate from university. I am the third of four children and neither of my two older brothers nor sister wanted to study; so, she dreamed while fixing my tie and adjusting my graduation cap in preparation for the upcoming ceremony. I knew my time was limited, so I made a lot of additional effort and spent many long nights studying. I was admitted for Computer Science Engineering at the Costa Rica Institute of Technology – normally a five-year program. By increasing my course load during the school year and taking additional summer classes to advance more rapidly, I was able to get into the final graduation project sooner: an internship with a major international company, in my case, Intel Corporation.

My mother died two months prior to my college graduation in 2005. I was furious with God and fell into a terrible depression. We were poor, and as the first in my family to graduate and have a good job, I wanted to shower my mother with everything she deserved, especially good medical treatment. But she was gone. I was contemplating suicide when a Christian co-worker reached out to me. He prayed with me and led me back to Jesus Christ who healed my soul.

I found this much needed friend at Intel. At first, with so much anger and pain in my heart, I did not want to talk about my faith or God. I just could not understand why “He called her to His presence” like that. On one of those ‘bad days’, my co-worker approached me in a respectful and open way such that I could not resist talking about my feelings and my broken relationship with God. In one of our talks together, I decided to open my heart again to Him, and prayed again. Still with so many questions and mixed feelings, I desperately needed God's love, presence, and guidance in my life.

A few days later, I attended a spiritual weekend retreat, organized by my co-worker's church. As I had no other plans, I decided to go. The name of the place sounded familiar to me, but I did not realize what God had prepared for me in that place: “Escuela Social Juan XXIII”.

Back in 1998, when I was in high school, the Math professor invited me to participate in the Math Olympics. After a couple of years of trials and losing in the preliminary rounds, I made it to the Olympic

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Final: a full weekend event, where the final 30 students across the country would spend many hours solving mathematical problems.

The event was in “Escuela Social Juan XXIII”. It was Sunday afternoon; the closing ceremony was about to start. Families, relatives, local press and school staff members were all present in a packed auditorium filled with excitement and nervousness. When my category was announced, the students all looked at one another, some with confidence and others with uncertainty regarding the upcoming results. When my name was called, I stood up and turned back to see my mother and there she was, standing up and excitedly clapping, with the happiest and proudest face I ever saw. This is the most beautiful memory I have of her.

Back to my retreat. From the first moment I stepped into that place, an avalanche of thoughts, memories and mixed of feelings (pain, sadness, happiness) started running through me. Then, the international speaker that was invited for that year’s conference started talking about death, because he just lost his father a few months ago. I cannot say enough about how God talked to me that weekend. He spoke to my heart to make me understand that the peace and rest she is experiencing could never be compared with the material things and happiness I wanted to give her and that, this event in my life, would form the character and temperament needed for me to serve His purposes.

I cried like never before, a river of healing tears. After that weekend, I was finally able to speak out about what happened, without feeling pain, a trembling voice or teary eyes.

Time passed and I continued restoring my relationship with God. Faith became the most important thing for me, it defined my core values and my essential identity. My team members and co-workers soon started noticing something different. How could I hide that in my workplace? Or check out my faith at the building door? I needed to do something. I had this burning desire to help others, the same way my co-worker helped me. I wanted to express freely and openly to my team and manager that faith was now core to me.

My wife Magdaly and I (she worked at Intel at that time, and yes, I met her there too!), we requested time with our site general manager and prepared a proposal on a series of Christian programs, speeches and resources to help those employees in emotional need or interested in supporting others. He appreciated the enthusiasm and desire to help. Being an expat in Costa Rica, he mentioned seeing similar efforts in United States and put us in contact with Christian ERG leaders there and with HR, with the objective of opening a local chapter in our country! We walked out the meeting amazed of what God made possible and that same year, in 2009, an incredible adventure started with a “Christmas Gathering”, for Christians to celebrate Jesus birth. This was the official Christian community inauguration at our site.

There were several challenges and voices raising concerns to HR, as hearing words like “Christianity”, “Jesus”, “Prayers”, etc. was “not allowed” in our work environment, however, those were properly addressed based on education, tolerance and respect.

During these 10-years, hundreds of employees and their families have been positively touched in one way or another, spiritually, emotionally and personally. From recurrent Bible-studies to musical concerts, from networking opportunities for new employees to meaningful one to one mentoring on faith-based career progression; thousands of volunteering hours and community impact, helping to attract and retain talent, challenging our community members to foster a spirit of excellent and to live out Christian faith by serving and loving all employees in our workplace.

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Recently, our community coordinated an event named “Nurturing Interpersonal Relationships” with our peer LGBTQI+ ERG. This was a great example of how we can bring our communities closer, focusing on our similarities instead of our differences. We have hosted the same Martin Luther King event that happens at US sites every January and while it is not a holiday in Costa Rica, what he stands for, we stand for.

It has been an amazing journey so far and the most exciting of all is the incredible opportunity we have ahead of us, to create a positive impact in our workplaces through faith-based initiatives ... that maybe, could save a person’s life, just like me.