

Jóvenes Adelante Graduate Comes Full Circle

“Coming home to San Miguel means I have also come home to my JA family. Now it’s my turn to support the younger students however I can.” To that we say, welcome home Chayo!

It was always clear that Rosario Hernandez Morales (“Chayo”, as she is known by friends and family) had a bright future. At 14, against all odds, she won an arduous national contest which took her to San Diego, where she spent eight months as an exchange student. She thrived in her stimulating new environment (though she started without a word of English!) and credits a visit to UCLA’s science school with having “launched me in the direction of my dreams.”

Her story of great potential alongside financial obstacles is all too familiar. Chayo is the second of four children whose parents believed passionately in her future but feared that their own resources would not suffice. Her father, a taxi driver and “the smartest man I know,” saved what he could and encouraged her to apply for every possible scholarship. Exemplary high school performance positioned her well for scholarship prizes and caught the attention of Jóvenes Adelante founder Virginia Wheelwright.



“Virginia was my angel,” says Chayo, her eyes filling with tears, “I will hold her in my heart forever.” And she remembers how quickly she discovered that a JA scholarship was about more than money. “Suddenly,” she recalls, “I was surrounded by a new family who understood the challenges I was facing.” She had found the perfect complement to the loving, hard-working foundation provided by her family -- a mentor and a whole team of volunteer supporters.

Chayo left home for Monterrey to pursue a specialized science degree in chemical bacteriology/parasitology. Although maintaining contact with a distant mentor presented challenges, the consistent phone and email contact support was precisely what she needed. Her mother, an artisan and crafts vendor, initiated face-to-face meetings with Virginia when Chayo could not attend in person. Chayo laughs, remembering how Virginia persistently asked not only about her grades and her class projects, but about her health, her social life, and whether or not she had found a boyfriend!

Chayo graduated first in her class in 2013 and her final research paper “Bactericidal, antioxidant and cytotoxic activity of 5 natural extracts” won her a *Women in Science* award in 2016. Since then, she has held senior technical positions with Hersheys, Lala Milk and Barry Callebaut, the world's leading supplier of high-quality chocolate. When she decided to return to San Miguel,

her passionate interest and expertise in food science landed her a regional Research and Development position with Lactalis Group, where she provides technical and quality assurance support to three facilities.

Now, as her family and Jóvenes Adelante supported her, Chayo is giving back. She contributes to the family income and mentors her two younger sisters who have followed her example and are now in university. She is a founding member of JA's new alumni group and has her sights set on being a JA mentor, assisting with student selection interviews, and perhaps joining the Board down the road. We at Jóvenes Adelante could not be more proud.