

## **Elvira Sánchez de Malicki**

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### **Choosing Canada**

[01:00:11:20] When I was a very young girl, I developed asthma in my city so my parents sent me to study in a small Indian village in the mountains. And I felt that there was much more to life. So I asked my parents if they would allow me to study abroad. I told them, if I get really good marks, would you allow me to go and study abroad? And my father said, "Sure okay, why not?"

[01:00:35:10] So I did get very good marks and then I find out about a school in Canada, and I applied. One day when my father came home, our travel agent asked him, "Would you be able to sign the documents for your daughter?" "My daughter, why?" "She is going to Canada." "What do you mean?" "She said you had told her that she could and you would let her, so she has applied."

[01:00:57:22] Before my family knew it, I was enrolled to come to Sacred Heart Convent in Calgary, Alberta to study English and to finish my high school.

### **First impressions**

[01:01:13:19] I come from Ecuador. Ecuador is a very lush, green country. When I first came to Canada, it was the first time I was leaving Ecuador. I remember as my plane was landing in Calgary, I looked down and there I could see this huge bouquet of what I thought were very colourful flowers. And I couldn't understand why they would be so gigantic.

[01:01:40:22] And it was not until we were just about to touch down when I realized that these flowers were trees in fall - I had never seen fall before. And I would say that was the beginning of my love affair with Canada. I just fell in love with it.

[01:01:56:11] My first year in Canada was spent in Calgary in a boarding school with a group of Ecuadorian girls. It was fun because there wasn't that much multiculturalism in Canada or in Alberta at that time. There were twelve Ecuadorian girls and we caught the eye or the attention of the media. So they were forever writing interviews and articles about us.

[01:02:20:00] We used to go downtown as a group and they would take photographs of us. I felt that Canada was a very welcoming country. However, when all my other friends went back to Ecuador, I decided I wanted to stay. And I applied and was accepted at Notre Dame Academy in Ontario. I was 16 at Notre Dame and I happened to have been elected president of the student council.

[01:02:45:09] I managed to make so many changes as president of the student council that I received the Governor General's Award of Merit. I felt that for a girl who came with no contacts, no knowledge of the English language, to have accomplished something like that, meant that you could almost accomplish anything in this country.

*In 1967, Elvira met Mareck Malicki, the man who, 5 years later, would become her husband and a source of inspiration and motivation.*

*Elvira has contributed to Canada in many ways. Her achievements include:*  
*-founding the Canadian Hispanic Congress in 1983,*  
*-running the Spanish Theatre Company and working on Spanish TV as a host, producer and director,*  
*-receiving her Executive MBA degree from Queen's University, and*  
*-being named one of 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians.*

[01:03:12:19] We have been very proactive in everything that we have done, always trying to make sure that Canadians recognize the tremendous value of Hispanics in Canada. As a matter of fact, there is an organization that recognizes the ten most influential Hispanics; every year they recognize ten of the best. I was one of the first group of ten and since then, we have seen a large number of Hispanics who have succeeded in different fields, who are being recognized.

### **Honouring one's roots**

[01:03:50:21] First of all, I think anybody who comes to this country should always be very proud of who they are. I remember at one point when somebody said Canadians should be like the Americans, as far as anglicising their names in order to become Americans.

[01:04:10:17] Well, I wrote back and I said, I am a Canadian by choice, not by accident of birth. Therefore I will retain my name which is Elvira Sánchez de Malicki and I will always be a proud Hispanic because I cannot be a proud Canadian unless I am proud of who I am as an individual.

### **A word of advice**

[01:04:35:01] Canada is a land of opportunities. You only need to really focus, work hard, realize that the words "I can't" should not be part of your vocabulary. The opportunities are there. You have to go out and get them. Never stop working. For example, I went back to school when I was 55 years old to get my Executive MBA.

[01:04:59:02] Always keep on striving and make sure that success is your goal. But you cannot be successful unless you share. There is a tremendous joy in giving and I think what has helped me be successful is that I always gave to my community, give to Canadian society in general and by giving of myself, the rest of the people accepted and allowed me to grow with them and through them.

## Sharing stories

[01:05:29:13] I think that most people who have come to this country have come bearing gifts. And those gifts are their cultures, their traditions, their experiences, and we all want to share. And as long as you're sharing, everybody is the better for it.

[01:05:49:11] For me, it has been just wonderful when I have gone to different schools to speak to children. As I mentioned, my love affair with Canada started when I first arrived and saw this gigantic bouquet of trees. The same thing happens every time I attend one of the schools when I see a gigantic bouquet of children of different colours, races, religions.

[01:06:16:02] I share my stories with them and at the end I usually come and say, you know what? Now I believe that if you were able to accomplish this much, so can I. And knowing that they feel that they will accomplish something because they can is a tremendous opportunity that I am able to achieve thanks to the possibility to speak to these children through Passages to Canada. [01:06:45:05]

[End of recorded material]

*Elvira is the Business Administrator of the Malicki & Malicki Law firm in Mississauga, Ontario.*

*She is a recipient of the Citation for Citizenship, an award that recognizes volunteer work in support of the values of freedom, justice, equality and respect for diversity.*