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Mr. Hernandez  
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*Believe In Hope When There's No Hope*

As I was so lucky to be born and raised in Los Jardines Del Valle, Caracas, Venezuela. I saw it through my young eyes. Los Jardines was the smiles, the food, the gatherings and more. But in 2015, Maduro's regime brought tragedy to my country and its citizens and his brutality continues today. Maduro causes suffering and shortages for everyone living in Venezuela. Shortages of food, proper hospitalization and supplies, electricity and water. These shortages increase the vulnerability of all Venezuelans. They endure many illnesses, poverty and hunger. With my Capstone I hope to alleviate a small part of this humanitarian crisis.

Maduro isolated my fellow Venezuelans. The borders closed in Venezuela to block off international help. My idea first took root in the house I was raised in; my mom, uncles, grandparents and I were grieving the passing of my grandmother Elisabet Dubon. The shortages and mental stress the government put on many families and individuals had been too much. I listened as my aunt, Monica De Lugo, spoke about the work she does for poor communities. Her husband, her daughter and she go out to poor villages to distribute goods that they wouldn't be able to afford otherwise. As she was speaking, an idea bloomed and with my pencil and paper I started writing down → Shirts → Shorts → Pants → Food, Cans and so forth.

I left Venezuela still thinking through what I wanted to do to help my country. So I asked myself what can I do to help? I researched many non-profit organizations, attended free sessions at The Free Library about grant writing, fundraising and more, I read books on philanthropy and

nonprofits, and YouTube videos. Later I collaborated with my mom and my aunt back in Venezuela. We spent hours brainstorming ideas for the future of my light bulb idea. We talked for hours at night about the name, the mission, and my grandmother, Elisa. My aunt and I came up with “La Luz De Aurora.” This project is treasured in my heart because it was born in the midst of hopelessness and loss that I decided to push my idea to help other people in crisis. The help one gives to others is a light of hope like my grandmother was to the family and many individuals she helped in her life.

Now that I had the fully-developed idea. It was on paper and in my google doc, it was time for the next step. It needed to be broadcasted not only in my mind but the outside world. The first step was publicity. I needed to share my idea with my community. I contacted my cousin in Venezuela for a poster design. My cousin Mariam shared her digital graphic design skills; the first poster that informed the SLA community of a bake sale. Later, I needed a printer that Ms. Walker-Robert so graciously let me use to make color copies. After that, my friend Charles encouraged and motivated me as we tapped posters all over school and I knew this was bigger than I could grasp in this phase. I decided for the bake sale I wanted to showcase the humble yet delicious taste that is in the Venezuelan cuisine. I decided to do beef pastelitos, simple yet stunning with flavor. Also, my mom offered to make arroz con leche and vanilla quesillo. Two main deserts that are must miss in the Latin community. The money would offset the cost of boxing and shipping. My mother, Yoluybeth, invested in my idea without second thoughts and after my first bake sale she has been encouraging me to do more to send more boxes.

The confusion of where SLA would be located and our move to the School District was definitely an obstacle to work around. The different and new setting caused problems for the sales of items. My attempt at a bake sale was to bring pastelitos to sell without the need of making it a full on bake sale. I used an insulated bag that kept the food warm and safe. I walked around the School District and posted on social media that I was in the building selling pastelitos. It wasn't as successful as I thought; but, my teachers supported me and they were amazed by my vegan pastelito. Small gestures like that helped me keep going. Later, I posted on my social media I was going to be around the city so I could meet with them to sell them pastelitos. This experience really made me evolve to other possible options that I would not have realized if I had stayed in a comfort spot. I received help from many people. Even people I never thought would help came and asked and of course they could. Little by little my small idea grew and turned into something more fruitful. Right now I am collecting evidence to create what I'm doing right now to a nonprofit 501 c(3) organization where taxes would be deductible. This will be my biggest challenge; but, at the same time my goal. I am a part of a nonprofit 501 c(3) called Jill-Melmed Buzzeo Awards. I participate and ask questions about the organization because I aspire to help like they do and it's my first experience with a nonprofit. Prior to Covid, I participated in expos where I was able to network with other businesses and expand awareness of La Luz De Aurora's mission.

I am proud of being able to turn an idea into action and I found motivation through and am full of gratitude for the people on the journey that helped me and those who still continue to help La Luz De Aurora. The hours of preparation to have tasty pastelitos and sweets, and our determination to build what I believe in because after all the hard work I could see through

pictures the smiles of kids to adults. But for it there's no perfect way to start a nonprofit and starting small is the best way. But I would like to have a template for organization of the finances because it was my first time dealing with money and accounting. I needed to make sure we had enough profits to hold another bake sale and set aside enough to reach our goal of sending 3 boxes. I drew inspiration from other SLA students that held bake sales. I felt like I also contributed to the courage of my fellow classmates and under classmates because we all supported each other. I know that I contributed my own piece to the excellence of SLA.