

Dreaming of Different Circumstances

Single Mother Sets Example

by Heather DARROW



A few short years ago; Vashtai Kekich was at a crossroads. A single mother without a job, she faced the daunting task of finding a way to provide for herself and her toddler, Reese. The obstacles that lay in her path seemed insurmountable. But, Kekich dared to dream. She didn't want to settle for an occupation that barely met her needs. She imagined a world in which she would set an example for her daughter.

She put on a brave face, held her breath and sat down in a college classroom. Like waves crashing against a pristine beach, surges of knowledge permeated Kekich's mind and changed her life. Now, four years later she has a corporate job, holds an associate degree and a bachelor's degree and is a master's degree candidate.

Baby Steps

While two-year-old Reese began to explore the world, her mother began to expand her knowledge base and flourish. Kekich's confidence skyrocketed when she was invited to join Collin College's Phi Theta Kappa National Honor Society. She and fellow students learned about the North Texas water crisis and a bill to fix it, and they decided to help educate the public. Spearheading a water symposium, they gathered more than 600 signatures of support.

Before she graduated with an associate degree from Collin College, magna cum laude, Kekich was awarded a Collin College Emerging Scholar award, received a PTK scholarship and was inducted into the National Honor Society Texas Hall of Honor. The PTK Honors in Action water project provided Kekich with a slew of university opportunities including Cornell, Brown, Yale, Southern Methodist University and the University of Pennsylvania. Her PTK project helped her acquire several scholarships at Southern Methodist University (SMU), where she earned a



bachelor of arts degree in communication studies with honors.

Today, Kekich embraces a leadership philosophy she gleaned when she began her education.

“At Collin, I learned that first you serve, and then you lead by example. Value your community because you are part of a team. Empower those around you, so everyone will gain and succeed. Give direction, but serve with great integrity. A servant leader is truly concerned with everyone on the team and all you affect. I try to live this way now. Wherever I go, I want to learn and grow, but I also want to contribute, to do something that matters,” she said.

Kekich’s first job after earning her bachelor’s degree was at The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute where she worked with philanthropists and celebrities, like Emmitt Smith, and joined the fight for mental health legislation. She also worked for The Arc of Dallas, a



nonprofit organization for individuals with disabilities. Today, Kekich is a content specialist for Axiometrics, a real estate research and analysis company, where she not only writes content for multiple mediums, but also helps manage all PR efforts. She is also close to earning a master of public affairs degree at The University of Texas at Dallas.

Full Circle

Kekich’s journey is coming full circle. Recently, she was invited to speak to PTK students. At the event, a former student told Kekich’s mother a story.

“He looked across the table and said, ‘I owe all of this to your daughter because she convinced me to join PTK. I am now attending The University of Texas at Dallas, and I am planning to go to medical school.’ It was never my intention to be a leader. I was just showing belief in others as others showed belief in me,” Kekich said.

Born in gratitude for all that others did and continue to do for her, Kekich’s ultimate goal is to become a professor and effect that same

transformation in as many people as she can. With policy, nonprofit and corporate experience she will have many examples to share with her future students.

“The end goal for me is to teach. I’ll give back while also leading a generation of people to be able to do what I was able to do,” she said.

Kekich is still a dreamer, but her dreams have broader horizons. Where once she hoped to simply put food on the table, now she works to improve the community. If you ask this mother what gives her the energy to study until the wee hours of the night, she will show you a picture of six-year-old Reese.

“As my dreams continue to evolve, until I take my last breath, Reese will always remain in the center of them all,” Kekich said with conviction.

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Photos by Nick Young, Collin College photographer.