

Gratitude

“We must find time to stop and thank those who make a difference in our lives”. – John F. Kennedy

Uplifting moments from Fall 2024 and Winter 2025 found their way into my life. One source of inspiration was to connect with readers through these blogs—to openly share my thoughts, experiences, and life journey while allowing myself to be vulnerable. This reflection was inspired by one of my mentor’s thoughtful observations. His words encouraged me to seek greater clarity, reflect more deeply on my direction, and identify meaningful next steps along my journey.



My life is a journey of constant dynamism and evolution, where resilience has proven to be limitless. As my legendary mentor wisely noted during our first meeting, “There are two types of battles in life: those that pick you up and those that you pick up.” In 2024, I faced one of those battles that picked me up when a member of my family encountered a tremendous health challenge. Together, we navigated the health system and visited multiple specialists in the hope of finding someone who could understand our situation, guide us, and provide a diagnosis.

Being an immigrant and a mother without extended family in Canada made me rethink who I am, what I am doing, what I will be doing, and why—for myself and my family. My professional life came to a standstill, and I once again experienced burnout, feeling lost in my sense of direction and purpose. In those moments, my faith and resilience became my anchors. Despite having a strong mentorship network, I felt hesitant to share my struggles with my mentors because I was ashamed of my inability to act on their advice and support. The energy I had once devoted to moving forward with positivity and purpose was unexpectedly interrupted. Preparing for and participating in meetings with my mentors became challenging, including some of our informal coffee conversations. However, my desire to overcome this hesitation and to find purpose empowered me to move once again with resilience and strength.

You might wonder what fueled my sense of purpose. It was this project—the mentorship project—guided by my mentors. We all need to find purpose. On days when I felt down and lost, I kept my community at the forefront of my mind and in my heart. I remembered their kindness, vulnerability, and unwavering support. They understood my reality and encouraged me to continue pursuing my goals, showing me the power of connection and belief. I was also inspired by countless individuals facing their own challenges and in need of support, which motivated me to keep moving forward. No matter who you are, what you are doing, or where you live, we all sleep, dream, eat, cry, and face challenges. Remember, we are human! It is essential to recognize that we leave a legacy in the lives of those around us through simple gestures such as saying “good morning,” offering a smile, or giving a supportive hug. Be kind! Even when you feel drained, remember that everyone is uniquely fighting their own battles.

Building the Advisory Board of Your Life - Blog 7- Eileen Santos Hernandez, PhD

Throughout my professional journey, I have faced interviews where the core values of potential employers did not align with mine. This experience has reinforced the advice I have received from my mentors: it is crucial to express and remain true to my values, as they ultimately shape how others perceive and treat me. While I recognize the importance of interview preparation to move my career forward, I found that my energy and focus were limited by the mental strain associated with a family member's health situation. Following the wise advice of my first mentor in Canada, I chose to take one day at a time.

After open discussions with my "Advisory Board of My Life," we identified that I was at an exciting point of divergence, where I could explore many different paths and possibilities. Embracing this perspective, I became eager to explore opportunities in research and development, share my expertise through teaching and mentorship, potentially launch my own STEM-focused venture, and contribute to small-business growth while supporting others on their journeys.

During 2024–2025, I remained committed to making a meaningful impact within both academic and industry communities. I contributed to higher education through teaching and cross-functional academic collaborations, while also gaining experience in business development, sales, and operations within the food and beverage industry. These experiences allowed me to continue connecting my scientific background with my passion for innovation, entrepreneurship, education, and community impact.

At the heart of my professional vision is a desire to serve and support individuals and their families living with chronic diseases and special health conditions by contributing to food systems that can enhance their overall well-being and quality of life. I firmly believe we are shaped by our thoughts, surroundings, actions, and diet. As a food engineering scientist, I embrace the concept that **"Food is Medicine."** I am determined to contribute my knowledge, experience, and passion toward advancing sustainable, health-centred food solutions that can positively impact individuals, families, and communities.

To conclude this inspiring blog series about mentorship and the relational vulnerability of my life, I would like to share an insightful quote from a remarkable entrepreneur, businessman, psychologist, TED Talk speaker, father, and fellow Colombian from my hometown of Cúcuta, Colombia. His name is [Efrén Martínez](#), and he wrote about the significance of the people who are present in our lives:

"In the middle of so many possibilities, it is amazing to meet some people. It is incredible that along the way, we come across some lives, and they become part of ours. But the most amazing thing is that there are magical beings who, with a mysterious gift, connect with you and make your world better. Therefore, we must thank them and not take them for granted, because it is a true miracle that someone who could have never existed becomes part of your life."

I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of my mentors for your guidance and leadership. Your willingness to be open and vulnerable has created a safe space for me to express my true self. For that, I am deeply grateful, and I sincerely hope that I can give back even a small part of what you have given me.

Call to Action:

- Find inspiration during challenging times through human connections.
- Journal your personal and professional aspirations.
- Be grateful for the present.
- Prioritize your mental and physical well-being.
- Continuously learn, grow, and adapt.