



Evelyn Hernandez Tavernier

Express Commercial Cleaning
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Being the new kid in class: a challenge. Being the new kid in the country: even harder...or is it?

Evelyn Hernandez Tavernier came to the U.S. from Central America when she was 6. It was a decision her mother, Eugenia Hernandez, made for the family, and because of the move, Tavernier was able to make the most of the American dream.

Today she owns her own post-construction, make-ready and janitorial cleaning firm, and she proved to herself that challenges are never barriers.

What do you remember about life before coming to America?

I think my first real memories are from right around 5 or 6 years old. I remember Guatemala as being a beautiful country, and I remember that we had a great family.

Can you recall what it felt like to leave your home for America? Were you excited?

I think at the age of 6, you can't really understand or appreciate what that decision means – to leave a country. I don't know that I even had a say, but I am thankful for the move, and I thank my mom for making that decision for us.

What are some of your earliest memories of Texas?

The very first memory I have of being here is being in a movie theater, and just the grandness of it all. There were seats, lights on the floor – I was blown away!

The first movie I watched was "E.T.," by the way. I love that movie to this day. If it's on, I will watch it!

Did you know English when you arrived here?

I didn't, and it was very challenging. The teasing was tough because you come into a new country and you are challenged by not knowing the language or the culture.

One of the best things my mother did for us was realize that language was going to be an issue. We got here in February, so we couldn't start the school year yet, so between February and August, she taught us everything she could about math. She figured that if she couldn't

teach us the language, she certainly could bring us a step ahead with math.

I remember sitting at home during the summer practicing long division and double-digit division. At 6 1/2 years old, I was doing multiplication and long division. She really prepared me for my first year at school.

So fast-forward to high school. What were things like for you?

My mother was always an advocate of education. I didn't have to work while I was in high school, but I helped out at home taking care of my brothers while my mom worked.

I focused on school, and did really well. I was in band and I played the trombone, which is funny because I'm 5'2" and the trombone was almost 5'2". I don't play anymore – if I were to try today, I'd be very poor at it!

It came time to go to college, and it wasn't an "if" I was going to go, it was a "where" do I get to go. I was so excited to be able to go to college.

Where did you decide to go?

I went to Austin Community College and figured I'd get my basic classes done there. I took part-time classes in order to save up money to pay for the next semester. So it was part-time classes, a lot of working and a lot of saving. I did that for a good three or four years. Then I was able to transfer to Texas State.

Texas State had the degree plan that I wanted, and it's a good school. I lived in Cedar Park, so it wasn't as close as I wanted it, but since I wasn't in school full time, I wasn't commuting every day.

I was doing more work than school because I was working to pay for school. By my last semester, though, I was commuting every day. I was so busy with work, school and studying that I didn't really have time to do anything extra.

What type of work did you do while you were in college?

I paid for 90 percent of my education by working and student loans and credit cards. My first job was helping my mom with her jobs doing residential cleaning. We'd tackle a home in half the time that it took her to do one alone, so we could fit in one or two houses a day.

At the end of the semester, if I had money saved, I'd keep paying on the credit cards to make sure that I didn't stack myself up too high in debt.

What was your major?

At ACC, I majored in business administration, but my ultimate plan was to get an accounting degree.

When I started at Texas State, accounting was what I majored in. It was Southwest Texas when I got there, and in my senior year it converted to Texas State. I have two accounting degrees – one with Southwest Texas and one with Texas State. I kept the Texas State one and gave my mom the Southwest Texas one.

Did you ever work in accounting?

My last semester in college, I found a part-time accounting clerk position. The finance director at that company ended up going to another company. He emailed



Evelyn Hernandez Tavernier says that by working with her mother she was able to gain an appreciation for hard work and where it can lead you.

me after I graduated and said he was looking for some help.

It was my first real job out of college, and it was a great experience. I was there for a few years, and while it was one of the best jobs I'd had, I felt like I needed more experience.

An opportunity opened up for me to work with Dell, so I took that position. It gave me the experience I was looking for – working on a corporate level, which added to my experience working with a startup company.

How do you believe your different work experiences helped you get to where you are today?

I put myself through college doing residential cleaning. My last semester, I worked in a business environment. After that, I watched a startup company double in size. I found that I had the business knowledge and the experience, and I started getting the entrepreneurial bug, so my past experiences absolutely helped me out.

Why did you choose to establish a company in commercial cleaning?

I felt that I had the work ethic and the experience. That in combination with my college education presented an opportunity.

I don't know that I would ever start a residential cleaning company, but I saw that there was a market out there for commercial cleaning. So that's what I chose.

It was a plunge that I needed to take. Before I started my company, I was working with a company and had just been laid off. I really considered that to be an opportunity, so I thought, "Why not just go for it?" That's what I did.

How did you prepare for starting your company?

I made numerous calls, did research with existing companies who were using these services, and found that they were not happy, rather, just OK with the service.

I felt that these companies needed to be more than just OK with their service – it should've been above and beyond service they were receiving.

I put the company together little by little, deciding how I should formulate it,

what value we wanted to add to this market, and everything else after that was just following the standards to set up a business.

Why did you choose the name Express Commercial Cleaning?

It was mainly by thinking of post-construction cleanup. I wanted contractors to see the name and envision us coming in, doing the job, and leaving – express service. I didn't want janitorial to be in the name. We offer janitorial services, but it's not the only thing we do.

Can you recall your first job?

Yes – it as a make-ready job for a business park. We went in and cleaned everything out, and I remember going to buy all those things that we didn't have – mop, bucket, broom, gloves – needless to say, we didn't pay ourselves anything for that first job. That job paid for all our equipment and supplies. It was a good starting point.

One of the key things I have been able to do is reinvest into the company to continue our growth. As the old adage says, "It takes money to make money."

Are there other people working with you?

My husband, Dan, is the director of operations. He was behind me the whole time, motivating me and believing in me.

We also have family working with us, my brother and sister-in-law. My nephews have even shown interest as well. We still utilize my mom for her years in residential cleaning. I rely on her for advice and her expertise.

Now here you are, business owner, wife, mother, and daughter. Do you ever reflect on what you've accomplished?

I don't really think too much about it, but every now and again it's nice to sit back and share the stories of when you first started building your business – not paying yourself and everything else that goes with it.

When I started the company, I had a lot on my plate, but I thought about my children and my husband: that motivated me to make this happen. –va



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