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The Story of Helen Serrano

Helen Serrano

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I was born July 19, 1951 in Brooklyn New York. My parents came from Puerto Rico. When they first arrived in this country, my father became the superintendent of the building we lived in. My mom was a stay at home mom for a while, and we lived with my two sisters. My parents weren't married, and they decided to separate when I was about 5 years old. From Brooklyn, I went to Manhattan with my mother and my grandmother. My grandmother was the first to come to America from Puerto Rico, and she worked as a live-in maid. My grandmother took care of us while my mom would go work in the factory. I would see my father regularly on visits, so I did have contact with him, which I thought was good.
When I left, my daughters came to visit me a few times and they saw how life moved at a different and slower pace in Dayton than in New York, and that you could attain different things here.

When you are living in an apartment your whole life, you have no real say in anything and you're at the mercy of your landlord. That becomes tiresome and you feel like you're trapped. Here, with the recession, many people lost their jobs and there were a lot of foreclosed homes, and I was lucky enough to buy one for very cheap. I hadn't seen the house until I signed the papers. When I left the office and my sister brought me to the house, I thought to myself, 'What did I do?' because there was a lot of work to be done on the house: half the ceiling was gone, mold was found in the walls, and the house needed plumbing, new electric, and many other things despite these setbacks. I saw all the potential in it.

All the homes in my neighborhood, Five Oaks, have their own personalities; there are no cookie-cutter homes and that gives the communities a unique atmosphere.

When I was settled into Dayton, I started doing volunteer work for the community. I really wanted to use my skills for the good of other people. I volunteered with the private animal organization for about a year, and then I started working with my church more. I've noticed that people here are so nice in comparison to New York, even the people addicted to drugs. Dayton is such a giving community, if someone is in need, someone else will be there to help them. I have never seen anything like it.