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Kirsy DeSimone

## LIVING THE DOMINICAN DREAM

BY JILLIAN ABBOTT

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"It makes me beam with pride to see people defying the weather, the traffic jams and the odds everyday trying to get where they want to be," Kirsy DeSimone said when asked what she likes about America.

DeSimone's adoration of America and the American way of life developed early. As a child she came from her home in the Dominican Republic to Connecticut for summer camp. "I always admired America. There's so much less corruption here and because of that you can achieve what you want."

However DeSimone didn't dream of coming to live in America. "I admired the way things ran here. But I never thought I would end up living here permanently. It was very hard at the beginning for me and my family, since I'm very close to my parents and brother, but we made it through," she said.

DeSimone's marriage to an Italian-American she met when he was visiting his own family who had retired to the Dominican Republic from New York brought her here in 1997.

"A lot of people want to live the American Dream. I'm living the Dominican Dream. It's the same dream, to pull yourself up from scratch and give your family a better life. We're all dreaming the same dream but the system in America is designed to help you achieve that dream, whereas in other places it isn't quite so straightforward," she said.

"The economy is stable here, there are rules and regulations. You can save and put your money in a bank knowing it will be safe and the banks won't fold," she said.

Adjusting to her new life wasn't easy. DeSimone went to college for her bachelor's degree in her homeland. "When I came, I couldn't find anyone to tell me what my "real" options were. It took me four years to figure out what I could really do. It's a real shame." Eventually she went to Queens College for the

Paralegal Studies Program which she finished in 2001, and now has a well-paid and satisfying job at a large corporate law firm.

DeSimone, now a mother of two daughters, Isabella, nine and Gabriella, seven, is very focused on her family and working toward her children's success. Despite the commitment of career and motherhood, Kirsy still finds time to give back. "I have been involved in community work since I was a child, since my mother was the Administrator for the YMCA of the Dominican Republic," DeSimone said.

Her work for the YMCA was focused on projects aimed to improve the quality of life in the poor neighborhoods and to teach people skills to help them get jobs. She represented the YMCA in the U.S. and Europe.

Now that she's an American she has become active in her daughters' PTA Board at P.S. 228. She's also Secretary of the Community Council for the 115th Precinct in East Elmhurst, voluntarily performing a range of duties for both organizations. "I believe it is very important to make a difference wherever it's in school, church, or work. We must take the responsibility to give our time and effort to make things better in the long term," she said.

America has certainly made a difference to her and other immigrants she knows. "We have changed our outlook and have realized that we must not only work hard but very intelligently in order to achieve our goals. We must wake up in the morning and remember why we came here to begin with."

She thinks that good preparation can really enhance the migrant experience. "Study English and take some technical classes, because that can make all the difference in how well your American experience goes. A gift of English classes is better than the fancy sneakers people send to their families. The sneakers are just fashion and will not look so nice once they've beaten the sidewalk down Junction Boulevard in search of a low-wage job."

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**Kirsy DeSimone**