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# finding her own Opportunity

By Christa Weber

**W**hen Glendale resident Virginia Gilea left her native country of Romania four years ago, it was the thought of her children's educations that drove her. In America, she found that opportunity was waiting for her as well, in the form of her own education and a job in the technology field.

"Basically, I came here for my children," she said. "We wanted them to be able to have a good education because here, if you get an education, you can get a good job."

Gilea had already studied some English in Romania and had a good grasp of the language in a classroom setting, but found herself somewhat overwhelmed when she first arrived in this country. Her initial intimidation stemmed from the fact that she was being confronted with the language on a daily basis, on the streets and in stores. Nonetheless, without any additional classes, she muddled through until her comprehension of English became a proficient talent at speaking what had once been a foreign language.

"I survived learning English," said Gilea. "I couldn't do a lot, though, because I came here with three children, one 12, one 3 and one only a

month old. When you have no one to help you, you can't do much and I thought that if I were to go to school, it would help me later on."

Seven months later, she entered the Technical Career Institute. With her husband, who began working as soon as the family arrived in America and now maintains an automatic mail distribution center in New Jersey, supporting the family, Gilea began a course of digital media art and design classes.

"It wasn't difficult to learn the technical terms because I knew I would need those for my career and it was good because I started to learn them from the very beginning," she said.

She worked hard, though she missed her family in Romania, and, in 2001, graduated with a degree in web developing. Her first step was working as a freelance web developer to expand her portfolio and, while most companies were downsizing their web development departments, she defied the odds by landing a position as head web developer for Gold & Reiss Kitchen and Bath Center, a nationwide company that supplies high-end architects, builders and designers unique cabinetry and plumbing fixtures. One of the most difficult parts of her job-hunting experience was keeping the English vocabulary in her mind even when she was nervous.

"I am a hard-working person," she said. "It's difficult because you often miss your family and so it is not easy



Photo courtesy of Virginia Gileo

**Virginia Gilea brought her children, including her daughter Antonia, to America in the hopes that they might receive a good education. In doing so, she found educational opportunities of her own.**

to be the first generation in the United States."

But, she added, the Americans are good people who are willing to help and this is how many obstacles can be overcome. She found that American society is one that plays a role in how one's life will turn out and here, hard-working people will get what they deserve.

In just a few months, Gilea's eldest daughter will graduate from high school second in her class and there will be a scholarship waiting for her upon entering college. As a pre-college student, she interned with Morgan Stanley. This is an opportunity that Gilea believes would not have been afforded to her daughter had they stayed in Romania.

"My daughter has a lot of friends who are still in Romania and they want very much to come and study here because the education can pro-

vide something real for the future," she said. "Where I came from, it was very hard to achieve that."

Since coming to America, Gilea and her family have visited Romania a number of times. She misses it very much, but she has her memories and she truly does enjoy living here. They chose Queens as a place to settle because they had friends here who assisted the transition from country to country and culture to culture. In Glendale, there are other Romanian people, but it is not a tight-knit community in the same vein as the nearby Greek or Polish communities.

"It is nice to share culture and political backgrounds," she said. "I think it's great. I found out that other immigrants can be very kind. Americans are just nice and kind people. People say in 'when in Rome,' so maybe when people move here they start to act like Americans."

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