

Dr. Vilma Luz Caban-Vazquez, Ed.D  
-Humanitarian Advocacy Lead Researcher  
-Global Citizen for Positive Social Change

# AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

## HUMBLE ORIGIN



Vilma is very proud of her humble beginnings, and how she was destined to become a global humanitarian vessel. Just like a resilient urban flower trying to flourish, Vilma faced great adversity and challenging odds. However, this flower was a statistical outlier because it was destined to break free from the norm. Vilma Luz is the only daughter of Maria, a señorita from the small town of Toalta, Puerto Rico. With a 2nd grade elementary education, Vilma's mother immigrated to New York City in the mid-1960's in search of a better life. In this new world, Maria became a seamstress working 12 hours in subpar working conditions inside many sweatshops of the garment industry. Vilma's destiny manifested...as the *illegitimate* love child of a married Nuyorican radio personality. Her father worked for the first Latino N.Y.C. radio station—WADO 1280AM. After sharing the news that Maria was pregnant, Vilma's "papá" was nowhere to be found. As this single mother faced poverty, hunger, and oppressive working conditions, Maria declared that her daughter's future would be different. Unbeknownst to Maria, her daughter's birthplace, on the lower east side of Manhattan, played a historic and central role in the development of the Puerto Rican Movement or better known as the "Nuyorican Movement". On the same streets that Vilma's mother walked her precious infant and dream, walked the likes of Puerto Rican poets, intellectuals, and artists. This Nuyorican, philosophical, political, and social landscape was the birthplace of many

poverty programs. It was the mecca of counterculture, social awareness, and activism. As a young girl, Vilma was the beneficiary of social poverty programs. When Vilma was 2 years old, her mother remarried and the next turbulent chapter of this young girl's life began. As the eldest daughter, and now the stepdaughter of her mother's abusive and alcoholic husband, Vilma became a vital source of help for her battered mother.

## BREAKING AWAY

At the age of 18, Vilma could not tolerate any longer bearing witness to her mother's abuse. Her greatest fear was to have a broken spirit just like the one she witnessed in her beloved mother. Consequently, after she graduated from one of the worse inner-city high schools, Vilma fled to an upstate college 75 miles away from home. Even though her impoverished neighborhood represented love and belonging to a number of close friends and neighbors living in their dilapidated tenement building, Vilma knew in her heart that she had to break free from the neighboring threats of teenage pregnancy, the high rate of crime, and the explosive 1980's drug culture that took hold of a few local friends. As an undergraduate student at the State University of New York (New Paltz), Vilma wrestled with culture shock, homesickness, and she felt lost. But with the love of dear friends like Rachel Torres and Madeline Perez, who served as her anchor and peer mentors, Vilma was inspired to remain steadfast towards academic success. With an altruistic heart, she set her eyes on the profession of teaching, and Vilma never looked back. Near the end of her studies, she became the proud mother of her son Christopher. Quitting college was never an option. Having her son was the ultimate source of motivation and inspiration. Ten years later Vilma married James and together they raised their blended families that include Christopher, Kimberly, Felita and their grandson Prince Anthony.

## PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY

### EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

As an educator for over 20 years, with the honor of touching the lives of thousands of children, Vilma transitioned from many educational and community-based leadership roles. After earning her Masters of Science degree in Mathematics, she served as a math instructional consultant and teacher leader in an urban school system located in the Northeastern part of the United States. Vilma designed research-supported professional development training experiences for educators, educational leaders, local family shelters, and community-based organizations that were tailored to serve children at risk. Understanding the value of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s mantra, *to reach one and teach one*, Vilma worked as a guest lecturer and adjunct professor at *Bank Street College of Education*, and *Manhattanville University: Graduate School of Education*. Her goal was to prepare the next generation of teachers, as well as give novice teachers insight on how the privilege of teaching is a public service that can greatly impact and empower the lives of women and children.

### NATIONAL CONSULTATION WORK PROMOTING VOLUNTEERISM

Her desire was to examine strategies that can offer and create the greatest impact for positive social change. Vilma believed that education was the greatest social equalizer. Consequently, in an effort to support national volunteer literacy initiatives that served underprivileged communities, Vilma served as a national volunteer trainer and educational consultant for various non-profit organizations such as *Ameri-Corps*, *L.E.A.R.N.S.* (Linking Education and America Reads through National Service) and *V.I.S.T.A.* (Volunteers in Service to America). The consulting work, through the *Corporation for National Service*, sparked an interest to examine national and global issues of socioeconomic and educational disparities.

### INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE & COLLABORATION

In 2007, Vilma traveled abroad with the *People to People Ambassador's Programs* to Cambodia, Egypt, and Vietnam wherein she served as a math educational leader, presenter, and delegate. Within this international forum, she engaged in bilateral, educational, and professional exchange with international educational leaders and counterparts. This international congress offered a platform to examine effective pedagogy and educational reform. As a gesture of professional exchange to the Cambodian, Egyptian, and Vietnamese educational leaders/dignitaries, Vilma presented a teacher training video that she co-produced in collaboration with her home school district—*Illuminating Effective Differentiated Instruction Classroom Practices for Math Learning*.

### **DEFYING THE STATISTICAL ODDS**

In February 2011, the news correspondent T.J. Raphael reported a feature article on Vilma's international work and the noteworthy accomplishment of a Latina earning a doctorate degree in the United States of America. "*Dr. Vilma Caban-Vazquez is one of only about 46,000 Hispanic women in the nation to ever obtain a doctorate degree. According to Pew Hispanic Research Center Senior Research Associate Dr. Richard Fry, just .4 percent of Latina women ever reach that level of education, making her journey unique.*" Vilma couldn't take all of the credit for that accomplishment because she shared it with all of the strong and inspirational educational leaders that fostered and nurtured her leadership capabilities. They were great women pioneers in the field of education and educational reform. Vilma is indebted to Dr. Vissa, Dr. Klemm, and Dr. Dubitsky.

### **HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH JOURNEY**

Currently, Vilma serves as an executive board member and advocacy researcher for a grassroots community organization of research scholars comprised of *Walden University* Alumni, faculty, and students involved in promoting positive social change around the world. It was a perfect fit for Vilma to serve as a fellow researcher and humanitarian leader. After publishing her dissertation, Vilma's biggest desire was to make a scholarly contribution that can serve as an advocacy tool to make positive social change in the lives of women and children.

### **KENYA: CHILD BRIDES FLEEING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)**

Throughout the summer of 2011, Dr. Caban-Vazquez expanded her advocacy research repertoire with *Social Changers without Borders, Inc.* by conducting a program evaluation commissioned by *Equality Now, Inc.* (Nairobi Office). Dr. Caban-Vazquez visited and evaluated a Kenyan girls rescue center utilizing grassroots efforts to save child brides from the dangers of FGM, and offering the rescued girls an education in private schools. Her efforts were recognized in *Walden University's* "2012 *My Walden Impact*" publication. Dr. Caban-Vazquez proudly serves on *Walden University's Public Relations Student Bureau* and she continues to seek ways to raise public awareness on pressing educational issues.

### **DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

On April 2, 2012 Vilma lost her beloved mother Maria to her brief battle with cancer. As a result, she chose a cause that would commemorate Maria's legacy. Prior to her mother's death, Vilma was working on a research article, "The Latina Project: Using the Educational Path to Break the Silence of Domestic Abuse" which reported key issues related to domestic abuse among Latina immigrants, and the importance of opening educational pathways that release and support the lives of children living with domestic violence. Therefore, in August 2012 with the help of her dear friend Loida, who served as the former Dominican Republic UN Consulate General, and a modest sum of donations in her mother's name, Vilma set out to make a difference in a rural town that reminded her so much of her mom's small town in Puerto Rico. Initially, she wanted to launch the study in Puerto Rico, but emotionally it was too soon to deal with this close topic in her mother's hometown. So Vilma traveled to the impoverished town of Bonao within the Alta Gracia Province of the Dominican Republic. In August of 2013, Vilma went back to launch a follow-up economic empowerment program for the 2012 research study participants. With the help of *Social Changers without Borders*, local/regional senators, councilmen, community advocates and other dignitaries of this rural town, Vilma conducted empowerment workshops and trainings that equipped the women to create a School Uniform Cooperative. This seed project established the foundation for a future micro-enterprise project for these battered women.

### **MOROCCO: STREET CHILDREN & ORPHANS**

In July 2013, Vilma served as an international volunteer for *Cross-Cultural Solutions* which a non-profit organization serving abandoned street children and orphans in Rabat, Morocco. As a humanitarian researcher, her vision was to explore the international phenomena of the invisible and forgotten children. Vilma's heart was transformed by the tender moments that she shared with the sick children that she served. While observing the compassionate international volunteers and the various staff on the field, Vilma was inspired to formally launch an advocacy study centered on this societal problem. Currently, she is working with Mohamed Mhmmoudi who is a fellow humanitarian, and the Moroccan country director for a non-governmental organization. As strong advocates of women and children, they are joining their public-spirited gifts to collaboratively research and share effective community-based and international humanitarian strategies. Their goal is to publish and share research-proven strategies that make a significant impact for improving the quality of lives for these impoverished children. With the support of several NGO's and private sponsors, Mr. Mhmmoudi and Dr. Caban-Vazquez will continue to examine the complex issues related to the abuse and tragic circumstances that Moroccan street children face as victims of child labor and sexual trafficking.