

SOLEDAD GARCIA – A WOMAN WORTH A POTOSI



Soledad tiene su negocio en el mercado de Uyuni, ubicado en la ciudad de Potosí al sureste de Bolivia. Allí, Soledad es reconocida por sus exquisitos platos y la calidad en la atención a sus clientes. Liderar un negocio próspero y querido por su comunidad, le ha permitido construir una casa para su familia y pagar los estudios universitarios de sus hijos.

Illustration by Bancosol

Soledad is Sucrens of birth and Potosine of heart. Her parents, like so many other families in search of a better future, moved to Potosi, a city famous for its precious metal deposits, when the girl was only five years old. There, in this department of cold climate and contradictory geography where geysers and volcanic muds merge with freshwater lagoons and valleys nestled between the mountains, each with its own microclimate, Soledad grew up, who imagined starring in adventures, met love, married at 15 and very soon welcomed the first of her three children.

During the first years of life as a couple, she dedicated herself to taking care of, accompanying and sharing her knowledge with her kids, while learning to know herself as a woman and forging her character and personality. However, as often happens in this unknown and uncontrollable universe that we inhabit, things soon began to change and when her youngest son was three years old, Soledad found herself surprisingly navigating a new stage that would profoundly transform her and her family.

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Her husband, who worked from sunshine to shade to provide what they needed at home, fought, like many of her colleagues, against "mine sickness", a very common kind of tuberculosis that mercilessly ends the lives of Bolivian miners since colonial times. Soon, his abilities began to diminish and Soledad, unable to think twice, found herself working at a food stand in the city's Uyuni market where her mother had worked most of her life and inherited them to help them.

Thinking about her, her mother, she imagines her telling anecdotes that she now shares with her grandchildren about their frequent trips from city to city buying and selling goods of all kinds to get Soledad and her brother through after their father abandoned them.

One morning, while Soledad was working at the market, she received the news of her husband's death. His departure left her plunged into a deep sadness, which soon turned into fear and worry, seeing herself now alone navigating life towards an uncertain future and with her three children.

Today, at the age of 40, Soledad exudes serenity and wisdom. She lives with her children in the house she dreamed of having as a child and managed to build for them. A small apartment per floor for each of her three sons, her musketeers, her accomplices and her fortress. They are the ones who help her with the preparation of her food and other business and household tasks, something she appreciates because she admits she could not do it alone. Her middle daughter, always by her side, watches her work with pride and curiosity, perhaps trying to absorb her mother's wisdom,

perhaps trying to get to know the woman she's become, or perhaps making sure Soledad is always certain she's not alone.

My responsibility is to work and support my family

In the Uyuni market, as every day, Soledad arrives early, plays music and with the kindness that characterizes her offers her food to acquaintances and customers who faithfully visit her to taste at an accessible price the flavors of the traditional food of her community, those that represent the identity of her people and that Soledad continues to offer to ensure that they never remain forgotten.

The food business is one of the most demanding and free time is very little. Between client and client, Soledad takes advantage of the seconds of tranquillity to think about the vacation she would like to take. Visiting the departments of Bolivia she does not know and getting lost for a few days out there, with her family, is something she craves.

She has thought about moving to another country to work, crossing the border with Chile or Argentina, for example, but she has never had the opportunity for that. While that happens, Soledad enjoys the tranquillity of her life in Potosí and does not lose hope that the situation improves and the government invests in her community so that that desire to leave that so many Potosinos feel, ceases to exist. As they say in their land, Soledad, without a doubt, is worth a Potosí!