

PURE RELIGION

From Refugee to Retailer

Larisa and her husband fled their country as political refugees and ended up in the United States looking for a new start and a new life. But where do you go when you're half a world away from home, with few job skills, approaching retirement age, and struggling to communicate in a foreign language?

With death threats and constant danger, Larisa believed that anything would be better than living in perpetual fear. And although she was extremely grateful for this new opportunity to live in a land of relative security, she still felt afraid.

How would they live? Who would employ them? How would they pay their bills?

After struggling to find employment, Larisa's bishop suggested she work at Deseret Industries. And it was at Deseret Industries where Larisa found the answers to the haunting questions about how she would survive in a new land.

She went to work as a cashier and immediately enrolled in an English as a second language class Deseret Industries offers to those who are employed there. Three times a week for an hour a day, Deseret Industries paid Larisa while she attended English courses taught by members of the community who volunteer their time to help others.

While there, she learned about the literacy, math, job-search, and values and ethics classes that Deseret Industries also offered.

Day by day, she became more proficient in English as well as in her work. She participated in a cashier certification course that included class work, practical application that demonstrated understanding, and a comprehensive final exam.

Larisa excelled in her work so much that her supervisor began to encourage her to start looking for another employment opportunity in a business where she would have the ability to progress further. But this Larisa did not want to do. She felt safe at Deseret Industries. She felt loved and respected. She did not want to leave the place that had nurtured her and offered her encouragement and hope.

But her supervisor gently encouraged, and Larisa enrolled in an intensive 40-hour class in job searching taught by LDS Employment Services. She began to interview. It hurt when she was passed over and not offered positions, and that made her want more than ever to stay at Deseret Industries. But her supervisors and trainers had confidence in her and insisted she continue.

Eventually, a major retailer offered her a position as a cashier, and Larisa accepted it—hesitantly. But her fears soon disappeared. She sailed through the cashier training program, finishing with a 97 percent, the top score in her class.

Today, Larisa is overjoyed and grateful.

"I thought Deseret Industries was all there was," she says. "But now, I see that I have potential. I can really make a contribution to this company and to the customers who shop here. There is so much more I can do than I ever thought possible."

Larisa's husband is now working at Deseret Industries, enrolled in the English classes, and pursuing his own dreams of a life of self-reliance in the land of opportunity.

