

19-year-old acts as a mother and a dreamer

“I will make my dream come true and bring pride to my family,” says Izabely Benjamin, a Brazilian volleyball athlete that aims to go to college in the United States.

Born in a family that always had to work extra to put food on the table, Izabely has a different mindset and life perspective than some of your family members. She said that “the only one who has a job at [her] house is [her] mother.” Her dad passed away when she was five, and her stepdad does not do much besides drinking beers and watching tv.

Izabely has four siblings and acts more as a mother than a sister because her mom is never home. Izabely must cook, clean, study English, practice volleyball, and take care of her family. Too much work for a 19-year-old, but she does not let the struggle put her down.

Besides acting as a mother, she also deals with the hardships of being a 19-year-old that takes care of herself since she was 15. “My mom was never there, our schedules were different, so whenever I would get home, she was leaving to go to work. I basically had to raise myself, but I don’t complain because she did what she had to do to put food on our table.”

A typical day for her consists of waking up every day at 6 a.m., taking three buses to go to volleyball practice, coming back at around noon, cooking, taking care of her siblings, and studying so her English matches the requirements whenever she arrives in the United States. Volleyball is the reason she got a scholarship, and when asked if she loved the sport, she said: “To be honest, volleyball is the part of my day that I forget about the problems. Whenever I step on the court I feel like I am the happiest person ever. This sport brings too much joy into my life.”

Izabely graduated from high school in 2019 and had everything settled to go to college in the U.S. in the fall of 2020. However, COVID-19 got in her way. Since the entire world has been impacted by the pandemic, so has her life. The American Consulates in Brazil are closed since March of 2020, so she cannot get her VISA and paperwork to enter the United States legally. The borders between the United States and Brazil are also closed since May of that same year.

“I will have to travel to another country to get my paperwork, which scares me because I cannot afford it. My mother doesn’t even know about this extra amount I will have to spend, and she also doesn’t have the money.”

As a very hard-working person and one who naturally does not have the financial resources to travel to another country to get her VISA, Izabely started to sell homemade candies and cakes. “I have sold more than I imagined, and I am so proud of myself. I have made more than \$500 in two weeks, and this money will help me pay for my flight ticket to Chile, where I will get my VISA,” said Izabely very proud of herself.