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Foundation CEO lives her dream of helping others

Step by Step aids children's groups in U.S., Venezuela.

By Michelle Kaplan
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Lilliane Stransky's philosophy of life can be summed up in three words, follow your heart. The CEO and founder of the Step by Step Foundation has been doing that since she was a child and so far, it's never steered her wrong.

Growing up in Caracas, Venezuela, Stransky watched a movie that changed her life.

"I was 6 and I saw a movie on TV. I think it took place in Mexico. This woman in the movie had an orphanage. So I said, when I grow up and if I have money, that's what I want to do," said Stransky. "That's what I tell everyone about my life, that dreams come true. I believe a lot in that."

Despite what other people thought about her dreams, she made them come true. Teaming up with a few friends, she opened an orphanage in Caracas, the Abandoned Children Foundation (Fundana), that has helped more than 15,000 children find homes since its inception in 1991. Although Stransky immigrated to the United States in 2000, she still helps.

"I am not involved in the running," said Stransky. "But I am still involved in donating for some of the educational programs and supplying needs."

The family decided to leave Venezuela when the government took a turn



Lilliane Stransky is the CEO and founder of the Step by Step Foundation, which supports 25 organizations in the United States and Venezuela. CONTRIBUTED

they were uncomfortable with.

"I moved from Venezuela 15 years ago because of the insecurity in the country when (Hugo) Chavez was getting in power, we moved here with the kids."

An ironic turn of events because Venezuela was the country both of her parents had immigrated to.

Stransky's mother, Vogeltje Katz (Miriam) was only 6 years old when her family fled Holland during World War II, their safe passage secured at a priceless price.

"All family Katz got special treatment to leave Holland in exchange for two Rembrandts and one Johannes Vermeer."

Her father, Jose Secchi, arrived from France under more pleasant circumstances.

"My father came to Venezuela to play soccer, and he fell in love with the country, and he met my mother at a friend's party in Caracas."

Today the 58-year-old Wellington resident is busy running her Foundation that she started in 2002. Step by Step helps meet the needs of 25 organizations in the United States and Venezuela. The staff consists of about 40 volunteers including Stransky's three daughters; Samantha, 27; Valentina, 25 and Daniela, 20.

While Step by Step is involved in giving year round, Stransky was determined to make the holiday season special for as many children as she could and collected toys to distribute to a number of organizations including Toys for Tots, Heroes & Heroes, The Caridad

Center, Place of Hope, Friends of the Orphans, Children's Home Society of Florida and New Jersey, YMCA of the Palm Beaches and the Kids Cancer Foundation. Stransky is also collecting dog toys to donate to area shelters.

"I believe that you have a purpose in life," said

'This is my purpose and I enjoy every single minute of it. My message for everyone — keep dreaming.'

Lilliane Stransky

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For more information about the Step by Step Foundation, call 305-458-

Q&A

What's your guilty pleasure?

Playing poker

What's your favorite junk food?

Big Mac — extra sauce, no tomatoes and fries.

If you could have dinner with anyone who would it be?

My grandparents or Ellen DeGeneres

Who do you admire most?

Lady Diana

What's playing on your iPod?

Merengue

What three things you would bring with you if you were stuck on a deserted island?

Cards to play solitaire, water, a survivor kit and Cabernet Sauvignon

What's your favorite movie?

"Mary Poppins"

Who is your favorite actor?

Meryl Streep

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