

The Life of Vida

“Te ayudo Mamá Tere?” I asked.

“No, esta bien mija no te preocupes” answered my grandma. I always offered to help her cook dinner, but she believed that if she let someone help her with her recipes then the food wouldn’t taste the same. I didn’t fight her decision because her food was always finger-licking good and I wouldn’t want it any other way.

“I’m going outside, Ma.”

“Ok, cuídate, Vida.”

I was teaching my grandma English while she was teaching me Spanish, so there was always a mix of Spanglish in our conversations.

It was now two minutes after I left the house. My abuela usually takes forever to cook the food, so I figured I had time to make my way down to the alley. There was a giant tree that I made kind of into a hangout spot. I climbed my way up and just sat at the top then let out a big breath of air. I thought back to when I first found this tree- that day I was walking in the alley with my parents. I told them how I wanted to design it, and they helped me bring my dreams to life the very next day. We set up a tire swing, frames of La Virgen, and blankets. Coming to this tree everyday helps me remember them and some of our good times. Mama Tere, on the other hand, hasn’t come to see this tree ever since they passed away.

“Hola Vida!” My friend Andy then ran up to the tree. “Que haces?”

“Nothing. I just got here.”

“Wanna go over to my place? We’re having a carne asada and you know my parents can cook!”

“No, it’s okay, Mama Tere is cooking back at home already. Maybe I’ll ask to go to your place tomorrow and eat some leftovers.”

“Okay, yeah, that sounds good!”

We then hugged and went our separate paths. She lived a couple houses down to the left of mine. I met her in second grade and we just so happened to live on the same street. We have been best friends ever since.

As I put the key into the doorknob of my house, I felt a freezing cold breeze run right through me. I stopped for a moment and looked around; everything seemed normal. I decided to ignore it and walked into the house.

“Buenas tardes, Vida ¿Cómo te fue?”

“Buenas tardes, Mama Tere. It went well.”

“¿Estás lista para comer?”

“Yes, I’m always ready to eat!”

We ate dinner as she told me adventurous stories about her life traveling the world. Mama Tere came to be one of my main inspirations for wanting to travel. She always seemed very happy thinking back to her young days visiting places like Mexico, Bora Bora, Rome, Paris, the Great Wall of China, and so on.

I called Andy. We decided to book an appointment to skydive in a couple of weeks. That way, when we get to the day, there’s no going back because we already paid for it. Mama Tere’s stories at dinner inspired me to start going on my own adventures. My parents both passing away proved to me that you could die at any moment, so don’t wait. Go now that you can.

Three weeks went by. I was shaking like glass during an earthquake. The cold wind was smacking me in the face. All I could see were fields waiting to catch my lifeless body.

“Come on, Vida! How many people can say they jumped off an airplane before!”

“Andy, this is not just jumping off an airplane. We’re going to go flying down to our deaths!”

“Hurry up before I push you. I’ve been waiting for my turn for ten minutes now, girl.”

“Okay, fine. Just count me down one more time.”

“Three..two..one!”

I jumped. I went straight for it. My mind went into spirals. Did I wash the dishes last night? Am I ever going to get the chance to have kids? Is this really what I’m going to feel before I die? I was going so fast that I couldn’t calm down. My body was stiff. At that moment, I started to wiggle my toes and got some of my senses back. My body felt a sort of relief. I felt free. I decided to let the wind take me and I don’t regret it at all. It was a once in a lifetime experience that I will hold on to and tell my future children about.

A couple hours later, we arrived at Andy’s house.

“Hey, Nando! I didn’t think you would be home.”

“Of course I am! My sister and cute friend just jumped off a plane and you didn’t think I’d want to ask about it?”

“Oh, no, yeah. Totally.”

I was only 15 and had never been with a boy, so I wasn’t really sure how to respond. Andy looked over at us and saw me blushing. She rolled her eyes.

“You two are so gross.”

We found a spot in the living room to chill with some snacks and talk about how skydiving went. Hours went by and I didn’t notice until I looked out the window and it was dark outside.

“I should probably get going now guys. Mama Tere is not going to be happy if she sees the moon before she sees me in the house.”

“Do you want us to walk you home?”

“No, it’s okay, Andy. I’m just a couple houses down and I wouldn’t want you guys walking out this late, either. The mosquitoes will get to enjoy three people instead of one.”

“Alright, well yell extra loud in case anything happens. We’ll be right next door, literally.”

We hugged then I made my way to the door. They said goodnight to me one more time and I headed out. I was looking up at the sky, wondering how much time I had until the moon popped out. I didn’t want to run in case I fell and hurt myself because trust me, I’ve had enough of those incidents on this rocky pavement.

I was halfway home when I heard my name being called. At first I ignored it, thinking I was just hearing things, but then I heard it again. The calling soon turned into screaming. It started getting closer and louder. I ran for home, not knowing exactly what I was running from. All I knew at that moment was that I didn’t want to find out either.

I made it to my house. I slammed into the door and swung it open. Mama Tere always leaves it open for me at night in case she falls asleep, so I knew I didn’t have to knock.

“Que paso, Vida??”

“I don’t know what happened, Mama Tere. I thought something was following me, so I got scared and ran.”

“Mija es mejor que pares de ver películas de terror porque después vas a tener miedo hasta de la oscuridad.”

“Okay okay, I want to sleep now though. Buenas noches, Mama Tere. Te quiero mucho.”

“También te quiero mucho, Vida. Buenas noches.”

It was 7:35 in the morning. Mama Tere barged into my room and snatched the sheets off of me faster than a jaguar catching its prey.

“MAMA TERE, WHAT’RE YOU DOING?”

“We need to get to church, Vida! Hurry up!”

“Can’t you let me sleep just a little more? I’m so tired.” I grabbed my sheets from the ground and grumbled as I laid back down.

“No, it’s going to get late and you still have to eat. Next time get home earlier so you can sleep a little more.” She then walked away and into the kitchen. I decided to get up and make my way to the bathroom so that I wouldn’t waste her time having to wake me up again.

It was a nice and bright Sunday. I had a great breakfast, consisting of giant waffles topped with loads of strawberries and puddles of syrup. It was delicious. I had a feeling that church was going to go by very smoothly today.

Mama Tere and I now arrived at church. We walked in and found the pew that we always sat at, which was right with Andy’s family.

“Buenos días, Señora Santos.” I walked over and laid my hand out to shake.

“Buenos días, Vida. I saw that you finished all of our snacks yesterday!”

My face went redder than a ripe tomato as I noticed Nando was right behind her.

“No, Ma. It was actually me who finished them.” Nando came around from behind her and laid his hand out to shake as well.

“Well, I don’t care who it was as long as someone buys me some more chocolate turtles.” We all sat down and the church’s bells went off soon after. I laid my eyes on the Virgin Mary as I started to think back. My parents would always force me to come but I would throw a fit and cry all of the time. I regret not just going along with what they wanted. I know it would have made them so much happier.

Over 2 hours later, Mass was now over. We all headed out into the parking lot and chatted for a little. When it was time to say goodbye, I hugged Andy. At the same time, I felt my inner core violently shake like a blender. Then I collapsed to the ground. I could hear Mama Tere yelling my name and Nando running over. The rest was a blur.

“Vida, please wake up. Please.”

The light soon struck my eyes as I lifted my eyelids up slowly. I was in a hospital room. I looked around me and saw Andy's family surrounding me.

"SEÑORA ALBA, COME IN. SHE'S AWAKE!"

"DON'T LIE TO ME, ANDY, I WAS JUST..."

My mother barged in. We made eye contact then she quickly ran over to me and hugged me. "This is a miracle. Oh, I missed you so much, Vida." Another person came over and joined us. I couldn't see their face over my mother crying all over me, but I felt them. Then, my mother got up to call the doctors and I saw that it was my father who had joined in on our hug.

"I- I thought that you guys were dead?"

"What are you talking about, Vida? We're right here. We always have been, mija."

"But I watched you die. What is happening? Why am I here in the hospital? I have to be dreaming."

"Mija, I don't know how to tell you this. My father looked at me with extreme dread in his eyes. "You were in a coma for over a year now."

My heart dropped. I felt a lump crawl down my throat. Soon after, tears started running down my face. I glanced around at everybody. No one was breaking character. They were not joking.

"How though? I'm confused." I noticed something shining around my mother's neck. It resembled Mama Tere's family heirloom. "And where is Mama Tere?"

My parents stared at each other with their eyes full of tears then my mother looked back at me.

"Vida. Your Mama Tere passed away last month. She was right here though, still talking to you everyday as if you could still hear her."

"No. Stop. That's not true. I was just talking to her."

"You could have been dreaming, but you're awake now hija. You're back with us now."

I hugged my parents so tight at that moment. I thought I was never going to get the chance to hug them ever again. I got upset thinking about how I wouldn't be able to do the same with Mama Tere anymore. Yet, I learned a lot from her and I know that whenever I sleep, I can meet her in my dreams and be with her once more.