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Esteban Cadena

Loyola Marymount University

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Lasting Fear

by

Esteban Cadena

An essay written as part of the Writing Programs

Academic Resource Center

Loyola Marymount University

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Ever since I can remember, my family always gathered together for small weekend barbecues. My mom would invite my aunts and uncles to come and eat dinner at our house. These gatherings consisted of about twenty people and were considered a “small” barbecue. The number of visitors always changed, sometimes there were more, sometimes less. However, the close family friend that always happened to show up was alcohol.

Alcohol was the only guest that never missed the party. This relative of mine was usually at my house by Friday evenings. My parents would pick him up and his family of eleven, or sometimes twenty-nine, from a supermarket and, suddenly, one by one they would begin to leave. As they slowly began to disappear, my parents would act in ways that are familiar to all. They usually slurred, “*Ven aqui*” or “*I ‘lab’ you hijo*” and invaded my personal space. My mom would pull me in and kiss my cheeks numerous times, but my dad would constrict me like an anaconda would its prey. Except instead of squeezing the life out of me, he would squeeze out an “I love you too.”

My younger and unaware self only saw the positive things that resulted from my family’s consumption. It always brought me great joy when my parents drank because they would turn into performers. My mother would sit me on her lap and sing about how much she loved me, while my father danced to oldies a couple feet away which I found very entertaining. The best perk about having alcohol around was that it would hinder my parents’ ability to think properly. This meant I could persuade them to give me what I wanted, and because they were so affectionate, they often did. However, I only took advantage of this when it came to sleeping over at my cousin’s house. When my *tio* decided to leave, I would run to my parents and ask if I could sleep over. They always responded with, “*Si amor! Lo que tu quieras,*” and allowed me to leave.

In June of 2008, when I was thirteen, we arrived at my *Tio Chuy*’s house for a barbecue. It was as ordinary as any of the previous ones we went to. Inside, the beans and rice sat waiting to feed any minor hungers that passed by. Outside, however, was where all the good stuff was hidden. The smell of grilled *carne asada* and *pollo* filled the air, instantly making everyone hungry. That day I escaped the summer heat by watching movies indoors with my cousins. Meanwhile outside, the adults cooled off by sipping on their beer and wine. We locked ourselves in the air conditioned room the whole day and never walked out unless it was the occasional bathroom break.

After using the restroom, my cousin walked in with a smirk on his face. “I think my *tia* and grandma got in a fight,” he said laughing.

“What *tia*? My mom?” I asked.

“Yes, I walked out and your mom’s like, ‘No one told you to do the dishes!’”

I chuckled, “Oh... nice.” Seconds later, I walked outside the room and checked to see what had occurred. On my way, I passed through the kitchen and found my mom washing dishes. “*Estas bien?*” I asked curiously.

“*Si.*” She smiled.

Satisfied, I returned to my seat on the floor and continued watching the movie. Moments later I walked out to grab a drink but instead found my Uncle Chuy, who rarely drinks, in the kitchen with my mom. She cried while my uncle tried reasoning with her. “*No se tienen que ir,*” he tried convincing her to stay.

“*Si, Chuy ya nos vamos,*” she insisted. “*Blas! Ya vamos!*”

“What happened, Uncle?” I demanded.

“Nothing, your mother and grandmother got into an argument,” he responded.

“*Hola hijo,*” she tried hiding her tears. “*Ya nos vamos pa’ la casa.*”

“*Ma’ me puedo quedar?*” I attempted to spend the night.

“*No! Ya nos vamos!*”

She made it very clear that I was not going to spend the night. We said our final goodbyes and stormed out the door. I entered the car and immediately recognized the stench of alcohol and an awkward silence. My brother sat up front beside my dad, leaving me in the back seat with my mother. Before my dad started the car, my mom slurred in between her sobs, “*Ya vamos por favor. Ya me quiero ir.*” She began to tell us about the incident in the kitchen, “*Es que tu abuelita me cae gordo.*” She continues to criticize my grandma, “*Siempre se encabrona por cada cosa!*”

“*Cuca, ya callate,*” my dad tries to quiet her.

“*Es que mi mama...*”

“Mom! There shut up!” my brother shouts.

The car was silent for a few moments.

“*Mi mama...*”

“Enough!”

She whined the whole ride home and both my dad and brother demanded her to stop. I did not know what to do; I was stuck in between. I hated that both my dad and my brother told her to be quiet instead of sympathizing, but on the other hand, I also hated hearing my mother sob. I stared out the window and wished I had stayed at my *tia*'s house. We arrived home around midnight and my mother continued to weep. Unwilling to put up with her cries any longer, both my dad and brother went for a walk. While they were gone, I was stuck alone to listen to my mother. In an attempt to escape, I went past the kitchen to the laundry room and got clean underwear so I could shower. On my way there I ran into my mother, who was on the phone repeating the words, "*No Chuy. Ya no puedo.*" I thought nothing significant about it, shut the laundry door, and made haste to the restroom.

Inside the shower, I was unsure as to whether water or tears ran down my face. It took an eternity to regain my composure, and when I finally stepped out, I no longer heard my mother. A sense of relief came over me. I took my usual course into the laundry room and stepped quietly, trying not to wake my mother, who I assumed was asleep. As I stepped into the kitchen, I noticed the laundry doors were open. Faint sobs were heard from inside. I peeped in and witnessed my mother holding a glass cup in one hand and a gallon of bleach in the other. We faced each other. My mother and I stood, staring at one another for what seemed like the longest two seconds of my life. "*Te quiero mucho hijo,*" she said softly.

I dropped everything at hand and ran for my brother. He was not in our room. He was not in my parent's room, nor the living room. I could not find him or my dad. I began to wail. "Mauricio! Maury! Dad!" but there was no response. Finally, I remembered they had gone outside and I bolted out the front door. There was no sign of them out there either and I yelled out again, "Mauricio! Dad! Where are you..." They slowly appeared from behind some cars and casually crossed the street. Once I caught sight of them, I wailed hysterically and they too shut me up.

"What's wrong? Everything is gonna be fine."

"*Porque lloras Esteban? No te preocupes.*"

They tried to reassure me that everything was fine from outside the gate; they did not see what I witnessed inside the house. I ran indoors but stopped right before entering the kitchen while my brother chased after me. "Hey, little brother," he said. I pointed to the ground where my mother was now lying. "Mom..." I stood watching my mother lay motionless. My brother rushed to the

floor beside her and violently shook her. “Mom! Mom! Esteban! Get the phone!” I did not respond. My dad tossed the phone to my brother and approached my mom, “*Esteban solamente se cayo. Is ok mijo.*” He tried to explain that she simply slipped on the spilt “water” that was on the floor, but I already knew the truth.

“She drank bleach...”

They stared at me, then at each other with the same blank expression I had earlier.

“*Cuca, cuanto te tomaste?*” my dad asked how much she had drank.

My mom only repeated, “*Los quiero mucho, los quiero, los quiero mucho.*”

Mauricio, who called 911, ordered me to mix salt in water, but I could not take my eyes off my mother. She stared at me and continued to repeat those words, but I refused to believe that she loved me at that moment. My father brought the salt water over and forced my mom to drink it. She began to throw up and I started crying again. My brother came to me and promised everything would be fine. He took me to my room, told me she’s safe, and shut the door. I no longer saw what went on outside my room, but I heard multiple people enter the house. My Uncle Chuy and *Tia Dilia* arrived moments after my mom was taken by paramedics and decided it was best for me to stay at their house. Even though she was safe now, I relived the incident the whole night and blamed the alcohol for my mother’s selfish decision.

Alcohol is not as amusing as it was when I was younger. Now after seeing the control it had on my family, I am fully aware of its destructive nature that continues to take control of my family. Sadly, although alcohol was the cause of this incident, I am the only one in my family that recognizes its downsides. It still remains a close family friend, present at all my family gatherings. I, on the other hand, am stuck on campus dreading the day when alcohol takes advantage of my absence in another attempt to cripple my family.