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The Positivity in My Lived Experiences

by

Jane Dawkins

A narrative written as part of the First To Go Community

Academic Resource Center

Loyola Marymount University

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The Positivity in My Lived Experiences.

By Jane Dawkins

The computer screen was searching me, and I could not help but stare right back at it. My fingers were set in place like a small army ready to attack, but it was almost as if the computer knew that I was not going to make a move. Where could I possibly start? I did not know how to make my life fit on only two pages, a life full of disappointments and obstacles – challenges that have shaped me into the strong young woman that I am today.

Realizing that for tonight, at least, I had lost the staring contest with the computer screen, I returned back to bed, defeated. My teachers told me that I had an amazing story to tell; regardless, a story is only as good as how it's told, how the storyteller brings to life the events, places, and people involved.

College applications were due soon, and I started falling behind due to the necessary visits to the oncologist with my mother. She noticed a small lump in her right breast a while ago, but was too scared to get it checked. I do not blame her. Two of her sisters died of breast cancer, as well as her mother. As the oldest in the family, she had to take care of them while they went through chemotherapy and provide emotional support for them, yet she needed support, too. She mourned them alone since her family fell apart quickly after their deaths. I was too young to know what was happening – too young to notice that my mother was hurting. Plus, just a couple of years earlier, she suffered the devastating loss of her son to brain cancer. After her sisters' deaths, her hope began to erode. It was my small presence that kept her going each day; she saw something in me that triggered a maternal instinct deep inside. As a mother, she had to continue living and fighting for her daughter because I was young, but more importantly, I was alive.

I felt my mother moving around the bed the entire night. She was not able to fall asleep, knowing that in just a few short hours the results of her test would be given to her. When I woke

up a little after six, she was making breakfast. She had a smile on her face and reassured me that whatever the diagnosis was, she was not going to give up. We were in this together. Even if we had to fight another cancer battle, at least she would have me to look after her.

We walked inside the small white room. I took the chair to the far left; my mother sat on top of the bed. She wore a paper robe around her and waited impatiently for the oncologist to appear. My hands sweated and my chest felt heavy. When the nurse came in to announce that the doctor would be coming in soon, my mother looked at me and said that she trusted me; it was my duty to translate whatever the doctor had to say.

I assured her that everything would be okay, that despite the diagnosis she was going to be fine. Ten years passed after her sisters' deaths, and with all the technological advancements, my mother was going to live. She could not die. NO. Not her. It was not her time.

The doctor came in and introduced herself. She spoke broken Spanish, but at least my mother could understand her. I felt the words coming as the room became tense. The doctor held my mother's family history in her hands and fully understood what this woman had been through. How do you tell someone that has already witnessed so many deaths, that she has cancer? You don't. You tell the daughter, and it's the daughter's responsibility to translate it to her mother. I'm sure she didn't think about it that way; rather, she probably couldn't explain it well enough in Spanish. She looked me straight in the eyes and told me the diagnosis. Her words made me confused and angry. I didn't know what to say, how to say it. "*Que dijo?*" Those two words broke the silence and my mother turned to me.

At first, I tried to tell her the unimportant details, but it was too late after I realized that the words had slipped from my mouth and were on their way to hurt my mother. I had pronounced the words she hoped not to hear, "Mom, you have cancer." I wonder how it felt to

have your daughter tell you your fate? Having breast cancer was my mother's biggest nightmare, and as much as she wanted it to be a dream, it was her reality – my reality. Tears filled her eyes and started their path down her cheeks. She knew it. She knew all along what the diagnosis would be – her family history predetermined it.

I lay in bed that night, pretending to be asleep while she choked on her tears. Part of me wanted to roll back and stroke her hair. I felt the need to tell my mother she was not alone, but I knew that she did not want me to see her cry. She wanted me to think that the super mom I knew – the super mom that I have – was still there despite her diagnosis. An hour later, she cried herself to sleep. I lay still, hearing her breathing and listening to the sounds of the night, wondering – wondering how our lives would change – how she would change, physically and emotionally.

Suddenly, I felt an insatiable urge to write. I rose slowly from the bed, making sure my mother would not awake from the dreams that provided her respite from this living nightmare. I took a seat on the blue sofa and turned on the computer. Its light blinded me. My eyes felt intimidated but confident at the same time; they were up for the challenge, looking back fiercely, like an attacker teasing its prey. The walls beside me collapsed and an invisible force tore off the rooftop of the small apartment. There was no ground beneath the couch. The only thing that I could make out in such a state of destruction and chaos was my mother sleeping – oblivious to the world falling apart beside her – the world I destroyed with every sentence I wrote – the hatred I expressed for the life I'd been given and the uncertainty that filled me up at that moment. Every aching feeling that plagued my soul that night was let loose on to paper.

I heard a young girl calling her daddy who wouldn't come to her aid; I saw her waving goodbye before boarding the plane at the airport, seeing her daddy for the last time. He remained

emotionless, waving back as if the girl who was leaving was a stranger and not his daughter. A young boy suddenly appeared. He looked innocent and vulnerable. The needles in his arms seemed painful, but the smile on his face suggested otherwise. He was searching for his parents, who were on the other side of the crystal window speaking to the neurologist. He knew his time was almost up, and as much as he tried to hold onto the hospital bed, he would have to depart to a place seen only by those who have transcended our world into one of peace and serenity. The hours passed and flashbacks of my memories went along with them.

When I finally looked up from the computer screen, I sensed my weary eyelids. My small fingers were cramping and my body was drunk with drowsiness. I placed the computer aside and allowed myself to become seduced by the coziness of my bed.

The next morning I awoke to the aroma of fresh pancakes and to the sizzling sound of the pan. My mother had already set the table for breakfast. When she saw me standing by the kitchen door, she handed me a glass of orange juice and gave me a kiss on the forehead. As we ate, neither of us dared speak of the situation, even though we knew it was a topic that needed to be discussed. When my mother left for work, I looked back at the couch after closing the door behind her and found the laptop resting there, as if the affair we had the previous night had not occurred. I pressed the power button and the sleepy machine came back to life, recharged after a good night's sleep. After reviewing the pages, I was bewildered to find that despite the hatred the white pages exuded, beneath the words laid a story of love and perseverance.

Soon I became a potter, raising and shaping words into sentences full of meaning. It was my eagerness for finding positivity in my lived experiences that made the bitter lines bearable. I slowly witnessed the blossoming of a beautiful writing piece as its roots deepened in my life. Little did I know that this was the process of my becoming – of my internal growth. As an

amaryllis, I grew into my misfortunes and bloomed. Even when I could not always immediately see the connections in my experiences, the act of writing allowed me to flourish. It felt like such a natural thing to do. I try to never stunt my growth as a person; rather, I try to learn from my mistakes and experiences, finding something to hold on to when torrents crash and threaten to drown me.

Even in the face of the tragic news of my mom's cancer, I knew that I needed to start thinking about college. I returned to school on Monday morning with the first draft of my personal statement in hand. When I stepped into the college counselor's office, she asked me to close the door and take a seat. I explained to her my situation, emphasizing the fact that I knew what came next. My mother had explained to me her cancer treatment process, in detail, over the weekend. On Friday, she came back from work finding me at the foot of the stove stirring the soup that I made for dinner. I could see sadness in her eyes, and when I asked what was wrong, she said that soon I would have to complete all the chores around the house by myself. She broke down in tears right before me and came to my arms like a fearful little girl. She tried explaining to the best of her ability what would happen to her. She knew from experience how it was to see someone you love in pain, to see them confined to a bed, struggling to get up. I would soon know, too.

I was aware of the challenges we would face but I promised my counselor and myself that I would continue working on college applications and maintaining my good grades. I reached my hand out and handed her my life. She took my personal statement and placed it on top of a pile of other essays. Suddenly, the essay did not look stunning anymore. It was short. There was no physical trait that made it stand out from the rest of the pile – except for one thing – the story depicted in it. I returned to class and took a seat in the back. Halfway through, I

started zoning out until I heard my name being called. The executive director of the school wished to speak with me in his office immediately.

When I turned the door handle and pushed the door open, I found him and my counselor sitting at opposite ends with my essay lying on his desk. As he began to talk, I shut his voice out and started wondering what I was doing in the office of a man who never had time for anybody except for important administrators or prospective donors. It was not until his hand reached for a tissue that I realized he was crying. I suspected he had read my essay and I tried to focus on the words that were coming out of his mouth, “I cannot let you graduate from this institution until I make sure I know where you are going next, until I know which university you’ll be going to. Someone like you cannot be left behind because then I would have failed in my purpose. It is my dream to help those with potential like yours find a place in which they can flourish, promote justice and help others.” When I walked out of his office, I had a college budget, at last. He offered to pay for my college applications and flights to visit colleges of my interest. He said it was his duty to make sure a young woman with my potential attended college because then I could really make a difference in the lives of others.

During the weeks ahead, I worked mostly from home on my college essays and the common application, trying to fit in my academic responsibilities around my mother’s doctor appointments. Despite my interest in leaving California to attend a college in another state, I could not leave my mother behind in such circumstances; thus, I began the search for prestigious colleges within Los Angeles and the Bay Area. Soon, my list of colleges amounted to a number of Cal States, UCs, the Claremont Colleges, and Loyola Marymount University. Pomona College ranked as my first choice because I spent two consecutive summers there in an on-campus bridge program. Because I am an undocumented student, applying to Cal States and UCs and actually

getting accepted would be a bitter dream come true, as the government was not going to give me any financial aid to attend those schools. However, deep inside of me, I was thrilled to know whether UCLA or Berkeley would accept me. The previous year only one senior from my high school got accepted to both universities, gaining the recognition from the entire graduating class. I aspired to be recognized like that and make my teachers and my mother proud of me. But in reality, it was not recognition I sought. I just wanted to confirm that I could have been a Bruin or a Bear, if I was not an undocumented student.

Coming home from school one afternoon, I entered the apartment building and headed towards the mailbox. I reached inside my right pocket for the key that had been pressing against my leg for a long time, retrieved it, and turned it inside the lock. I propped the box open and several postcards and hospital letters fell to the floor, while the rest of the mail was stuck inside. I picked up the mail on the floor and then reached inside for the rest. Among hospital bills and junk mail, I found postcards from different colleges I had not heard of before. I cannot recall a moment where I have felt as confident in my life before; it was after reading those postcards that I knew I would get accepted into every college I applied to. Soon I would receive an admission letter from Pomona College accepting my early decision and congratulating me for my outstanding work. All the late nights spent doing homework was paying off and all of the doubt of whether or not I could attend college was vanishing.

I returned to the mailbox, day after day with increasing irritation. Weeks passed and still the one letter that I really wanted to get had not come. One Friday night after a hot shower, I headed straight to my closet when I noticed an envelope sitting on top of my laptop. The dust on my fingers when I grabbed hold of it told me that the envelope had been resting there for a while. A sudden coldness ran down my spine and goosebumps rose on my skin. My eyes caught a

glimpse of the Pomona College mark as I turned the envelope around. I stood in the middle of my room wrapped in a wet towel for a few minutes when I realized my feet were cold and numb. I sat on the edge of my bed with the letter between my hands; my fingers caressed the top fold. I slowly loosened the adhesive, but my nervous hands lost control. I dropped the letter, fumbling it in midair. Then I lost it again but caught it just before it hit the floor.

But my eyes were able to follow the words until the end of the first sentence. The message was clear – Pomona regretted to inform me that I had not been accepted in the college. I was dumbfounded. I let the letter fall out of my hands and sink to the floor once and for all. I crawled into bed and buried my head in the sheets. In a matter of seconds, I fell into a state of helplessness. I tried with all my might to hold on to my dreams, but they seemed to vanish from my mind. I sent my unconsciousness to go in search of them, but a heavy fog had blurred my vision. At that moment, I felt that I didn't stand a chance. I was a failure, who, despite all of her hard work, would not be able to attend college.

What am I to do now? I certainly needed to find a job after high school if I want to attend community college at least. *No! College is not meant for me; it has never been. As much as I have tried, I have failed. Now there is nothing left to do but help my mother. I need to work and provide for her, like she had provided for me.* With the sheets tightened around my head and my body quivering, my heavy sobs were the last sounds I heard before losing consciousness. My mother found me bundled in my yellow blanket, with my eyes red and swollen. She kneeled next to my bed and began to cry, tearing the letter to pieces.

The world that I envisioned for myself was not the world that I woke up to the next morning. The last I saw of it was torn into pieces at the foot of my bed. I had the weekend to decide whether or not to go back to school. I felt humiliated and crushed. It had been moronic of

me to think that I would go to college despite my legal status – that I could make the difference in the system because I deserved it. Maybe I did deserve it. If I had not gone above and beyond what was expected, I would not have received the postcards or the financial support of the executive director of my school. But in the end, I wouldn't be able to make a change; I had no way to, no matter how much I wanted to. I would become another number contributing to the statistics of undocumented students that graduate from high school but cannot continue further on.

Monday morning, I felt a finger poking my back. I rolled over and saw my mother standing before me. She urged me to get ready fast so I could get to school on time. It had been foolish to think she was going to let me stay home, that she would let me give up at the snap of my fingers. The first thing that I did when I arrived to school was head straight for my counselor's office. She was reading an acceptance letter placed in front of her, but when she became aware of my presence she asked me to take a seat and put the letter aside. She met my gaze and listened to what I had to say. She made sure that I understand Pomona was not an easy school to get accepted into, much less a school willing to provide an undocumented student with an education. It was so simple for her to tell me not to worry, for her to assure me that good things were still coming my way because God has a plan for all of us. She wanted me to believe in something I had no faith in anymore and to believe in myself even if nothing else could bring me hope. She was absolutely right when she said that any college would be pleased to have a student like me, *which is why Pomona rejected me*. When she said my mission in life hadn't finished there, she was right. *It will finish after graduation*.

I forced my mother's signature on a blank piece of paper and wrote an excuse note. My mother was sorry that I had to miss my fourth, fifth, and six periods of class but I had a doctor's

appointment scheduled for the afternoon. I left school and started walking with no direction. I did not know where to go, whom to go to. My mother was still at work and I really did not feel like going anywhere. I took the gold line train and started my quest back home. When I entered my house building, I avoided seeing the mailbox, but when I got to my door I could not ignore the package stuck between the bars of the protection door. When I was able to get it out from the bars, I opened the door and went inside.

Five minutes later, my mother arrived. She found me sitting on the blue sofa with the remote control in my hands. She gave me a searching look and after a few seconds asked me what I was doing home so early. I felt preposterous when I said, "I ditched my classes, Mom." I had never done it before and if I had done it in other circumstances, I would have probably gone to the beach or the mall, but instead, I wound up at home. I had hoped to see my mother as soon as possible, but now that I had her in front of me, I felt ashamed of what I had done. She placed the market's bags she had been carrying on the floor and sat next to me. I could smell the Clorox scent on her hands as she held my face between them. Her callouses made me think of how difficult it is to clean a mansion all by yourself, to go up and down the house all day without stopping.

I saw myself in my mother's eyes and her strong grip emphasized the hope she was holding between her hands. She was afraid to let go, and I was afraid to let go of myself in the battle I had started. If I were not a dreamer, I would not face so many obstacles and put up with so many fights; life as a conformist would be so much easier. But like my mother, I am valiant. We fight with heart and see hope in the smallest things. Together we have crossed frontiers and become invincible. She might as well be Wonder Woman and I her faithful follower. It was at that moment, with her gripping my will to continue, that I realized my future was not sealed in an

envelope; my goals went beyond Pomona and my mission on this earth did not stop or start at a college.

As she went to the kitchen, my mother noticed the envelope on top of the dining table. She looked back at me and asked if I had opened it yet. “No. I’ve been waiting for you so we can open it together. I was scared to do it alone.” She stretched a hand and pulled me up from the sofa. “Open it,” she said. “If it’s another rejection letter I promise I’ll take you out to dinner to celebrate their loss.” While I was opening the package, my mother took a wine glass from the cabinet and opened a Chardonnay bottle. I followed her with my gaze as she moved flowingly around the kitchen; I couldn’t help but notice the smile on her face. When she finally sat in the chair next to me with a wine glass in hand, I opened the folder.

It is our great pleasure to offer you admission to UCLA for the Fall Quarter 2011. The wine glass crashed to the floor and spilled its contents as my mother flung her arms around me. I could not believe I had been accepted to one of the most prestigious schools in California. I crushed the letter between my hands and pressed it against my chest. “We did it mom; we did it!” When I thought God had abandoned me and remained silent, I realized that He only wanted to make his point that soon I would have to handle things alone. He sent me a little letter in a big package, giving me license to continue dreaming and striving for more. That was my first of many acceptance letters to come. By the end of March, I had been accepted to all the UCs, Cal States, and some of the private schools that I applied to. As an undocumented student, however, getting accepted into such great schools was an honor but not a reality. My brain could no longer process the huge money signs I attached to each letter. In my mind’s eye, the money signs would sometimes transform into an S-shaped path to a new road with new obstacles and new

adventures, but it always came back to its original shape. The big fat S with two parallel lines only reminded me of the parallelism between my dream and my reality.

Two weeks before having to make my final decision on what college I would attend in the fall of 2011, Santa Clara University sent me an email congratulating me for my acceptance into the school and informed me that due to my academic standing I qualified for The Hurtado Scholarship. I picked up my cell phone and called Silvia Juarez, the woman who helped me with my college essays. It was thanks to the many drafts she revised for me that I was able to submit a masterpiece that I am proud of even to this day. I wished she had faked amazement when I told her the news; I wanted her to make me feel special and blessed. Instead, she said she expected the essay part of the application the next morning before 9AM.

I went back home did research on the Hurtado Scholarship. After accessing my application, I proceeded to read the essay question. The question was so broad that it was challenging for me to think of anything special that I could write about. I began typing anyway. As soon as my first sentences appeared on the screen, the words were deleted by the cursor that chased after them. It was difficult to stay focused when there were so many things that I could write about. I knew, though, that only one of these ideas could get me to the next round. The question was which one of them would get me there? What do I have to offer that other students might lack? Who did I need to be to get into a school like Santa Clara? Why would I even go there if I knew I couldn't leave my mother behind? That night I stayed up debating whether or not to apply for the scholarship. I weighed the possibilities of being one of the chosen ones and leaving everything behind including my mother. I also thought about the possibility of not even making it to the first round and wasting my valuable time on something that had nothing in store for me. Either way, I knew that I had to do it. I had to try. I had to challenge myself to bring out

the best in me and submit my potential in the form of an essay to a committee that would ultimately decide my fate.

I finished typing the last words of my essay around five in the morning and ended up emailing the finished document to Sylvia thirty minutes to six. I got up from bed and got dressed into my school uniform. I rode the bus to school that morning feeling exhausted and sick. I wanted to exit the bus at the next stop and ride another one back home. When I got to school, Sylvia called me and asked me to check my email. I downloaded the attachment that came with it and opened it on the school's laptop. A blank piece of paper appeared in front of me with one sentence – “You can do better than that.” I wondered where my essay had gone and I felt anger rising within me at the thought that she had maybe discarded it in her laptop's trashcan. It was not the essay she was throwing away. She was disposing of a night of my life and words that spoke to who I was. I was furious the rest of the day but managed to put my anger aside and think about more effective ways to write about myself.

That night, I wrote from the heart and left my rationale behind. Although I might have something greater to give than the rest of the other applicants, it was true that we were all overachievers. Santa Clara could have asked us all to create our own epic version of *The Hunger Games*, and we would have done it because it is in our nature to fight. For this battle, I had all that I needed – a working laptop with Microsoft Word and most importantly, a heart. Survival is my second nature and even if I didn't make it through the first round, I would find something that would keep me alive. Even if I couldn't stay alive, I would die thinking and thanking the man who gave me life, the same man who once called himself my father.

All of the low expectations my father had for me and his lack of faith in me used to be my shadow. I once thought to myself that maybe I was a failure, that maybe if I had been a boy

my father would have loved me and respected me. But as I grew up, I understood that if I were truly a failure, I would sit waiting for him to come and rescue me from things falling apart. I would have gotten pregnant at the age of sixteen, like he predicted, and I would have lost myself in alcohol. Sadly for him, I failed to meet his expectations. Today, I only turn to my past to see how much I have accomplished and I always think about him.

As I typed the last words of the essay, I prayed to God and asked Him to take care of my father because if it weren't for him and Mom, I wouldn't be here. Even though I was done with my essay, I waited until the next morning to send it to someone else for review before submitting it to Sylvia again. By the afternoon, I had a great piece that I hoped would get me more than just one sentence. It was not until after I sent it that I doubted that the essay was good enough. I thought that it needed a little bit more work, but it was too late now. The essay had probably been printed out already and was being stabbed to death by a red pen.

Two days later, I received a call from one of the members of the scholarship committee. I was in my Economics class when one of my peers screamed out loud that he had become a Quest Bridge Scholar. I had applied for that program, too, but I did not have the same luck as him. Still, I jumped desk tables to get across the room to hug him when I felt my phone vibrating on my jean pocket. I answered the call and stepped outside after asking for permission. The caller introduced himself and said that Sylvia was right when she assured him that I could write a better piece than the exceptional essay he thought he had read. He asked me to pack my bags and clear my schedule for the upcoming week because Santa Clara needed to interview me in person as part of the second round. I went back inside the room screaming with emotion the good news and feeling everybody gather around me in a big hug.

In the upcoming week, I would be attending Latino Overnight at Loyola Marymount University and flying to Santa Clara for my interview. It all seemed crazy and unrealistic. A month prior, I had no notion that opportunities like these would present themselves to me. Likewise, I didn't know that my mother, a woman who never got sick, would have to battle cancer. I felt uncomfortable leaving my mother behind but that was all part of the process. Soon, I would have to let go of her completely to attend college. I packed my bags and kissed my mother good-bye on the forehead before departing to LMU. I could see her from the rear view mirror of the car as I drove down the street. When I lost sight of her, I began wondering if I would have the heart to leave my mother alone if I did receive the Hurtado Scholarship to attend Santa Clara.

When I arrived at Loyola Marymount University, I went in search of Monica Jara, the admissions officer in charge of Latino Overnight. I followed the schedule that she gave me and attended each and every event; everything was exciting, yet tiring. At 11 o'clock at night, many of the students were packed inside St. Robert's Hall dancing and laughing. The ones that had decided to join LMU for the upcoming year were trying to find each other. On my way from the restroom, I saw an exit door to my left and decided to leave the dance through there. The students that had been guarding it were now on the dance floor shuffling. I opened the door to a long hallway that leads to Regents Terrace. Once outside, I sat on the stairs breathing fresh air and admiring Sacred Heart Chapel when I noticed something peeking through from the back of the church. I turned to see if anyone else witnessed it, but I stood alone. I felt the cold night breeze right through me as I ran across the Sunken Gardens. There was something resting on the bottom of the hill that created a horizon, and I wanted to find out what it was. The temperature seemed to drop as I got closer. Once on the edge of the hill, I wondered how many other students

had struggled to climb through here and escape the inferno to this peaceful and safe haven on the bluff. This was the first time that I was able to see past the city, past the mountains, and past my struggles. I was at peace.

The next day, I had to wake up early to get ready for my flight to Santa Clara. Monica Jara told me that she could no longer drive me to the airport but she asked one of her assistants to take me instead. I lost track of the time as I lost myself in conversation with her assistant. The assistant muttered a curse, and it was only then that I realized I was running late and she had made a wrong turn. It would be difficult to get back on the right track and time was running out. She maneuvered the wheel and passed different cars. I don't know what scared me more, crashing or missing my flight. Finally, we arrived at the Southwest Airlines terminal. She hurried me out of her car and said, "Go!" I grabbed my bags and ran towards the entrance. I jumped past people and ran all the way to gate 23. I saw a plane rising in flight through the crystal windows as I ran, and I found my feet slowing and my chest burning with sharp breaths. I had missed my flight and, with that, the opportunity to attend Santa Clara University.

I called the school and explained to them what had happened. I could feel my heart racing, jumping out of my chest as I told them that I had missed my flight. I expected them to tell me how sorry they were and that they couldn't buy me another ticket. But to my surprise, they scheduled another flight that departed later in the afternoon and wished me luck. I arrived at the campus a little after eight o'clock in the evening and joined the other students who were there to interview for the same scholarship. The next morning we all woke up early and ate breakfast together. In chatting with the students and hearing about their experiences, I felt better about the situation. Regardless of whether or not I received the scholarship, I knew the award would go to

students who truly deserved every cent of it. I heard my name being called across the room. It was time to bring out the super star student in me and defend my case.

I guess I wouldn't have a successful career if I were a lawyer, as I'm not very good at defending what I believe, or perhaps maybe I didn't want to defend my case in the first place. Maybe I knew that something better waited for me. The truth was that even if Santa Clara offered me the scholarship, I could never leave my mother behind. We are complements of each other and without her, I wouldn't have a reason to try hard. Plus, I knew that she needed me as much as I needed her.

I opened the door to the apartment building and saw my mother waiting for me in the living room. She held a beautiful bouquet of white lilies in her hand and handed them to me. She looked beautiful in that blue dress – it was hard to imagine that she had cancer. Over dinner, we chatted about Latino Overnight and my visit to Santa Clara. She sounded really excited and hopeful, even though I knew deep inside she did not want me to leave home. Two days later, I received an email from Santa Clara regretting to inform me that that I had not received the scholarship. I didn't regret it. I was happy that one of the other students received it. I had become Facebook friends with all the other students who had applied for the scholarship so I logged in hoping to find out who had received it. I felt like a stalker perusing their walls, trying to find a post about Santa Clara. When I came across the first student who received it, I was full of joy. Then I found another one, and then three more. I guess that was the worst news that I had received in a while, yet I still felt happy and hopeful. Life has an inexplicable way of making things happen for a reason. Some days it feels as if we drift into limbo, while other times, it feels as if we are a step away from heaven.

I could feel pity and disappointment from other students when they found out about the scholarship. I could feel their gazes following me as I walked down the hallway on my way to the entrance door. I knew what they were thinking, “Oh, God. What is she gonna do now?” “Poor thing. She killed herself for nothing.” “I guess it doesn’t matter that she’s valedictorian. She won’t be going to college.” I was turning the corner when I received a phone call. The caller ID said that it was Monica Jara.

“Hello, this Monica Jara,” Monica said on the other end.

“Hi, Monica. How are you?” I replied.

“I’m doing well, thanks. How was your interview?” she continued.

“It went well. Thanks for asking.”

“Have you checked your email?” she said lightly.

“Yes, just now. Why?”

“Have you received an email from financial aid?” she inquired.

“No, I didn’t. Why?”

“Are you sure?” she sounded surprised.

“Yes, I’m sure. Why? What happened?” I asked.

“Why don’t you go back and check,” she suggested after a moment.

“Okay, I’ll check it again and will call you back in a few minutes. Bye!” I hung up the phone and walked back to school. Again, I felt whispers following me. Fingers pointed in my direction – but I didn’t care. I had other things to worry about. I tried logging on to the computer but it was taking a while to boot up. Finally, the home screen appeared. I opened Safari and went on the Yahoo homepage. I signed in to my account and clicked on the inbox. There was no

financial aid email to be found. I checked spam and trash but there was nothing there. I pulled my cell phone out and dialed Monica's number.

"Hello? Did you find the email?" she said immediately.

"No, I didn't. There is nothing there."

"That's weird. Financial Aid should have posted the awards already," she insisted.

"The what? What does that mean?"

"You got the scholarship. Congratulations!" she added.

"Really?" I asked incredulously. "Yes!" I shouted, "Thank you so much."

She congratulated me one more time and hung up the phone. I walked back outside, smiling to myself and accepting the students' stares with gratitude. They did not know what I knew, but it didn't matter. I knew. Soon my mother would know, too.