

Bio Clip 5 - My Mother

My mother was warned. If her second pregnancy reached full term she would die. Maria was her first child. During that pregnancy Mami lost 20 pounds and a week after giving birth both Mami and Maria had to be rushed to the hospital. Maria had fainted and Mami had blood clots in one of her legs. They both made it out okay, but now Mami was again pregnant and an appointment was scheduled to terminate her pregnancy. She cried so much. Then she made her decision to risk her life, skipped her appointment, and showed up at the doctor's office in her seventh month. She had to sign documents releasing the doctors from any liability should she die.

Mami was born on Valentine's Day in a little town in western Cuba and lived in a home that had dirt floor. Many families from the United States lived there and they built their own schoolhouse and church. The town's only social activity was attending Sunday morning service. But neither the teacher nor the preacher spoke Spanish. My grandmother saw the potential for my mother to learn English and made a deal. She would wash and iron the teacher's clothes in exchange for Mami going to her school. And though grandma was Catholic, having Mami attend a Methodist church would help her brush up on her English. Thus it was that my grandma's vision for Mami to be bilingual became a reality that served her well later in life. Maria and I had the same vision for our children and raised them bilingual, believing that the more languages a person speaks, the more people they can reach with the Gospel.

The most impressionable lesson Mami learned at that little school was that if a country turns communist, the only salvation for the people is to flee. Her young mind was deeply impacted then and that knowledge became valuable in due time. In the 1950's when news reporters kept hammering that Fidel Castro was communist, Mami's heart was stirred. Castro's armed rebellion against the Cuban government ultimately triumphed in 1959. My father had been in the military since his youth and served under various presidents whether they came into power via elections or by *coup d'état*. He was planning to continue serving under the new regime. But Mami had other plans. He didn't listen. So Mami recruited Mother Superior, an older Spaniard who had experienced communism, as her ally to talk some sense into my father. It worked. He sought asylum at the Uruguayan embassy. Days later a couple of Castro's men came looking for him. But they came too late. Other military men's fate became execution before a firing squad. In May of 1959 the Uruguayan ambassador escorted my father inside the plane that flew him to safety. But there was a problem. To travel beyond Uruguay one of the required documents was his honorable discharge from the Cuban army. Raúl Castro (who is now the president of Cuba) was back then Minister of the Armed Forces. He had to sign the document. Mami panicked. But one of my uncles had connections. For the right price an acquaintance of his who worked on the inside was willing to forfeit his allegiance and produce the document notarized, bearing all the required stamps, and the signature of Raúl Castro. Everything would be authentic except the signature. Would Mami take such risk? Her focus was saving her daughters. A decade prior she risked her life for me. Our family reunited in New York in 1960.

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The courage of women for the benefit of others is overwhelming. The midwives of Israel in Egypt defied Pharaoh. Harriet Tubman worked on the underground railroad. Juanita Castro, a younger sibling of the Castros, collaborated with U.S. intelligence becoming an agent of the CIA in the early 1960s. In her memoirs, *Fidel and Raúl, My Brothers: The Secret History*, published in 2009, it is claimed that she leaked information to the CIA about the Soviet missiles which were being installed on the island and which culminated in the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 at which time the world was on the brink of nuclear war. History is filled with heroines.

Mami kept a tidy, organized and clean home. She was always singing, helping those in need, visiting the sick, donating money and things, complementing people, serving as interpreter for co-workers, studying Scripture, praying. She taught me early on the Lord's Prayer. I was so young that I don't remember it, but she would tell me about it. She said she would say a few words and I'd repeat them, except when we got to the part that says, "lead us not into temptation." In Spanish, the actual phrase is "let us not fall into temptation." At that point I would insist, "I'm not gonna fall cause I'm gonna hold on." Truthfully, we don't fall when we hold on to Jesus.

Mami always made her own clothes. It fascinated me seeing her cut all the different shapes and how they fit together as she sewed them until a garment came to life. I would watch her for hours transfixed on the magic of it all until by beholding I could do it too. The end result is that many years later I made my own wedding gown. It's been said that by beholding Jesus we become changed.

When I was 13 a man selling Bibles told Mami that the Catholic church now allowed parishioners to read the Bible. Mami got one. My time had come. I read a couple of chapters but was so eager to get to Jesus that I just skipped the Old Testament and read the Gospel of Matthew. I was impressed by the intelligence of Jesus, particularly because they were always trying to trick Him and couldn't. I wanted to be like Him because so far if someone tried to trick me I thought of the perfect reply three years later. But though I thought Jesus was nice, I didn't see beyond the Man and didn't read anymore. Was it my natural inclination to logic and reason that kept me blinded in spiritual matters? Evidently so. But God had a bait in place for me. Years later after a *colporteur* visited my home, I held *The Great Controversy* not intending to read it though I felt I should. So I read the table of contents. A title caught my eye and I read that chapter. Surprisingly, it was about numbers, familiar territory that I loved. Every cell in my body was transfixed reading the 2300-day prophecy. First you cut off 490 from the beginning of 2300. Then you cut off 7 from the end of the 490. And then you split the 7 in half. I was feasting. Yours truly fish bit hard. I didn't want to let go. And then, suddenly, like a revelation, it dawned on me: "Jesus is the Messiah!" The blinders came off. God reeled me in. I went back to the beginning of the book and devoured it. It was as if years prior I had met Prince Charming and didn't fall in love, but when shown His x-rays I did. How pathetic is that? Ah, but for God's love of nerds!

Way before my rebel-without-a-cause years, I remember that Mami would look at me while raising her hands pretending that she was about to pull out her hair, and exclaimed in

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desperation, “But this little brat has the spirit of contradiction!” Her remark always stunned me. It would be years until the day she heard me finish making a presentation about a mathematical Biblical pattern, that she looked deep into my eyes, and with a sense of wonderment and admiration, she quietly but solemnly said, “Now I understand you.”

I miss Mami very much. If I were not using a computer right now and instead were writing this by hand, the ink would have bled all over the paper. On the way to her burial, someone mentioned that a dove followed flying over the hearse until the procession entered the highway. Mami was 83. In her honor and to her memory, I give you this letter’s spiritual reflection classroom style. Also, a pattern of the three angels’ message which so impressed her may be viewed at my website as a three-part PowerPoint show.