

The Present

It has been three and a half years since that dreadful day that left a permanent scar in my soul. I look back, and I acknowledge the fact that I have walked a long path since Mariana died. Many people have told me that I am strong; they cannot understand why I have not collapsed, or become insane. I think: “You have not seen me at my worst moments”, but I know I have fought fiercely not only to survive, but also to continue living. The truth is that I did not have many options. What could I do but fight? Of course, I could have chosen to sink in desperation and sadness, become bitter, and will myself to die. But I have another child that deserves to live and to be happy. I can’t imagine people who don’t have anyone to live for!

I believe that in time, the acute pain and the deep sadness will lessen in their intensity, but they will always be with me. Pain follows me around like my own shadow. I have learned to live with it. Perhaps, I have learned to become more tolerant of its blows.

I didn’t see Mariana falling from the balcony. However, images fill my mind and many nights, in my sleep, I see her falling. Sometimes she looks at me, smiles and says: “look mom, I can fly.”

Memories of Mariana are a mixture of pain and tenderness. It took me a long time before I could recall memories of our life together. Some days Mariana’s memories are like thunder and they strike me with all their might, leaving me without any strength, engulfed in a very deep sadness. Other days, I can smile when I think of a funny story about her life. It is still a very weak smile, though. My laughter does not come from my stomach, like it used to.

Sometimes, small events can awaken my pain with an intensity similar to the one I felt when Mariana died: a picture I had not seen before, or one that has been sitting on my nightstand table, suddenly becomes a reminder of Mariana’s death; running into one of her friends, listening to her favorite rock group. I do not fight the pain. I let it embrace me, because only when I acknowledge it can I accept the fact that I am alive.

It has not been easy to continue being a family. It took us a long time to sit and have dinner together again. Looking at Mariana’s empty chair was too painful for us. It wasn’t easy going on vacation to the same places the four of us used to go to before. Any activity we do is incomplete. How can we live wholeheartedly if our hearts are broken? No matter what we do, Mariana will never be back. She is gone forever. One question still remains: How would it be if Mariana were still here?

I avoid family celebrations. When all family members are together, Mariana’s absence is unbearable. Seeing her cousins grow up happy, becoming young adults, is like a knife ripping my heart.

One of the things I’ve learned is to be more understanding and sensitive to other people’s pain. If I see someone who treats me roughly, I immediately think

Searching for My Estrella Maili
Rebuilding my life after the death of my daughter

Chapter: The Present

that maybe that person is suffering, like me, the loss of a loved one. I know there are people who have gone through more devastating experiences than mine. My suffering is small, compared to this immense universe of pain.

Little by little I have reconciled and reconnected with life again. I have learned to laugh again, to work, to relate to some people and I have stopped relating to others. They represent the difference between now and then... and it hurts. I have learned to protect myself from situations or people that hurt me and diminish my energy. Slowly, I have built a new life, adding new elements in it, trying new activities to find out which ones I feel comfortable doing. It is a process of trial and error. All I need is discipline, not motivation.

This search sent me back to college, to schools. I needed to know if I still have what it takes to relate to children as a teacher and counselor. I did not find it. Maybe in five years, or in ten... maybe never again. I like to help others, but it does not have to be in a classroom or in a therapeutic context. I am searching for a mission in my life. Something I feel is worth to get up in the morning for. I know this mission has to be related to Mariana. She guides me in my search. I need to learn to quiet my mind so I can listen to her voice whispering to me. It's only a matter of time. I am patient. I know how to wait.

The most important thing for me, has been finding new ways of honoring and keeping Mariana's memory alive. Since I can not give her anything else in this life, I try to find simple rituals that can help her in her new life and that give me comfort. I light candles on the 3rd of each month, on her birthday, and on any other day when I need to do it, or I feel Mariana wants it. For me, the light of the candle is Mariana's spirit, and I believe that wherever she is, she sees the light of the candle, and does not feel alone. Carlos and Mauricio planted roses in our garden to enhance her portraits. We have created a Web page, so the entire world can meet Mariana.

I try to do activities I know she would like to do. Mariana dreamed of the snow and we often would talk about how it feels to play in the snow, to practice winter sports, to have snowflakes gently falling on our faces. When we moved to Colorado, I decided to learn how to ski. The first time I dared to ski, I cried because Mariana was not there with me, skiing on the cotton-like slopes... but at the same time, I smiled, because I knew Mariana's spirit was with me, enjoying the snow.

My relationship with Mariana is no longer a physical one. It is spiritual. I believe and I feel that the more I grow spiritually, the closer I will be to Mariana. I like to think that Mariana and I are growing and developing, each one in her own realm, each one in her unique way, and that our relationship has changed, reaching a deeper and different perspective.

I take a break from writing. The sun is out again. I go out to the garden and smell the roses. It is such a beautiful day! I decide to swing on the hammock, play some music and read. Nowadays, I feel satisfaction doing these things. Mariana is always with me. I feel her presence in every one of these simple acts in my life.

Searching for My Estrella Maili
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Chapter: The Present

I see Mariana in the watercolor strokes of a beautiful sunset, in the deep dark brown eyes of a small girl, in the gusty wind that swings the top of the trees. We communicate without words. Invisible and unbreakable strings bind us.

I open the book and read Tagore's poem:

The End

It is time for me to go, mother; I am going.

When in the paling darkness of the lonely dawn you stretch out your arms for your baby in the bed, I shall say, "Baby is not there!"- Mother, I am going.

I shall become a delicate drought of air and caress you; and I shall be ripples in the water when you bathe, and kiss you and kiss you again.

In the gusty night when the rain patters on the leaves you will hear my whisper in your bed, and my laughter will flash with the lightning through the open window into your room.

If you lie awake, thinking of your baby till late into the night, I shall sing to you from the stars, "Sleep, mother, sleep."

On the straying moonbeams I shall steal over your bed, and lie upon your blossom while you sleep.

I shall become a dream, and through the little opening of your eyelids I shall slip into the depths of your sleep: and when you wake up and look round startled, like a twinkling firefly I shall flit out into the darkness.

When, on the great festival of *puja*, the neighbors' children come and play about the house, I shall melt into the music of the flute and throb in your heart all day.

Dear auntie will come with *puja* presents and will ask, "Where is our baby, sister?" Mother, you will tell her softly, "He is in the pupils of my eyes, he is in my body and my soul."