

The Path of a Writer

by

Elian Villar

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Sponsor: Janis Astor del Valle

Second Reader: Lauren McCoy

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Introduction

Growing up, I had a lot of limitations. I'm not saying this for my readers to pity me, but because it was true. It was always, "Elian, don't point toward that because they will think you are Campesino¹; Elian, stop eating candy because that's why you look like you do; Elian, don't cry because..." Well, you know the rest. And it is not that I grew up in an evil family. However, I'm Latino. This means that everyone is observing from afar and from close when you are going to mess up. I learned to put my feelings aside and focus on something else like school and even work. Because if you are the best at something, people will not notice your flaws. Moreover, this limitation has been part of my life since I can remember. The biggest limitation that follows me to this day is the one brought about by the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" This might be because of the conversation that I had with my dad while we were doing errands in his friend's car. I remember my seat in the back of the car. He asked if I wanted to do what Alonso, his friend, and his son are doing. If I wanted to be seated on a chair every day for the rest of my life. Looking at the same four walls and filing people's taxes. If I would like to be an accountant or something that would secure me a good job. That day I told him that I wanted to do something in film. That's how I told him that I would be joining Purchase.

My high school journey was the main SCHOOL FOR LIMITATIONS. This is because from the moment that I stepped foot at my school on the day of registration, the first thing that administration told my guardian was that they were going to move me to the 9th grade because of my English and they thought that I wouldn't be able to pass all my Regents in the next two years. On the other hand, that was the first day that I put aside one of my limitations and started

¹ **Campesino:** a native of a Latin American rural area *especially*: a Latin American Indian farmer or farm laborer.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/campesino>

crying in front of everybody. The administration then decided to put me in the 10th grade. Looking back, I feel that these limitations are the reasons why I behave the way I do. I was determined to prove everyone wrong. And just within the first year that I was there, I convinced my teachers to let me take the Regents. I ended up passing the one that everyone was most afraid I wouldn't be able to handle, English.

Moving on, another way to tell me "Here are your limitations," was the process of filling out my college application. I got into Purchase and Temple. I know that because of the system and not being able to afford it, going to Purchase was the best choice. At least this was what everyone told me. I had to come to terms with the limitations that life threw at me. I remember two huge moments of my high school experience that helped me know what I wanted my future to look like or even to have movements of. One of these moments was when I went to my first play called *La Gringa* at el Repertorio Español. At the end of the play we, the attendees, had the chance to talk to one of the directors of the play. In the end, he asked, "Who wants to become a writer?" Only one person raised their hand. And no, it wasn't me. However, it made me think that I had options. This idea of becoming a writer got stronger in me during the year. But it wasn't until I got the chance to participate in a collaboration with an acting group and my English class, that I knew I wanted to become a writer even if no one would ever read my script/pages. That is also one of the reasons that I chose to double major in Arts Management, to have that secure job, but also to be close to what I wanted to do.

My college journey has taught me a lot about how to be a writer and what it is like to make it into the film/TV industry. If you are not sure where to start when becoming a writer, then going to school will provide you with training and resources. College is more like a map that you use when you don't want to get lost, or even when you want to move from point to point without

getting lost from where you are standing. Going into college I knew that I wanted to be in the film business, I just did not know what I wanted to focus on. I started by exploring different branches of the television world. I joined the Cinema Studies major. That was a big NO. Not because I didn't think it was important to my learning, but because it gave more information than what I could have handled. After having to write a ten-page essay on what I learned in Cinema Studies class for my final, I decided that history was not for me and chose to go into the fun side of the television and still be behind cameras. So, I decided to join the Screenwriting and Playwriting Major. After joining this major, everything started to change for the better, but also things started to get complicated. I discovered what it was like to be in the industry. It was at the college level, but it did not take away the fact that it affected me deeply. For example, it was here that I discovered to control my emotions on a surreal level. I learned how to control my emotions on paper. It might have helped me to become a better writer, but it also showed me that sometimes too many emotions can hurt your readers. Don't get me wrong, having a lot of emotions is the best thing when writing a drama. However, knowing when to portray these emotions will play a significant role that will make your piece successful.

With classes that teach about collaborating, and making your work a priority, as well as classes that will tear your work apart and help you put it all back together, going to college is one good option. It will be painful to see over a hundred people trying to make it on the same path you are seeking. There will be times when you will say to yourself, "Why do I have to listen to them if they are on the same level as me?" And to that my friend, I just have one thing to say. They are the ones that will have no filter to tell you what's working and what's not. They will also be the ones that will "make it" and might help you to "make it" with them. Making it by starting their own business; making it to the Big Screen; making it being successful on a larger

scale that they can also be able to reach. So, seeing this as a possible long-run gain is better than just seeing the moment.

One person that chose the path of college for primary knowledge to make in the industry is M. Night Shyamalan². Shyamalan, an immigrant just like me, got his bachelor's degree in Film and Television school at NYU. His most-known films are *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and *Old* (2021). In an interview with CNBC³, M. Night Shyamalan talks about the importance of viewing the school system as a whole and from every point of view rather than taking information that will prove one argument/side. After watching this interview it gave me a clear point of view on what I want this paper to be about. I don't want this paper to be about choosing a side. On the other hand, I want this paper to be informative and provide you with the information necessary of why any choice you make will be the right choice because in the end what matters is all the obstacles that this path will put in front of you for you to be successful.

“I actually realized I had a bit of talent at it [by] going to acting class. And I was always doing bizarre scenes in acting class. Little by little, I started adding more and more and more to the scenes and that was me learning how to write dialogue.” (Quentin Tarantino explains how to write a good film article.)

Going to college might serve as an eye-opener for those who have trouble with self-learning. Although he didn't go to college, the above quote from an interview with Quentin Tarantino captures the essence of what it is like to be in college in just two sentences. Don't get me wrong, a school won't give you the formula on how to become a famous writer. Going to

² <https://tisch.nyu.edu/film-tv/alumni/m--night-shyamalan>

³ <https://www.cnbc.com/2013/12/06/m-night-shyamalans-sixth-sense-on-education.html>

college will help you to apply what you know in different aspects of your life/career. I remember that when I was in high school, and even now in college, I connected all my classes and developed a central idea to analyze how these classes have helped me to learn something from one to another.

Nevertheless, for me, someone who moved to the U.S. with English as a second language, not everything college-related has been rainbows and flowers. Going to school meant that I had to work harder for what I wanted to accomplish. It meant that I could not be caught slacking or falling behind because falling behind did not mean just falling behind one step. It meant starting all over again.

There are many ways to accomplish making it into the industry when it comes to becoming a screenwriter and acquiring knowledge through self-learning and experience. One is by creating your own path. For example, when applying to college, I got into one of the schools of my “dreams,” Temple University, into the major of my “dream,” film. Everything was going according to plan. But then, in that same letter that states, “Congratulations! I’m thrilled to inform you that...,” you will have another letter stating what you are paying for the four years or more that you will be spending there. So, it was basically a letter saying, “I regret to inform you that you will not be able to attend our University because you are broke!” After experiencing all types of rejections, college-wise, I was imagining what the next step in my career would be if college wasn't an option.

So, here was the plan if I didn’t go to college. Within the first year, I would start with what I disliked most about the learning process, which is reading. Readings with titles like *A 10-Step Guide: How to Become a Screenwriter (No Degree Required)*; *The Three-Act Structure in Screenwriting, etc.*, or even reading and viewing articles about MasterClass. Then, after

learning all the fundamentals of how to become a writer, my next step could have been to do the things that college promotes as extracurriculars, for example, sending my script to film contests, enrolling in film fairs, and even attending focus film groups for reading and gaining feedback from other upcoming writers. Basically, doing the college thing, but without paying.

Nevertheless, because I know you, as a reader, want facts, and I'm currently completing my bachelor's degree at Purchase College, I confess that I did not opt for the self-learning option. You might say that my insight into this doesn't matter, or at least it is not that valuable. Let me bring to the table someone for whom self-learning was the way to go: Quentin Tarantino.

“The filmmaker insisted that he never attended any seminars on writing and didn't even take a pamphlet for such a class. ‘Everything I've learned as an actor, I've basically applied to write,’ he said. In order to be a great writer, Tarantino advice aspiring artists to ‘keep it personal.’ Just like an actor borrows from personal experiences to bring out the emotions, a good writer will access the same place for convincing material.” (Swapnil Dhruv Bose, 2021)⁴

Tarantino is just one of the many examples that have shown that with determination and passion, the only one that is in the way of getting what you want is yourself. What he said in this interview is important because, like any type of career, you can apply what you learned in the other. Taking these classes helped him to be more in touch with these emotions and to understand what these actors go through when they are reading the script. As a writer, yes, I see myself as a writer. As a writer, I feel that if you can not provoke any emotions in the paper, you will not be able to provoke any emotions in your audience. He also mentions keeping your writing

⁴ <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/quentin-tarantino-explains-how-to-write-a-good-film/>

“personal.” This means that as a writer if you don't have any life experiences, you won't be able to write. This is because the more you live something and write about it, it becomes more familiar and closer when you feel these experiences.

Hence, self-learning doesn't block you from going to college. If you decide to follow the self-learning path, ask yourself: Will this path take me one step closer to becoming a writer? Will I be able to gain what I want from these experiences? Self-assess what you have gained from it and what you have lost from it. And if what you have lost is more, don't get discouraged, because they say any step that you take, no matter how small it is, if it's a step forward, will help in the long run of your career.

When it comes to being successful or succeeding in life, it is difficult to define it. This can be because success can be defined as a lot of things and it can be different for everyone that is trying to reach it. For a screenwriter, I can define it most commonly as getting your work into the big screen and making your name known. But this also can vary by the writer because not every writer wants to be Quentin Tarantino. They might see it as a successful story, but it's not their success story. One reason for this can be that there is no clear path to success in a screenwriter career, it is wide open and the metrics are different. Another reason for this is that new metrics are being implemented in the game. For example, some of these metrics are based on the way that the world of the theater is changing and adapting to technology.

Self-learning can be defaulted to defining success. This is because within self-learning, like in schools, learning is the main factor. In the world of writing, the definition of self-learning, if it has one, is the way that a writer gathers all material to craft their work without having a mutual environment where their work is taken apart and reconstructed with all feedback and lessons learned. Moreover, self-learning and the college experience meet in the middle when it

comes to expanding your career through making connections. Going to college, during classes or just meeting people in college activities will serve you when it comes to making connections. I know that we as people like to be lonely wolves, Omegas, but in this industry, if we want to “make it,” we will at least need to have someone that will show us the path or help us open new doors. Even more, connections are a must when you are up for self-learning to be able to access the doors that going to school exposes you from the beginning.

“For starters, making films is a collaborative craft. It takes a good deal of labor and plenty of teamwork to get a film made, especially once your projects get more ambitious. For that reason, your network should consist of passionate, like-minded filmmakers who you can trust when it comes time to make films you care about...But your network is about far more than just screwing up your projects. It’s also an essential tool for getting ahead in the business of film. Whether you’re an industry worker looking for your next job, a freelancer looking for new clients, or an indie filmmaker looking for financiers and distributors, your network is the key to success.” (Rob Hardy)

After taking it consideration what Rob Hardy⁵ mentioned above, not only because he is “... a recent nominee of the HBO Director to Watch Award, broke into network television with his January 2007 directorial debut of the Emmy Award-winning show, *ER*. Soon after, Black Enterprise Magazine listed him among the Top 40 Entertainers under 40 for the year 2008. Since recently wrapping production on *Stomp the Yard: Homecoming* for Sony Pictures, Hardy has returned to television with a directing stint on the CBS series *Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior*

⁵ https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0362734/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm

starring Oscar winner Forest Whitaker.” His point of view is crucial because it explains the importance of analyzing every step you take and how these steps will build up to make you into a successful career story. It also demonstrates that whether you choose to go to school or by selecting self-education metrics at some point in your career it’s important to build a good network that you can count on.

The filmmaking business, the art of producing or writing a story, from the beginning, focuses on relying on a group. Even writing the first draft of a script you need another set of eyes to help you to gain perspective and help you expand on what you know. When it comes to networking, you will need it from the start of your career. For example, at the beginning of my college career at Purchase, I was undecided about what I wanted to do. I knew that I wanted to do something that had to do with the film. However, having the right people around made me realize that becoming a writer was something that I knew I wanted to do but did not have the strength to put all the pieces at the target and start with this like my family says, “crazy idea” of mine.

Networking is and always will be a must if you are trying to break into the industry as an outsider. Outsider is the meaning of being foreign, from another culture outside of Hollywood, or even being an outsider as a first screenwriter whose last name is unknown in the industry and is trying to make it into the film world. Here when you ask, how am I an outsider? Well, I’m a Latino with no known last name; that is an outsider to Hollywood culture. So, yes, it's kind of complicated. Following this path, the path of the writer/filmmaker has taught me to have patience. For example, it was just this semester that I registered my work with the Writer’s Guild of America (WGA). And let me tell you that it was something that for most writers it might not be a big deal. However, for me being able to register my work, helps me understand

that I have something in mind. If that something one day becomes public it will have my name and I will get the credits for it. There is where those simple things of a writer become something big and significant.

When it comes to breaking norms in the life of an immigrant there are a lot of writers that have taught me one of two things about it. For me, becoming a writer, although it's my decision, is somewhat criticized by others in my family that have their mind fixed on what a success story should be. Going to college, I always asked about my college career and studies. It was always, "Elian, did you see that [introduce random name here]'s son is making a lot of money as an accountant?" Or even the question "What are you going to school for?" Hoping that I give them a different answer every time I see them or at least an answer that will satisfy them. I thought that these things only happened to me, but after listening to M. Night Shyamalan, I noticed that this might be something that happened to most immigrant children that were or wanted to pursue an art career. For example, in an interview with Tony Dokoupil, a representative from CBS Sunday Morning, when he was talking about the time he spoke to his dad about getting into NYU, Shyamalan mentioned that,

"Where'd your parents say so that was not the greatest thing oh so yeah so that's when it became really serious. So I went, you know hey my mom was supportive, she was open-minded as my dad. I think at that time that was very kind of, it would be the equivalent if you're telling your Indian immigrant parents that you're gonna become a filmmaker that's the equivalent of you telling your parents you're gonna be a goth rock and roll star and that's what I'm doing you know? So their reaction, whatever you imagine that reaction, that's kind of internally what's

happening in the Indian household, you know you're definitely on the road to damnation. And this, you've just thrown away everything that they've worked for, right? And that makes sense in a practical way because they did this whole hard road really, practically done and then their son's going into a field that has no guarantees, there's no one that's ever done this. I'm from the East Coast, I'm Indian, and we're immigrants; there is no one like this doing anything like this...there's just no road for this, so I told him – he was watching the Flyers game, I remember very specifically, my dad loves the Flyers hockey – and he has arm up on the sofa and I was like, ‘Dad, so I got into NYU film school. I did get a scholarship and I'm going.’ And he didn't even look...maybe he shut it out but he never, you didn't even look at me and he just kind of nodded and kept watching. You know the immigrant parents...the worst thing that can happen is just disappointment...” (CBS Sunday Morning, 2019)

This bit made me realize why it's important to follow your dreams. I'm the type of person that would rather try and fail to do what I love and learn from it, rather than be miserable and have regrets. But, it also made me realize why immigrant parents are the way they are with their kids. The main reason when moving to a new country, besides the finances, is the new opportunity that the country can provide to the family and their children. But because of this motive, their minds get so centered on it that they only focus on the known and take the distance from what makes them uncertain. For a writer, these happenings/events that occur in our life as Latinos or immigrants might be ironic and even funny. This is because it gives us another source of writing due to experiences and the way we tell our stories.

Talking about writing a story, when it comes to writing a screenplay, there are some factors that make a good story. No, producing a script doesn't mean that your story is a good story. Writing a script doesn't have anything in correlation to the other unless we are talking about cause and effect, where the cause is the script and the effect is the production of it. Whether going to school for screenwriting or self-learning how to become a writer there are some things that both have in common when creating a piece. For example, when writing a script, the first step that you will need to take before writing or even developing an idea is to know the fundamentals of writing and what a scene is. While scenes can be seen as basic to the eye of the viewer, they are one of the most crucial fundamental practices when developing a script because without them we couldn't have a script. Quoting Robert McKee⁶, a scholar that is most known for his lectures on film development and as a story consultant, he mentions,

“A SCENE is an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character's life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance. Ideally, every scene is a STORY EVENT.”⁷ (Robert McKee's, *STORY: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*)

Like life, a script is a compilation of events that take us from one to another. Those events are the scenes of life. In a sense without scenes /events, there could be life. Well, we could have been alive but we could have lived. You might be asking why and talking about scenes and connecting them to life. And to that, I have two answers. The first one is that, well, this is a paper

⁶ https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0571210/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm

⁷ <https://mckeestory.com/do-your-scenes-turn/>

about how to become a creative writer, a screenwriter. My second answer will be that, going into what a writer is and how it connects to making scenes, all of the content we write comes from one experience in our life. It can be a primary experience, where she felt it first hand or a secondary experience where we got to watch that event happen to someone or close enough in our life.

Moving one to experience, becoming a writer, for a Latino, or for someone whose principles were marked by getting educated and becoming a lawyer or doctor, becoming a writer in the Latino community can be groundbreaking, but also life throws yourself into a gutter. And that's a big part of it. You can start writing as a way to expand traditions and as a way to make your community known. But at the same time, some of us are forced to quit our careers as writers, because of the same pressure that a community puts on us. For example, I was reading an interview by *The Interval* with Tanya Sarocho⁸ a Mexican playwright and screenwriter, where she talks about her joining in writing and what it means to represent a community. In the interview, one of the questions asked about representation and how the deficit of representation has affected these good writers. To which she responded with,

“... You know, I take it on. I think people get that vibe from me and it’s okay. I have a lot of Latino friends who are working in TV now, and they’re playwrights and they don’t write identity plays. They never have. They don’t want to. It’s not of interest to them. But people expect them to because their last name ends with a Z or an A. Or they’re Cuban and now they have to represent all Cubans. And I hate that for them. Now obviously, I have an interest in my culture—in my little tiny niche in Mexico and my specific Mexico too. It’s like if they asked you to represent all America and you’d be like, “Which America?” But, yes, I think

⁸ https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2571374/?ref_=nmls_hd

that's so problematic. But that's also why a lot of us have gotten our foot in the door. When it becomes problematic is when you can only be seen that way. Strangely, I feel TV is more advanced that way than theater is. [In theatre] all the programming that has brought me on, like commissions, is related to me being Latina. I'm super grateful and I love the programs. In TV, I came in through the ABC Diversity program, and then my next job I got just because of my writing, and it's not a Latino-themed show. It's going faster. I think there's so much money involved in TV that you have to prove yourself, and if it doesn't work, you're out of there. Your identity is not going to keep you there. Something about the theatre is taking longer to incorporate these stories of color and these points of view into their mainstage seasons. I don't know why. You go in there and you either become embittered by the tokenism or you embrace it and you say, 'Listen, this is the way I got in but it doesn't mean it's the way you stay in.' So it's complicated." (Tanya Saracho, 2014)⁹

One of the big obstacles that comes into play when becoming a well-known writer and making your story a success is your background. As a Latino writer, one of the perceptions is that every piece of work you created it's going to have that piece of representation. And true, it might, but there's a difference between having to write and wanting to write. And, I'm not saying that being Latino has its consequences, although it is in an aspect. I'm a proud Latino. What I'm saying is that being Latino in this industry can confine you as a writer. It can put you in a box. This can be an issue also when landing a job. For example, entering the Hollywood industry can be groundbreaking. It can be an opportunity as a Latino to expand your audience. It's an

⁹ <https://www.theintervalny.com/interviews/2014/10/an-interview-with-tanya-saracho/>

opportunity to show your art. It's an opportunity for those to make their name and their background notice and make it a brand. On the other hand, it also can be a curse. As Latinos, we are opening doors that should have been one firsthand, but are closed because Latinos were not in the same "category" or "rank" as someone that's within the industry. Someone whose name is not defined by their origin. Here is when racism has a big spot on the plate. You can see it as the protein to those who closed the door on us and pushed it to prevent us from opening it.

Nonetheless, in the same interview with Tanya Saracho, another question that was asked was when did she notice that she had grown up. To which she answered with,

"The first night that we moved into my apartment in Chicago—it was me and my college roommate—we moved into this apartment that I'm still currently living in. We were on the stairs, and the people upstairs had a porch. We were on the stairs just contemplating the neighborhood and like, 'This is where we live! We're such grownups!' That moment of, 'College is done and the real world begins!' And then these two girls from upstairs, who were white, came out and were so friendly and they offered us lemonade that they'd made. We were like, 'This building is going to be awesome!' And then one of the girls starts breaking down the neighborhood and she's like, 'Just be careful if you walk over there because there are some *black people*.' She whispered, '*black people*,' and all of a sudden, you become very aware of who you are. Then she goes, 'And over there is okay—there's just some *Mexicans* living down there.' And then she was like, 'Oh sorry. Are you...' and this pause is something I'll never forget, '*...Mexican?*' Like she was saying 'a cunt'—like an awful word she didn't want to say. And I

was like, ‘Yes, I’m Mexican.’ And she was like “Oh, the *other* kind of Mexican.” And that has stayed with me. It was like a big slap: Hello, Chicago. I love Chicago, but it is a racist city. And the racism lies not in the primary colors of it, but it lies in the corners in little exchanges like that. I was so shaken by it. Like what, to her, is the other kind of Mexican and why should I not walk over there? So that was a slap in the face. We were idealists and then that.” (Tanya Saracho, 2014)¹⁰

Besides taking more responsibilities, growing up means that you start understanding how things affect you. That is why I feel a big connection with Tanya’s answer. It will help me realize that when I make it, most of the questions that I will have to answer will be focusing on how I did it being Latino. Don’t get me wrong, being Latino is part of me and I won’t erase it. In fact, I will celebrate my Latinidad. However, the issue comes when my work, or any Latino’s representative work is classified as just for a Latino audience, and barriers and limitations form around it where it is only going to touch certain demographics. In relation to my work, I feel that as a writer, any writer should not be limited to her origin. It’s part of it but there’s more to it because through origin you can find adventures that can help you tell a story. For me, as a writer, I don’t try to tell a story through themes, I believe that the themes write themselves through the emotions that I convey and let out through my words. I love to explore and tell a lesson through the art of feelings because the deeper the feeling the deeper the reaction and connections from your audience you get when presenting your work.

¹⁰ <https://www.theintervalny.com/interviews/2014/10/an-interview-with-tanya-saracho/>

What does it mean to make it, anyway? This can be different for a lot of people in the business of writing. The concept of making it comes from the question, “Am I happy where I’m at?” If the answer is “Yes,” then, congrats, you made it. But if the answer is “No” then the question becomes “What am I going to do to get where I want to be?” This question I learned through my years in college, living life in general, by searching Tanya Saracho’s work and her role in Hollywood and being a proud Latina. You who are reading this paper might ask yourself “Why does a paper that 's talking about how to make it as a writer end up talking about Latinos in Hollywood?” Well, the main answer for this is that I’m a Latino that strives to make it. I for one think that to make it is that anyone connects to my work or feels identity in one way or another. I don't need to get famous. For me making it means that with my art, like doctors, but with the art of writing, I could change a life in a way. And the other answer is that no matter what path you take to “make it into the business” is that you will face a lot of struggles and barriers. It might be struggles that have to do with your background or other battles. One example of this is our own Tanya Saracho and her experience with the big screen and being Latina. Alongside other powerful Latin women, Tanya Saracho formed part of the ULP, the Untitled Latin Project, as a way to make their voices heard after all the limitations that the Hollywood empire created to women and Latin women in the business.

“By refusing to tell our stories AND by refusing to put us in charge of telling them -- Hollywood power brokers are complicit in our exclusion. We are tired of Latinx projects being developed with no Latinx writer, director, or producer attached. We refuse to be filtered through a White perspective. We are tired of hearing ‘We couldn’t find any Latinx writers to hire.’ We are tired of Latinx

writers being asked to repeat Staff Writer and lower staffing levels, which not only ensures that we stay at those levels, but also helps perpetuate the narrative that Latinx writers don't exist at the Showrunner and other upper levels. We are tired of being painted with the same brush. We are made up of an array of backgrounds and ethnicities. We are tired of stories that are only about our trauma. We contain multitudes.” (La Letter, Las Hermanas)¹¹

The entire letter will be displayed in APPENDIX A. This letter, directed at the Hollywood industry, was a knock on the door of reality. It was the way to answer discrimination against the Latino community after the industry was closing doors that were already opening to the Latino community by canceling shows from Latinos producers and writers. And the evidence for this? Yes, it's Tanya Saracho whose work, *Vida* and *One Day at Time*, got canceled. This letter shows the demands that we as Latinos writers are entitled to because they want writers to represent an entire community but do not give them the respect and value that their work represents.

Moving on from Hollywood and its problems, which need an entire series of their own, when it comes to the path of success, I will feel that I reached that moment when my writing touched any type of audience. This can be by them enjoying it, getting a message from it, or connecting to it. APPENDIX B will give you an idea of my work. As expressed in this paper, *The Path of a Writer* is determined by you. No matter how you do it, if you decide to follow the path of college or follow the path of self-learning, what matters is the purpose of why you are

¹¹ <https://untitledlatinproject.com/la-letter>

doing it, and how what you are doing will determine and help you say at the end “I MADE IT!” And for this, we have Quentin Tarantino who did not go to college and is considered to be a successful American director and writer in the film industry, and Tanya Saracho who chooses the path of education and is considered a great Latin figure, writer, and activist in the industry. Therefore, if you want to become a writer, I want you to always have this quote in mind, “Start writing, no matter what. The water does not flow until the faucet is turned on.” (Louis L’Amour)¹²

¹² <https://medium.com/the-1000-day-mfa/start-writing-no-matter-what-dca2a42b6b5c>

APPENDIX A

Dear Hollywood,

As we come to the end of Hispanic Heritage Month in the midst of a global pandemic and continued racial injustice, many of us in the Latinx community have found it difficult to celebrate. Inspired by the activism of the Black and Indigenous communities, many of whom also identify as Latinx, we stand in solidarity with our fellow Black, Native and Indigenous writers, co-signing their WGAW Open Letters and echoing their demands for systemic change in our industry.

As Latinx Showrunners, Creators, TV and Feature Writers, we are incensed by the continued lack of Latinx representation in our industry, especially among the Black and Indigenous members of our community. Our stories are important, and our erasure onscreen contributes to the persistent prejudice that prevents real change in this country. This prejudice is not as overt as the one that keeps immigrant children in cages and separates families at the border, or as violent as the racism that is killing our Black, Brown, and Indigenous community members at the hands of police. But when we are onscreen, we're often relegated to stereotypes or villains. And as a recent [New York Times OpEd](#) states, “White elites cannot muffle a huge, vibrant community for decades and not expect consequences. For Latinos in the Trump era, these consequences are deadly, from Hurricane Maria to the Walmart shooting in El Paso and the pandemic, as well as soaring hate crimes.”

Writers create television and films, the arenas where national conversations about culture take place. But while Latinx are 18.3% of the U.S. population, we only make up 4.7% of feature writers and 8.7% of TV writers. As Latinx writers move up to Showrunner level, the stats only get more dismal.

By refusing to tell our stories AND by refusing to put us in charge of telling them -- Hollywood power brokers are complicit in our exclusion.

We are tired of Latinx projects being developed with no Latinx writer, director, or producer attached. We refuse to be filtered through a White perspective.

We are tired of hearing “we couldn’t find any Latinx writers to hire.”

We are tired of Latinx writers being asked to repeat Staff Writer and lower staffing levels, which not only ensures that we stay at those levels, but also helps perpetuate the narrative that Latinx writers don’t exist at the Showrunner and other upper levels.

We are tired of being painted with the same brush. We are made up of an array of backgrounds and ethnicities.

We are tired of stories that are only about our trauma. We contain multitudes.

We are tired.

Movement on this is critical. Inclusivity is not enough. We want action. Here are our demands:

1. No Stories About Us Without Us

Make room for us to tell our own stories. It is not enough to hire one Latinx writer and expect them to be the sole representative of a vast and heterogeneous group of people. Hire more of us. Listen to us. Put us in positions of power. Don't know how to find us? Reach out to the WGA, or go to one of the TV writer lists created by members of our community. ([La Lista](#), [The Latinx Writers](#), [Afro-Latinx List](#))

If you're a non-Latinx White writer and are offered a Latinx-centered project with no Latinx writer, director or producer at the helm, consider partnering up with someone who is, or even passing it on to and advocating for a Latinx writer. While we recognize that writers can tell stories about an array of voices and experiences, until the Latinx community is close to reaching parity, we need to be included in the telling of our own stories.

2. Greenlight Our Projects

Make a plan to reach demographic parity. It is not enough to buy our pilots, you must also greenlight them. Only a handful of pilots by Latinx writers are bought each year, and most of those are never made. Likewise, if studios, networks, and production companies were more intentional about hiring BIPOC executives, more of our stories would be championed to production. And with the recent commercial and critical success of *Pose*, *One Day At A Time*, *Vida*, and *Gentefied*, it's clear Latinx stories find loyal audiences and receive accolades.

3. Represent All Aspects Of Our Lives And Culture

Make sure the projects you greenlight reflect the diversity of our population. We are a diaspora from more than 20 different countries. We are more than just White Latinx and Mestizxs. We are Black and Indigenous. We are LGBTQIA. We are Undocumented. We are Disabled. We have

different religious backgrounds and spiritual beliefs. We are more than our trauma. We write stories of joy, origin stories, genre stories, children's stories, and much more. We demand to be seen and heard in our entirety.

4. Do Away With Repeating Levels

In television writing, we want advancement of all writers and regular promotions like our non-Latinx White counterparts. For too long, BIPOC writers have had to remain at Staff Writer level for multiple years, either because they are dismissed as “diversity hires” or due to the loopholes that Diversity and Inclusion Programs have unintentionally helped foster. Our talent is wasted for years at the lower ranks, keeping us from Showrunner positions. Rather than hold us back, invest in our growth.

5. Hire Us For Non-Latinx Projects

We are able to write more than identity stories. In fact, our stories are also American stories, stories of resilience, of liberation, of hope. Stories of business owners chasing the American dream, little girls that one day will be president or work for NASA, war veterans, nurses, musical artists and fashionistas.

Because we are steeped in the dominant culture, we speak at least two, if not more, cultural languages, well versed in yours as much as we are in ours. Our voices and our perspective will undoubtedly enhance yours and that of all Americans.

We submit this open letter in good faith that you, as our peers and colleagues, will consider it, likewise. And we will continue to demand an industry that sees us, hears us, and values our contributions so that the world will do the same through the stories we tell.

Stories are powerful. Stories change the world. Let's get on the right side of history so we can continue to create needed change and tell captivating stories together.

In solidarity,

APPENDIX B

Backstage

A one-act play

By Elian Villar

Characters:

Jose: A man in his late 40s.

Maria: A woman in her 30s. Jose's sister.

Luis: A 12-year-old boy. He is Jose's and Amanda's son. He is played by two actors in the last three scenes of the play which take place years after.

Amanda: A woman in her late 30s. She is Jose's wife.

Ramiro: A man in his late 30s. Jose's and Maria's brother. He is also Samuel's dad and a lawyer.

Samuel: A 10-year-old boy. He is Ramiro's son and Jose's and Maria's nephew.

The Reporter: A man with a deep voice.

Woman #1 And Woman #2: Two women in their late 40s.

ANNOUNCEMENT/ AIRPLANE SPEAKER.

Man #1 and #2: Two men in their late 20s.

SETTINGS:

- Maria's house in New York.
- The Streets in New York.
- The airplane.
- Amanda's house in the Dominican Republic.
- Ramiro's house/living room.
- Luis' bedroom.
- Auditorium.

Five minutes before the play starts, the stage lights are off, and the song “Dominicano Soy” by Fernando Villalona starts to play.

SCENE ONE:

Lights up. The stage is empty. Jose enters the stage with a chair in his hands. He sits down. The vibe in the room is giving you the impression of a sunny and peaceful day. Everything changes when two men enter the room. The man has a gun in his hand.

MAN #1:

(yelling and pointing his gun at Marcus's head.) Give Me Your Money.

Jose doesn't say anything.

MAN #1:

(yelling.) Your money and your necklace! Fast!

Man #2 grabs his necklace. What they don't know is that Jose has a gun. He does a movement as if he is about to grab his money out of his pockets, but instead, Jose grabs his gun. Lights down. Two gunshots.

SCENE TWO:

Lights up. We are at Maria's house in New York. Jose is in the living room, sitting in one of the dining chairs. He is packing a suitcase.

JOSE:

(Looking at the suitcase that is wide open on the floor.) Deodorant. Check. Charger. Check. Underwear. Check. Clothes for a week. Check. Luis's new clothes. Check. Uhh... What am I missing? *(Stops. Thinks.)* Oh, yeah! A towel and a toothbrush.

He exits the stage. And enters again with a towel in one hand and a toothbrush in the other. He throws the towel and the toothbrush into the suitcase. He

tries to close the suitcase. Maria enters the living room and sees Jose struggling to close the suitcase.

MARIA:

(Laughing. Puts her backpack on the floor and helps Jose.) Do you know? One of these days your suitcase will explode in the middle of the airport.

Maria helps Jose try to close his suitcase. They finally get it to close.

JOSE:

At least I'm not the one that has taken out all the clothes in the middle of the airport and put them on because their suitcase weighed more than 50 pounds.

MARIA:

How dare you! That only happened once.

Beat.

Maria and Jose Laugh.

MARIA:

By the way, that probably weighs like 70 pounds.

Jose weighs the suitcase with one hand. He puts the suitcase down and exits the stage. Maria takes off her jacket and sits on the chair next to where Jose was sitting. He enters the living room with a scale on hand. He puts the suitcase on top of the scale. Maria approaches it.

MARIA:

(Laughing.) uhh... 51.

JOSE:

(Looks at her with no expression on his face.) Don't play like that.

MARIA:

(Laughs.) I'm just playing...

JOSE:

I know you are.

MARIA:

It weighs 47 pounds.

JOSE:

Nice! Three more pounds for my one more pair of shoes.

Maria nods her head. Lights down.

SCENE THREE:

Lights up. A day after, people can tell by the different sets of clothing that Jose and Maria are wearing, we are on the streets of New York City. In the middle of the stage, there's a yellow taxi. To represent the street and the taxi, there are trees around the stage and yellow car doors. Maria is putting Jose's backpack in the taxi's back seat, while Jose is putting his suitcase in the trunk.

MARIA:

(to Jose with fear in his voice.) Mira, please don't go out Jose. You know that DR is a lost country right now. I don't want anything bad to happen to you.

Jose rolls his eyes.

MARIA:

And please... Please, don't wear that necklace out in the open.

She's pulling his necklace by the big crucifix on the end of the necklace.

JOSE:

(makes a motion with his hand, a gun-like motion.) Maria, sis, you know that I don't need protection.

Jose enters the cab.

MARIA:

(closing the cab door.) Yeah, right! Be safe out there. Que Dios te acompañe.

*Jose nods his head. He waves his hand to Maria.
Blackout.*

SCENE FOUR:

Lights up. Jose is on the airplane. Because it is impossible to bring an airplane to an indoor stage, the stage is filled up with chairs with Jose and random people sitting on them.

ANNOUNCEMENT/ AIRPLANE SPEAKER (V.O.):

Hello, this is your pilot speaking. Just want to remind you to put on your seat belt because Flight 666 is about to touch Dominican ground.

There's a sound of an airplane landing. Everyone including Jose starts to make noises of happiness while applauding. Lights down.

SCENE FIVE:

We're at Jose and Amanda's home. Jose is sitting at the kitchen table. It is lunchtime, and Amanda (Jose's wife) enters the stage with a bowl of bread in her hand. She sits.

AMANDA:

I missed you!

Jose grabs her hand and smiles.

JOSE:

Soon we'll be living together again.

AMANDA:

I hope that's true... You know that Luis needs to be raised in a better place than this.

JOSE:

(cleaning his mouth with a napkin.) I know... what I don't know is why those damn papers haven't arrived yet.

Beat.

JOSE:

(Looking at the watch on his wrist.) Is Luis still at school?

AMANDA:

No, he has baseball practice today. *(She looks at the time too.)* He will be here in like an hour.

Jose stands up and grabs a chair.

JOSE:

The food was good like always... I missed it.

AMANDA:

(smiles) Are you going out?

JOSE:

Just like the old days.

AMANDA:

(Smiles) Like the old days...

Jose leaves the stage. Amanda stands up to clean the table. Minutes after, she sits again and grabs a piece of bread. While she's eating, she hears two gunshots, coming from nearby, in the streets. She doesn't move. The piece of bread falls out of her hand. Lights down.

SCENE SIX:

Lights up. We are now at Ramiro's house, hours after Jose gets shot. Samuel, Ramiro's 12-year-old son, is in the living room playing with PSP, while

his dad is on the couch reading. Ramiro, Jose's brother, receives a call. He answers it.

RAMIRO:

Hello... Yeah, this is him... To whom am I speaking?

Ramiro's smile disappears. He is now petrified. Samuel looks up and notices that his dad has tears in his eyes.

SAMUEL:

(Worried.) ¿Dad? ¿Qué pasa?

RAMIRO:

Go to your room, Samuel.

Samuel is confused and doesn't move.

RAMIRO:

Por favor!

Samuel obeys.

RAMIRO:

Are you playing with me right now? *(Beat.)* What happened? *(Beat, beat, beat, And another BEAT.)* Do you know how this happened to him? *(beat.)* And the other one?

Ramiro doesn't say another word. He is paralyzed. He ends the call. Without recitation, he dials Amanda. Amanda enters the stage, on one edge of the stage. Like she is there but not really. They are just talking on the phone.

RAMIRO:

Come on, Amanda. Pick up!

She picks up.

AMANDA:

(Crying.) ay, Ramiro... Me lo mataron...

Ramiro, with nothing to say, grabs the edge of his shirts into a fist. Lights down.

SCENE SEVEN:

Lights up. We are nowhere, one week after Jose's death. Nobody is on the stage. The only thing on the stage is a radio. Jose enters. He is dressed in black bottoms and a white button-down shirt. In one of his hands, he has his necklace. The necklace moves left and right with every single step that Jose gives. Jose approaches the radio and presses play. A reporter starts talking.

THE REPORTER (V.O.):

Today is Monday the 12th of 2009. It has been a week since the tragedy of the death of Jose Santos, who got cold bloodily killed by two criminals, whose motive was to get his necklace... Right now we have Ramiro, Jose's youngest brother in the line... Ramiro, can you hear me?

RAMIRO (V.O.):

Yes, I can hear you.

THE REPORTER (V.O.):

First of all, Ramiro, I want to tell you that I know the feeling and say that I accompany you in your feelings. Right now, the Dominican Republic has hit rock bottom, and we are living in crazy times.

Beat.

Jose's shirt starts turning red from the inside out. This is possible by some special effect with fake blood. Still, with his necklace, on one hand, he starts touching his shirt making body movement that represents he's scared.

THE REPORTER (V.O.):

So, Ramiro, can you give me an insight into what's happening with the murders?

RAMIRO (V.O.):

At the moment we just know that the two of them were trying to escape but one of them got shot by the police in the foot... both of them were captured and now are on the way to get prosecuted.

THE REPORTER (V.O.):

I see... and tell me, we know that you are a lawyer, will you be representing your family?

RED. Still making the same moments.

RAMIRO (V.O.):

My family and I have decided that for the best of the case, someone else will be representing us... you know because of feelings and other reasons.

THE REPORTER (V.O.):

Ramiro, thank you so much for sharing this story with the media. I know how difficult this is. If you and your family need anything you guys know we are here... And it's with these sad tones that we end today's news. To all of you hearing this, please stay safe because the Dominican Republic is burning.

He drops the necklace. A pause. His shirt is completely red. He turns off the radio and grabs it. He exits the stage. Blackout.

SCENE EIGHT:

Lights up. We are in Luis's room, who's getting ready for his dad's funeral. He is struggling to put on his tie. Amanda enters the room. And helps him.

AMANDA:

(her eyes filled with tears.) Who would have thought that the first time that you're using a tie is for your dad's funeral?

Beat.

LUIS:

MOM?

Amanda looks at him.

LUIS:

I miss him so much.

AMANDA:

I know, Luis... I miss him too.

LUIS:

Mom, do you believe in heaven?

Beat.

LUIS:

Do you think Dad is there?

AMANDA:

Yes, I believe that Jose is in a better place and that he is watching over us and protecting us... And, just know that he wanted you to have a good life. I was talking to Maria...

Luis looks at Amanda waiting for an answer.

AMANDA:

... and the correct thing to do is to send you to New York.

LUIS:

So, are we going to New York?

AMANDA:

No, I will send you to live with your aunt Maria until I get my papers and get some closure on everything that's happened.

Luis doesn't say a word. He just looks down.

AMANDA:

Hey... don't worry. I promise to call you every day... and you will be living with Maria... you will be making new friends, seeing new places. You will be better there than here.

LUIS:

Will I be able to come back every summer to visit you until you get your papers?

AMANDA:

Of course!

Luis hugs Amanda. She hugs him back.

AMANDA:

Okay... let's finish this conversation another time... people are waiting for us.

Lights down.

SCENE NINE:

Lights up, and we are at Amanda and Jose's house. In the living room to be precise. The stage is filled with a lot of chairs and in the front, there is a podium. There are random chairs, in rows across the stage. In one of the chairs, Maria is sitting. Maria is crying looking down. She grabs one end of her black shirt and wipes her tears. Luis enters and sees a chair at the end of the room. He decides to sit on it because he doesn't want to be bothered. Amanda, who was sitting next to Maria, stands up and walks to the podium. Besides the podium, there's a big picture of Luis, dressed in white. She pulls up a paper from her pocket and starts to give her speech.

AMANDA:

It was the summer of 1995 when I first saw Jose. He was working at a construction site, and as I was walking on the street, I happened to drop a napkin (Smiles and pause.) Who would've thought that a hard-working man would end up being my husband and we would have a beautiful baby boy?

Silence. She continues doing motions that give the idea that she's still speaking. In the back of the room next to Luis are two women drinking coffee. The two are complaining.

WOMAN #1:

(she takes a sip of coffee and spills it back into the cup.) This coffee is cold. They could've done a better job.

WOMAN: #2

I know right... but at least we'll get snacks later...

Luis looks at them. The two women notice.

WOMAN #1:

The coffee's good. *(Taking a sip and making a face.)* Sorry for your loss.

Luis doesn't say anything and looks back at her mom who is still talking.

AMANDA:

... I don't understand how someone can take someone's life and still sleep at night... I don't understand how someone takes someone's life without thinking about the consequences... But what I don't understand the most...

Beat.

AMANDA:

... is how someone takes someone's life without thinking about the family... their mother... their father... their grandparents... their children...

Beat.

AMANDA:

(Looks at the audience and spots Luis in the back.) Enough about them... they have taken a lot from us and Jose... *(She looks at the picture.)* Jose was a good man and he didn't deserve this... Luis didn't deserve this.

Maria stands up and approaches Amanda. Maria hugs Amanda and takes her place.

MARIA:

I want to thank everyone that came today to pay their respects. Please, before you go there will be some snacks in the next room. When you enter the room you will see a book. Please, if you are kind enough, sign the book and write some kind words. The book will be given to our mom who isn't here due to her health conditions. Once again thanks for being here.

Light down.

SCENE TEN:

Lights up. Continuously. We are in the other room at Amanda's house. The room has a table with snacks on the side. In the middle of this room, there's a podium with a book on top; people are in line signing the book while others are eating. Luis has a cup in his hand and he is serving himself water. The same two women from earlier are standing next to the table with the water. Luis hears the two talking. On the other side of the room, Amanda and Maria are receiving condolences. Maria is also watching over Luis.

Woman #2:

Only one type of empanadas? I don't eat meat.

Luis can't take it anymore and approaches them. He takes the empanada from the woman's plate and smashes it with his hand. Amanda saw what was happening and ran over to the other side of the room where Luis and the two women were.

AMANDA:

Luis! ¿Qué estás haciendo?

Luis doesn't say anything, he just takes off his tie and exits the stage.

AMANDA:

Perdon... he has just lost someone very important.

Amanda exits to follow Luis.

WOMAN #1:

A 12-year-old boy without manners? How rude.

WOMAN #2:

I'm telling you... this is how today's kids are.

Maria approaches them. And grabs both of them by the shoulder.

MARIA:

Girls... I saw everything... and let me tell you my brother just got killed... and right now... right now, I just want to punch something... or someone in the face doesn't matter to me. So, let me tell you both how it is going to go. If you both don't leave in the next minute, this funeral will end up being a cockfight. Do you understand me?

Both put the plates on the table and exit. Lights down.

SCENE ELEVEN:

We are back in Luis' room. He is seated on the floor looking down at a photo of him and Jose. His mom enters the room.

AMANDA:

(Sits next to him.) Hey, what happened out there? I know that your father just died but that is not an excuse for you to behave that way.

LUIS:

Sorry about that... I just was getting fed up with hearing the two complaints during the entire funeral.

AMANDA:

I know that people can be a pain in the A-S-S, but violence is never the answer.

LUIS:

It felt necessary.

Amanda takes a deep breath. She looks at the picture and takes it from Luis's hands.

AMANDA:

(Smiles.) I remember this day... This was when you turned five. And you didn't want your dad to put you down. Every time he put you down you would start crying.

Luis smiles.

AMANDA:

Let me see how everyone is doing downstairs... I need to check on Maria.

LUIS:

Yeah, go check on her... see if she hasn't killed anyone yet...

Beat. Reality hits.

AMANDA:

Too soon.

Lights down.

SCENE TWELVE:

Lights up. It's nighttime. Maria is in the backyard. The stage is decorated with grass and two chairs. To indicate that it is nighttime, the lights on the stage are blue, giving a cool vibe. Maria is seated

in one of the chairs looking at the sky while smoking a cigarette. Amanda enters the stage. She sits beside Maria. Maria gives her a cigarette.

AMANDA:

Do you have a lighter?

Maria takes the lighter out of her pocket and lights up Amanda's cigarette.

AMANDA:

¿En qué estás pensando? What 's on your mind?

BEAT.

MARIA:

(Still looking at the sky.) The last conversation I had with Jose... And how I didn't know that it was about to be my last one with him... I didn't even ask him how his trip went.

BEAT.

MARIA:

(Looking at Amanda.) But you know that isn't the sad part... the sad part is that I told him about that stupid necklace. I told him!

Amanda smokes again.

MARIA:

Why didn't you!?

AMANDA:

Excuse me?

MARIA:

You should have known better! You know how the crime rate is in this country.

AMANDA:

Do you think it was easy for me? Do you know how difficult it was for me to find my husband bleeding all over the streets after just having lunch with him?

BEAT.

AMANDA:

Do you think it was a piece of cake for me to tell my boy that someone had just killed his father for a goddam necklace... And that maybe... just maybe, he would have the chance of seeing him again... a chance that became slimmer by the second!

Awkward silence. Luis enters.

LUIS:

Are you guys fighting?

AMANDA:

No. *(opens her arms.)* Come here.

MARIA:

(smiles.) Just your mom and I acting like two old ladies... Tell me, are you excited that you are going to be living with me?

LUIS:

I'm packing already.

AMANDA:

Ohhh! You are?

Maria and Luis laugh. They give each other a high five. Everyone laughs. Lights down.

SCENE THIRTEEN:

Lights up. We are now in New York back to Maria's apartment. Maria and Luis enter the living room with suitcases in their hands. Luis puts his suitcase on one side of the stage. Maria follows. Luis sees one of those comfortable chairs they announce on tv for people with back pain. He sits on it.

MARIA:

Your father would have smacked your ass for sitting in his favorite chair... but now I guess it's yours.

Luis gets more comfortable.

MARIA:

I remember all the times your father would come from work. It was like pressing replay. He always took a bath, ate, and sat there to watch TV... He never watched the TV for more than 20 minutes; the TV would end up watching him all the time.

Without saying anything Luis looks down and smiles.

LUIS:

I miss him.

MARIA:

I know... I miss him too.

Silence.

MARIA:

Well, tomorrow will be a long day... take a bath and go to sleep. Tomorrow we will be going to the district to enroll you in school.

Luis stands up. He grabs his suitcase and opens it. Now he is sitting in the same chair that his dad was seated in when he was packing his suitcase. Maria is reminiscing about the resemblance. She exits the stage. Luis takes out a towel and clothes from his suitcase. Maria enters the stage with a box in her hands.

MARIA:

Look, your mom told me to give you this... It's from your dad.

Luis takes the box. Maria kisses Luis on the forehead.

MARIA:

Goodnight!

(Smiles.) Goodnight!

LUIS:

Maria exits the stage. Luis puts his stuff down and opens the box. The box has a frame inside with a drawing. He takes it out of the box and looks at the drawing for one minute. He stands up and places the drawing next to the comfortable chair. He turned off the lights. (Lights down.)

SCENE FOURTEEN:

Lights up, and there's a big wall dividing the stage into two halves. On one side of the stage is Amanda with a phone in her hand. On the other side of the stage is Luis. Also with a phone in his hands. Years later, Luis is about to turn 18 years old (this part is played by another actor) and is soon to graduate from high school.

Hello?

LUIS:

Hola, mi vida. ¿Cómo estás?

AMANDA:

Bendicion mami. Good and you?

LUIS:

I'm good... here making dinner. Want to guess what I'm making? ... It's your favorite!

AMANDA:

Arroz with maiz? And pork chops?

LUIS:

Amanda laughs.

LUIS:

It's been years since I have eaten the food you cook.

AMANDA:

Yeah... I know that I promised to buy you a ticket every summer... but my economic situation has been shitty these past four years.

LUIS:

I know.

Amanda:

Tell me, how's Maria? How's school going?

LUIS:

Tia is sleeping. She's been working since five in the morning... And school... Well, scho/ol.

AMANDA:

LUIS!!?

LUIS:

I'm kidding! School is good... not just good, but great... I'm the valedictorian of my class.

AMANDA:

Your father would've been proud of you.

BEAT.

LUIS:

(Sadness in his voice.) I know.

AMANDA:

My boy... 18, and about to graduate from high school... My boy is becoming a man... I'm getting old.

Both laugh.

AMANDA:

Mira!!! I know that you're getting older, but it doesn't mean you have full control of your life. You're still my baby...

LUIS:

(Complaints.) MAMI!

AMANDA:

So you aren't my baby?

LUIS:

Yeah, but I'm 18! It's embarrassing.

Amanda laughs.

AMANDA:

You can be in your 30s and with kids, and I am still going to call you my baby. Do you hear me?

Luis nods, almost as if they can see each other's faces.

AMANDA:

Tell me, do you have a girlfriend?

LUIS:

Mom!

AMANDA:

No! What about a boyfriend?

LUIS:

OMG, Mom!!

Amanda laughs. There's silence for a moment.

LUIS:

Mami?

AMANDA:

Yes, Luis.

LUIS:

Let's talk tomorrow after school. I have to wake up early and I have a graduation rehearsal. I need to prepare my speech.

AMANDA:

Okay, baby boy... Let's talk tomorrow, good night.

LUIS:

Before you go. Is there any advice you can give me to write my speech?

AMANDA:

Just talk from your heart and the reason why you have accomplished all things you have been able to.

LUIS:

Thank you! Bendicion Mami. Good night.

AMANDA:

Love you.

They hang up the phone (sound effect). Lights down.

SCENE FIFTEEN:

Lights up. Luis is in Maria's Living room, He is dressed in his cap and gown. He is barefooted. In one of his hands, he has a pencil, and in the other, he has paper. He is writing his speech. He starts to read from it.

LUIS:

... and for this. *(stops.)* No, no, no... NO!

He breaks the paper into so many parts that feel like it snowed inside the house.

LUIS:

God! Why can't I concentrate? Stupid speech. *(looking at the pieces of paper.)* Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!!

He stops. He looks towards this dad's chair. He sits on it. Now we are on memory lane. He is seated

looking at the ceiling. While Jose and what looks like toddlers Luis enters the room. Jose enters the room first looking towards the entrance, and 5 years old Luis follows. Five years old Luis is riding a bicycle.

LUIS (5 years old):

Look papá! I'm doing it! In doing it!

JOSE:

Yes, you are!

Jose smiles. When Luis approaches him, Jose hugs him. This hug lasts as if this is the last hug he will be giving to Luis. Lights down.

SCENE SIXTEEN:

Lights up. We are in an auditorium. Some of the actors (students in caps and gowns) are seated with the audience. On the stage, there's a big podium. The stage is decorated with yellow and black balloons, and in the back, there's a big banner that says "Congratulations, class of 2019." Luis is giving his speech. Inside the podium is a photo of Jose.

LUIS:

... today we can say we made it. Today, we can say that we are better. Today... Well, TODAY we can say that more than immigrants, we are dreamers. *(Pause.)* It was like it was yesterday...

Luis pulled out the photo from the podium.

LUIS:

... when I came to the United States, let me tell you it wasn't like the movies. Well maybe if you put it in the sense of horror... *(Pause.)* I came to the U.S. one week after my dad was killed. Killed by people that didn't know how to live honorable lives... People for a living dedicate themselves to stealing from others. *(Pause.)* Two weeks ago I was talking

to my mom, who couldn't be here. (He laughs.) Instead, that crazy lady that you see there in the front rode...

*He points towards Maria, who is recording him.
And weaving her hand to the people around her.
Acting as if she is the first lady.*

LUIS:

...is recording to send it later to my mom. So, where was I? Oh, yeah! *(Pause.)* That day I asked my mom if she could give me any advice on how to write this speech... She told me to write it from my heart and to think of the reason why I've been able to accomplish this. *(Pause.)* Well, my friends, there are like a million reasons, but two that are worth mentioning... *(points toward the picture)* is him. The other reason is to prove that not my entire country is burning! The second reason is that no matter how tough the struggles are you can always overcome them. And for that, I want to thank all the people that have supported me... the ones who support us... because they are the reason that we are here today and can say WE HAVE MADE IT.

END.

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