

REDEEMED

A Journey from Darkness
to Light

REDEEMED

A Journey from Darkness
to Light

A Memoir of Extraordinary Lives

By

Bianella Orozco-DeLaHoz & Alain Orozco



Copyright © 2025 by Bianella Orozco-DeLaHoz & Alain Orozco

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

All photos in this book, on the jacket cover and case, are the property of the authors, Bianella Orozco-DeLaHoz and Alain Orozco. Any use of these photos, or copying them, is prohibited without the authors express permission.

All inquiries should be addressed to BookGo at www.bookgo.pub

Cover Design by Khadijah Ali

First Printing 2025

To my mother, Maria Isabel: your love and compassion continue to live through us, Nella and Alain, and your grandkids Isabella Maria, Dasio Adean, Bianella Isabel, Alanna Isabelle, Nina Marie and our future generations. “Mami, I kept my promise to never forget who makes the rainbow.”

~ Nella

To my wife Ivette, to our daughters Allana Isabelle and Nina Marie, and to everyone who reads this book, with my thanks and God’s blessing.

~ Alain

This book is a memoir of our lives from childhood to now. We have tried to recreate events, locales, and conversations from our memories of them. Some conversations have been recreated and/or supplemented, and the details of some individuals have been changed to respect their privacy. We hope you are inspired by our story.

~ Nella and Alain

INTRODUCTION

The book is in two voices because we are two people telling the same story, but from the perspective of how we saw it. We were both there, but we looked at things through different eyes, and so, you will hear us tell you in our own voices what happened.

Rather, what we lived. This book is the story of our extraordinary life, so far. We are twins, and our twinship has been essential to how we have managed to get through what we did, and to come out as successful, healthy people. Without each other, we don't know if we could have managed it, and thankfully, we won't have to know because we were always there to support each other in both terrible and good times.

Even if we weren't there physically, in the same room, due to events that you shall discover in our story, we were there emotionally and spiritually, knowing that even though we might be alone in a room, we were never truly alone because the other was there with us, in our heart.

So as you read our story, we ask you to bear in mind that, even though we are twins, we are two different people, and we will see things differently. It's a bit like that wonderful film *Rashomon*, in which the same crime story is told seven different ways as it told the story through many different

2 | REDEEMED

lenses, but there will be times when one of us sees or feels something that the other didn't. And you will notice.

Like Rashomon, ours too is a story of terrible crime and eventual justice. It was through our own lives, through our epic struggles and our sometimes unexpected triumphs, that we got not only justice for ourselves, but we found redemption. We hope that our story inspires you to look into your own lives with a new perspective, and to see things that you might not have seen before. We are not alone, for we have God who loves us immensely and wants the best for us even when things may be falling apart around us. In that way, you too may find a path from the darkness into the light.

CHAPTER 1: June 9, 1982

It was the last week of school for us, and we should have been happy that summer joys were just around the corner. Except that joy was very much not around the corner. And what happened on that day changed everything, forever. For the worse, and then, for the better. This is how it happened.

Alain remembers...

It was June 9, 1982. My sister Bianella, whom we call Nella, and I attended the Perrine Baptist Academy, a Christian school in Perrine, a suburb of Miami, Florida. The city was undergoing a transformation from a retirement destination to a cultural one, with renovated hotels popping up, and a lively music scene, all combined with intense drug battles, as the Medellin cartel was in town and doing business. But all we knew at the time was that we were going to be graduating from the fifth to the sixth grade in a week or so, and we were excited to move up in the world. We were especially excited because on the morning of June 9, we were scheduled to go on a field trip to the Sunshine Roller Skating Rink.

Roller skating was a thing back in the 1980s, and it was my thing. I loved it. I used to go skating every weekend, and as an eleven-year-old boy, I was eager to show off my skating skills to my classmates. I was an athletic kid who loved football. To look at me, I was your average Hispanic

4 | REDEEMED

American kid with dark hair and light brown eyes. I'm normally light skinned, but my sister and I, we sucked up the sun as much as possible. And in Miami there's a lot of sunshine.

Our uncle, Francisco Gomez, whom we called Kiko, was at our house on that warm June morning. He was our mother's older brother, and he had been living with us for the past month. He was tall and lean and had dark curly hair and olive skin. He was a beautiful man. He had a great energy to him, and he was funny. My sister and I loved him.

Our mother's family in Colombia is one you could call middle class; they had car repair shops and trucking companies, but even the middle class is not rich there compared to the United States. Her family was close. Our mother was the youngest of six brothers and sisters. Her sister Luz was the oldest, then her sister Nubia, her brother Guillermo who we called "Memo", and then Kiko. They had a third brother John, who was murdered six months before we were born. Violence was always circling around my family, here and in Colombia.

Kiko also had a dark past. He had been arrested back in 1978 for possession of eighteen kilos of cocaine in Miami-Dade County. He spent about six months in Miami-Dade County Jail. When he finally got bailed out, he escaped back to Colombia. He never faced US time for the crime.

In 1982, he came back to the US via Mexico. He had been a trucker in Medellin, Colombia, driving a 10-ton dump

truck. But he wanted to come back and work with his sister, my mother, in the drug business because his wife was pregnant with their fourth child and he wanted to make extra money. This would then allow him to go back to Colombia and build his trucking business and do better for his growing family.

So he showed up at our house about a month before our roller skating field trip. My father owned two Texaco gas stations in Miami, one of them on Le Jeune and Flagler, close to the Miami Airport, and another one a couple of miles away on 16th and Coral Way. One of them was called Orozco's Texaco. The other one was called Zapata's Texaco. However, our father's main business was dealing drugs, and Kiko was getting into the drug business with our father.

On that June morning in 1982, Kiko was driving my sister and me to school in my mother's white Corvette. As we were about to leave, our mother came out of the house to say goodbye to us. I remember her wearing a long white nightgown. She said goodbye to us as she made the sign of the cross over us, which she always did. My mother was raised Catholic and would bring us to church on Sundays—like it or not. My mother knew I was looking forward to skating on our field trip that day. She would take me to the Kendall Skating Center every Saturday morning for two sessions of skating. I was very spoiled by my mother, a huge contrast from our earlier days on welfare in Brooklyn where toys were scarce. Since moving to Miami in 1977, we went

6 | REDEEMED

from a small apartment to a modest house; to opulent houses with pools and maids; from public to private school, and from playing with a box of mismatched toys to having expensive speed skates, motorcycles and video games at our disposal.

My mother loved both of us very much, and she was very close to my sister. They were joined at the hip. I was a little wilder and my mother worried about me a lot. I had already broken my arms four times: in Brooklyn, in Colombia, then twice in Miami, and so I was always going in and out of the hospital. I almost died when I was eight in a horseback riding accident in Colombia. I fell off a horse, cracked my skull, and had internal bleeding. My mother was always looking out for me, telling me to be careful.

So, that day, Kiko drove us off to school and dropped my sister and me off in the driveway of the Perrine Baptist Academy. And then we went off on our rolling skating field trip.

Nella remembers...

The night before the roller skating field trip, I was getting ready for it at home. I asked my mom if she could help me iron my jeans. I liked everything just right. I was always a careful person. I was petite in frame with olive skin. Dark brown, curly, frizzy hair. I was very shy and quiet but smiled a lot. I've always had a beautiful smile. My eyes and smile are a true expression of my soul. I was not encouraged to speak my mind or to reveal my emotions; my father thought

it was disrespectful for a girl to reveal too much. Although quiet, I was deep in thought with questions. My very first books were Cinderella and the Bible, which I believe inspired me with hopes of finding both love and God. Observing life in silence sharpened my skills at detecting others' emotions: anger, happiness, love—and also cruelty.

My mother was born in Medellin, Colombia and her name was Maria de Los Angeles. However, she had changed her name when she came to the United States and decided to call herself Maria Isabel, but everybody called her Maruja. I called her Mami.

So when I asked Mami to help iron my jeans, she said to me, “Well, you have to learn how to do it. What if I die tomorrow? You have to learn how to do these things yourself.” I never forgot those words because they came true, and I did have to learn so much more without her. Whenever I am ironing or making a bed, I always think about what she said to me on her last night on earth. That last night was, ironically, very special because of my uncle Kiko, who I loved so much.

He was my favorite uncle, and he and my mom were very close. I felt so much love from him. He also made me feel very pretty. He would sing to me a song from Nat King Cole, “Yo vendo unos ojos negros” (it means “I sell black eyes”) with a loving smile. Indeed, he was the first man for whom I ever felt love. I would simply be walking through the hallway, and he would look at me and say, “Who is that

8 | REDEEMED

beautiful girl? Look at those eyes!” He just made me feel so happy and he gave me the best hugs. He made me feel loved, not only as a niece, but as a daughter as well. I just adored him in a way that I did not adore my father. I was afraid of my father. He was very stern and angry. I had already witnessed his fury when he was beating my mother and us. His belts, his fists, his pulling of hair created a fear of him that he misread as respect.

So on that night before the roller skating trip, my mother, Kiko and I were all sitting at the kitchen counter. I don’t know what we were talking about. But we were all laughing, and I was happy to have my mother and my uncle there. Then I went to bed and fell asleep. And I had a nightmare.

I dreamed of two tornadoes coming for us at school. I woke up very scared, and my mother rushed to my room. I told my mom that I had had a terrible dream that frightened me. These terrifying tornadoes were coming after us and it was horrible. She calmed me down and reassured me that it was just something working itself out in my mind and that I would be fine.

As I got ready to leave for school, I asked my mother for money for the field trip and she went and got some for me. She was in her white nightgown. My brother was waiting in the car with my uncle to take us to school. I walked to the car, then turned and ran back to look back at my mother. She always gave us the Sign of the Cross blessing: “In the name

of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and may the Virgin Mary accompany you.” That’s what she did on this day as well. I got in the car and waved goodbye to my mother, not knowing it was my last time seeing her alive. As Uncle Kiko drove us to school, I remember just staring at his feet as he drove. Not too much later, I would see them on the TV news, sticking out from a white sheet as he lay on our front lawn. I don’t know why I looked at them, but I did.

Once at school, with attendance taken, we got on a bus to go to the skating rink. I suddenly got a really bad stomach ache and went to the skating center to tell them that I wasn’t feeling well. I called my mother from the skating center. There was no answer.

Alain remembers...

Later, what I found out was that on that morning, my father had gone to work and was at one of the Texaco gas stations he owned in Miami.

My father was a good-looking 45-year-old with jet black hair. He stood 5 feet 7 inches and weighed approximately 180 pounds. He presented himself as a very serious man, the oldest of six brothers and sisters, from an impoverished family out of the mining town of Amaga, an hour outside of Medellin, Colombia. He was good to his friends, and he was also a womanizer. He had a swagger to him, with a kind of mob look, and he was also very short tempered. He was physically abusive to the women he was

with, whether it was a girlfriend or my mother. Same thing with the kids, as he certainly beat us. My cousin Alan shared with me that he was physically abusive with him as well. He told me about one time when my father got upset because my cousin came in and was jumping around the room. My father just picked him up by the hair and threw him across the room. The kids were crying and everybody was afraid of my father.

So on that day at the gas station, my father got a phone call from my mother saying, “El Monje is coming over.” El Monje means “The Monk”; his sister Emma was called La Monja, “The Nun”. My father told me she was given that nickname because she had wanted to be a nun at some point in her life. Her brother Fernando was nicknamed El Monje simply because of his sister. They were in their early thirties, about the same age as our mother. They were coming over to pay a debt owed from a previous drug deal. At the time, all I knew of my father’s business was that he owned two Texaco gas stations in Miami and five video stores in Medellin, Colombia. On a couple of occasions I saw piles of cocaine lying on a table in our house which was explained to me as being flour for making cakes for a new bakery in Colombia. I knew something wasn’t right with all these shady people that would come and go at the house. Especially after all the events that transpired prior to June 9, 1982.

Usually payment to my father would come in large bundles of money, especially because back then, a kilo of cocaine was very expensive. Its wholesale value was about

\$40-50,000 a kilo. My father told me they had been waiting on that three-million-dollar payment for weeks, and a few weeks earlier El Monje had shown up with less than \$75,000.

So Fernando, El Monje, called asking if my father was home, and our mother had responded that he was, even though he wasn't, not knowing that Fernando had been calling from Old Cutler Hammock Park, which was literally around the corner. The park is now called Bill Sadowski Park, after the congressman. The neighborhood we lived in was Perrine, which has since been renamed Palmetto Bay. It was upper class and predominantly white back then.

At the time of this phone call, my mother asked my uncle to change his clothes because they were having people over and he had been outside mowing the lawn. We had a big house on a cul-de-sac with four homes on it, and we had nice gardens and grounds. Kiko was helping to look after them.

Also in the house was our maid, Gloria. She was a very thin lady with black hair. I remember she read Spanish Tarot cards. Our mother was very religious, but she was also involved in the world of Tarot. About a month before the terrible events of that day, my aunt Lucero and her husband came to visit. She was my father's sister, in her mid-thirties. Her husband, Alberto, was one of the managers at my father's gas stations. We were in the kitchen of our house, and my sister was there as well. Gloria the maid was reading the Tarot cards to my mother, Aunt Lucero and Uncle Alberto.

When Gloria was reading the Tarot cards to Lucero, the death card came out. In that deck and in most Tarot cards, Death is shown in the card as a giant skeleton and takes the fateful number thirteen. Nella and I heard Gloria say, “This card says somebody’s gonna die.” My aunt and uncle asked, “Who?” Gloria didn’t answer. And then she read the cards to my mother, and the death card came out again. They were trying to figure out who was going to die. Very soon they would have their answer.

Gloria was in our house when the men looking to pay the drug debt arrived and rang our doorbell that morning in June. My uncle was still getting dressed and was holding a shirt in his hands; this was confirmed by Gloria because she could see him from the kitchen, where she was standing. She heard him open the door and invite them to come in. They walked into the house and began shooting at Uncle Kiko with silenced guns.

My mother had been getting dressed herself when she stepped out of her bedroom to see who had arrived, only to see men shooting at her brother in the foyer. As she ran back into the bedroom one of the shooters chased her down, and Gloria heard my Uncle Kiko say, “No la maten a ella.” Don’t kill her.

One of the men continued to shoot Kiko as my uncle staggered backwards and tried to escape through the garage. Kiko was pressing his body against the garage door to prevent the shooter from entering the garage, so the killer shot

through the garage door five times, hitting Kiko again. Even so, Kiko was able to press the button to open the garage door onto the driveway, and he managed to make his way to the end of our driveway, finally collapsing on our lawn, on the grass he had just cut. The killers shot him a couple more times in the face. The police said he had been shot more than 50 times.

The fact that the killers were chasing our uncle and our mother and shooting them gave Gloria the maid time to hide in our father's office behind his desk, which ultimately saved her life. She later told us that she could see that the master bedroom doors were closed, which made her think our mother was inside the bedroom hiding and hearing the assassins pacing through the house.

Gloria waited fifteen minutes or so and then called my father at the gas station to tell him that something horrible had happened, not knowing that the police were already on their way. One of our neighbors had seen our uncle lying in a pool of blood and made the call to the police anonymously.

When the police arrived, they found Kiko lying dead outside. Gloria was in the house and our mother, who had been shot several times in the face, across her cheek and up to her ear, was found lying on the blue carpet floor at the entrance of her master bedroom. Gloria had not seen the killer go inside and murder our mother, then leave and close the bedroom doors. Everybody in the house except for Gloria had been killed.

It was not until twenty-four years later that Nella and I finally went to the police to find out what happened to our mother and uncle. That morning, our father had driven to the house after Gloria called him, and upon seeing the yellow police tape marking the scene of a crime, he did not stop to ask what had happened. Instead, he drove on to the office of his attorney, Nathan Diamond, in downtown Miami. The police immediately found this suspicious. Even so, they did nothing about it.

Nella remembers...

As we pulled into the parking lot at our school from the roller skating trip, my brother and I saw police cars near the school drop-off. We could also see Louie, the son of our father's childhood friend Nicolas, standing with the principal and waiting for us. He was tall and slim, with curly brown hair. He wore glasses that were very thick, like bottles. As we stepped out of the bus we asked Louie what he was doing there. Where was our mom? He told us that she was running late at the Winn Dixie supermarket and that he was there to pick us up. We told him that our mother did not want us to leave with anyone but her, and so we would wait for her. As we looked towards our school principal, we could see the sadness in her face as she told us that it was okay to leave with Louie.

I had alarms going off inside my head. I just knew something was wrong.

Louie then took us to a satellite police station that didn't look like your usual police station. This one was in an office building. We sat there for a long time, waiting.

I told my brother I was hungry and to tell the police that I wanted to get something to eat at a store next door. They said sure, so I went to the store and asked to use the phone. Then I called my house.

A man answered the phone, and I could hear a lot of male voices in the background. So I said, "May I speak to my mother?" He said, "Who's your mother?" When I told him, he hung up. So I called again and said, "Where's my mother?" I felt our house had been robbed, and I wanted to know what was happening. He replied that my mother was out, and that she would be "back tomorrow". Then he hung up the phone again. I went back to my brother and whispered: "We're being robbed again! They broke into our home again. We're being robbed right now. I heard men's voices, and I know that we are being robbed." So in my little eleven-year-old mind, that's what I thought was happening. We had been robbed before, and this is what it sounded like to me.

Alain remembers...

Louie then drove us from the police station to his father Nicolas's house, which was about ten minutes from ours. Nicolas was a childhood friend of my father and at the time was about fifty years old. Nicolas and my father grew up in the same town in Colombia, in Amaga. Nicolas had recently

moved down from New York and was doing business with my father. I liked Nicolas and his wife, Blanca, and their two sons, Johnny and Louie. But on this day, June 9, 1982, I felt uncomfortable being there because months earlier my sister and I had witnessed a confrontation between my mother, Nicolas and my father in our kitchen. I'll never forget Nicolas telling my mother that if it weren't for my father's presence he would hit her. My mother responded by saying go ahead and try it, that she would kill him if he did. To this day I don't know what that confrontation was all about, but I was shocked that my father hadn't defended my mother and just stood there allowing his old friend to make that threat.

On arriving at Nicolas's house, I saw my cousin, Juan, my mother's nephew. I hadn't seen Juan in months because of a dispute he'd had with my mother as well. Juan was ten years older than me and had been living with us for the past three years. My mother had brought Juan to the US in 1978 to start helping around the house. He was about five feet ten inches and weighed 175 pounds. He and I were very close. He was a masculine kid and loved the girls. It was Juan who introduced me to weight training, and to the martial arts—in particular, Taekwondo—as well as to boxing, not to mention rock n' roll music.

I remember asking my mother to buy me my first record, which was by Ted Nugent, and listening to Wango Tango and Cat Scratch Fever, which were hits back in the early 1980s. I'm grateful to Juan for introducing me to all of

these things. Today I still practice martial arts, but when I think back on those days with him, I marvel at the violence. Juan and I would be fighting all the time. We would hit each other hard, throwing body shots. I was just eleven and he was nineteen, so I was taking some heavy blows until one of us ran, usually me.

I remember when I was ten years old I got into a pissing match with five kids across the canal. I was talking to a girl that was on the other side of the canal, and those kids didn't want me talking to her. So I told them to go screw themselves. I had my best friends with me, Lewis King and Scott.

Lewis and Scott were my classmates since the third grade at R.R. Moton, prior to starting at Perrine Baptist Academy Private School. Scott was a white kid with blond hair. Lewis was a Black kid from a lower income neighborhood. I remember going to visit him once at his home and remembered how familiar it was, and how recently my own family had lived on welfare back in Brooklyn.

So while we were arguing with these guys across the canal, my sister came out. I was telling them to jump in the canal, and then to swim across so we could fight. They were telling us to jump into the canal and do the same. One of them called my sister ugly. That raised the stakes. He had said something disrespectful to my sister, so we really got into it. I took my insults up a notch. They finally had heard enough

and jumped into the canal and started to make their way across.

My friends and I ran into my house, and I went into my father's room to get a gun, his .357 Magnum. Scott went into the kitchen to get a knife. And Lewis King went into my bedroom and came out with a baseball bat. Nicolas, who was at our house at the time, stopped us at the door. "What the hell is going on here?" he asked. We were all ten years old, and this was insane. So we did not fight those kids with guns and knives and a baseball bat. We did not fight them at all. At least, not yet.

About six months later, I saw one of the kids on the other side of the canal again. We started fighting again, with words. Juan pulled up in his Camaro and I said, "Brother, please, drive me over there. I gotta kick this kid's ass." Juan refused, but I begged him, and he finally agreed to do it and said that he would drive me to the other side of the canal. It took fifteen minutes to get over to the other side. I was finally face to face with this poor kid giving him what I felt at the time he deserved. The dispute was over.

Nella remembers...

Upon arriving at Nicolas's house we were surprised to see our cousin Juan, since we had not seen him since his argument with our mother a few months earlier. Juan and my brother immediately reunited and went downstairs to practice martial arts with nunchucks. I suppose our cousin Juan was keeping

Alain busy, killing time. I can remember Nicolas's wife, Blanca, kept wanting to feed us and I told her that I didn't want to eat. Blanca was a fair skinned woman in her 40's with a slender frame and dark medium length hair. She was nice, caring to us. She liked to cook and tend to her family. I could tell she was a loving mother. I think she wanted us to eat and wouldn't let us watch TV because, I realize now, what had happened at the house was shown on the local news. I said that I wanted to speak to my dad.

When my father finally called, I immediately got on the phone and asked, "Where's Mami?" He said, "I'm here in the hospital with her. She's just very nervous." I replied, "Let me talk to her because I can calm her down. I know how to calm her down. Just put Mami on the phone."

He told me no, because he would be on his way home with her shortly. "You can talk to her when we get home," he said. So we waited. He finally arrived around 8 pm, and when he came up the stairs he was wearing white and blue striped pants. I looked behind him searching for my mother, but there was no sign of her. Then I just saw the look on my father's face. Everything in my body went suddenly on alarm.

My father said, "Alain, Bianella, and Juan, step into the master bedroom." We followed. I sat at the edge of the bed. My cousin Juan was standing behind our father. Alain was sitting beside me on the bed. My father said, "You know, we've been robbed many times in the past. Today some bad

men went into the house, and they killed Kiko.” Then, in the same breath he followed with, “and they killed Mami.”

I was just in shock when I heard that. I felt like he had thrown a bucket of ice-cold water all over me.

Everything was just surreal. I looked to my left, at my brother, who had risen, and was pacing and punching the wall, but he didn’t cry. He never cried. I was just taking it all in. And then I started screaming. I remember yelling at my father and saying, “I don’t believe you. I don’t believe you until I see her myself. I think that you’ve kidnapped us. You just won’t leave her. You kidnapped us. And you have her somewhere.”

I had only seen him cry once before in his life, which was when his mother died. At that moment, when I said that to him, tears were coming down his face. This meant to me that what he had told us was all true.

Then Blanca came up to me with a glass of water and a pill. She said, “Take this pill, it will calm you.” I was so angry. I looked at her and I said, “Absolutely not. There’s no pill in the world that can take this pain away.” That set the tone of who I am today. Strength was born in that moment.

My next memory is of us calling Kiko’s family back in Colombia to give them the horrible news. It was Juan and not my father who called. I watched as Alain stood next to Juan as he was telling them about the murders, but still, no tears came from my brother’s eyes. I sat and watched his demeanor and couldn’t understand his lack of tears. I realize now that

my wounded brother was hiding in a safe place, one from which he would emerge thirty-five years later.

On the phone, Juan told our relatives that a tragedy had occurred, that Maruja and Kiko had been killed. We heard a scream and the call dropped, and Juan had to call again. My poor uncle's family, my cousins, were howling in horror at the news, and my heart ached as I watched and listened to the conversation. Staring at them all. Wondering why my brother was not in tears, too.

Later that night, some police detectives came over and asked us some questions. My father was probably a suspect, because if there's a murder of a wife, husbands are high on the suspect list.

Afterward my brother and I went into one of the other bedrooms at Nicholas's house. We were just thinking, "Okay, so what happens to us now?" We were then told that we were going to the house of Yesenia, who was our father's youngest sister.

Back inside the house we caught a glimpse of the local news. We saw the front of our house surrounded by yellow tape and we saw our uncle lying dead in the front yard, covered with a white sheet with his feet sticking out. His feet are what I remembered seeing last, on the drive to school.

As we were making our exit, a car pulled up, and the housekeeper, Gloria, was inside it. She got out of the car, and she grabbed us. And she said, "Oh my God. Your mother, your mother, her screams... she screamed."

I always imagined my mother screaming and I knew this nightmare was all true.

Then, I remember arriving at Yesenia's house and seeing our cousins and Aunt Lucero all together. I just remember wanting to be in my home, in my own bed and not here. Our mom was not close to Yesenia, who was cold to our mother. So when our mother died, the last place I wanted to be was with the people that were not close to my mom. Our mom was very warm and affectionate. She would hug us, and she was very affectionate with us. Our mom and our aunts were not very close, and I didn't feel comfortable with them. I found them to be cold and narrow minded.

Aunt Yesenia was the youngest of six in my father's family. She was a heavy-set woman with light olive skin and dark, straight, silky hair. She hardly ever looked happy, usually with a frown on her face. Very opinionated and judgmental and her tone was always harsh and angry. But she loved Alain. She would smile and hug him. Always raving about his looks—so handsome—the son of her much-adored oldest brother. She herself had four kids, three boys and a girl. I love all my cousins and out of respect for them I'll just say that my aunt was a narrow minded, uneducated woman whom I did not trust. And I didn't want to be in her house.

Our mother died on Wednesday, June 9, 1982, at 9 AM, and on Thursday we were taken from my aunt's home, back to ours by our father to pick out the clothes for the viewing of my mother's body. As we walked into that house, the smell

of death was everywhere. There was blood on the walls and floor in our foyer. This is where our Uncle Kiko had been standing when the two murderers walked in. We could follow the blood trail as it led to the garage where we could see the garage door with the five bullet holes in it. As I opened the door, I could see my uncle's bloody handprint on the garage push-button.

We were then taken by our father to the entrance of the master bedroom where Alain remembers our father asking, "Are you sure you want to go inside?" When he opened the door, I could see the outline of our mom's body laid out in the position of her death, with her blood still visible on the light blue carpet. There were two large circular blood stains where she had lain dead the day before. It was so lifeless inside our home, where just a couple of nights earlier we had been laughing with our mother and uncle, just acting as any eleven- year-old kid would act as the school year was coming to an end and summer was in the air.

So I picked out my mother's clothes. It was the same outfit we had given her for her thirty-ninth birthday on February 4, 1982: an ivory skirt suit with a lilac blouse. Then I walked to my room and saw my stuffed animals torn apart and my dollhouse thrown on the floor. With every step I took I felt sick and years later asked, "How could my father take my brother and me to a house where my mother and uncle had just been murdered, with blood stains still visible everywhere—on the floors, walls and doors?"

On Friday, June 11, the funeral home suggested to my father that they should have a closed casket for our mother's service. Our father decided to turn this decision over to us, two eleven-year-olds. My brother and I walked into the room where both caskets lay next to each other. Our father opened Kiko's casket, showing us his massacred face and body.

We immediately decided that the children and adults waiting outside should not see our uncle like this. Our mother, on the other hand, looked beautiful, although you could see the bullet entries on the right side of her cheek. I remember Alain was holding me up because my knees buckled when I saw her lifeless body.

Looking at my mother, I could see marks on her hands and on her face, but I was happy just to be holding her hand and just to be with her. Then I got on my knees and prayed, and I felt at peace with her.

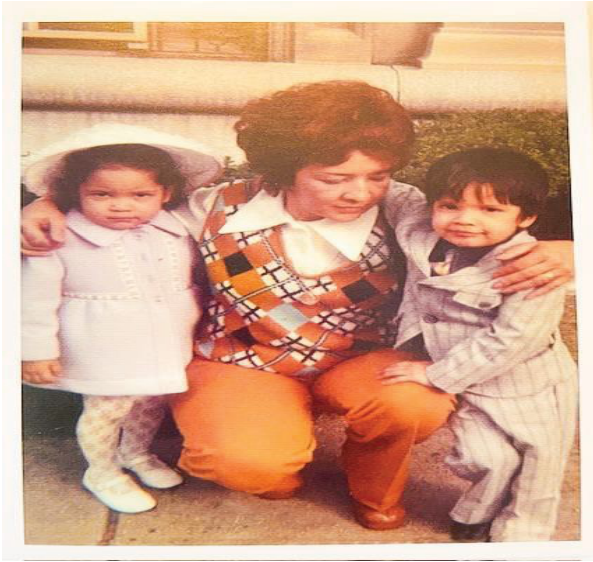
On Saturday, June 12, 1982, the day of my mother's funeral, I learned a great lesson. The funeral director said to us, "Okay, you have ten minutes, and then we're going to close the casket." I was thinking, "What has he said?" He just told me I had only ten minutes with my mother. I would not see my mother for the rest of my life. He had no idea how hard and cruel that was to hear.

Eighteen years later I would become a nurse, and share with the nurses a great lesson, one I learned then. So, to this very day, with my patients and with my labor room nursing sisters, I share that we're never going to rush our patients

when they are saying goodbye to their loved ones. They can say goodbyes for as long as it takes them to do so. It's very important that they have their closure, and not be rushed.

At that moment, I just held onto every millisecond of those ten minutes, holding my mother's hands and kissing her. I stayed with her until the casket was closed. It felt like a terrible dream, the ride to the cemetery in a limousine escorted by police. As they laid her in the ground, I felt like a black curtain had come down around me. Everything went black, as if to say to me "that little girl has died" too.

I later learned in therapy the little girl had not died. I succeeded in becoming the woman I envisioned but now it was time to go back and rescue this little girl from the dark abyss of my unconscious. I needed to find that girl and comfort her, and unite her with me, which I've done. But that's the day that the little girl in me died for a very long time. And my mother and uncle were gone forever.



1973, Brooklyn, NY: Nella and Alain age three, in their Sunday best, with their mother. Ivette, Alain's wife, loves this picture because you can tell by Nella's unhappy face that Alain got away with



1977, Brooklyn NY:
Nella with her mother.



Miami, Florida, 1977: Nella and Alain, age 7, with their mother.



1975: A happy day in Brooklyn: their mother, Maruja, is laughing and hugging her twins on their birthday.



1977: Young Alain at lunch in Coral Gables with Luz and Maruja.



Florida, 1978: Little Nella hugs her Uncle Kiko.



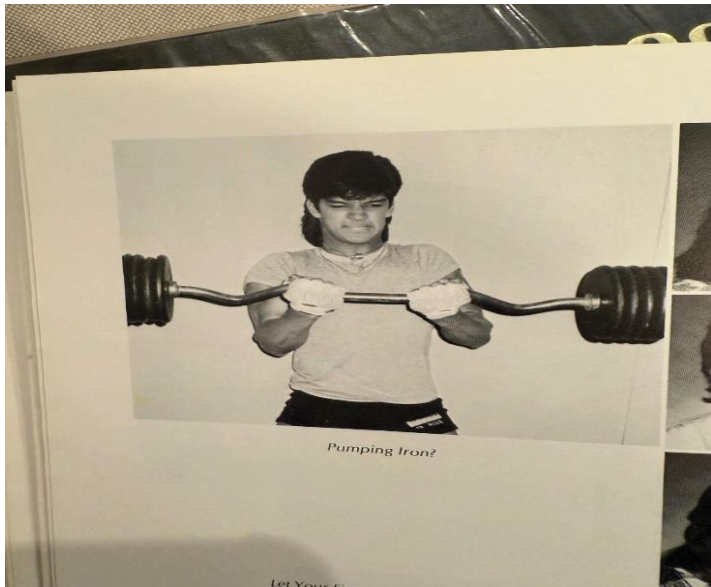
Brooklyn, NY, 1975: Studio shot of the twins at age five. Alain still remembers those Buster Brown shoes.



May 1982: Maruja with her Mother's Day flowers in her home in Miami, one month before she is killed.



February 4, 1982: Nella and Alain with their mother on her last birthday. She loved the color lilac, her favorite, and she is in an outfit the twins bought for her, which they had her buried in.



Florida, 1984: school yearbook. Alain has always been into sports and fitness. Here is Alain, age 13, pumping iron.

In that same
1984
yearbook,
Alain saw the
picture of
Ivette, his
future wife.

