

A Busted Window or My Observation of Luz Moreno, mi Tía Paty

by Rosa Lisbeth Navarrete

Las mujeres en nuestra familia saben como recibir golpes, pero me enseñaste tambien como regresar el tiro. Y me encanta que con todo lo que dices siempre hay un propósito y intención. The womxn in our family know how to take punches, but you taught me to hit back. And I like that with everything you say there is always purpose and intention.

Luz Moreno, also known as Paty in our family, was born in 1979. She was the last of the Morenos to emerge, and she stood out like a sore thumb with her lighter complexion and short legs. A small suspicion wandering the halls of my grandmother's house, that no one in the family was brave enough to confront. Her older sister, Magda, had become a kitchen helper in the family and home business — the indoor garage was turned into a restaurant, that once belonged to the eldest, sixteen years Paty's senior. The eldest was at the time of Paty's childhood, crossing the border to be reunited with her husband. Paty only remembered that her sister's husband used to bring her toys, but that those presents stopped when he moved away.

Most of the time, Paty was left to her own devices. She was either in the living room with her father, in the backyard with the grapes, or sometimes two doors down with the neighbor lady who watched after her. The neighbor was a baby sitter of sorts. One that obsessed over Paty's adorable face and wit. The neighbor lost a child in utero. This woman offered Luz's mother, my grandmother, money to purchase her indefinitely.

"She's such a pretty doll!" the neighbor exclaimed. Luz's mother knew better than to sell her daughter, but loan her for a price she could do and did. Money was tight, and if someone else wanted to buy her child pretty things and dress her in nice clothes — so be it. It was through this neighbor that Luz was able to visit the zoo, eat yummy treats, and wear pretty dresses.

To look at a childhood picture of Luz, was to look at innocence and loss. She knew she was loved, and quickly understood that her adorableness could be made into a business. When her cuteness dissipated, and the neighbor-lady moved away, Paty grew up to be an insecure young girl. God knows why, she was always beautiful to me. Through this, she learned to make her own money and raised funds for her quinceañera. She worked in bakeries for almost five years, paid off her quince, shopped at the malls, and even raised enough funds to help her get through graphic school. This is where she found her niche. My Tía Paty, has an eye for design.

I learned to appreciate the small things hanging around her when she was in her mid-twenties and me in my late teens. Paty is able to see beauty in the most mundane things. I've seen her pick up pieces of plastic and hold it up to murals; this ignites her passion for contrast and texture. Restaurant menus were always explored with such focus, and we would spend an extra twenty minutes in ordering because she wanted to know how the plastic was bound and what material the owner used before deciding on the appetizer.

Once I accompanied her to a drop off of postcards she made for a Christian Missionary group. We went inside the pretty beach house in Miraflores, a private residence. It was such a beautiful house. I was in complete awe, but my Tía Paty walked in like she had seen it all before. The Christian folk were dancing and enjoying each other's company, nobody knew I could speak English. They wouldn't know from just looking at me. They offered us treats and drinks, and my tía laughed and smiled. The missionary complained about the dark shadows in the picture, and my aunty had to explain the exposure and quality of the picture submitted was not up to par, and she did her best with what she received. I watched silently as the two of them made direct eye contact.

Paty was not fazed by incredulous looks. After a few minutes, the missionary womxn disappeared and returned with soles. My tía received the money and smiled gracefully. She downed the rest of the champagne, and walked out the door with me following closely behind her. I could hear the missionaries whispering behind us, but I was so moved by her pride and power, that I didn't even think about looking back.

When I spend too much time away from Perú, I forget to be Peruvian. It's a strange thing to say, but it's the truth. Paty's the only one who's ever shown me patience and love when I stagger over Spanish words. Between my Spanglish and twisted hand gestures, she gets it. She gets me. That is my Tía Paty. She is unique, something I long to be. She is herself all the time, even when it means being strict or mean. She can cut you with her words, and make you laugh minutes after her insults. If you've ever had the privilege of being cursed by her, you would agree that it's a work of art. She is both family and stranger, which makes her the best of friends when things get rough. She gave me a cigarette once in the second floor of grandma's house, and I learned that to relieve my cramps I could put my feet on the cold cement wall and inhale tobacco to clear my head. A habit I have since kicked, thank goodness.

Tonight, as I lay in bed here with a pregnant belly, I think about Paty. She is probably about to close her shop in Lima. I imagine her looking at her computer with tired eyes, the way I am doing right now. Maybe she called in sick, and she's actually home? If grandma were still alive, she might be heating up lunch that has been waiting for her in the fridge since eleven in the morning.

When we were younger and teenagers, it was hard to see you as an aunt. Though you've always felt stronger than me. Always putting your guard up when our culture, family, or your work ethic came into question. You fell in love with two horrible liars, and the third liar wasn't too bad. You had a son with him. You inspired me to become a mother through your miracle of life and love. You taught me to always have a back up in everything I do.

I will never forget one December when I came to visit Perú— you were still a single hard working womxn in the city— you told me over beers in the dining room table, “I know I look awful. I got mugged, and my hair was pulled from side to side, but they didn't get my purse. It was wrapped around my wrists for fear that I may get mugged. The thief quit and ran away, taking some of my hair with him. I was more worried that the poor taxi man has to fix a busted window!” and you laughed so hard. I will never forget that laugh. It sounded like hiccups and song all at once.

I was mugged in San Francisco. It was a young man, pricked my finger to get my cell phone after I unlocked it. All the rage came up to my head. I found a cop, we confronted the thief, but he ran away. The cop ran after him, and I ran after the cop. I could feel my face getting red, as adrenaline pulsed through me—rage leading the way. Why are the Moreno womxn always getting hurt by men? It isn't fair. I pressed my feet on the earth and was stopped by a costumer who worked with the San Francisco Ballet.

“Stop chasing after him! They'll catch him. Oh, you're bleeding...” she said. I looked down at my pants and the blood trickled around my wrist and was now dripping on the cement floor. I was spilling story and legends and memories, and the costumer grabbed a tissue from her bag and asked me if I had anything. I said, no, and she continued to heal my finger. All that blood from such a small prick?

Tía Paty, you don't compare yourself to other girls who worry constantly about what clothes to wear. You don't have time to *paint your face* as you say. Your insults are a work of art with perfect comedic timing. Your laugh is ceremoniously followed by claps and I look forward to the rhythm. You are not shy, but openly vulnerable...like me. You met my first boyfriend, and my now husband. You remind me of my mother when she was younger and let her hair down. You know that the best time to make me laugh is when I want to punch something.

The womxn in our family know how to take punches, but you taught me to hit back. And I like that with everything you say there is always purpose and intention. You've taken blows, and given some back. You now live in the garage where my mom, dad, sister and I used to live and now it's yours, your husbands, and your baby's room. You encouraged me to laugh when life got hard, and inspired me to become a mother after meeting your baby son. Despite the hard knocks, we Moreno womxn are still able to love unconditionally.

You rise to the occasion, my last-minute twin. Though it was harder after grandma left us, I still go to you in Bipol when I feel as though your spirit is shifting. Do not change too quickly, Tía Paty, from the gentle soul who loved to go to the beach and teach me about Los Hombres G. Your benevolence is spiritually attached to mine, and I want so much for kindness to thrive within me. Now in our thirties, now you as a mother and me a soon to be mother, I want to still remember your love for the bizarre, the six a.m. chicken noodle soups after bar hopping, and your ability to see the beauty in the mundane. Until we meet again, in that old house where garages were restaurants, and men are still learning to be kind. Yours, Lisbeth.