**Family: The Most Important Thing in My Life**

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For my altar, I decided to honor and commemorate three people who are/ were extremely important to me. The reason why I chose three people, was because they all hold an equal amount of importance in my life, as well as an equal amount of love and memories. The three people who I chose to commemorate with my altar are my grandma Maggie, my grandma Julieta, and my great grandma Elena. It was extremely tough when I lost each of my grandmas. My grandma Maggie passed away about 15 years ago, when I was about 10. My grandma Julieta and my great grandma Elena both passed away about a month apart from each other.

My grandma Maggie is my mother’s mom. I don’t know much about her background, other than she was born in Tijuana. As a matter of fact, she was actually unsure of her birthday. Unfortunately, there is a lot of mystery and uncertainty surrounding her early life and background. I know for sure that she 1 sister, and she is still alive and living in Norwalk. She was someone who was always up at 4 in the morning cooking. It was amazing to be able to wake up to the smell of fresh, handmade food (but it also made it extremely tough to sleep in). From tortillas, to chorizo con huevo, to huevos rancheros. Even when my siblings and I would get home from school, she would still be cooking. It was like it was never ending (which I didn’t mind at all). I included the tamales in my altar to commemorate her and her great and constant cooking. Those are also her glasses at the bottom right. My grandma Maggie very calm, thoughtful, and funny. She always had a joke for us, and never failed to send us to sleep without a laugh. Although she did not speak much English, she did know every single curse word in the English dictionary. In fact, she had pretty much no formal education. Her inability to speak, read, or write in English made it extremely tough for her to find consistent work, but somehow, someway, she always found a way to make things happen. Reflecting on these memories, I now realize that she really only said those things to make us laugh. It was especially tough when she passed away because my little sister was born only a few weeks before she passed, and unfortunately, they never got the chance to meet each other. My grandma Maggie was checked in to a hospital because she was not feeling well, and ended up passing away only a few days later. My mother took this loss very hard because she does not have a big family, and her mother meant everything to her. Another reason why she took it hard was because my sister was born only a few weeks before her death.

My grandma Julieta is easily one of the top 3 toughest people I have ever known. She is special to me because I can remember spending endless summers and weekends over at her home. My grandma Julieta’s mom actually was a Zapatista and fought in the Mexican/ American war. My grandma Julieta was one of the founders of MELA (Mothers of East L.A.). Throughout her life, she had received numerous honors, awards, and recognition certificates from congressmen and congresswomen for her service in the community of East L.A. Some of those people include, but are not limited to, Gloria Molina and the former Mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa. I remember when she would tell us stories about when Antonio Villaraigosa was younger and how he used to get in to trouble. I think she did this to remind us and inspire us that we could be anything we wanted to be. She would also tell us stories about her mother, and her participation in the revolution. I know that she was born in Guadalajara. As far as her family size and siblings, I know for sure that she had 9 siblings, but I am unsure of the amount of brothers and sisters. She met my grandpa Alfonso (who is from Mexico City) in East L.A. Together, they had 6 children (2 boys, and 4 girls). One of the things I cherish the most about her is that she always taught us to be proud of where we’re from, as well as to be proud of our heritage and our culture. She was the epitome of a proud Chicana. She was not scared of anyone or anything. For her, I included a salt shaker because I remember the first time I smacked my lips at her, she threw a salt shaker at me before I could even blink. It hurt at the time, but now I am able to laugh about it (even though I will forever be terrified of salt shakers). She definitely did not fit the typical role of a Chicana. She was tough, outspoken, and fearless. She was definitely “Chingona”. Although I never heard her say this, I can remember being told by my dad that the reason why she was like that was because she was always treated as black sheep of her family. Also, she grew up in a different era, and given that her mother was a Zapatista, contributed greatly to her attitude and personality.

My grandma Elena is easily one of the sweetest, kindest, women that I have ever met. She was always giving and caring for others. She made sure that at least once a month, all of her children, grand children, great grand children, and great- great grand children got together (typically on a Sunday) and cooked out. Those are memories that I hold near and dear to my heart because I can remember as a child, driving to Ontario, or Chino (this is where she lived, as well as many of my family members) and eating good food, listening to good music, playing with my cousins, and always trying to hear the stories that my dad and all the veteranos would tell and talk about. This is something that I really want to continue with my children and all of their cousins. I can also remember going over her house, and her feeding my siblings and I until we were about ready to pass out. She would ask us if we were still hungry, and our response was typically “No gracias, abuela, ya estamos llenos”, but she would still insist feeding us and serving us 2 or 3 more times. And as many people know, it is a crime to refuse food in a Mexican home, especially from your grandma. For my grandma Elena, I included the case at the bottom that has a variety of momento’s, trinkets, and even jewelry that she used to wear. As far as her background, I know that she was born in Veracruz and came to the United States in her teens. She was born in 1911, and lived until she was 101 years old. That is when she met my great grandfather. Together, they had 11 children. They first lived in East L.A., and then moved to Ontario in the 70’s.

As you can probably tell, all of the people who I chose to include in my altar are extremely important to me. Even though they are gone, I continue to cherish their memories and the lessons that they have taught me, and I will do so forever. They have played a huge role in shaping who I am as a person and where I am at in my life, right now. For that, I am eternally grateful and thankful for them and what they have done for me. The very least I could do was create an altar to commemorate them and express their significance to me, and my life. Family is easily the most important thing to me, and they are largely responsible for that. They have all contributed greatly to how I view the world and my perspective on life. They also had a significant impact on my parents, and shaping their lives and teaching them the values, morals, principles, ethics, and standards that my parents taught and have instilled in my siblings and I. Because of them, I have an immense appreciation and respect for women. I do not believe in the traditional gender roles that are typical among Chicanos. I believe that women are just as powerful and just as able as men.