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I Love my Mami

By Veronica Cool

Who else is captivated by the P&G Olympic commercials? Athletes from across the world stand poised for their moment, filled with trepidation, doubt, nerves...and flashes of Mom pop on the screen, uttering encouraging words, holding hands, smiling with support, gently pushing forward, waiting with open arms.... Darn, I always get teary -eyed.

And no, I am not an Olympiad in the making but I am a gold-medalist through and through.

No arrogance here, but simply an ode to Mami.

You see, as a parent today, I realize that there's no roadmap for parenting, regardless of the number of books I buy or articles I read: From the hormones to the friends, messy rooms and talking-back, the hopes for the future and the monitoring of their health... There's no formal set of instructions.

Throw in technology. And complete access to any data point, true or fabricated- from drugs, sex, terrorism, evil, idiocy and over-indulgence.... How do you curtail or combat all of that? I want to wrap my babies in a bubble!

And that's not living.

And here's my moment.... My parents brought us to the United States when I was 10. They didn't speak English. They knew nothing about navigating the culture: where to get your license, get the car registered, get the kids vaccinated and in school... No support network of friends or family. We, a family of 5, were living with another family, of 4 people, in an apartment. A one-bedroom apartment. So, no family wealth or trust fund either.

Yet, I had the best childhood ever. I was Loved. Encouraged. Motivated. I still don't know the definition of fear or failure.

My Mami, or Papi for that fact, didn't understand any of my homework assignments, but I learned to excel in school, without knowing a lick of

English, because I was taught to excel. We sat on the table until we finished our work, with a plate of food (plantains, typically) and lots of smiles. She drove us everywhere, to band practice (don't ask me about how ended up playing the trombone when I signed up for the drums) and drama rehearsal.

When there were no more math courses to take in high school, she drove me to Drexel University in the evenings to audit advanced calculus. After working a 14-hour day at the grocery store. With a smile on her face.



I earned a partial scholarship to attend college, but we couldn't afford to pay for the rest of it...So, she took on a second job, working as a security guard during the night shift at a nursing home.

After graduating, I moved into a little apartment in Reading, Pennsylvania where despite having a professional job I still couldn't afford to pay my telephone bill. She paid it.

She didn't understand all of the details- the Spelling Bee invitation, the scholarship award, the college acceptance letter, but she knew that education was the key to changing the future and she gave it her all.... Easily sacrificing her own lifestyle, for us. For me.

As an adult, I now know the rest of the story. The sleepless night, the concern, the hope that their efforts were enough.

She raised me right. Her actions, her beliefs, her faith, permeated my being. Without understand the culture, the rules, the steps, she facilitated the process, greased the wheels per se, so I could develop. So I could learn and become something.

She is still doing that today. Her influence continues- through my kids. My high-maintenance prima-donna teenager cooked dinner last night. No one

needed to ask her, she noticed everyone was tied up and she made empanadas from scratch. Because grandma taught her.

Full circle.

My kids know Love, Encouragement, Motivation- They won't ever fail. Because my every move, alongside my husband, is geared towards their Olympic moment. Thanks to Mami who got me here. To my beautiful and strong Mother- La quiero muchísimo.

I'm certain my story is not unique- substitute "soccer" for "drama", "India" for "Dominican Republic", "Baltimore" for "Philly", you get the gist... Your mother (and it could have been your grandmother, father or aunt) invested in you, in their own way, to have you arrive here, your Olympic moment.

Amigos, demonstrate your gratitude and appreciation to your Mother, especially during Mother's Day.



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