



STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

MIJA (ESPAÑOL) – 05: YITA

[00:05] -Mija

Hi I'm Mija. Mija means my daughter in Spanish. And this podcast is about my family: those alive though those long gone, and those still dreaming. Now here's what you need to know about Yita. She has sparkling eyes, and has a tendency to speak in parables. She loves from a great distance but always feels close. Yita is my grandmother.

[00:33] -Mija

So here goes, ten minutes to tell her story.

[00:45] -Mija

Picture rolling green hills. Nothing but emerald green for miles.

[00:52] -Mija

This is el eje cafetero. The coffeelands of Colombia. There's a truck driving on a nearby dirt road.

[01:02] -Mija

It's transporting coffee. The young woman driving is about 16 and she's worked in the coffee lands her whole life. This young woman is my grandmother Yita.

[01:17] -Mija

And she's on her way home to the farm where she'll have lunch with her parents.

[01:27] -Mija

Her mother, Maria has made rice and beans. Her old age has made it hard for her to work the grounds. So instead, she writes poems and recites them over lunch. As for her father, Emilio, he's the quiet type. He too has another talent: mapmaking. He works as a land surveyor in addition to running the farm. The three of them live in the house together and run the farm with the help of some local workers. They all sit down to eat. Amen.

[02:09] -Mija

This was before La Violencia. In the space of a year or so a civil war breaks out between the Conservative and Liberal parties in Colombia. The 10-year war is called "The Violence" and displaces hundreds of thousands of people from the farmlands as different factions come to claim the lives of those from opposing parties.

[02:26] -Mija

For some time, their region was untouched. But one day in the midst of the war, a small group of rebel soldiers came to their farm.

[02:37] -Mija

Yita, Maria and Emilio hide in their basement storage room behind a large painting of the Virgin Mary. And even though they spend the entire night there. The rebels never once enter the room where they're hiding.

[02:54] -Mija

The next morning, they leave behind a farmhouse in ruins. So the three of them flee to a nearby city carrying the last two chickens they had left. Maria and Emilio buy one train ticket Yita to go to Cali to live with her aunt and uncle at their boarding house. Yita's parents decide to stay behind to try to salvage the farm as soon as it's safe to go back. When the day comes, they see her off at the station.

[03:24] -Mija

She's nervous and scared. Everything has changed so quickly. But a new life awaits her big city. She looks out the window and sees the greenery slowly fade into concrete.

[03:48] -Mija

Shortly after arriving, her aunt suggests she enroll in beauty school. She does but misses the handiwork of the farm. So, in her spare time, she makes things paintings, vases, earrings, even dresses. She quickly falls into a routine. Every morning she has breakfast with her aunt and uncle at the communal table at the boarding house. Arepas con chocolate caliente. Then school, then she works on her art. It's like that for a while. She graduates and even starts working in a salon in central Cali.

[04:23] -Mija

Until one day, everything changes.

[04:32] -Mija

A young man comes to stay at the house and this young man is my grandfather. He's a traveling matador. Yita is drawn to his Matador uniform which glistens in the sunlight. He invites her to come see him at the arena.

[04:51] -Mija

As she cheers for him, she fears for his life. But he always wins.

[04:58] -Mija

In a matter of weeks. He steals her heart.

[05:07] -Mija

No one in the family approves of the match. He's an orphan living paycheck to paycheck as a matador. But she has already lost so much that all those things don't matter to her. So they elope. Run off to get married one afternoon in October. Their witnesses are two people who happen to be at the church at the time, and their first kiss is at their wedding.

[05:36] -Mija

They move in together and soon she has her first child, Memo. As their family grows, so do their dreams. They want a nice big house for their children, so they move to the capital from the humid vibrant city of Cali, to the cold mountainous city of Bogota.

[05:53] -Mija

And Titi puts away his Matador uniform and picks up a pen. He becomes a journalist.

[05:57] -Mija

Then Tatika is born and Melita. Yita stays home to take care of the children while he is away on reporting trips.

[06:08] -Mija

So she has the house herself with three kids running around. It isn't always easy. Her own mother is miles away. So she has to figure it out all alone. But this family is the best thing she has ever made. She calls them, her little birds.

[06:34] -Mija

As soon as he is of age, Memo enrolls in military school. Her daughters stay at home. They're growing up in the big city the capital where the war can't touch them. They have the freedom to do things she couldn't at their age. So she lets them: helps them sneak in after curfew, set up dates with boys from the neighborhood and listens and responds with wisdom to every one of

their heartaches. Melita is the second to leave the house, she falls in love gets married and has two children who would be Yita's first grandchildren.

[07:05] -Mija

After school, they come to the house where Yita, Tatika, and Tti, still live to spend time together. When Memo is on leave, he comes home and they all have a big feast to celebrate. La Familia is all together for a short while. Yita loves having her little birds under the same roof again. But she sees that Tatika is growing restless. She knows her daughter needs a change and even though it will be hard for her to see her leave, Yita asks a family friend to help her get on her feet if she moves to Nueva York.

[07:42] -Mija

When the day comes, she makes breakfast as usual. She asks Tatika about the weather and flight details and never once lets on that she's sad to be separated from her. Her last little bird, her Tatika. And despite the sadness she feels, she stands firm by something her father told her on the train platform. All those years ago.

[08:14] -Mija

Children are borrowed. The world gives them to you for a short while, but you have to give them back.

[08:25] -Mija

Now I'd like to end my 10 minutes with this: As children of immigrants. Mano and I didn't get to grow up going to La Casa after school. And though we went there every summer. Distance is something that has defined our relationship with all of our grandparents.

[08:48] -Mija

At the end of her nightly calls to La Casa, Tatika would ask Mano and I to stop watching cartoons and come say hello to them on the phone. At the time, we both were too young to understand how important those hellos were. How they were the only connection we had to La Familia back in Colombia. Mano and I would say hi quickly and then run back to watch TV. But Yita never showed signs of disappointment.

[09:18] -Mija

She always smiles. Her eyes sparkling as she hears the accented voices of her grandchildren saying: Te quiero Yita. I love you Yita.

[09:31] -Mija

Yita is our last living grandparent. The others: Ana, Fino, and Titi are all long gone.

But I still dream of them.

[09:41] -Mija

This episode was produced by Studio Ochenta. Our executive producer is Lory Martinez, our associate producers are Laura Ubaté and Rebecca Seidel. Our theme music is Gabriel Dalmaso. Our art is by Tiffany Delune. Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @mijapodcast. That's m-i-j-a podcast. If you like the show, tell a friend about it and maybe leave a comment on Apple podcast while you're at it. Until next time sending you much love and good ol' American Recuerdos.

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