



STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

MIJA PODCAST (ENGLISH) – EPISODE 1: MIJA

[00:05] - Mija

Ten minutes isn't a lot of time. But when I was eight years old, ten minutes was all the time I had with my dad between home and school in the mornings. Imagine being a kid and having just ten minutes to tell someone everything about your whole universe. I guess that's why I started this podcast why I became Mija. Mija means "my daughter" in Spanish. And though this first episode is about me, the others will be about members of my family: those alive those long gone and those still dreaming.

[00:42] - Mija

Now here's what you need to know about me. I'm brutally honest. I love deeply and forgive always and I love to embellish things to tell a good story. But I'm real I'm Mija. So here goes. 10 minutes to tell my story.

[01:07] - Mija

New York in the 80s was full of criminals and delinquents. Or so they say. But it was also home to working class people like my parents. My mother, Tatika immigrated from Bogota, Colombia to Jackson Heights Queens. My dad Rocky, immigrated from Cali Colombia to join his sisters somewhere in Brooklyn.

[01:32] - Mija

One night they met at a nightclub in Long Island City and danced the night away. I imagine it went like this. Hola mami quieres bailar? Bueno, de donde eres? Cali, y tu? Bogota.

[01:57] - Mija

Imagine moving thousands of miles from home to a city of millions, where you disappear into the crowds where you're English isn't the best it could be, and where work is hard to come by. Life as an immigrant isn't easy. So naturally, the person that makes you feel the most at home is someone from home. These two Colombian immigrants found each other in New York fell in love and had me. Mija.

[02:35] - Mija

A few years down the line they had my brother Mano and then they split up. Mano and I stayed with Tatika and Rocky, well, he drove us to school remember? Growing up my parents used to tell us stories about our family back in Colombia like this one about my great uncle Alvaro.

[02:54] - Mija

Alvaro was a genius with no money. When he was 10 years old his parents could no longer send him to school. But he continued to practice his math skills all on his own and by the time he was 18 he'd turned those skills into a fully functioning construction business. That's right. He worked on every house in his neighborhood fixing up the homes of the working-class people that lived there. And he was good at his job. So good that someone with money heard of him, paid him to design and construct an entire suburban block for the new rich in a city not far from his own.

[03:29] – Mija

When he finished the job, the client liked him so much that he gave him a house on that same block. Alberto would spend the rest of his days driving home in his pickup truck covered in dust parking his car alongside the Mercedes and Audis of his neighbors he had what we in the family call "El cacumen".

[03:48] - Mija

I'm not really sure how to describe it but it means something along the lines of the genes of a genius. The genes of success of survival. They basically meant that no matter what obstacles came our way we'd make it because of el cacumen. Whenever something didn't go well or work was slow or nonexistent, Rocky would tell us different versions of that story. Telesforo was a scientist who discovered a vaccine without ever graduating from school. Marino was a poor orphan that became a beloved town leader. Carmen taught herself to play guitar and became a celebrated musician without ever having a lesson.

[04:26] - Mija

And so on. El cacumen meant that no matter what happened, whatever our goal in life was, we'd be good at it.

[04:32] - Mija

Of course, the stars of these stories were always long dead so no one could ever figure out if they were true or not.

[04:39] - Mija

But here's the thing, even though I grew up knowing life is hard and that things don't necessarily work out the way you'd like them to, I always believed it would work out in the end because of El Cacumen.

[04:52] - Mija

All right. I'll be honest. That's a lie. But wouldn't it be nice if we actually believe that?

[05:06] - Mija

Now my story is a tale of two cities: Queens and Bogota. Queens was great. Trees line the streets of mom and pop stores making you forget that you're in the sprawling metropolis of New York City. They call it the world's borough.

[05:20] - Mija

Everyone I grew up with came from or had parents who came from somewhere else. Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Jamaican, Korean, Egyptian, Greek, Polish etc. All Americans.

[05:34] - Mija

As for Bogota, the capital of the land of coffee and emeralds. Well, we spent every summer there. Tatika would send Mano and I to spend time with La familia.

[05:44] - Mija

Every morning we'd have arepas and chocolate for breakfast then go and play in the garden.

[05:52] - Mija

We moved into our new apartment at Ochenta street in Queens a little after my parents separated. Tatika would always sing us to sleep in Spanish.

[06:01] - Mija

At the time, I didn't really think about how cool it was to have two cultures like that: to be very American at school and to be Colombian at home and sometimes be both.

[06:15] - Mija

But I do remember wanting to play a part for others. I wanted to be like the people I saw on TV middle class white Americans with their perfect hair and their family sedans and their unrelenting financial security.

[06:29] - Mija

It was the early 90s, and all I saw with my people on TV were Latin gang members or hyper sexualized women and so many Colombian drug dealers. That explains why sometimes I overcorrected. I made sure I didn't use any slang when I spoke English or color my speech with Spanish words. I didn't want to be a stereotype.

[06:51] - Mija

But as I grew older I understood: this beautiful blend of cultures made us feel at home anywhere. Even now, miles away from La Casa my brother Mano and I, whenever we need to feel at home all we have to do is turn up the music and dance.

[07:09] - Mija

But there is one thing that I feel guilty about and I want to end my 10 minutes with this.

[07:14] - Mija

Picture a landfill. And on top of one of its many hills is a little radio. It's made of yellow plastic and it's all worn out. The tuning dial has fallen off from years of use. In its heyday, it was perched over the bathroom vanity in our apartment and it was perpetually tuned into New York City's Latin stations. You see, Tatika wanted it to be like a shower radio that she saw on TV, except she hooked it up to the light switch which meant that it would play music whenever you switched on the light in the bathroom.

[07:56] - Mija

It was on all the time. Spanish music guiding me through every stage of my life.

[08:04] - Mija

From the loss of my front baby teeth to getting ready for my first communion to the moment I looked in the mirror after I'd had my first kiss.

[08:13] - Mija

This was the soundtrack to my world and blended as it was, I couldn't just share it with my friends who came over to hang out.

[08:20] - Mija

So I disconnected it, whenever they came over. Half out of shame and half out of a need to be... normal. Sometimes I made Tatika feel so bad about it she would cry and after one of our more heated debates she threw it out and she never replaced it.

[08:39] - Mija

Deje asi, she would say. I only realized how special it had been to have that source of language and love until much much later.

[08:49] - Mija

I am the daughter of immigrants and every day I called Tatika to see how she is. We are together for at least 10 minutes a day. When I call home I think about the way she would call her parents back in Bogota every night.

[09:04] - Mija

After dinner Mano and I would run back to our room to watch cartoons and Tatika would stay behind, have a coffee and sit in the living room alone.

[09:13] - Mija

She would look out the window, a lit cigarette in hand and she'd make her call. She'd waited all day to hear this sound: the dial tone connecting to home and the voice on the other end saying "Todo va salir bien mija"

[09:29] - Mija

Everything will be OK.

[09:31] - Mija

And it would be.

[09:32] - Mija

After all, I'm here aren't I?

[09:36] - Mija

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

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