

# Rebirth at Thirteen

Juliana Edwards

It was December 2, 1993. I was thirteen years old. It was a hot Thursday afternoon in Medellín, Colombia. The sky was blue, the sun was out, and like every afternoon we were stuck in traffic, lots of traffic. You could feel the sweat running down your forehead. The 85-degree weather kept spiking up in a closed window sedan without a/c. Car horns honking, motorcycles accelerating, buses rushing. Radios were on, different kinds of music made the afternoon even more overwhelming.

Over the past ten years, the hectic city had been a daily witness of car bombings, kidnappings, beheadings, and the assassination of three presidential candidates. Over a thousand police officers dead. Two hundred judges had been killed. Planes were bombed. Kids were shooting kids. Nothing seemed to be changing any time soon.

Being stuck in traffic during rush hour with your window rolled up so that nobody would steal your watch was just part of the day. Looking over your shoulder whenever you heard a motorcycle getting close was just part of preventing getting caught in a shootout. Driving over a dead body lying on the sidewalk was the part not one day could miss. Being thirteen in one of the world's most dangerous cities at the time was nothing out of the ordinary for someone who's only known that type of life.

I remember the traffic finally started to move on that Thursday afternoon. Little did I know, it was about to stop again when the radio announced that the world's richest, most brutal drug trafficker, the billionaire godfather of international drug dealing, Colombia's cause of sorrow, "Pablo Escobar," was dead. Killed by the Colombian Army and lying barefoot on a rooftop.

Nobody could believe what they were hearing. It was like a bucket of cold water had just been dumped over your head. Suddenly, it wasn't hot anymore. It was the moment every Colombian who had been a victim of violence, the way my family had, was waiting for.

On our way home, which happened to be a few blocks away from the city's morgue, I saw the crowds gathered. Some celebrating as if the National Soccer Team had just won The World Cup. Others crying rivers over the man that provided them with food to eat and school for their children. I felt my heart sink. For a minute I felt bad for the man I many times wished didn't exist. I was confused. Would it really be the end of the violence I had been a witness to since I could remember?

Would I be able to walk peacefully around the neighborhood without having to hide from a shootout? Yes, I would. Would I be able to have a childhood

like the one I saw in the movies but nobody I knew actually had? Would I ever see a dead body again? Not ever.

Pablo Escobar was more than a name. He was the subject of conversation during breakfast, and he would make his way to lunch and dinner depending on the massacre of the day. Nobody I knew actually met him in person but boy did we see the consequences of his evil. He was part of my life. He was part of my fears. He taught me with actions the meaning of the word death at a very young age. He is the reason my childhood's memories are dark.

As the years went by and my memories of him became part of my past, I realized the world was a better place without him. Violence will always exist, but my family, as well as many others, was born again the day he died.

After I moved to the United States and left my childhood memories in the past, I decided I would cherish the freedom life gave me as an adult. It was the same freedom it owed to me as a child. That part of my life is buried but one thing has carried on to my adult life: The fear Pablo Escobar brought to me as a child only made me stronger as an adult.

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