

A Letter to My Younger Self

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Prologue:

A letter to my younger self is my way of healing the inner spirit. Writing this book opened my eyes and made me realize that all the events that occurred happened for a reason. It made me who I am today, and I would not change that for the world. This is almost like a journal that I would give to the younger version of me. The little girl who had big dreams but changed because life moves forward. She grew up not being herself, and losing who she was because of what others said. She grew up too fast because she was a first generation woman. The first generation woman in her family to make it to college.

Despite all of that, I made it here and am writing this and being proud of what I was able to accomplish in my life. I have always been able to express myself through my clothing no matter what. Growing up I was always dressing myself in cute outfits even if it was to go to the store or sit on the couch all day, the point was if it has glitter I am going to wear it, maybe it is just the Leo in me. However, as I grew much older I began being less comfortable in my own skin and finding it difficult to dress up for me. As of now, I have left that road and finding who I am once again. Slowly but surely.

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Chapter 1: Picture Day

Waking up on a fall day in October, the morning cold breeze took over my entire body, I noticed the window right by my bed slightly open. I quickly covered myself in a blanket, the darkness took over so the only thing visible was my hand. The warmth of the blanket was very comforting, making me doze off and slumber. That did not last for long as my mother pulled the blanket exposing me to the cold breeze once again and sending chills up my entire body. The brightness in the room made it difficult to see as my eyes were adjusting from dark to light. “Wake up mija, today is picture day. You get to wear your dress.” Is what I heard my mother say. From under my pillow I smiled so hard that It made my cheeks hurt. I quickly jumped up from bed in excitement. I have been waiting for this day just so I can wear the dress, I did not care if it was cold, I was still eager to make it work.

My mom had me sit in a chair, which was not comfortable at all and began with my hair. She slightly tugged on my hair as she detangled it. When I was younger my hair was a lot straighter but it has always been thick and voluminous. After detangling she sprayed a leave-in conditioner that smelled like vanilla and made my hair slightly damp at the roots to make it easier for her to style. She then began to grab small pieces of hair at the front of my head and made small braids going vertically towards the back and stopping at the mid scalp of the head. Securing each individual braid with a small green elastic. The rest of my hair just flowed down to my shoulders, which then frizzed up later in the day. After my hair I went into the bathroom to finish getting ready. I brushed my teeth to enhance the cleanliness and order of morning breath as well as brightening them. I moisturize my untouched skin with an odor free moisturizer to make my skin extra soft and illuminated for my pictures. Now it's time to get dressed.

I gently placed this wonderful piece of fabric on my bed as I admired how vibrant the emerald green reflected from the dress. The fabric was a satiny velvet, with golden pearls sewed onto the bottom left side of the skirt. The pearls were there to illustrate the seeds of a flower and the petals were hand stitched onto the dress with a thicker fabric so you could feel the difference between the 'petals' and the actual dress. The garment has an A-line tea length dress with bell sleeves that had the same design as the skirt. The top of the dress had a princess neckline, which was not too tight around me.

What made me remember this dress specifically was because my parents had surprised me with a gold necklace with the Virgin Mary on it. They told me that this necklace is special because it is my saint and she would always protect me. Since then I have never taken off the necklace and till this day I still have it on. As for the dress, I loved how the dress fit me overall, It made me feel like a princess. Growing up I was obsessed with the movie Shrek and especially Princess Fiona and her green dress. So, when I wore this dress it made me feel like I was just like Fiona. This feeling of pure happiness of a child made it so memorable and special, it is the little things that matter.

Chapter 2: Elementary School Dance

It is time for my middle school dance. I had stayed after school to help set up for the event, since I was a part of the student council. Luckily I lived three blocks away from my school so getting home was not a problem. Especially since I was going to walk with my best friend at the time, Mia. She was going to stay over for a few hours until her mom came to pick her up. Inside the building it was a lot cooler than it was outside. The student Council had originally decided that the party would be outside at the playground. However, because it is summer and it was burning hot outside we decided to keep it indoors in our school cafeteria for the safety of everyone. Since I had stayed at the school my mom dropped off everything I needed to get ready.

Mia and I had agreed on getting ready together, we both made our way to the school bathroom which was on the same floor as the dance, the first floor. In the bathroom I had wet my hair to make it easier to manage since it was very frizzy because of the humid air outside. I had decided to put my hair into a very high ponytail which lifted my face up due to the pulling on my skin. I had attached some small hoop earrings to make my face look a bit less rounder since all of my hair was out of my face. In my hair I had also attached two black and white hair clips to the left side of my head near the temples to make my hairstyle stand out. Around my neck I wore a black choker aside from my gold necklace, to draw more attention to my upper portion, since a lot is going on already. I smeared a pink sticky lip gloss that made my lips stick together every time they touched, from the dollar store which had a very strong smell of chemicals. My nails were already painted black to match my accessories and garment. The polish was very shiny, which enhanced my nails to stand out more with such an unusual color for a fifth grader.

Getting into my dress was a bit difficult since my mom was not there to help me zip it up. My satin tea-length black and white dress had a square neckline with thick spaghetti straps to

latch on to my skin. The silhouette of the dress was a pouf dress which cinched in towards the waistline and flowed outwards. Under the dress it had a crinoline skirt that caused me to be very itchy throughout the night. However, it did puff up my dress almost like a ball gown. There were slight ruffles on the skirt portion of the dress that were caused by the excess length past the crinoline. The overall design of the dress had black and white flowers all around the skirt and the top was all black with a sequin belt to balance it out. The sequins made my skin a lot brighter especially on the dance floor since there were lights reflecting off of it. My shoes were black with a very small heel, closed toed and a strap to keep it from sliding out. These shoes ended up giving me a slight blister on my pinky toes.

Chapter 3: Traditional Mexican Dance

It's a hot summer day in July . My dad, Evelio, and I are on our way to Passaic, New Jersey to dance for an event in which we would perform for almost an hour outdoors towards a church. Our performance was based on a traditional dance known as Los Tecuanes, which means dance of the Jaguar. We arrived in a big white pale bus with a bunch of other members of the dance group. The bus had picked us up from another church in Sunset Park, Brooklyn on twenty first street and sixth avenue. On the bus, it was very musty and hot because of everyone being sweaty and close together. Everyone had on regular clothing and their dance attire were in their duffle bags and our big hats layed on top of each other.

Once we had arrived at our location we all had to go get ready in a small hall where the event would take place after all the performances. It was a lot cooler and fresh here than in the bus. To get ready, I had to make sure my hair was out of my way and secured. I did two french braids on my hair to lift all the pieces off my face and expose my features. Since we were all sweaty I applied deodorant about two times to reduce any bad smell that escaped my body. I detached any jewelry from my body to prevent them from falling off or hurting me as I perform. I then wrapped a bright red bandana around my head to prevent any splinters on my head from the straw hat that I am going to wear. I made sure to apply sunscreen on my face to prevent any sun damage and protect myself from any harsh tans.

Under my attire I had to wear a pitch black pair of leggings because of how sheer the fabric of my dance performance was. I also wore a snowy white t-shirt to make the top portion more breathable and have better mobility. My overall suit was almost like a zoot suit with oversized wide pants and oversized blazer jacket, made out of cotton. My pants and jacket were hand designed by my mother who sewed in every patch, ribbon, lace on to the suits. The suits

had to be designed to match from top to bottom. My jacket had a sequenced patch of Jesus on my back with sequenced flowers around the patch. Ribbons and lace were stitched onto the sleeves of the pants and jacket. Bells were attached to the pockets to make noise every time you moved. For my hat or sombrero, it was made of straw with a long top piece that dangled downward. Around the rim of the hat there was a ribbon with white lettering stating “ Viva Mexico” with a banner of Mexico attached to each end of the ribbon. My mask was handmade in Mexico from my grandma, Esperanza. It was carved out of wood and hand painted precisely with every detail. The faux hair is straw that was braided onto the mask and made to look as realistic as possible.

This day became memorable to me because I have never worn an outfit based on my culture. Being so young and clueless I had no idea what was going on. I thought my outfit made me look so cool, especially since I was the smallest one in the group. However, despite me being excited about embracing my culture it did upset me knowing that I was far away from my mom. She was not there to help me tie my outfit into place or fix my braids. I was all on my own to learn to adjust myself.

Chapter 4: First day of Middle school

It is the first day of middle school and a new journey has begun. Waking up on a regular day in September at precisely 7:00 am. My room in a Brooklyn apartment is always frosty and cold in the mornings. So as soon as I feel a slight bit of coldness on my exposed skin I aim for warmth under my thick fur blanket. It is always five more minutes of resting my eyes, until my mother, Miriam, decides to yank my blanket off my warm body and instantly wakes me up for school. As I rolled out of bed I remember how excited I was to start walking to school by myself, and even told myself, five whole blocks by myself, from Ditmas avenue to Coney Island ave. Once I was out of bed it was time to get ready for the day.

I started off by making my way to the bathroom. I looked in the mirror to find my hair frizzled up and in tangles from the night before. So I had to make sure I brushed out my hair as much as I could. From the bottom to the root, I tried my best to be as gentle as I could when brushing my hair. That was until I got impatient and began tugging on it every time the brush got stuck in a knot. After struggling with my hair it was time to brighten my teeth. Morning breath is not how I wanted to go to school. I made sure to enhance my scent and clean my teeth as much as I could. Ending it off with mouthwash, the little burning sensation on the tongue always made me uncomfortable but the job had to get done. Still in the bathroom I leathered my soft skin with a gentle cleanser that my mom gave to me, that way my face can be illuminated and radiant. Patting my face down with a towel to dry off all the moisture from the water so I don't walk out dripping in water. Making my way to my room I begin to imagine myself in the outfit I had planned the night before.

Keeping in mind that at the age of 11, my fashion choices were not always the best. I decided to go with the brightest outfit I could imagine. I chose neon blue skinny jeans that were

a bit long on me so, I had to cuff them at the bottom to make it fit better. A neon pink off the shoulder crochet top that had fringe ends at the bottom. The material was so soft that it was not uncomfortable like other shirts I have tried on. I wore a white cami underneath that made my pink shirt stand out more, since the top was see-through. My white converse left blisters on my ankle and toes after that day so I never owned another pair of converse ever again. My arms were covered with slap on bracelets that tugged on my arm hair every once in a while but I wanted to look fashionable. I had also decided to apply a press on nails for the first time. The glue had gotten stuck on my fingers so I walked around with glue on my finger which did hurt. I had also discovered eyeliner for the first time. I did have to sneak it into school though because I was not allowed to wear any makeup. I only put the eyeliner on my lower lash line cause my friends were doing it too and I wanted to fit in. This was how my first day of middle school went.

Chapter 5: Middle school performance

It was summer in June a week before the last day of school. I hated how hot it always was in the summer. The feeling of itchiness and sweat on my body was the worst. However, that was not going to stop me from performing. I still lived in my Brooklyn apartment, which was still cold but only because we had left the AC on all night. I had made sure to do my regular routine of getting ready, which has not changed since I first started middle school. I made my way to school where I ended up meeting my friend Chris, she was also performing at the end of the year show. The day goes by and it is now 3:00pm, the show starts at 4:30 so we had plenty of time to get ready. In the dance room in the basement of my school which was always cold as well, all the dancers were there getting ready.

My friend, Chris and I had decided to go to the school bathroom which was on the other side of the building. We decided to get ready there so we can get changed. In the bathroom, the sink was outside of the actual door and all the stalls were inside another room which was kinda weird. So we stood by the sink, I had put my hair down since it was pretty short from the damage of box dye. We made sure to put on lotion 30 minutes before showtime to prevent slipping on stage. Since it was a long day we were not smelling our best, so we sprayed ourselves with a bath and body works perfume. Not much body modification was done because of how limited supplies I had on hand at school. After we sprayed ourselves, I went into a stall to get dressed for

Our outfits all had to match so everyone on the team wore the same thing. The stalls were so small that I struggled to change. Now into my leggings, I gripped onto a wall to prevent falling and slipping. My black leggings were so comfortable, they hugged my legs and were very high waisted which was a win for me. My bright red tee was very loose on my body which hid my figure. I personally did not mind because I did not want the sweat to seem through a tighter

shirt while performing. Changing my socks into another pair which had more grip on the bottom to prevent from falling down and hurting myself. All the performers had to have socks with grip as well, just in case. After getting dressed, we made our way back to the dance room, it was now show time.

Chapter 6: Middle school Graduation

The last week of school, a hot summer day, it was with a slight breeze. I had woken up very early, around 7 am to go get my hair done at a salon down the street from my apartment. My mom had accompanied me to the salon because I was too shy to say anything to them even though they had known me for so long. The process of getting my hair done was so long. I made sure to wash my hair at home so they would not do it themselves because it always hurts my neck. Beginning to blow dry my hair, the heat from the hair dryer burned my scalp. I flinched every time the heat got near my ears. I did not like the smell of something being burned which was coming from the dryer but there was not much I could do. They made deep waves in my hair to make it look volumized and very bouncy. They applied this oil that gave it an extra shine and stayed on throughout the day,

On my way home I had remembered I already picked out my dress for such an exciting occasion. Before I got dressed I had to make sure I looked my best first. I walked into my room and sat by my vanity mirror to start applying a minimum amount of makeup. I was sitting in front of the AC to prevent myself from sweating and ruining my hair. I had begun by applying moisturizer to brighten up my tan skin. Mascara that I had stolen from my mom to widen my eyes and a very long and sharp eyeliner on my top lid was my makeup routine. Lastly, a clear lip gloss which was very sticky but made my lips look very full.

Time to get dressed. I decided to be a bit fancy that day. I had picked out a teal strapless dress which had no shape to it, just some support for the top to prevent it from slipping. On top of that I had worn a black cropped short sleeve cardigan that covered my arms. On top of my outfit, I wore my gown. Royal blue gown which was ironed the night before to make it look

sleek. As well as my cap which would not stay in place so i ended up clipping in a few shiny hair clips to make the cap look more enhanced.

Chapter 7: Softball game

Currently at school waiting for the day to be over so I can get ready for my first softball game. I attended high school in Park Slope. At the time my school was called the Secondary School of Journalism at the John Jay Campus. The day was sunny and not a cloud in sight on a beautiful day in May. The time hit 2:30, school is over now, we can start getting ready. My friends Kelly and Emily would always get ready with me before any game. Today's game was going to be at the fields on Prospect Park, a few blocks away from us.

First thing first, I had to immediately detach any jewelry on my body. This was to prevent any injuries when I had my helmet on. Since I am the catcher on the team I am going to constantly be squatting, so I had to take some precautions to prevent injury. I put my hair back into a low ponytail to get everything off my face and make things easier to see, without bothering me. I pressed it down with a hairspray that I borrowed from Kelly. Applying deodorant was a step that could not be missed due to the fact that I will be sweating a lot throughout the game and I do not want to have a bad odor.

Getting into my uniform excited me very much. My number was 8, my birth date and month. Under my Jersey I had a very thin ocean blue nylon long sleeve to prevent any uneven tans. My Jersey was designed to have my last name attached to the back. The jersey cotton made it very comfortable to move around and be flexible. The softball pants were the most uncomfortable. They were very cinched into the waist, hugging on my waistline and being extra snug around my glutes and thighs. The pants were a non-stretched polyester that only reached and hugged onto the calf of my leg. For the excess space between my calf and my ankle we wore thick cotton socks that matched our ocean navy blue jerseys. The socks were thick enough to prevent from sliding down on our skin as we played and protect us as well from

injuries and tans. Being my first game I had recently bought a new pair of cleats from Nike and they did not feel comfortable at all. I had to break them in but there was not enough time for that. Therefore making it a bit difficult to perform at my game. However, that did not stop me, later at the game I could not even feel any pain from my feet because of how focused I was.

My uniform gave me a boost of confidence that I needed. It hugged my curves in all the right places, despite the pants being uncomfortable. The uniform felt almost like shapewear because of how tight everything was. This specific outfit was very special to me because it was my first game, after two years of practice I finally had the chance to perform.

Chapter 8: Senior Prom

June seventh on a thursday night at a party hall in Bay Ridge, was where my prom was going to take place. I had been running for prom queen so I was very eager to attend prom, especially since I have been planning my attire for months. During this time, I was going through a breakup which led to some decisions that I later regretted. I had my hair length up to my lower back and had decided to cut it, bob short right before prom. I was devastated but there was nothing I could do at that point. However, that did not stop me from having fun. At home, in the same little apartment I have always lived in, I had set everything up so I can start getting ready

For my hair, since I had already impulsively cut my hair really short it was a lot easier to style. I went to the Dominican hair salon right down the block from my house on Ditmas Avenue, it was called The Aztetica Salon. There they had transformed my hair to be a bold dark black and straightened to a silk, my hair was so silky that it moved around freely like a feather. On my way home, I had already imagined how my makeup was going to make my features stand out. I started off by cleansing my face with an oat cleanser from Aveeno that I had purchased in CVS. I patted my face dry with a thick towel and gently applied moisturizer around my face to illuminate my face. Starting off with filling in my eyebrows to expand the shape and length of my natural brows. Then applying foundation and concealer to hide any blemishes and discoloration around my face and make everything smooth and even in skin tone. Lashes to enhance the curl of my natural lashes and lipstick to plump my lips from its natural state.

My dress was a deep burgundy that complimented my skin tone very well. A satin high waist mermaid dress that sunked into the waist and flared out more towards the bottom of the dress. There were a few ruffles at the bottom back of my dress that made it look a lot like a small train but barely dragged onto the floor. There were no straps on the dress therefore giving me a

bit less support around the bust. The cut on the top portion of the dress was straight and right under the bust was a 'belt' like appearance attached to the dress. On the left side of the skirt had a slit going up to my thigh, making it very breathable.

My overall experience with this dress was not the best, only because I felt as if I was very restricted. I could not move around how I wanted to because I was afraid that a part of my dress was going to expose me and slip out. The dress also made me feel a little uneasy as well. I had always struggled with my body image and this was the first time I have worn a tight fitting dress without shapewear underneath. However, it was a first step in overcoming my insecurities and stepping out of my comfort zone.

Chapter 9: Meeting him

At home, in the same little apartment I was waiting for him to pick me up. His name is, this was going to be the first time I have ever met him. I felt my stomach turn knobs just thinking about going on a date, I was nervous. It was a very hot summer day in June and I was inside my apartment sitting right by the AC because I can not stand being sweaty and sticky, especially if I am going on a date. My first actual date with a guy, we had decided to go to the movies to watch the new Anabelle that was coming out that year (2019). It was not a long train ride, we had to take the F train from Ditmas Avenue to 4th avenue 9th street and transfer to the R train and get off at Bay ridge.

Since it was a summer day and it was extremely hot there was no need to do my makeup. I did however, make sure to always have sunscreen. I lathered the product onto my skin evenly and waited for that to dry down before applying my moisturizer. I had curled my hair the night before to give it a more natural curl for the following day. It increased my hair more than it already was. The night before I had also shaved my legs because I knew I was wearing shorts. It left my skin smooth like butter. To enhance my skin's brightness some more I applied an even layer of moisturizer all over to make my skin glow when I am in the sun. You can not forget about your teeth on the first date. I made sure to reduce the smell and brighten my teeth with toothpaste and mouthwash, making my mouth smell fresh and clean.

It is just a casual date, nothing to fancy. My shorts were linen khaki paper bag shorts with a belt attached to them. The shorts reached my mid thigh which were not too short. They were very breathable and I was able to move around in them. For my top I had a basic cotton white crop top that had a square neckline, it hugged onto my body to accentuate my curves. As for shoes, I had a pair of pale white sandals from Aldo and my toe nails were painted the same color

as my sandals to match. I did not bother with accessorizing because I did not want to feel anything on my skin because of the heat.

The feeling of excitement took over my body and made me feel the most confident even if I was wearing a casual outfit, overall I was comfortable. What made things better was that he complimented my outfit as well, which I did not think he was going to do simply because I did not dress up. Since then I have been a lot more confident in wearing casual outfits and calling them date looks. Also since then he has been my boyfriend and it has been three years. To this day I have still worn this outfit every summer and it reminds me of our first ever date, making this outfit very special to us.

About the Author

My name is Guadalupe Soriano, I am currently a Senior at CUNY New York City College of Technology. I am the first generation Mexican-American to make it to college in my family. With that title I have honored everyone I love. I am doing this for my family to make them proud of who I am. Growing up in a small income family, we did not have a lot for clothing. My mom would shop for our clothing at thrift stores, discounted shops etc. I grew up always being grateful for what I had. My creativity was always there even with the simplest of clothing. I remember growing up and putting on fashion shows for my parents. I would wear big puffy skirts in the house just to watch Blues Clues. I would occasionally try on my mom's heels when she was not home and walk around the house in them, until I fell down and hurt my ankle. My love for fashion did drift away as I grew up. I started working and going to school at a young age making it difficult for me to dress up how I wanted to. To this day I still struggle with time and dressing up for myself. However, that has never stopped me from learning. With all the knowledge I have learned from college I am now able to put that into practice. One day I hope to become a well known designer. I am inspired to use my culture to express my work in clothing and its beauty.