

# A sound of silence

Having a small voice and a small body always made me feel inferior to everyone else. Speaking and conversing with words that never got through felt like I was screaming in silence. I often wondered when my scream would finally carry weight.

As the second child to my parents, I was expected to live under the shadow of my older sister and cousin, always to be looked down upon for the rest of my life. My father's constant comparisons between my sister and me felt unjust. He would give lectures on my posture repeatedly, demand I learn new languages, and assign me impossible tasks that were far beyond what a seven-year-old could manage.

At one point in my childhood, my father assigned me the task of overseeing his land and business in Veracruz, Mexico, for a month. He promised he would celebrate my birthday the same way he celebrated my older sister's. something I longed for. At just 12 years old, he sent me across the border alone.

When I landed, I faced with a problem, getting to my father's hometown. There was no ride waiting for me and no family member to pick me up. Frustrated and scared, I sat in the airport for an hour, flipping through the booklet my father had given me. Eventually, I found the number I recognized, one of his cousins. After I explained my situation, my uncle arrived about 40 minutes later.

My father called as soon as my uncle picked me up. He was surprise that I managed to find a solution, saying, "Knowing you, I thought you'd cry until there were no tears left." Before hanging up, he instructed me to register my name for the family's housing allowance in the city of Paraíso. I stayed silent and complied.

The car ride with my uncle was mostly quiet. He occasionally glanced at me, but nothing more. Halfway through the drive, we stopped to eat at a restaurant. When I got out of the car, I noticed him looking me up and down, almost as if he were examining me. I gave an eye exchange, I knew what he was doing.

At the restaurant, as we sat down, he gave me a sudden smile that caught me off guard. Sensing my confusion, he said, "I apologize your father told me not to talk to you to check your manners." Still confused, I replied, "I don't understand, Uncle." He chuckled and said, "You're just like your father, you never speak unless spoken to."

I responded, "That's how our house is raised. You should know you're part of it." He smiled sadly and said, "I'm not like YOUR family. You're just a kid for god sake Talk, smile, look around. It's like you're screaming in silence."

His words stuck with me. I wondered about his relationship with my father but chose not to ask. I quietly ate my food, looking out the window.

When we arrived in the city, I handed my paperwork and ID to the housing booth attendant. He glanced at my documents, and when he realized I was my father's daughter, he said, "Wow, out of all his daughters, you look the most like him."

For some reason, his comment infuriated me. I gave a tight-lipped smile and said, "Thank you." My uncle noticed my anger and asked why I was upset. I replied, "I have a name. I am not just my father's daughter. I may look like him, but I am most definitely not him."

My uncle seemed taken aback but also proud. As I walked toward my father's house, he called out, "You'll get lost you don't know where you're going!" But I did. My father's stories and lectures about the town had left a vivid map in my mind.

Walking through the city, I saw the red rock with painted animals where my father once played with his brothers. On the left was the small, unkempt baseball field where my grandfather taught my father to play. Step by step, I followed the landmarks my father had described.

When I finally arrived, I opened the door to see a massive wall covered in family photos. My sister's and cousin's portraits were obviously well kept in shiny frames, while mine was an old picture from when I was six.

My uncle walked in, out of breath, and saw me staring at the wall. He said, "You're one heck of a kid it took me years to learn the streets here." Then, noticing the wall, he quietly added, "I don't know what's going through your father's head anymore. We've barely heard about you over the years, but you're really something special....different from what I expected."

Hearing the word "special" brought tears to my eyes. My father had never used that word for me. I grabbed the booklet my father had given me with all the errands and tasks I was supposed to complete. Without hesitation, I threw it in the trash.

My uncle laughed. "Don't you need that?"

I turned to him and said, "I don't need a book to guide me. I don't need my father's praise. I have you, Uncle." His face lit up, and he hugged me. "You're such a rowdy kid with such small words," he said with a laugh.

Later, I learned why my uncle and father didn't speak. My uncle was gay, and my family had disowned him. During my stay, he helped me handle all my father's business tasks. Though I was still a child and didn't fully understand what I was doing, my uncle did most of the work for me. We promised not to tell my father.

When it was time to leave, my uncle dropped me off at the airport. I promised to call him, and as I boarded the plane, I let myself cry for the first time in a long time.

When I landed back in California, my father and sister picked me up. My sister was cheerful and asked about my trip, but my father said nothing. He grabbed my bag and walked ahead.

Frustrated, I stopped and yelled, "Father, are you really not going to say anything after a month? Not even 'good job' or 'are you okay'? Just silence?"

He grabbed my hand tightly and fumed, "I am your father, and it's my responsibility to make you independent. Your sister did the same at your age."

Shoving his hand away, I responded, "The only father I know is back in Mexico." He looked at me in disbelief but said nothing.

The car ride home was silent, except for my sister singing to the radio. For the first time, I stood up to my father, and his towering presence seemed to shrink. I realized I would never be the daughter he wanted, but I no longer cared. I wasn't going to take his bullshit anymore.