

THERESE OBESE:
WITHOUT KILOS, YES, THERE IS PARADISE

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“In the name you carry the penance”, once my mother said to me, who, by her own experience, she assured that the “Terasas” suffered a lot throughout their life. “To begin with, your name starts with a “T”, which symbolizes the cross of the martyrdom of Jesus, and you bear the name of the saint (Teresa of Jesus) who suffered tremendous illnesses while she lived. Of course, what you do not get is humility and religiosity.”

Whenever she repeated this sentence, I was horrified, because, indeed, my life has not been honey on flakes and neither have I had the nature of a martyr; rather, I have been considered a rebel without a cause.

Since I was born, my mother feared that I would die like my sister Margarita, who died being one-year-old due to gastrointestinal diseases and the lack of economic resources.

When she died and I was born, I occupied the fourth place in the list of the seven children procreated by Teresa and Serafin, migrants from the states of Hidalgo and Michoacan, respectively, established in the nascent Nezahualcoyotl City, “The City of Change”, as some politicians named this desolate municipality of the State of Mexico where the flowers and trees did not grow easily due to the excess of salt from their land, where the wind lifted the loose earth as well as the cardboard sheet roofs of the humble households.

As I said, my mother was afraid of losing the only baby girl that she had given birth, since her first three children were male and she wanted to have an ally, someone to talk to and who would accompany her the rest of her days. With the boys it was not the same, she could not trust them with intimacies like with a daughter. But Tere, was born a sickly baby girl, and during my first year of life, the visits to the hospital were frequent, either because of constant diarrhea or due to serious respiratory diseases.

When I turned three years old, my true martyrdom would begin. According to my mother, one afternoon when she was preparing the food for the family, I was furious because I was hungry and the oatmeal atole that she was cooking for my dinner, was not ready yet. Since she was ignoring me, I took advantage of an oversight of her, I took a small chair that my father bought to me, I put it near the stove, I climbed and pulled the pot where the atole was being cooked. When my mother heard my cry of pain, she discovered that a white, boiling liquid covered my body that made me scream as hard as my lungs allowed me to. She only managed to throw me a white sheet and ran out with me in her arms. She went towards the hospital Gabriel Mancera of IMSS, so they would take care of my burns that, fortunately, did not mark my face, just my left arm, and caused all my hair, eyebrows and eyelashes to fall off, that they grew back well some months after.

As a result of this incident, my mother discovered my love for food and how difficult it would be to control my appetite.

During my convalescence, someone took a picture of me among the plants and stones piled up in the backyard of my house, I looked like a girl of Biafra, bald, skinny and with a belly enlarged like the abandoned children of the African continent.

The rickets did not last long, because when I entered elementary school I started to show a round figure and to suffer from hot flashes due to excess weight and to a heart murmur which was detected in me by the doctors of the Health Center who visited the school frequently. Both, my teachers and the doctors advised my mother about the type of food which I should consume and which exercises I had to do in order to lose weight. It was very difficult for my mother, with the low expense that my father provided for the food for the week, to buy what was necessary to eat a balanced diet. Money was not enough, just to buy meat once a week, in the best of the occasions. The frequent dishes were rice, beans, potatoes and, of course, a good amount of tortillas (four

kilos a day). With so many children, the urgent thing was to fill them up more than to nurture them.

The exercise was not much problem, in that flat land of saltpeter, what we had more than enough, was plenty of space to play and run. Once, my father bought a used bicycle and gave it to me, happily I received it and rode it immediately. Later on, I organized a race with the children of my street that would bring me serious consequences. In the middle of the street there was a deep hole full of rainwater that I did not notice when I passed close to it with my bicycle. Without weighing up the consequences, I kept pedaling hard with the intention of winning the race against the other children, and when the hole appeared in front of me, it was too late. I fell inside even with the bicycle, the blow was brutal, I fainted and, luckily, I did not drown because my friends ran to tell to my parents about the accident.

My father pulled me out of the pit, soggy and smelly because the water that had stagnated for days, stunk horribly. They took me to the old doctor of the colony, who said that I had several bruises and a broken wrist. As if that was not enough, I got sick of the bronchi, I had recurring nightmares where I always saw myself covered with mud and with difficulty to breathe. Of course, my bicycle was destroyed, my mother never allowed it to be fixed; in fact, she sold it to the man who bought old iron.

At eight years of age, my mother enrolled me in the catechism. She recommended me not to eat much so that I could lose some weight and be able to wear the dress of first communion that my aunt Chelo would sew for me. Although the illusion was great, more was my appetite, and about wearing the dress became a dream that was not fulfilled.

When I found out that my father had another woman and that he had left our house to live with her, I thought that the abandonment was some divine punishment for not controlling my gluttony, one of the seven cardinal sins, as Father Pedro said, parish

priest of the church of my colony. Later, I realized that the real punishment was that he returned to the house due to the seventh pregnancy of my mother, who had found out that Lucia, her rival, was pregnant and had to act before the threat of losing her husband.

When my father returned, our tranquility was annihilated. He always shouted and demanded the attention of a king, he got angry about everything and argued over anything he did not like. Teresa, my mother, did honor to her name, she said that she had to put up with my father because it was the cross that God had imposed on her, because we needed our father at home and because it was her duty to keep him there at whatever price.

I did not approve her theory. Out of the economic necessity that he satisfied, his presence was not indispensable to me; moreover, it caused to me an excessive fear that I calmed down, frequently, with food. I used to assault the kitchen at night, which it was when my head made conjectures and caused me insomnia. At that time psychologists were not in fashion, so my problem with food continued to grow uncontrollably, and at fourteen I weighed ninety kilos. To think about a fifteen-year-old party was crazy, not only because of the lack of money, but because of how difficult it would be to lose weight to wear a nice dress and so that the honor chamberlains could carry me at the time of the waltz.

Like most teenagers, I dreamed about my fifteen-years-old birthday, with the party where I would be the center of attention and I would dance all the pieces of cumbia and salsa that I loved, with the handsome guys of the neighborhood, but my dream became a nightmare, because my cousin Malena was also going to be fifteen years old, just one month before me, and because of our rivalry she decided to celebrate her birthday on the same day as mine, and to invite Gerardo and all the guys that I liked, so they would be her chamberlains.

Her parents granted her the whim and I only had, for a party, a meal where the special dish was: fried green vegetables (*quelites*) with onions and a green sauce that my mother cooked for us to eat with uncle Fer, her brother, and my aunt Chelo, who brought as a gift to me a small Kodak 110 camera with which I would get started as a photographer.

The camera thing excited me a lot, but not enough to forget the desire that I had to enjoy a special dish. At night, my mind went over all the stews that I craved for, especially the green mole that my mother cooked masterfully when she had some extra money. As the saying goes “in the absence of bread the tortillas are good” and I settled for stealing from the kitchen cabinet a small jar of mayonnaise that I ate with the black beans that Mrs. Cata, my mother’s stepmother, brought to her in the afternoon.

On Monday after the party, during school recess, Malena proudly showed to her friends some of the gifts which her guests gave to her, including a beautiful purple and transparent blouse that I would not be able to wear it even in my dreams because of how tight it was; she also talked in detail about all the particulars of her party and how Gerardo declared to her and asked her to be his girlfriend. If any hope remained for me to be Gerardo’s girlfriend, it vanished forever, it was clear that we, the chubby ones, were not his weakness. As for me, I learned to compensate for my shortcomings or frustrations with food; in fact, the placidity that I felt after a binge was very similar to pleasure, a pleasure that disappeared at the moment that I noticed that my clothes were tighter on me each day and my figure looked rounder each time.

I suppose that the frustration of my father, for not having the courage to move in permanently with his other woman, kept him angry all the time. At night, I listened to him telling to my mother that he had only returned because she had had the bad timing of getting pregnant again, but that she did not satisfied him as a woman, although he recognized that she was a good wife, good

mother and good housewife, that he hated that day may 3, day of the Holy Cross, when he met her, because that day his bad luck had started.

Lucia, his lover, was a woman of regular figure, white, well dressed and, what he said about her, very hardworking and independent, not like my mother who only stretched out her hand to ask for money, according to his assessment, since he did not take into account the hardships that my mother had with the household chores, the constant hauling of water from one colony to another or of the pipe that supplied the colony when there was a shortage of vital liquid, dealing with the children and the daily struggle with the iron plates that had to be heated with charcoal in order to iron the clothes of any neighbor who requested, as well as with the laundry sink that rumbled with the rubbing of the dirty clothes from the whole family and her clients. I supported my mother with the delivery of clothes and, when I was already a teenager, I helped her perform those exhausting tasks that allowed us to cooperate with the family expenses.

I remember that, a few weeks before my first communion, I accompanied my mother to find her husband at his job, Hardware Store Coto and Company, located in the Candelaria de los Patos, around the route to La Merced. She asked him for money to buy the things necessary for the celebration and, although he gave it to us, he shouted at her face that she only knew how to stretch her hand, that she should start working as Lucia. I never thanked him for that money, much less, when he showed up at the house at mealtime to make the party bitter.

We were gathered, my mother, my grandmother Hilaria, my aunt Tana, my brothers, my uncles Consuelo and Fernando, and my cousins Fer and Paty, when he came in, saying: "The bitterness of the party has arrived. Tere, serve me something to eat, I am very hungry". Our smiles froze and, little by little, we left the table while my mother attended him.

I went out to play to the street. I ran like a crazy kid behind Fernando who made fun of me and who sang to me that song by Chava Flores that said: “when the moon becomes very big like a big ball and lights the alley”. Enraged, I chased him without reaching him, because one of his friends put his foot in front of me and I tripped over him. I fell on my stomach and hands and, when I got up, I discovered that my white gloves had a huge hole in the center and they were dyed red by the blood that dripped from the palms of my hands; also, my knees bled and my white dress was covered with mud.

I went into the house running, and my father reprimanded me in front of all my guests. Embarrassed, I retired to my room to cry bitterly, until I remembered that my mother had saved for me a piece of chicken with green mole, which I devoured without consideration until I calmed down.

Since I was a child, I had to endure people calling me all kind of nicknames: sow, pig, whale, ball, fat or chubby, as my brothers said to me out of “affection”.

At night, my little head spun and I thought that my name would not mark me that way, that I would not be submissive like my mother.

From that moment on, I committed myself to put all my effort in school to see if that way, one day, I could change my destiny. I had to work hard to pass the school subjects, since besides having little time to study, because of my job of unravel, that I performed in the sewing workshop of my neighbor Armando, I was not, as everybody says, very intelligent.

At sixteen years old, I managed to finish middle school despite the auguries of many people due to my rebelliousness and “bad head”. I obtained an eight average, enough to aspire to do my admission exam for the baccalaureate. I dreamed of entering the CCH of the UNAM and then studying a degree in “Ciudad

Universitaria”, although I was not very clear about what career I wanted to study.

When I told my father my desire to enter baccalaureate, he looked at me fiercely and told me that the women did not have to study to get married, that they only needed to know how to cook and be good in bed, and that he did not have money to pay for my whims.

In addition, my brother Emiliano was not worth the investment, since my father and my brothers Alfredo and Ricardo had paid for his career without any profit, because Emiliano got married before graduating and it would be his wife who would reap the fruits of his efforts.

As I insisted on studying, Emiliano advised me to do the exam, and said that if I managed to get into the CCH, he would support me with whatever was in his hands and would guide me about all the libraries that I could visit to get the books that I needed so I would not have to buy them all. His intention was good, but his commitments allowed him to help me little. His wife suffered a complicated pregnancy and delivery, and when their first child was born, my brother had a stroke that knocked him out for a long time, so Leticia, my sister-in-law, had to work to contribute to the expenses of the house while Emiliano was recovering.

Alfredo, my oldest brother, said he wanted to help me, but I soon realized that accepting his help would force me to serve him as a slave; like father like son.

As I was not willing to submit to anyone to study, I worked in all that I could to pay for school and give the expense that my father imposed on me if I wanted to continue living in his house. In addition to being a rebel, he accused me of having ideas of an uncouth woman, he meant it and he seemed convinced that I would fail in the attempt to finish a professional career.

I worked as a nanny, as a servant, as a worker, as an ironer, as a laundress, as a literacy worker for the INEA, as a seller of gelatins

and of any product that crossed my way, for example, Avon or Tupperware. In this job I did not do it so bad, the bad thing is that I had to go around the city carrying a huge suitcase with the products which I had to show among my hosts and potential buyers.

My overweight did not help me. I got tired easily with the shoes that I had to wear to be presentable and the pantyhose ended up breaking in the crotch because of so much walking. Once I arrived home very rubbed and bleeding, the pantyhose had ripped and when rubbing one leg against the other, it hurt my skin. To my bad luck, it was pay day and I could never get into a taxi because all of them were occupied. To top off my bad day, it rained heavily and I ended up as a soaked street dog. The only hope that I had of returning home soon and change clothes, was that Alfredo would take pity on me and would pick me up in his old car, in the Vicente Guerrero Unit, but my luck was not so good and that did not happen. When I phoned him to ask him for the favor, he argued that he had more important things to do and that I was not born in a car; so that if I was so self-sufficient, I should manage on my own.

The attempts for breaking me were constant and there was no mercy for the defiant sister and daughter.

Between job and job, I managed to finish the baccalaureate, not without complications, because when I was in the fifth semester, I got sick and, I lost a semester that I had to repeat.

By then, I was already suffering from high blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides. The confidence in my youth and strength, as well as the ignorance of the consequences of not taking care of myself, caused the problem of my heart to increase. Luckily, when I started college, I got a job at a bookstore-stationery in my neighborhood, my employers were vegetarians and good vibe people. They stung my self-esteem to encourage me to lose weight and eat healthy; as I turned out to be a good employee, they pampered me all the time that I worked for them. They supported

me by feeding me before I went to college and I learned to nourish myself in a different way.

For a while I managed to lose several kilos, but later, I gained them again because I was undisciplined and I had bad schedules. That time was when I started with diets and using miracle products that promised that I would lose weight and reduce sizes overnight without effort. It was the most regrettable and erroneous decision, because none of that worked and I only managed to gain weight because of the continuous rebounds due to the abandonment of the diets and those products that only depleted my pocket.

After finishing college, I was already working as a librarian in the new Library of Mexico in the Ciudadela and I got another job in the Communication Consultancy of Pronasol. It was the administration of Salinas de Gortari and I had the opportunity to organize the video-library of the Consultancy. With two jobs, my schedules got complicated and I ate whatever, at any hour hastily and in greater quantity due to the time of fasting I had during the day. My dream was to become independent, at last! of the yoke of my father and of my older brother. The confrontations with my relatives were more and more frequent, because they wanted to control my life and my income, a situation that I never allowed, but which cost me to be bad seen and rejected; however, I had to put all my effort in raising money and leave home.

The dream of becoming independent did not come true at that time, because Pili, my youngest sister, had finished high school and she wanted to study nursing. Also, on this occasion, my father refused to support her. I talked to Elena, my other sister, about my desire to help Pilar so she could study without complications. Elena agreed to help with the expenses of the career and, after four years, Pilar graduated. As she was a well-behaved and committed girl, I celebrated her, with the support of the friends and family members, who volunteered as sponsors, her fifteenth birthday. The

party was delicious and we still have the memory of how well we spent that day.

One weekend, after the fifteen-years-party, Pili was hit by a stray bullet when we were going to the stand of quesadillas of Mrs. Rosa, a neighbor of us. I just remember that my sister put her hands on her chest and collapsed. Those of us who accompanied her, only managed to cry and scream for help, until a neighbor offered to take us to the hospital. When we arrived at the Social Security Clinic, the doctors informed us what happened; besides the fright, we had to face interrogations from the authorities who considered the case as medical-legal. After the torture experienced at the Attorney General's Office, that was insisting that the girl point out her assailant, since they thought that it was a member of the family whom she was covering up, the doctor who attended her told us that the bullet, despite having entered the chest and staying close to the heart, it had not compromised any vital organ, therefore they would wait some time for it to be encapsulated and they could extract it without complications.

Pilar spent two months with her bullet in the chest and she was called the steel girl. The recriminations from the family were for me, who accused me of having coaxed her to accompany me to buy the quesadillas; they said that, because I was a glutton, I was the cause of that unfortunate accident.

Alfredo, my oldest brother, used to use blackmail a lot and the feeling of guilt on my person to make people obey him and achieve his goals. When my mother became ill she always said: "It is your fault that my mother got sick, for not obeying her and because you respond to her badly".

The truth is that I was a little rebellious, but not to the extent of making my mother sick. I did not let anyone take advantage of me, and that was a different thing; nevertheless, those accusations made a dent in me, and it took a long time for me to understand that it was not my fault, but of a drunken madman who wanted to

shoot bullets in the air to demonstrate his “manhood”, and of fate that wanted us to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Far from not being hungry for fear of losing my youngest sister, I became more compulsive with food, since it was a sedative for my anxiety. Fortunately, my sister was saved and we were able to continue with our lives, but the words of those who accused me were stuck in my memory and I thought that if it had not been because of my gluttony, that would not have happened.

It is said that God makes us and we get together, and apparently the saying is true. In the Library of Mexico, where I worked for almost fifteen years, I had two friends who shared with me the weakness for food and we used to get together to eat and fix the world, although it seemed that only on my body the fat accumulated.

Despite the excessive weight, I was always an active worker, and even with my bag of kilos and aches on my back, I wandered around the library solving the problems of the service and those that caused to me be the head of eighty workers who formed the staff of the Department of Public Services for which I was responsible for seven years.

Although I was a responsible worker, who gave results, my boss felt seriously conflicted that his collaborator did not look spectacular and well dressed, according to what he considered an important position. Regularly I wore wide and long skirts and blouses that concealed my huge figure; black or gray were my favorite colors, because, according to me, they helped disguise my weight.

Miguel Garcia, the deputy director of the Library of Mexico, made constant insinuations to me about my looks and he tried to keep me away from him when a personality visited the library, it was like an annoying stain on his record. I attributed to my problem of obesity and to my singleness, the strength of my character and convictions, I considered that I was severe and that I surely hated

women with nice figure, with an exemplary husband or boyfriend and with enviable families that I could never aspire to, because I did not have the physical attributes to get them.

He liked to help women of fragile appearance who talked to him about real or fictitious problems that allowed them to obtain favors of labor concessions which were denied to me, since having a big figure, I seemed strong and healthy, so I could not complain nor be absent for sickness.

Definitely, my appearance did not favor me, since not only my boss made a mockery of my obesity, but the whole world baptized me with any nickname and criticized my figure.

Without taking it personal what was being talked behind my back, I tried to fulfill my work responsibility as best as possible, until I started to have more severe health problems. My menstruation became more painful than usual and I began to have more separated periods from one another, with intervals of up to six months. The worst was when the bleeding appeared, because I had to take medications to calm my ovarian pain and to stabilize my mood. Over the time I suffered hemorrhages and the pain increased until it became unbearable, it was when I decided to visit the gynecologist so he would diagnose and treat me, because that was not normal.

After routine studies, the doctor recommended removing the womb, but not before making me notice my lack of children and how difficult it is to be old without them, that is why he recommended me to think about things before deciding about the surgery. I thought to myself that this was a matter of health and not of preferences, so I consulted another doctor to get a second opinion.

Dr. Lopez, gynecologist and colposcopist, asked for other studies, including tumor indicators, because he already suspected a major problem. Luck played unfair to me again and I had a heavy hemorrhage that resulted in my hospitalization and I had a dilation

and curettage performed, which was also used to study and redefine the problem.

Dr. Lopez and I met at his office to talk; I never imagined the seriousness of the problem. I began to suspect it when, on the day of the appointment, Pilar, Elena and Ricardo went to pick me up to the library to take me to the doctor. That meeting of siblings was not normal and much less on a business day. I asked them to show me the results of the studies and they told me that the doctor had them, that he would be the one who would give them to me and explain them.

When we arrived at the doctor's office, Ricardo did not want to go in, Pilar and Elena accompanied me. Juanita, the nurse, let us go in. After a while, Dr. Lopez appeared with the envelope of my studies in his hands. He joked a little with us before showing a face of circumstance. I was really alarmed and asked him to come to the point. With a little detour, he began to explain the problem to me until the word cancer appeared on his lips; my sisters began to cry and hugged me.

The news knocked me out and, while trying to clear my mind, the doctor commented that an important factor for the development of endometrial cancer was obesity; once again, my fatness was a heavy reason to mortify me.

It was not enough to endure the destructive criticism that a bulky body provokes or the embarrassment of breaking the chair in a restaurant in front of half the world or dealing with the drivers of the public transport who at all cost want to fit the passengers like sardines, without considering the chubby people who with difficulty fit into seats designed for thin people, and also the fact of trying on clothes in a department store where sizes, plus and extra, do not manage to adjust to the volume. That must be a bad taste joke in order to scare me and force me to lose weight.

The doctor noticed that my mind wandered and brought me to reality by explaining to me the possible treatment and the

urgent need to schedule an appointment with the oncologist of the ISSSTE. Pilar had gone ahead, and that step was already done. Starting the following Monday, I would begin my relationship with the Hospital “20 de Noviembre”, where I have been treated since 2001. When we left the doctor’s office, the doctor said goodbye to us with a strong handshake, a supportive hug and a recommendation: “Cry all you want this weekend, and from Monday on, put all your effort to it”. Why wait until Monday? I had to avoid my mother suffering even more by hearing the news, since she was diabetic and her health could complicate, so we had to take action on the matter.

After leaving the clinic, Pilar told me that Emiliano was waiting for us to eat and that we would go to his house to talk. Along the way I did not know what attitude to have, I was distressed to worry others unnecessarily and I only commented that I was starving, if they could speed up the car so we could arrive soon.

Once at Emiliano’s house, I joked about my wish that this would not be my last dinner, because from the things that I liked about life, food was my favorite, so I would enjoy what Emiliano had cooked and we would turn the conversation so as not to embitter anyone’s afternoon.

At night, we went back home. My mother was waiting for me, she did not talk much, she hugged me tightly and asked me to add value to the matter, because I still had a lot to live.

My father showed a funeral face and questioned himself the reason for the illness and if this or that was the cause of the misfortune, perhaps some divine punishment; he never approached me to hug me or comfort me, which I greatly appreciated because I could not stand it coming from him, who all the time had set his foot in front of me so I would fall. Alfredo did not say anything or I can not remember. After the first weekend, everything was: going back and forth to the hospital. It was a year of tension, three surgeries, radiations and chemotherapy until the

tumor gave in, and Dr. Rosas, an oncologist at the Hospital “20 de Noviembre”, gave me the good news. I had overcome the disease, and from then on I had at least eight years of follow-up and control, but it was vital to lose weight, because my breasts were in danger and I had to lower on fats.

After the shock, three months after the trance was overcome, I faced to another major one, severe depression. Fear and anguish took over my life and incapacitated me for enjoyment, joy and to carry out my working activities. What I had learned until then, evaporated, I could not solve the everyday activities without having to work at a thousand percent. What I once enjoyed had lost its meaning. My family life got complicated, I entered into an absolute isolation where only sleeping and eating allowed me to mitigate the pain, the sadness and the loneliness. Eating, I felt accompanied and comforted, it was like hugging myself wrapped in the arms of a good steak, some French fries or a cake. The depressed patients live in the midst of sadness and incomprehension even if they are surrounded by people who love them well. One does not understand what is happening to them and they suffer as a condemned person.

All of a sudden, my life took a turn of one hundred and eighty degrees. I did not recognize myself, the person who inhabited my body was not me, I felt overwhelmed by my condition, I weight even more because of eating at all hours; I spent the days in front of the TV trying to calm down my anguish and anxiety.

I was always fearful that something bad would happen, I was mortified to know that my obesity produced a very great discomfort in my sister Elena, my huge figure made her sleepless and embarrassed her. She used to get very angry because she said that I annoyed her children with my demands of asking them to bring me objects that were not within my reach. What she did not understand was that it was a martyrdom for me to move towards

them, I got tired, I suffocated and I almost had a heart attack by the effort made.

The armchair in the living-room where I spent long hours “lying like a big cow”, in the words of Alfredo, threatened to collapse at the slightest provocation. There was no chair armchair or bed that could hold me anymore. Once, one of the bars of the base of my bed, broke, and we had to weld it and reinforce it so it would resist.

My feet would not hold me anymore, even less when I broke my left foot when I slipped in a florist shop.

My festive and cheerful nature, like that of almost all the chubby people that seem to compensate people with their enthusiasm for accepting their involuntary defect, vanished giving way to bitterness. I was not the funny chubby girl anymore, and my mood was very down. Now, I was the lazy one that spent the day lying doing nothing, just eating and sleeping. Sleeping kept me safe, I did not have to face my reality: getting up, going out on the street, walking, working and struggling with transport in which every time it was harder for me to move. There were many times when I spent part of my salary to board a taxi to avoid facing the small seat of the microbus or the subway, or its narrow corridors designed for thin people and where my enormous anatomy had no place, and in order to lighten the burden of my tired feet and escape the glances and morbid comments that a voluminous body causes.

I was desperate. I had to make drastic decisions and improve my physical condition and, therefore, the emotional one. I asked my sister Pili for help, I was honest with her and I suggested, despite the difficulty to express my feelings, how difficult it was for me to continue in that situation. The idea of suicide never crossed my mind, but it was difficult for me to live. Desolation flooded my soul and I would have been grateful, at that time, if someone or something would have truncated my existence, but as they say that

God does not fulfill cravings nor straighten up humps, my life continued its course.

I resigned from the Library of Mexico. I did not have, by my bosses, the moral support to my condition and I preferred to retire before overthrowing the prestige gained during almost fifteen years of service. A mismanagement in my job would have ruined my good reputation as an employee and that was the only glory I enjoyed. Buzzards roamed my place and had already placed crowns on my head, only the epitaph was missing. My boss Miguel was looking for a replacement, assuming that I was going to die. When I heard about his intention, I decided that I would retire when it was opportune and that I would die when it was my time, not when he wanted me to. A bit of rebellion still peeped into me, although, to tell the truth, I had no intention of fighting for any position. I retired voluntarily with the program promoted by the government of Vicente Fox, which allowed me to survive while I did not work.

Pilar paid for me a facultative insurance to enter the Metabolic Unit of the Specialities Hospital of the Medical Center La Raza of IMSS; there, I had studies carried out to find out the reason of my overflowing obesity. I was hospitalized for eighteen days, in which I lost eight kilos and that I recovered later. I was kept with a rigorous and supervised diet, I had psychological and psychiatric support to treat depression. Despite my reluctance to use antidepressants and anxiolytics, for fear of dependency, I had to accept the treatment. The psychiatrist convinced me of its benefits to overcome the problem; after all, a brain chemistry problem would have to be attacked with chemicals. At the end of my imprisonment, I was diagnosed with severe depression, cholesterol, triglycerides and high uric acid; diabetes mellitus and morbid obesity grade 3. Everything seemed against me, but a light appeared in my life when the drugs began their effect and I began to think positively and with greater clarity.

In January 2004, my brother Emiliano informed me that in the “Faro de Oriente”, a cultural center dependent on the Ministry of Culture of Mexico City, they requested a librarian to organize the library. Without much encouragement I had a meeting with Agustin Estrada, coordinator of the Cultural Services, who would later be my boss. He told me about the benefits of the “Faro” and the importance that it had for the community of the east side of Mexico City. I accepted the position. The job, the new colleagues, the medication and the challenge to organize what in the eyes of others was just a store of books that nobody read, they all were a good antidote to depression.

During that time, I was recovering emotionally. The children, the housewives and the young people who visited the library, they renovated, with their joy and enthusiasm, my strength to resist the world; however, obesity remained being one of the main obstacles in my development. My one hundred and forty kilos were like a prison in which I was serving a sentence of more than twenty years. During that time, the fat was accumulated around my body until I made it lose its harmony and proportion and the possibility of movement.

In March 2006, I had the misfortune to fracture my left foot, which kept me incapacitated for two months, time during which I was able to reflect again on my situation. Today it had been a foot, tomorrow I could have broken my hip or spine and my recovery would be more painful due to weight, without considering the difficulty that not just me, but someone else, would be able to move me. I did not fit in the standard wheelchair, so I had to buy a special one, well reinforced! The idea of returning to the hospital in those conditions, terrified me, because I considered that the stretchers were not so strong to support me, the band of the baumanometer did not manage to turn around in my arm and it became difficult to measure my blood pressure; the potty sank in

the mattress because of my weight and it overturned the urine on the bed. I came to imagine my funeral. How would they manage to carry my coffin? I could see myself transported by a crane or something similar.

Once the cast was removed from my leg, the rehabilitation came, but it was not enough to get me back to normal. My foot swelled everyday, it hurt a lot and there was no shoe that would fit me. The difficulty to walk increased, I had to lean on a cane to walk and the image was not pleasant. The orthopedist insisted me to lose weight, only that way I would be able to walk well again.

Since I was a child I noticed that I used to fall frequently, I had always my knees and hands scraped, I thought that I used to fall because of being distracted or accelerated, all the time I was running from one place to another. The otolaryngologist told me that my problem could be due to the deafness in my left ear, coupled with obesity that contributed to my losing my balance. Definitely, the picture was discouraging. If I was not ready to leave this world, I should take action on the matter.

In the middle of 2006, I found out about a surgical method to lose weight that was practiced in several private hospitals and at the Manuel Gea Gonzalez Hospital of the Ministry of Health. I directed my steps towards there, since I could not even think in a particular hospital because the surgery was very expensive.

I registered at the Gea Gonzalez Obesity Clinic and, after six months of studies, consultations, therapies and assessments, I underwent a gastric *bypass*, a surgery that reduces the stomach and allows the patient to satisfy the appetite with little food. This technique is indicated as very effective; however, it involves a larger procedure with stapling and connections of the intestine by laparoscopic approach. The patient selected for surgery belongs to a group of people who have taken and tried everything and have

not been able to lose weight, so the *bypass* becomes their only alternative.

When I informed the family of my decision, there were conflicting opinions: those who bet with me on this method as my only solution and the detractors who claimed that it was not necessary, that it was enough for me to have the will power to diet, that I could die in the surgery, come out worse and other “good” wishes. You never give people their way; when you decide to change your life, they manage to make you stay the same. But there was a comment from Elena that inspired me to decide: “I prefer that you die on the surgery than continue fat and sitting in your armchair doing nothing”. My heart gave me a rollover, but after the shock I realized that she was right. My world was not that armchair, there was something outside of it, on the street, in other cities, in other countries, with other people, and I had to know it. I could not vegetate for the rest of my life. I liked going out, and traveling really thrilled me, but in my condition, I did not even dream about it. So the *bypass* was the solution.

Although the situation terrified me at the beginning, I had to resolve my existence and take drastic measures. I knew that the surgery to counteract obesity had its risks, but after all, what could I lose? If they were not kilos, it would be life and that, I could lose it at any time if I did not lose weight. The surgeon argued that a heart attack, an embolism or a sudden death could get me out of the play; the probability of success of the surgery was of ninety-nine percent and, with discipline and control, I would achieve the goal and have a better quality of life.

The decision was made and the doctors scheduled my surgery for March 28. On the appointed day, Pili accompanied me to the hospitalization and the responsibility for the intervention fell on her shoulders. My parents ignored the plan, because they are elderly people who should be spared mortifications.

At eight o'clock sharp, a stretcher-bearer picked me up in the room to move me to the operating room. The surgeons, nurses and anesthetists were already waiting for me; the last ones suffered when they put the *raquia* on me for the blockade, they assured that they did not locate any vertebrae on my sturdy back. They totally bent me and a young and daring doctor managed to inject me quickly. After that, they laid me down and prepared me for general anesthesia. They asked me to count from ten to one and I only remember counting to seven. When I woke up, it was eight o'clock at night. I found out that the surgery lasted six hours and that it had been open; the condition of my belly did not allow a laparoscopic intervention; the previous surgeries had left scars and deep adhesions and radiotherapy hardened the tissues, which impeded working with the camera, so they opened me horizontally.

I spent fourteen hours on an uncomfortable stretcher, which almost break my back, in the recovery room and, later, they moved me to my room. It was already midnight and I had a headache; when I touched my head, I felt a bump. I assumed that the stretcher-bearers had hit me when they moved me from the bed of the operating room to the stretcher. The doctors did not accept my hypothesis and diverted the attention to another topic, but I knew that the stretcher-bearers were not, precisely, an example of strength and delicacy. They commented that the extra hours in the recovery room were due to the breakdown of the special elevator for patients and that they could not move me through the one of general use. They told me that at sunrise, I should get up to bathe and walk, because that would favor recovery.

My discomfort was infinite, I was swollen, full of probes and I could hardly move because of the pain; however, I obeyed and resisted stoically. Pili bathed me, dried me up and sprinkled me with talc like a baby. We awaited the visit of the doctors to receive instructions. They ordered five days of fasting until my condition be assessed. They had to carry out a study called "el trago" (*the gulp*),

with which it is verified that the stomach is able to receive liquids without having leaks; it is as if the plumber checks the plumbing in your bathroom.

On the fifth day they authorized my medical discharge and the change of diet, now I would consume mushes without salt or condiments for fifteen days. Pilar and I left towards the house hoping that following the indications everything would go well, but my luck was not so good.

On the third day, the staples that held the wound came off and left it exposed. My belly sported a reddish and bloody hole from which drained a yellowish liquid similar to oil for cooking. My mood collapsed. The illusion of a quick recovery evaporated and I had to endure new fasting, healings at bright red to avoid infection and morning vision, during bath, of my open wound. They could not close again until it stopped draining.

After a month they had to sew me again, this time with thread instead of staples and by four hands, like in a piano concert. One of the doctors was less skilled at sewing and he left the half in which he worked on, wrinkled and bumpy; however, I appreciated that they decided to close me, because the looks improved and my mood too. After that, the recovery was less dramatic.

In the third month, I rejoined to my activities in the Library del Faro. I was eighteen kilos less and I had more mobility. Little by little the months have passed by and I have lost, to date, seventy kilos. My other self, vanished.

For more than two years my emotional stability wobbled. It is hard to recognize yourself in a new body and assimilate the changes. It is complicated, because it is a stomach surgery, not a brain surgery, so then you want to eat like before surgery, but after surgery, you can not eat the huge amounts of food that you were used to. If you try, you get stagnation in the stomach, pain in the

chest, as if you had an apple stuck, nausea and vomit, and frustration at not being able to eat with the same voracity.

I had to educate myself, eat slowly, to chew the food certain number of times to swallow it well and not to provoke a return to the hospital.

During the five years that have passed since my surgery, I have received all kinds of medical and psychological support to overcome the disease; I have observed with certain sadness that many people see me and treat me differently. It surprises me and frightens, the importance that the physical appearance plays in treating people, in lavishing affection, in the achievement of labor and social objectives.

People, as it seems, admires you for having the courage to leave the world of extra sizes, plus or ultra. However, not everyone approves the decision that I made, even some relatives consider that “it is not a merit to lose weight through surgery”, they consider it unnatural and dangerous. I can not understand them, because they always criticized me for being fat and now that I have lost weight they also criticize me; although, to tell the truth, it is what matters the least to me. The gaining has been enormous despite all the setbacks that I have experienced and how difficult it has been to discipline myself, because although surgery is a huge help during the first year after it, one must follow a diet for life, re-educate and continue with nutritional and psychological control, since obesity is a disease that is controlled like any other one of addictive type, whether it is drug addiction, smoking or alcoholism. Every day, one must avoid falling into temptation: “Just for today”, as the anonymous alcoholics say.

As I mentioned it, the gaining has been enormous. Glucose, high blood pressure, triglycerides and cholesterol went down to the extent that the internist withdrew the medications that I took to control those conditions. I became more agile corporally and I enjoy again many things that I used to like and of which I deprived myself

for many years: I have ridden a horse without the animal bending when feeling my weight, I have ridden my bicycle in the streets of my neighborhood and other cities which I had the opportunity to get to know, I have danced without my heart threatening to run wild for the effort made; my feet sustain me for many hours without having to lean on a cane, even though my left leg never fully recovered after the fracture, a sprain and the calcaneal spur that formed in my left heel; I go through everywhere without fear of getting stuck or demolish something along my way.

Even though I am not a tuberoso wand, my appearance is of a normal person and my mood improved remarkably, which has allowed me to take on new challenge, such as going to try my luck to the United States working as a nanny, as an archivist and as anything that I could.

The work experience was a bit complicated. My employers, Venezuelan Jews, asylum-seekers in “gringoland” (*United States*) because of their bad relationship with the sadly famous Hugo Chavez, were looking for a submissive person and, as a good Mexican, that would bite the rebozo when spoken to. At least that was the idea that they had of us Mexicans. They never complained about my work, but they did not like that I wanted to learn things. I had to limit myself to what they indicated me, but I had the need to know.

Even with all these, I lived for two years in the city of Miami thanks to the cheers from my cousin Fernando, the one with whom I fought in other times, and from Cony, his wife. They have been living there for ten years, and life has not been easy for them either, since their illegal status has made it difficult for them to stay in that country; however, they have a goal to fulfill before returning to Mexico.

In those lands I discovered something that I had not noticed before: my frequent bronchitis, once or twice a year, had stopped. My friend Miriam, a practitioner of yoga and naturism, was sure

that I suffered from the respiratory tract due to the sadness that accompanied me forever. I do not know it for sure, but the sure thing is that I did not have them anymore.

Three things made me return to Mexico: having fallen in love with the wrong person; the fright that the sea gave me when a current pulled me and I was about to drown, if it was not for two men who launched to rescue me and who assure that in those waters have died expert people, but confident; and the nostalgia that caused me to be away from my mother, who died last year after thirty-six years of dealing with diabetes and seven years with depression. Her death taught me as much as her life.

Teresa, my mother, was a working woman, a fighter, a warrior in every sense of the word, especially when it was about defending her puppies and her salty land; however, when she became depressed, she lost the meaning of life and sat down to wait for death. There were no medications or affections that could manage to get her afloat. In her last months of life, she told me several times that the cross of the Teresas was to always suffer, that please, I should not let myself to overcome by the stigma of my name, to forgive my father and to support him in his old age.

Now, a year after her leaving and despite questioning about the stigma, I confirm my votes so as not to let myself be defeated, neither by my name nor by my illness, “the malignant obesity”. I am still under medical supervision and, so far, there have been no complications related to the *bypass* and I have managed to maintain myself in a reasonable weight.

My visits to the Gea Gonzalez Hospital are less frequent, but every time that I go and I see the seats of the obesity clinic full of patients, mainly women, who are struggling to get rid of their extra kilos, I am invaded with a great sadness and a deep desire hoping for them to achieve their goal so they can “live” again.

When I returned to Mexico I was fortunate that Agustin Estrada re-offered me a job in the Library del Faro, the one that I

made, when I was “feeling miserable”, and in which I have been to date.

Obesity, divine punishment, as my detractors say, gradually obstructed me from carrying out all my daily activities in a normal way. The disease caused contradictory feelings and desolation. I tried to lead a “normal” life, but anyone was aware of the difficulty of dealing with the weight and the unhealthy and destructive criticism. Now, after much work and discipline, I have taken the reins of my life and I try to enjoy each of the days that have been granted to me after so many trials.

I am a little apprehensive and that also influenced so that I would have two facial paralyses, one when I was eighteen years old and the last one, three years ago; nevertheless, I have learned to control better my emotions.

What still worries me a little, but only a little, is that my father and my brother Alfredo have not overcome my rebelliousness and, therefore, we do not have a good relation. My sister Elena does not forgive me either for going to Miami to try my luck and follow my path, but, in time and a little hook, she will recognize, maybe, that I am not longer Therese Obese (*Teresa Obesa*), as she named me, and that my feet have a lot to walk before allowing an armchair to bury me.