

The art of life.
A biography painted with the mouth

Érika Eloísa Chaidez López

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INDEX

1. Lili's birthday and her present...
2. The journey was her destiny...
3. El Aguajito welcomes the family again...
4. Lidia is still alive (at the hospital in Culiacan) ...
5. The creek house where she was born...
6. The trip to San Francisco and the return to El Aguajito...
7. The trip to Los Mochis, her true home...
8. Mom left...
9. An interior landscape from the university to the little house in Los Mochis...
10. The work project ...
11. Lucrecia: her new support...
12. And after 1999... a conclusion with the mouth and heart...
13. The beginnings of the school of painters with the mouth: the first workshop...
14. An ending that continues in creation and colors of the soul...

1. LILI'S BIRTHDAY AND HER PRESENT

It was March 14, 1983 during the morning, thirteenth birthday of Lidia de Jesus; her friends called her Lili. Very early, accompanied by her eleven-year-old sister, she went downtown to look for her gift. They stopped at a corner. Eliana stood in front of her, who looked happy; she observed her face against the light which showed the brightness of her neat skin, in ecstasy with the sun of silk, rosy. Her look had a sublime shine of satisfaction, and at that moment she manifested a characteristic feature that would distinguish her for all her life: determination.

Eliana's face, throbbing, alienated, with her neck extended by the difference in height, was a fleeting moment that would linger in her memory, the only previous one, always remembered before the disaster. Although the years passed without truce, she would never forget that moment, that figure, the body of her sister held with natural and ordinary strength, in a color photograph which fogged with the passage of time, as if covered with dust. From time to time it would emerge and then she would shake it in her mind and become fresh, almost recently captured. She compared it with the current Lili in order to realize the insurmountable feeling, without changes. She was certainly the same... She only longed to see her sister standing.

For a moment the noise from the street dimmed, everyone continued their way, oblivious, she was the only one there, owner of herself. There was no fear in her expression... or maybe she still had not tripped over it, it seemed like nothing would make her give up.

She saved for six months to buy the miniskirt dress with white and blue stripes and circles; she attracted the attention because of how short it was, and her perfect and shapely legs which stood out. She was already beginning to arouse the morbid curiosity of some more than indiscreet male looks. Her well-developed body when she turned thirteen was unusual for girls of that age; tall, perhaps contrasted with the childish curls, the sweet look entering puberty and her kindly honey-colored eyes.

She wandered the downtown streets several days, crowded with hasty workers and stunned shoppers at every sidewalk stall on her way to high school, planning her birthday present herself. She decided to buy that cotton dress; so she celebrated early in the morning. She arrived at her house where a cake, fresh water, her mom, siblings, and several friends who lived on the same street were waiting for her. On the wooden table with a blue tablecloth were presents, party hats, streamers and blow-outs; her face lit up. She blew out the

candles on the cake but not before making a wish, a big one that made her very happy: to go visit Manina for Easter holidays, which were already very close. She tried very hard that day to get her mother to accept it, insisting until annoying her, and she didn't succeed, because Olivia, her mother, never liked the idea of vacationing during that period because of the number of people traveling, accidents on the road, and not only that, because of the religiosity with which she took the passion of the crucified Christ, she thought it was a time of respect and peace.

Olivia was a young, attractive woman, who didn't show signs of six natural childbirths and a life of work that made her experienced, determined and capable in everything necessary for existence. One could feel the air of confidence she left in the ambience. In a daily struggle she forced Manuel, her husband, to take care of the expenses; her effort was evident when working with him being able to save the daily expense, without him noticing. There was a natural impetus from her strength that could be heard breathing in the particles of oxygen in that house made of brick and concrete in the corner walls, tied with annealed wire to the roof of beams and black sheeting, so fragile, that a hurricane that took place a year later blew it away, like a vulture taking off with its wings open, glittering with every flash of lightning.

Olivia would then grab Lili, wrapping her frail arms around her neck, her helpless body hanging from her back like a beetle, dragging her scrawny, long, bare feet. Eliana propped up the slippery body with her shoulders, which the wind tried to snatch away with storms that looked like scratchy and hurtful loops. They walked ten meters and on the same steps they returned, the water hurt them up to their knees when they reached the shelter of Doña Tere, who was giving shelter that stormy night of Cyclone Lydia, whose name was perhaps the conclusion of what she herself would live, an accident like a hurricane, which took everything in its path.

It was never seen again where the roof stopped its flight. It was searched for without desire, because it is well known that the things carried away by the hurricane disappear, they go far away, to some tree, they are carried away by the torrent that passes through the plots, grown and muddy, dividing and eating them away, taking the earth who knows where, making the weary stream that had found its course before measuring the land bigger and bigger and more abundant.

Or maybe it was possible that it had stopped in another house that needed a roof, that's what Eliana thought with her fortune-teller imagination, inherited from family mixtures with similar gifts, but none like that one. Her great-grandmother, grandmother, mother and then her, played with magical creatures and children who were not from this world; she dominated them and

fearlessly told her mother that they wandered around the house playing pranks.

Certainly, she was right about everything. Adults began to believe her as soon as she began to talk, she would tell pregnant women the sex of the product in their belly, she also guessed when would it rain, if it would flood, if a hurricane was coming or if a major accident was approaching.

It happened when Olivia was about to get on a bus. She told her not to do so, because it was going to split in two and burn. She knew she was right, she believed her five-year-old daughter. To her good fortune, and the misfortune of others, it was like that.

Eliana had the gift of prediction. For this reason her character was tough, leader, always attached to her mother by the pants, or by the waist, depending on how she was growing up. When visitors arrived, she would stand at one side of the chair, like a little English soldier on guard, without moving, attentive to any gesture from her mother to follow instructions, which she received with just a movement of eyes, each one with a different meaning. She knew them all, had respect for them and always obeyed or, if not, punishment, which she often carried out with a piece of hose that left welts across her leg that took a week to disappear.

Just as she was able to predict the cyclone, Eliana sensed that something inevitable was going to change their lives. In her mind the image of an accident persisted, of something strange that could not be explained. In her family there had never been a tragedy, everything was normal. She went over it many times in her mind, because she dreaded the mere fact of having in her head the difference between today and what could be. She was afraid to reveal the omens. For the first time she judged and analyzed what came to torture her often, for the first time she was incredulous without knowing that she was reasoning to her own natural instinct she denied. She was a girl.

Lili insisted Olivia to the point of exhaustion, to visit her Manina at Easter. With enormous lack of conviction, she finally agreed.

In those days Manuel, her husband, was away. He was going around the mountains selling his concoctions that he prepared for rheumatic pains, made with oil from light transformers, which was very cheap because it's disposable. He bought it by the liter. Those who sold it to him scratched their heads thinking: "What will this oil be useful for?"; they were always left in doubt. He also sometimes used lilac oil. In a twenty-liter can, he mixed it with branches and roots of matanene – a medicinal herb that grew in those places and that he cut on the banks of the irrigation canals on the outskirts of Culiacan –, with other herbs for rheumatism, camphor and menthol for the smell and penetration in the muscles, and salicylate for pain relief. He boiled it

all and then strained it into glass bottles which allowed to see the viscous and blackish color, but the most offensive thing was undoubtedly the smell. If someone dared to inhale it, that person would be in danger of it going to his or her temples until fainting. For this reason, Manuel, with his merchants skills, gave very precise instructions on his glued and typewritten labels, such as: not to smell the product closely and not to bathe for twenty-four hours, due to the penetrating heat that lingered when applied to the skin. Because of the stench they had during that time, no one ventured to approach within three meters of the smeared person, but it was worth it, just to be cured of their ailments. In another version of the same mixture, he prepared ointments containing, instead of transformer oil or lilac oil, candle wax, because was cheaper, and only a pinch of petroleum jelly. Not by chance, with so much heat applied, people felt relief from their ailments. The “matanene” was wonderful.

They had no alternatives other than herbs and potions made by healers in those invisible places high in the sierra of Sinaloa and Chihuahua. Manuel traveled in streetcars: Thornton trucks with seats embedded in the platform, without walls, with roofs lined with tarpaulin, slow as turtles. The hours to reach the most remote villages were endless, without escaping assaults for being ravine roads, broken. He even created, out of necessity, his satchels hidden in his belt to keep as much money as he could. He left little in sight in order to confuse the gunmen that suddenly came out from the pines. Who knows how they came down the slopes of the hills, like mandrills hanging from the bushes, jumping over the rocks at great speed until they reached the dirt road. For that reason he took a long time to return home; sometimes he didn't hear from his family for months.

Vacations finally started. Olivia and her children took the bus from Culiacan to Los Mochis, then another bus to visit her Manina. Four hours later they were walking along the entrance road to San Juan Bautista de Cochorime, El Aguajito, an ejido that was only five kilometers from the estuary, which itself was kilometers long, until it reached the mouth of the river where the white sand dunes of the beach began.

At that hour the town was almost deserted. The waves of saltpeter were causing the ocher taste on their lips, which were beginning to dry out. The loose soil chased their heels and shins, leaving them chammy, sticky between sweat and salt. At every moment the sensation of the sun, heavy, dazzled their vision which they kept fixed on the end of the crossing. They stumbled over the protruding stones of the street glistening with steam at two o'clock in the afternoon. Some aguajiteños watched them with curiosity and pleasure, sheltering under the mango trees. Hortensia, the Tencha, their grandmother whom all the grandchildren called Manina out of habit, Olivia's mother,

watched them from afar, before turning the corner, and then came out to meet them at the entrance of the plot. She saw them kicking up dust at every step. She was no longer expecting them, she thought they would not come. The dogs came out too, but only as far as the shade of the lying tamarind allowed them to step on the cool ground. They stayed waiting, wagging their tails from side to side. They followed them cutting their way off until they came to embrace their Manina, who was standing on the roof of the entrance, on one side of the awning, with curly hair, bright sparkling eyes, a flat nose, all full of freckles and colorful moles. She had strong hands and character, aggressive, controlling. She knew how to create dependence, was the figure that surrounded the family, abhorrence and adhesion, she awakened hidden and opposing feelings. Her image oscillated between witch and sorceress, between glory and chimera; some respected her, others were afraid of her, but for Lili and her siblings she was their beloved Manina, who gave them brewed coffee and freshly milked milk every morning, with molletes and empanadas filled with piloncillo sweet and pumpkin. She got up at five o'clock to light the firewood in the brick oven, which had been well preserved in the front yard for more than thirty years. She kneaded large quantities of wheat and corn flour for empanadas, molletes and coricos. A metate allowed her to do the whole job, grinding the piloncillo to fill the empanadas.

Among other things, she was dedicated to curing empacho, lifting the head and rubbing the tummy with olive or food oil, or whatever was available. People came to her house looking for her because they had had a scare and, since then, they couldn't eat well or with serious symptoms, because they vomited everything they put in their mouths.

She would take away the empacho with cow's hooves and other rare herbs that only she knew where to get, praying the Our Father, placing the children among the smoke of muñiga, she fed them powdered rattlesnake at the end, which she toasted in the oven and then grind it with the metate.

She made panela cheese, raised pigs that she kept tied to the tamarind tree in the back, chickens, few cows; she didn't have much cattle left, since Librado had died, she couldn't take care of the cattle.

Lalo, her only son, didn't like to take care of cows, he dedicated himself to sowing the fields that his father left him and he liked to fish, extracting from the sea everything he could: oysters, crabs, mule's feet, tripe, mullets, snappers and a few chigüil, which he threw back into the sea.

All this magic that surrounded grandmother was, for Lidia, like a magnet. Since she was a child she always wanted to be with her grandmother, go milk the cows in the corral in the cart pulled by mules, drink fresh milk and eat the cream while admiring the landscape of the salt water river that

bordered the land of Camacari, name given by the farmers to those plots of land. She had fun drawing in many ways the myrtle tree in the middle of her grandmother's hectares of dry pastures.

Lili was happy in that house, as always, in spite of hearing strange noises in the early morning. That was not unusual, those things were always heard, but this time she heard chains dragging under the bed, she closed her eyes and covered herself with the blanket. She knew that legends told that inside the house there was a treasure buried, very large, that no one had yet brought out.

To Eliana and Lucrecia the house awakened a certain mysticism, with high double doors with knockers, walls half a meter wide, ironwood posts across the roof and windows set with rods that looked like the bars of the skylights of a cell.

The first thing Eliana remembered were three huge metal trunks in her grandmother's bedroom. In the old days they were used to travel in wagons, when there were no motorized cars. Surely in them she kept her books of witchcraft, potions and herbal concoctions that she worked on secretly from everyone during the night and that she had never opened until then, not even when asked what she had in them. She always answered that she could not say, thus increasing her reputation as a sorceress. No one dared to check it out, but everyone around her always believed it.

Days went by eating tamarinds in the treetops, pomegranates and guamuchiles. They bathed in the fresh water extracted from the depths of the waterwheel, drawn by a water pump that discharged into the pool. They climbed the huge tree, which had fallen horizontally in front of the house during Hurricane Elisa when Eliana was a five-year-old girl. That day, while everyone was sheltered from the squall inside the house, she asked her tata Librado to go out on the porch to see how the air was knocking down the tamarind tree. Don Librado told her it was dangerous, but she replied: "Don't worry tata, the air is blowing in front of us and the tamarind is going to fall that way, where the air goes".

This was one of her many amazing premonitions that she didn't steal, but inherited from her grandmother. Just as they were leaving, they heard the dry rumbling of the root and saw how the trembling branches of the trunk of one meter in diameter and twenty meters high, were giving way to the whirlpool of water and air, which entangled them and made it collapse.

The next day, after the hurricane calmed down and the waters subsided, they saw how the branches were stuck to the ground, only a meter away from the house. The tamarind tree, which after several years continued to bear fruit and green up, became one of Lili's favorite places to play, to hide among the

world of leaves to talk with her cousin Galy about school crushes and other adolescent things. Also to make her daily sketches, the drawings that would always accompany her.

The vacation is over. Olivia thought it was a good idea to visit her mother. Fifteen days after their arrival they set out on their way back, on April 8 of that year. Aunt Mima's boyfriend took them in a truck similar to a walking refrigerator, where they transported fish and seafood from the Topolobampo Bay. Inside the box, through a small door in the back, they put Lili, Eliana, Lucrecia and their cousins Galy and Yaya. They half opened the top lid as if it were a can of tuna, placed benches for them to sit on and set off on their way. Lili and Galy could not stand the curiosity and the confinement, they stood on one of the benches to say goodbye to all the villagers who were watching on the banks of the canals and on the dirt road. At San Jose de Ahome the asphalt began. Galy decided to get down because she felt the air was frizzing her eyes and eyelashes. Lili turned in a sudden movement to get down; at that instant the roar of the engine of a trailer that was going in the opposite direction, slowing down, was heard. A whistling sound was heard with the withering pull of the wind, followed by the roar of a cannon and a bullet falling to the ground, sounding muffled and unexploded, as if the dust was rising. You can't distinguish with a burning sensation in your eyes, and you touch them because you don't know if you can see or not; like when something is returned to its place by inertia, propelled by a spring. That's how the lid suddenly closed halfway. In an instant, everything went dark. Eliana turned her eyes upwards, only distinguishing a slit of light, distant and confusing. She thought it was a nightmare where she was running slowly behind that light that seemed to suffocate. She stretched out her arms to reach the slit, which was held by Lili's pressed chest, looked at her open hands for seconds that seemed like minutes... Time stopped. Galy had been hit over the head with the lid and thrown hard inside. For a few moments she lost consciousness; when she woke up, she managed to react. Between her, Eliana and Lucrecia made a superhuman effort to lift the heavy tombstone with the head. With one movement, she pushed herself forward after placing her feet on tiptoe until she felt a cramp tearing her calf muscle. They touched the lid, clogged; inert, Lili's sturdy body sank limp, like a silk cloth that spreads with the breath of the wind, carries her, plays, and at the end lays her meekly on the grass. Immediately everything remained in absolute darkness.

Without reserve, with her face high, clean of innocence, she searched and found her destiny: the accident.

2. THE JOURNEY WAS HER DESTINY

It was what was left for them, the darkness that pervaded everything, the world that looks only at the void filled with darkness. Although Galy said she was fine, it was not true. Lili lay on the damp floor feeling the cold of indifference, believing it to be a horrendous nightmare, haunted by the intense fear of what we do not know if it leads us to an endless road, without awakening, or see the light from one moment to another.

She barely distinguished her body in the gloom, her face seemed exhausted by a struggle that was not physical, by a mental battle; her gaze was lost in the fibrous wall, dejected, unconscious. The figures were barely present. The smell of dampness penetrated without a gust of air seeping through the cracks. She was pressed for a few minutes, enough to determine the rest of her life. An infamy described by suffering. The journey was her destiny.

When she felt the hit of that heavy wooden lump on her chest, driven by the wind, she lost consciousness. A few moments passed, she half-opened her eyes, looked around her. Her blurred vision and the darkness prevented her from realizing what was happening. She sensed a warm, iron taste of blood choking in her throat. She looked at her arms fallen to her sides, she could not feel the skin sticking to the floor nor move her fingers. Only reached her temples the prickling of the cold that ran down her spine to her neck, where it became more intense; the heaviness of her own body turned into a sack of lead.

In the distance she heard the incessant crying of her sister Eliana and Yaya. They remained in that state for two hours; seemed eternal to them. The passing to old age and almost death in their faces, wrinkled, shattered in the shadows, that described everything. Could it be life that overtook Lili at such a young age? And her family would also accompany her on this path...that seemed to be hers alone. Because no one is alone in this world, neither in misfortune nor in happiness.

Yaya, her six-year-old cousin, silent, still, sitting on a corner bench, observing without understanding what was happening, only the reflection of the shadows on the shadows, with a rictus of terror on her face, as the events surpass her capacity to digest; understanding what was happening was almost impossible.

The torrents sweep you out of control, carry you to the slippery riverbed, you hold on to some branches and others, and sooner or later carry

you away again for a while, without knowing how long. That's the life of someone like Lili, a whirlwind that whirls around dozens of lives and they can't escape from it.

Attempts to alert those in the driver's cab were to no avail, and the racks were erected like ramparts. Desperation grew as the kilometers devoured patience. The wooden bench served as a weapon to hit the cab so they could be heard on the outside by someone who could help them before they collapsed, before losing track of who one is. Lili could not speak, her words came out like sighs.

Galy and Eliana lifted the heavy lid of that walking freezer with their heads again and again; on one side they pulled out their hand and part of their desperate soul. Eliana wanted to be in her sister's place, but it was useless, whatever they did would not change the event. As she cried, the tears ran down her body like hot lava and reached her feet to be absorbed again; so she would never finish crying. She knew something bad was going on, her perception wasn't wrong. Since then she knew it and awakened her clear consciousness to the world to overwhelm her with a pure reality, far from childish jumping and games: she now had a body, hands. She observed herself down to the last and most recondite place never to stop seeing herself again.

The rumblings of the city could be heard. They knew the agony of that journey would soon be over. They stopped at the bus terminal. The latch on the knocker of the small rear door, from which they had to come out hunched over, opened from the outside. The first thing Olivia, Lalo and the driver heard were screams.

After this event, everything became distant and confusing, nothing seemed real, nobody imagined the transcendence and what this would mean for Lili: her immobility forever. It seemed no one understood her suffering.

They arrived at Hospital Agraz and could do nothing for her. Maybe the doctors were not qualified to face the task, but they sent her to Hospital Fatima, where they knew had better technology.

Olivia's face let out a sign of strangeness: they followed in disbelief to Hospital Fatima, where she was immediately attended to. They asked for a stretcher to get down her totally weak and loose body. Lili was still in an ambiguous hallucination. The light bothered her eyes, couldn't open them, she heard strange sounds, thought they were people speaking in another language, with a heavy tongue, without understanding what they were saying. She was tired, she fell asleep thinking that maybe it was a strange dream.

She got lost behind the glass door, between the corridors. Men in white coats, lights that filtered through the retina and reached the temples caused the small muscle of the eyelids to close them. The smell of antiseptics wafted

out from under the closed doors and permeated everything. Perplexed, those present stood mute, uncertainty eating away at their reason. Olivia and Lalo looked at each other. They went out in search of the vehicle that had left them a few moments before; the driver, her sister's boyfriend, and the van were gone, he was never to be found again.

3. EL AGUAJITO WELCOMES THE FAMILY AGAIN

A warm gale ran along the road that died out in the little canal, unable to make them forget the sadness they were carrying, anguished thanks to the afternoon that was barely falling as they entered El Aguajito, welcomed them back on a rarely long and hopeless day.

It was another town which seemed vague, distant, mostly ugly, because in reality it was ugly, full of sparse houses, peculiar, undoubtedly different: facades without a canopy in front, illogical for a place immersed in the heat, with the sun always cutting the walls and flush with the doors; it was justified only when they had the ramada in front, made of sticks cut from the mangroves of the river and palm leaves on the roof. It was definitely not the same place they had left that morning. They got out of the truck; their mom and four siblings, serious, crestfallen, without Lili. The sticky mud scraped their faces, their eyes became so Chinese that they could hardly see where they were going. They didn't feel like talking; on mute with the sorrow, took a weary step trying to undo the sharp stones that pierced the arch of their feet, which tilted in a painful swaying. With staring eyes, they seemed to remember the day of their arrival. The dogs barked incessantly, some near, others far away answering a furious conversation, seeming to follow them and telling that they were carrying something strange in their backs, but no one paid any attention to them. There was a school and as they passed in front of it there was a "y", with the walls peeling, discolored, covered by the whitish salt that came with the sea breeze at dawn.

On the hill where all roads converge, even the one called the "riito" because it is a small river, was the school that would house three of the siblings for several months after that day. It was very small compared to the school in Culiacan that housed hundreds of other children, so empty but full of voices, echoes, scares, abandoned, far from having children... they seemed like ghosts.

Doña Hortensia, surprised, felt a breath of air that filtered in and ran through her body. She stopped doing her house-work and turned towards the entrance. She saw from the doorway the approaching

bundles. Worried, she knew at that moment that something bad had happened because the wind at that time of the day was hiding fatigued.

Olivia left the children with her mother and went to pick up Lidia at the hospital. She was no longer there, the specialist didn't want to see her. Later they learned that if he had operated on her at the time of her arrival, she would have had a better fate. She had been transferred to IMSS; the reason was obvious. Lalo, wearing jeans, a sweaty cap, tire-soled huaraches, an ashen face that revealed the wrinkles marked by years of life in the fields, tilling the earth by hand, calloused hands with nails bitten by ironwork.

The doctor in charge felt it would be better to take her to a place where they could cover the minimum expenses; in that hospital they would have had to sacrifice a lot to pay for it.

She waited in the hospital ward without being able to see her daughter for a considerable time, alone, with the windows and corridors becoming the same wherever she looked. The doctor arrived, it was the specialist who was treating her; in a parsimonious voice, he told her that her daughter's head would be shaved. She could only understand among so many incomprehensible words that they needed to pull the spine to try to straighten the cervical spine, it was compressed. She could only ask why they had to do that to her daughter, why they needed to drill her head. The conclusion was that Lili had only a short time to live, maybe a week, a month, they didn't know for sure. Olivia paled, sat down, her breathing became agitated. She didn't believe anything she heard, it was too much for a day. Many ideas went through her mind, she remembered for a moment the day before at her mother's house, everything was normal. Why was this happening a few hours later? She remembered her daughter running with the dogs, with the natural vitality of a child, playing with her cousins. This was undoubtedly a nightmare. She caught sight of the doctor who continued to stand in front of her and only asked him to help her and do what was necessary. The doctor walked away, losing himself in the background. At that moment she remembered Manuel, her husband. She had to tell him what was happening, had to send him a telegram, but later, now she had to wait. She wanted to wake up at any moment and never dream again. She only felt an immense desire to have a shoulder to rest her body tired by the events; she wanted to cry but her eyes remained stiff, far away, as if crystals were piercing her eyelids. She wasn't thinking, she just walked looking, feeling abandoned with a deep loneliness and an uninhabited soul, in ruins.

She arrived at the room where she was told her daughter was. Her hand trembled, which she lifted to slide the curtain, gently, not wanting to disturb with any noise whatever state she was in. She looked sick, she had lost several kilos since she arrived at the hospital, emaciated, without a single hair on her head. In her skull were embedded on each side two prongs of a heavy steel contraption pulled from a headboard hanging on the wall. Other attachments pulled at her legs, stretching her as long as she was and even longer. She was unconscious. Olivia took her flaccid still chubby hand and stroked it for a long time trying to assimilate the event. Eager to identify the remains of humanity that was now her daughter, she sat down beside her and leaned her head against the wall, exhausted, breathless even for a sigh. Her daughter was connected to life through the serum hanging from a hook. Lili managed to open her eyes and have consciousness for an instant, she looked at her mother with half-opened eyelids, consumed, and tried to open her grayish lips to speak, but was so weak that didn't emit any sound. She felt that life couldn't handle her, she made a great effort, but her body remained immobile, as did her lips. She closed her eyes to fall into a deep sleep full of delirium and confusing visions, emanating from the anesthesia and not being able to interpret the reality that surrounded her. She only heard for a few moments, getting lost in space, the distant words of her mother telling her that everything was all right.

Doña Hortensia arrived the next day. When she looked at her granddaughter, her face changed. It could be seen how each one of her wrinkles was marked, they became somber, and her eyes showed incredulous and spaced tears. Mother and daughter embraced each other still unable to comprehend the monstrosity of death so close at hand.

She awoke for an instant. The echoes of voices and whispers brought her back from lethargy: "An exacerbated light flashes around me, it seems like a thick cloud, an empty space where I float, everything is soft and light, I am suspended, waves of colors surround me, emanating from me, as if gray and whitish shadows were following me. All is peace, I no longer feel the cold that ran through the bones of my back with that intense pain up to the nape of my neck that tried to burst my temples. I don't know where I am, but thank you, nothing worries me".

4. LIDIA IS STILL ALIVE (at the Hospital in Culiacan)

A month later, doctors managed to stabilize her; she barely began to regain consciousness when she was about to be transported to Culiacan. When she arrived at the airport were waiting for her: her father Manuel, whose face was difficult to describe, and Eliana, who had no words to welcome her, only tears which seemed suspended since the day of the accident, gushed out. She didn't know if it was out of fear of seeing her sister transformed into something she didn't recognize, or out of unconscious anguish. It seemed like a hallucination; the white sheets that enveloped her, her snowy clothes, the clear noon, the intense sun, everything so solemn. And her face as white as foam, her head smooth and lustrous, with a thinness that made her look like a grasshopper with dry arms and legs, carrying a body that she could not support, since she was not an insect and did not have that condition that only they possess for their defense. She had lost the innate quality of the human being to protect herself physically from her environment, from time, reality and nature. She was forever out of a normal life, out of the everyday life of men and women who day by day were strangers to each other.

Now she was going to be perpetually the particularity of a rule, the distraction and abstraction in her way in this world full of normalities and with no room for the different, in a society that would observe her. Mission impossible when there are no exceptions to social conventions in times of significant backwardness in this country, without laws of social inclusion.

Nothing was designed yet for the being that is not complete in every way, there is only compassion or pity, as if that response is necessary to be happy in his or her confined world.

There was no hope for her future, being a burden was her fate in the eyes of those around; a divine punishment that was being paid by the parents, who were constantly told that they were to blame and that their daughter was paying for their sins as well.

Some launched again and again this blunt, pathetic statement, which put them in the electric chair to be executed from one moment to the next; the sentence had been pronounced, they could only revoke it if they assumed enough pain to heal their guilt and close the scars that opened with that huge crack in the road of life.

The truth is that everything felt like a curse; the undeniable thing is also that one never knows whose fault it is that punishes in anger. They could only walk together at a slow, heavy pace, dragging the fear, desolation, stumbling, impotence and economic misery that this misfortune would bring them for a long time.

Even at this recent time of the event, everyone blindly believed that Lidia would regain her physical movements; including her, because she was always told that she would.

The charlatans they saw, recommended by some neighbor or relative, were many, with the promise that she would walk again. They would tell her “with these herbs, with these therapeutic massages she will walk again”, and they asked for money that her mother sought at all costs, thinking that from one moment to another the miracle would happen, and even her uncle, the captain, managed to have her admitted to the Military Medical Hospital in Mexico City, where she was about to undergo surgery, but at the last minute they decided that they did not have the necessary resources – in scientific advances and medical knowledge – and all that was left was “everything possible was done, but she could die in surgery”. They returned home with only one less hope.

Time mitigated its process to crack at times the strength they had found in the passage of adversity. From the deepest recesses of the human afterlife, it emerged like a vague breath that invaded the insensible body of all the anger drawn from demoralization; Lili’s character became sour and unbearable for everyone, and even more so for Doña Olivia, who was left breathless every time she stumbled over Lili’s negative response to everything she offered her. But she had to breathe, deeply, lethargically and without rest, day and night, carrying her daughter’s physical body that was beginning to fill with deep, infectious sores due to lack of muscle movement. Her blood stagnated in the back, buttocks and where the bones that were announced weak nailed sharp the skin damaged by the passing of the months. All night long she had to shift Lili’s insensible body from one side to the other; Olivia babbled her misfortune in silence. And of course, being the eldest, since Lidia was then fourteen, Olivia had to run the household routines. There were four more siblings who undoubtedly required her presence.

Manuel also needed his wife to be his right hand again in sales, to accompany him to work in the sugar cane and tomato fields, to help him prepare the creams and perfumes that were sold as fertilizers in the steel sheet galleries, filled with people from the south who showed up

during the harvest season and that the farmers needed to work in the arable.

They were day laborers who traveled throughout the country touring the Mexican countryside, where the bosses offered them a place to stay while the day's work was over.

Manuel sold to them until they retired to another part of the country; she could no longer help him, perhaps for the time being, while she organized her new survival and the other children grew up to help her in this endless pilgrimage, where sometimes she walked with lacerated feet and many times she continued even on her knees.

Her strength was not enough and, one afternoon, Olivia subtly faded away. Exhaustion overcame her forcing her to regain her strength, leaving her bedridden for a week. Eliana tried to move her, but Olivia didn't wake up. She told Lili: "I'm going to look for my nana Agustina, I'll be right back, to tell her that my mom is not waking up".

Doña Agustina was the one who affectionately took care of Olivia's children when she went to work. She was a short, brown woman, with a round face like a full moon, black straight hair, with a bump on her back that looked like a hump, with southern features. Her two-room house, made of unhewn bricks, all the way at the back by the creek, had a fortress of stones that helped to retain the water when it spurted sharply, threatening to flood the houses on the 15th Street. All of them had in the back yard the shady stream, which was always dry until the rainy months. At the same time, the large stones carried by the stream served as a stove for cooking; she was never seen cooking on the gas stove. She ran – on short legs and light steps – to see what was going on. Olivia continued without waking from a deep sleep. Then, in a hurry, she went to the house of Doña Reina, who lived across the street, to ask her to help her get her up. Her knees were scarred with rough concrete after so many hours on the makeshift floor. She was lifted onto the bed; she was just behind Lili's headboard. A mattress sagging in parts, with springs that penetrated the cover and a quilt that had not been plunged for days with Olivia's body, welcomed her fiercely, as if it wanted to engulf her in a cocoon to lull her to sleep for a week and then be reborn on strong, silky wings, with new defenses to face a different world of unexplored challenges.

Someone said: "Bring a red onion and some oil to make her wake up". Doña Agustina ran to the kitchen looking for the ingredients. They sliced the onion in circles and covered her stomach with oil and slices that looked like spirals, to suck out the sick spirits that had lodged in her

body. People began to mill around outside the house. Some more daring, thought they had the confidence to enter killing the curiosity to know what was going on. Then people said:

- It seems that someone died – an insolent neighbor muttered.

Eliana, furious, answered:

- No one has died here!, get out of my house, you nosy women.

Eliana's character was categorical since she was a child; she was eleven years old at the time.

Meanwhile, Lili was in expectation. What else could happen?, that her mother die?, what would she and her siblings do?, were days in which Olivia wandered between dreams, lost in the venting that she could never express by shedding tears or showing a bit of anguish. Perhaps she was running from a nightmare that was erasing from her mind and only anguish would remain at the precise moment after waking up.

For a whole week remedies of all kinds rained down on her. She didn't wake up with alcohols or matanene put in her nasal passages trying to stimulate her brain, nor with the smearing of ointment of the seven flowers, nor with thousands of teas and strange concoctions invented by some herbalist, nor even with the last option: the doctor who had an office on the 18th Street, the last one in Colonia Diaz Ordaz, the last one in the city. In those years full of violence, shootings and executions, the machine guns that never stopped buzzing all night, since before, had become a sedative melody that lulled the inhabitants of that hamlet, which seemed like a pigsty, and not even the car that crashed into the post on the corner after a chase and many shots that seemed to pierce the weak walls of the house, managed to wake her up.

At last one day, without further ado, after the hungry spirits had fed on the accumulated filth of unhappiness, reached Olivia's pure and lucid essence and she awoke without the accumulated burden of anguish and tension. She had released the despondency in a dignified manner.

5. THE CREEK HOUSE WHERE SHE WAS BORN

The creek was rising as it did so many times in July, the rain was getting heavier every day and the house was always at risk of flooding by at least twenty centimeters. Olivia was always attentive to improve the wall she built herself, putting cement and stones to prevent the stream from swallowing the earth that supported the pillars of the last room made of black sheeting, made with a clean hand, flush with the stream, as well as the bathroom located next to the slope, on purpose to drain into the stream.

The bathroom was covered with old, faded fabrics, with a leaky can in the middle, where they put the hose to simulate a shower, the floor of red, loose bricks and of course a lot of shampoos packed in any bottle.

The two rooms of the house were becoming crowded with beds and closets because the family was growing. The corner room was dark, enclosed; the central post of the wall facing the street was broken and tilted the house to one side only; the entrance door in its lowest part had a gutter to direct the rain water; at the back, there was a window made of asbestos sheet that opened upwards and was supported by a board; the view was of the lamp post on the corner where the stream turned, two lemon trees, a lime tree and an ordinary mango tree. The smell was citrusy every time they opened the window and a little light came in. Above it hung a painting of an enhanced landscape, which in the background had a mountain in a dark night; on the sides, many pages of a nail-incrusted notebook that Lili had chosen from all the drawings she made in her school notebooks; they had more women's faces and landscapes than notes on any subject.

On the wall remained for a long time, already dusty, next to the picture that regularly tilted, as a prank from someone who liked to play, someone invisible of as many as there were in that house; children were witnesses of all those who crossed the walls, figures of normal plebes and others like goblins, and still that way they coexisted with them as if nothing happened.

On the other side was the courtyard, fenced with sticks and branches. There were three of the sweetest mango trees, two guava tress, several lemon trees and small oranges that were very much in demand by the neighbors, with salt and chili that made anyone's mouth water. It was everyone's favorite place to play; Lidia's favorite when she used to lie on her belly to eat fruit accompanied by her inseparable

sketchbook, to sketch anything that came to her mind at the moment: the landscape, the fruit, the children and many beautiful women's faces. She ate fruit with the Pinto lying on her side, it was a loving, good-natured dog who would end up blind in old age. There was also the latrine in the most hidden corner. In the absence of drainage in the area, they all had toilets at the back of the yard, surrounded by cardboard, posts and wooden slats. At the edge of the creek towards the street, they put barbed wire, but only at the top because there was a risk that everything the current dragged along getting stuck. It brought from the top of the hill everything it could reach, it went into the houses and took down what people left out of place, furniture, toys, tree branches and once in a while some reckless person who dared to challenge it and ended up losing to the flow which seemed tame but was very deceptive.

The rains would end and the water would remain stagnant for days, until it became thick and began to smell of stale branches. With a shovel they would look for a way out to the street, where it would be absorbed by the cobblestone earth and dried out by the tremendous heat of up to 45° C. Everything was filled with mosquitoes, flies, scorpions, centipedes, tarantulas, among many other insects.

Lili always used to play on the edge of the highest part, the one that overlooked Avenue Dos. That cost her a fall on the spikes when she was ten years old. She tried to hold herself and ended up with a wound in her right arm.

They rushed with her to the Red Cross to have her stitched up, a wound that would forever leave her with a ten centimeter scar. This happened before the accident that left her unable to walk.

She fantasized about being a ballerina while drawing pictures of women dancing, rode her steed as a child when she went to elementary school, when she played pilindrina at recess, jumped rope, played with her Barbies, when she walked back down Avenue Dos from Guadalupe Victoria Elementary School. This was located at the top of the hill, next to the church of San Juan de los Lagos, where after school three times a week sang in the choir accompanying Father Haro, who took toys out of a strange cellar located in a basement in the backyard of the church; sometimes there were girls looking for them.

She played with her siblings in the street, “bote robado”, “Doña Blanca”, “la cebollita”, “quemados”, and she fantasized about her future ecstatic with innocence.

There were so many memories: Olivia and Manuel used to leave her in charge of the house and her siblings; she took care of them with

much love and patience, like trying to catch grasshoppers all over the house, there were already three of them jumping to line them up, she couldn't, they ran away to the street losing sight of them for a while.

She was just remembering. After the accident, her only distraction was to keep an eye on the creek when the rain stopped. With the sky still cloudy, the weather refreshed due to humidity. Her gaze was lost on the other side of the rainy orchard, where she could not go anymore, of soapy earth, smooth, still shiny, where a few months ago she climbed the mango trees, fresh guava trees, painted and jumped the pilindrinas, collected broken glass as if they were precious stones, and when the water came down she crossed with it to her ankles.

She would no longer see her high school friends, nor run around at recess, not even be able to walk to school nor cross downtown to browse the stalls and window shop, nor buy a trinket, nor be independent; something she loved about being a teenager, the freedom she had recently discovered, when her mind was beginning to wake up to the world with endless possibilities, to discover herself, to see the boys she liked, with dreams for the future, what she wanted to do when she grew up. She was going to be a dancer and a painter.

She was trying to find in the current of her memory a way to take away the despair tattooed on her heart, lying on a camp bed for hours, on one side only, seemingly without moving an eyelash and without breathing, seemingly without thinking, just remembering. Suddenly, she would come out of her abstraction and watch something curious pass by: "Look what's going there, it's a chair!" And all the children sitting next to her would watch the chocolate-colored swirling water, full of green branches that emerging in a rhythmic beat, carried by the horizontal waves of the flowing downstream, captivated them with enchantment.

And she strove to immortalize the moments before it all began. At the beginning of that journey Lidia, perhaps unconsciously, already knew what was going to happen. Was it her karma? Was it destiny? But the forms of her creation did not stop, Lidia continued painting her way through life with her mouth.

6. THE TRIP TO SAN FRANCISCO AND THE RETURN TO EL AGUAJITO

The first months in bed, the trip to Mexico City and the visit to many doctors and healers with no positive results did not diminish Olivia's hope to see her daughter walk again. All suggestions and recommendations were well heeded by her; she took her to doctors and towns, tirelessly.

One day, someone told her about some foreign doctors who treated invalids in a hidden town in the mountains of San Ignacio, Sinaloa, called Ajoya, where they had set up a clinic. There they received sick people like Lili and it was one more possibility she couldn't pass up. She raised the money with a lot of effort. At that time the expenses were many, and what Manuel earned was not enough. She had to resort to selling some of her possessions and borrowing money to make the trip since it meant a ten-hour drive in a pick-up truck because Lili had to travel lying down. Her body didn't allow her, for any reason, to incorporate her back to sit up, she would surely lose consciousness; neither could she stand the terrible headaches when someone tried to get her to overcome the problem by lifting her up abruptly.

For the first time in almost two years, it seemed that luck was on their side, a glimmer of light illuminated Lili's future. The Americans from the Shriners Hospital had a rustic sanatorium hidden among dense vegetation, surrounded by winding and steep roads, mounted on the slope of a thirty-meter ravine, which looked more like a mountain man's den than a hospital.

It was conditioned with wooden paths and attachments made in a natural way, special for wheelchairs or physical disabilities, with peculiar people who passed through them as highways, with a workshop where everyone designed the wheelchair for their needs, with the collaboration of the disabled themselves who had settled in that place to live without being a burden to anyone, where there were people from various parts of the state, mountains of Sinaloa and surrounding areas.

In addition to the hospital area, there were also bedrooms and a dining room. Olivia was shocked to see this small world so well organized, this community so familiar with such a remote and implausible place. No one could have imagined it.

Lili was welcomed with open arms. She underwent multiple studies to know her current state of health and was there for fifteen days. They told her that they had to take her to the United States to help her, to be alert, because they would let them know in a month when they would pick her up in Culiacan, in a vehicle that would take other children to San Francisco, California.

Again, suspicions arose about this event: “Olivia, the gringos are going to experiment on your daughter. Don’t let them take her away!”

Different opinions arose in this regard: “What if they don’t give her back and tell you she died? How are you going to let her go alone?”

Manuel did not want to let her go, he was afraid because of ignorance of not knowing where they were taking his daughter, but Olivia was determined to do the impossible for her.

One day, on the federal highway where they were waiting for her, they handed her daughter over to a group of people in a van loaded with four other children bound for the United States. Lili went alone, without a relative, with the anxiety of not knowing if they would see her again. Her mother entrusted her to those blonde women and men who barely spoke Spanish, but who seemed willing to help them. She couldn’t do that for her daughter; it was one of the most difficult moments of her life, but Olivia never wavered.

Lili had been phoning since her arrival in San Francisco, California. She told them about the adventure of her road trip for several days, how she arrived to that beautiful country and the wonderful reception at the Shriners Hospital. Never in her wildest dreams had she been in such a beautiful place and with people who cared for them so lovingly, even though the circumstances were not the best in her life.

In the following phone calls she told them that she was able to sit up, they were teaching her to speak English, since she had to ask for things in that language which she didn’t know. They took them for walks every week and toured the city of San Francisco and nearby places, visiting the farms of the hospital’s sponsors. The psychological therapy sessions they gave her had also helped her to regain the joy of living.

They got a phone call from Lili, who was very sad. She was told in that hospital that she would never walk again, not to hold hope because it would hurt her. All the time she had thought without a doubt that she would return to her old self; she cried all day and night, alone, far away, without her siblings and her mother, because they were not

there to yell at them and hit them with her elbows, to ruminate on her ungrateful fate, because she could never be a painter artist nor a dancer!

Her illusions for as long as she could remember were to be a dancer, and she could no longer continue drawing because she could not take a pencil and trace the faces of women she liked so much, she would no longer return to high school, no more, no more, no more...

She was alone, thinking that dreams did not exist, that the stage had been reduced to a Lili subject to the will of others in order to survive. At fourteen years old the world was becoming more sour, fateful, pessimistic.

Time went by. She had a party on her fifteenth birthday, made many friends from all over the world, adored the nurses who forced her to speak English, was showered with gifts, so many that couldn't fit them on the plane home, had her fingers operated on so that they would stay straight and not curl up more over time.

After six months she was discharged and was ready to return. Olivia traveled for the first time to the United States to pick up Lili and take her home. She spent fifteen days learning how to take care of her and they returned with a normal and an electric wheelchair, among many devices and accessories adapted to make her life more practical, things that only gringos know how to do perfectly, suitable for people with special needs as they do with streets and accesses.

Mexico again. It wasn't unpleasant, but it was frustrating. An endless comparison: the living conditions, the adaptability for the less fortunate. The so-called "handicapped" – a tremendous word that by the mere fact of being pronounced caused anguish – were unjustly treated as unproductive and less valuable people, relegated, from hospital without access to the lack of public transportation that could take them, sidewalks without ramps, cobblestone streets full of dirt, do not allow them to have a dignified life and are seen as rare entities, as a circus attraction.

Facing this restricted life in all senses and social spheres made it difficult for Lili to adapt to her new condition. She could not be satisfied, she felt useless in the bed installed at the entrance of her humble home.

She opted to sell candy. They hung them by nails from the rafters on the wall opposite the door, and she, alert from her bed, watched the

whole scene with her eyes. Each person had to serve oneself, collect, and give oneself the money.

Eliana at her thirteen years old was the messenger. She would go alone downtown to buy the candy, returning loaded with full, stocked bags, sweating, walking many streets to get to the bus, enduring up to the humble abode.

The electric wheelchair remained in a corner for many months. The winding cobblestone streets that had no end, the steep hills of disappointment, barren of hope, and the hungry and insatiable stream were her cell. A sidewalk of ten houses full of friends to visit although no longer to play nor dance the choreography of Timbiriche's songs, now everyone gathered around her to listen to her talks and stories. Lili was always – and now even more so – a great conversationalist, friendly, loving and pleasant.

Eliana faithful to her always took her in the wheelchair pushing her slowly, dodging every stone and hole that mercilessly stopped the small wheels on the front of the chair.

They would go to Olga and Piri's house which had a large concrete step as a sidewalk at the entrance and a penguica tree at the door. They would run to help and settle on the porch to hang out; a strange house from the outside.

Right next door was Refugio and Mariana's house. The first thing that could be seen from the entrance, hanging on the wall, was a blacksmith's mask pierced by an iron saw, which had cost the life of Tommy, father of both of them.

They would also go to Nena's house which had a big fence in front always with dogs. Nena would go out to lock them in so that Lili could get inside; it was a nice house compared to the others. Yoyo, her husband, had a lumber shop.

She went with Doña Tere, her godmother, and Don Ramon; also with Chachis, Doña Reyna across the street, who by then used to make tostadas; Cristina, Paulina, Laura and the other neighbors who always loved her and wanted to see her happy.

But when she was in bed and had plenty of time to reflect, she would look at the walls with her old sketches and longed to draw, imagined her hands shaping the lines that came from the fantasies of the soul, and traced the figures in her consciousness.

Then they took the electric wheelchair to her uncle Beto's house. When she felt like feeling a little bit free and running through the streets

with her motorized feet; she visited it and saw it from time to time. Because the pavement to this day has not tasted the taste of the earth of that street of a happy childhood.

December 1985 arrived. The days without leaving the routine of the same street and the same houses bored her and she told her mother to go to El Aguajito, a place she loved bitterly and continued missing. Now she could see it defenseless of joy. She hadn't returned after the last day of vacation when she left walking with her feet. There were friends to visit too, and she couldn't finish in just one day; more cobblestone and dusty streets, more ground to traverse. Only the usual road would now become longer. By the narrow bridge, with two palm tree trunks, it was no longer possible to cross the drain, she had to turn around the road of cars and carts. After, when she returned, she traveled it for weeks and months, they were only about twenty streets and recognized every hole, house, dog that barked at the wheels of the chair, at the dust left by the loudspeaker cart pulled by mules... she never wanted to return to Culiacan. Manuel stayed there waiting for them.

Her grandmother was happy for a few months, because they were her "most refined granddaughters", she said. As time went by the real challenge began, fights between the children; the annoyance became present. So Olivia decided to look for a place to emigrate within that same remote and almost forgotten town where rumors spread that at night the nahual did its business. It appeared as a black dog quietly chasing someone, slowly growing into a horned demon with a cock's leg and a horse's leg until it caught up and ate the person.

It must be recognized that such apparition was possible in El Aguajito because when darkness fell, the streets were transformed into tenebrous deceptions, black nights that made one see imaginary things.

The specters of the trees danced with the humming of the wind, motionless as a mountain that didn't move even if you kept taking steps, that followed you and seemed to leave you stunned until bam, a foot in a dimple. So you remembered that battery lamp you carried in your hand to light a thin line in front of you always with the feeling that something or someone was following you closely, stalking you with a gaze of red devilish eyes.

Yes, it was easy to believe in that as well as in the headless man who riding his horse appeared by the cattails that sprouted from the "riverito", as they called the small river that splits the town in two, now less forgotten than before.

A lot of people saw that headless man! They also talked about the woman in white who always came out scaring the daring ones who emerged late at night from their roofs as it happened to Leonardo, Aunt Ney's son, who was petrified with his eyes open for several hours.

How to stay in that place so full of spectres accumulating the dark days that followed the endless nights? Difficult times were ahead for Lili, her mother and siblings.

Manuel stayed in Culiacan following the routine of his work and waiting for his family to return, but that didn't happen. Consequently, he disappeared for long periods. He was not seen much in El Aguajito. His responsibility for his family also disappeared. Not having them around, he forgot about the six kids he had to support with a more or less full belly.

Olivia, selling clothes in the nearby fishing camps, had to take care of her children, all of whom were small. She left Lili with her sister, Aunt Mima, nurse by profession, took care of all Lili's needs; she knew the best way to take care of her: with lots of love.

On one of Olivia's trips, Lili would face death again. Her body defenseless against the most common illnesses gave her a hard lesson, the flu turned into pneumonia and she was transferred to the nearest hospital, in Los Mochis.

With no social security to cover her they didn't want to receive her. At the entrance, on a stretcher, she waited on the verge of death, until Aunt Mima convinced them that she would bring them the documents.

When the doctor went to check on her he noticed that her heartbeat was so weak that he could only shout ordering to make way for them. She was immediately transferred to the intensive care floor, where those who may not make it out go, or do so with their feet ahead.

She spent two days struggling to live. She knew how to do it very well at that point, when others she had met in the same situation, who through accidents had become quadriplegics let themselves die just like that.

The doctor told them that there was no more hope for her, that she had no strength in her lungs, that they should "intubate" her and call all the relatives to give her the last goodbye. The aunt told them no, that she should die with dignity. And waiting for that to happen naturally was the best thing to do. A critical hour and the outcome was the opposite to what they diagnosed. Some would say it was her destiny, but others thought she was very strong, she didn't allow death – that

bony woman – to reach her presence; she still had landscapes to draw, countless colors to capture, countless brushstrokes to rejoice herself and rejoice others.

When living with her mother became unbearable, Olivia had no choice but to buy a small plot of land from Teli. The days of the tamarinds were over for the family; pomegranates and fresh bread baked in the brick oven in the mornings would no longer be part of the new landscape. They were now from one end to the other. The Manina with her coffee brewed in the talega mixed with freshly milked milk was out of reach. It was necessary to leave alone the water pump where they bathed at noon, the freshly killed chickens, the corucos that fell on their backs – that was a consolation – the iguanas in the tamarind trees; also the crossed trunk was an illusion now. It was a relief for them to leave them without the presence of the family, they would no longer be one with the Manina ranch, which had aborted them after such a long time of welcoming them with endearing warmth. Now they were also part – as everything that becomes habit – of a fondness, and then it ceases to be what was expected, what was remembered, believing that it will be forever.

Teli's lot, known by that small-town name, measured fifty by fifty meters and had two huge, beautiful, leafy trees almost in the center, and a date palm with five huge trunks emanating from a single root that formed in its center a flower opening in it and then closing at the highest ends. That was for a long time the perfect hiding place for all the games of Eliana and her cousin Yaya, both thirteen years old.

Olivia didn't have enough, just to put a roof of posts and black sheeting, which she built all by herself, where she placed the two double beds and a bunk bed, a dining room, the stove and the cabinet. The bathroom was placed at the back next to the tomato bushes and the cacaragua; the toilet even further back. She made a hole two meters deep and one meter in circumference. There was no well to provide water, they had to ask permission from the neighbors to use the hand pump located at a distance and carry the water in buckets. But what a beautiful land! The children played surrounded by fresh, limpid, soft earth; by the mango tree and the poplar, enormous, spirited, in whose highest branches the wind always flowed freely; when bumping into the leaves, both seemed to burst into laughter in a murmur that one wanted to listen to and stay to contemplate with a mind in ecstasies, and feel the sun play with the eyes when, filtering through those leaves in the shape of swords, the flashes of light reached them until piercing the skin and

lodging in the body, to take it and enchant it. Thus were Lili's days, and the nights of stars that played with her as she sat in the middle of infinity, she could feel without touching, how she plunged into the darkness and the endless space that slowly took her to wander like a bird without wings, just floating in the everlasting sky without noise; the chirping of crickets was her ambient music.

Shortage began to make its arrival. Olivia could no longer cope with so much. She was desperately looking for something to earn some income. Earnings were not enough and Manuel's backing appeared from time to time. Every week, Eliana walked five kilometers over the rough country road to get to Higuera de Zaragoza, to the telegraph office, to pick up her father's money order for scarce two hundred pesos that so many times it didn't even arrive.

It was no longer enough for her and Lucrecia to go to high school in the Villa de Ahome, but they made efforts to do so. They generally ate shrimps, clams and fish that friends brought them or that they acquired at a low price because nature provided them with these delicacies; seeds, fruits and vegetables were collected in the fields; milk and bread. Eliana, on some occasions, left at five o'clock in the morning to the tomato harvest. Very strong physically, not even the midday sun frightened her. Lili continued her life with her friends, who appreciated her very much; she was becoming more and more sociable and pleasant to people. One fine day, due to fortunate circumstances, perhaps more sensitive than usual, Lili woke up inspired. She felt like going over the lines she forever remembered about the faces, lines of drawings that made her dream and relax, forget about everything for a moment, something she always did before the accident with unique skill, which she remembered she had always done, only this time her hands were no longer able to piece together. The pencil had to be embedded in the fingers; without the strength to maneuver it, it was not possible to follow any line nor trace. It slipped like water between stones and she picked it up then with her mouth. She decided to sketch that way. The "gift" of art was deep in her consciousness, it needed to come out and manifest in some form, whatever it was.

She had started again, her spirits glowed. She tried pencil portraits which at first looked like flat sketches, but which after a short time acquired form, expressions, came to life. Some out of curiosity allowed her to experiment with their faces. She began to amaze the townspeople. She was a novelty, a phenomenon. Now the visits to the

houses of friends, to the aguajiteñas houses with mango trees, with enramadas and awnings made of barrial mixed with cow dung, painted like frescoes, had a different meaning. There was novelty in the conversation. Lili always carried a sketchbook and several pencils to captivate them with her lips.

Raul, Aunt Mima's boyfriend from the city, lived in Manina's house. He found Lili's talent an extraordinary case and began to spread the news of her ability in Los Mochis. Soon the media tried to interview her and they had to think about leaving behind the harmonious country life, but full of limitations and shortages. That life was not for the family, the city was always the attraction because very soon the activities of a town that you can visit in only two days were over: same friends, same hours, endless routines, dusty swirls, mango and plum bushes falling overripe, amazing inventions and gossip of the neighbors who had a lot of time to waste, curious looks of old people sitting in the orchard all day with their feet crossed. The events they had now abandoned in that forsaken hamlet, far from growing, seemed to become smaller and smaller. Some fled and formed families, others died, and continued being the same every end of year, when they gathered to eat guajolote and tamales.

Moving to Los Mochis was the opportunity to get away from the ranch that seemed lost at the end of the horizon, where the fishermen's steps end to become tiny canoes; where the labyrinths of the estuaries and mangrove swamps begin after setting sail at three in the morning, with an almost deaf and blind penumbra, wrapped in the splashing of some daring fish in front of the prow, the dour sound of the clams closing unexpectedly when they feel the agitation of the swell produced by the advance of the brave sailors, late at night behind the dawn sun, tossing and pulling the net. This Aguajito was left behind, the one of dark streets with hardly any street lamps illuminating, of nahuales and women in white who illuminated the fear and desolation at midnight, of the little river of tules with the headless man riding, the pierced palm pole, the madwoman enclosed in the shed, the forest of poplars and banana trees where appeared the drowned twins, the salt stuck to the neck, the icy crystalline water of the springs that ran two meters deep, welcomed in the earthenware jars that gave it taste of wet earth.

Everything was left behind with no memory that would want to remember it, although are things that are not forgotten outright.

After a year and a half in resistance, Manina was the same as she watched them leave. Herding the chickens while looking into the

distance, she seemed to feel strangeness, although being her, no one knows. She would see them whenever they needed her. Maybe they would also breathe better without her for a long time. Communication had become polluted in the air that crossed from her house by the river and reached Olivia's roofs, one could even think there was a hint of hatred in the glances, in the misgivings from the corner of the Manina's eye, as if she cast a spell of mean intentions. It seemed that way but it wasn't. It was only necessary to peel off the scab of weariness to breathe pure oxygen and rest from everyone.

Forgetting her first platonic love in that place was a difficult test for Lili. That dark face of harmonized lines, sensitive eyes that watched her many afternoons after leaving high school, so deeply, with few words. There was no expression in any other way than those strange looks, nothing more was possible. There was not enough time to forget the shyness of adolescence and the fear of both of rejection or the experience of first love. The first kiss was put on hold until it was too late to try it, but she carried a sketch among her most cherished belongings, and in her feelings the nostalgia of leaving the one who filled her days of illusion.

7. THE TRIP TO LOS MOCHIS, HER TRUE HOME

Olivia and her children were back in the city, not a big city but a city nonetheless: Los Mochis. And all so they could meet Lili. Conditions weren't very good; they took the family to live in a hotel for three months.

After a few interviews in the newspapers and on the radio, Olivia was overcome with grief. She was alone with her children, as she had been for a long time recently. They ended up with no money after paying for the hotel; it was August 1987.

But the step had already been taken and there was no turning back and no regrets.

After the important events of Lili's novelty as a "handicapped" artist, the reality they faced was tough. They had to rent a house to live in and again suffer shortages.

Olivia's children were young: Lili, seventeen; Eliana, fifteen; Lucrecia, thirteen; Tony, ten; Paty, seven; Yuri, three; by then Zulema, who would come into the world a year later, had not yet been born, the last procreation of Manuel and Olivia. At the age of thirty-eight she was still able to give birth to strong and healthy children, like all the others.

Schools, expenses and Manuel's scarce visits to his family made life in Los Mochis very eventful, at the beginning in the colonia 75, almost at the corner of the cempasuchil flower fields and the irrigation canal, in a nice house, but the rent ate up a lot of what the children could not afford, sometimes it was better to eat than to pay the rent.

Eliana enrolled in high school, she was already fifteen years old which passed by unnoticed. She had to work on weekends. On Fridays, she would go to get together with her mother at Jitzamuri, a fishing camp where they caught shrimp. Some relatives who gave them shelter in the lots were living there. The whole field was sand dunes that imprisoned the feet when walking. Under the dark blue of the sky, cots were stretched out. So they all lived in the open air, in the ramadas and few small awning. She used to go to sell clothes and things in installments. She took Lili with her because she could not leave her alone nor her small children. A year or two went by like that; after that it was more difficult to go so far away.

But it was Lidia who always benefited from the landscapes that were so beautiful that seemed ethereal. The sand did her a favor by containing the wheels of the chair for hours in front of the bay, watching the gentle sea in front of the hills. It would only get rough when a presumptuous fish jumped and when the pangas arrived at noon loaded with shrimps. Seagulls swirled around waiting for the heads of the crustaceans to be thrown into the water by the fishermen and the people who hurriedly arrived to offer the short work of beheading in exchange for a few handfuls of shrimps.

She would stay until finishing the drawing, rehearsing the art that lost her in tranquility, intoxicating by the scent of the ocean at sunset, surrounded by friends who would take her to walk the harbor every night.

But in Los Mochis were other activities, another routine. Eliana and Lili opted to go to the Yarda, the Central Market in Los Mochis, to buy vegetables and fruits because there they were cheaper. Later, there they would raffle watched or tape recorders, and with the proceeds they would also buy cheese, ham, eggs and whatever they could to take home. The most complicated thing was transportation. There was no city bus that wanted to take them. Most of the time they walked or ran back and forth with the food baskets crossed on Lili's legs, with the hot sun accompanying them, embracing and giving them shelter. It already knew them well enough, loved them in its way, sometimes too much, and they in turn always followed it, more at dusk, when it allowed them to caress and watch it, they gave light to the sun as well, every weekend invariably.

Around that time the Association for the Disabled of the Municipality of Ahome was formed. Olivia heard about it on the radio and about its leader, Cirilo Mena, whom she decided to go meet at the municipal DIF to tell him that her daughter also needed help, who knows how, but she needed it, she was very lonely.

Cirilo, a very creative man, came up with a way to get funds. Because of the wheelchair, almost everything was denied to them, except selling raffle tickets. They started on the wide boulevards of Los Mochis, on the street, which was a great success. Not only they sold the ten-pesos tickets, but they were given tips as well. It seemed that the bad economic weather was improving and the shortages were less now. The commute to get to the workplace was the same, from one end of town to

the other, running or walking for two hours, just as when they used to go to the Yarda.

Now they sometimes went into the cinema. It was something new and relaxing to know that they could see a movie once in a while. There were always inconveniences, it was a never-ending struggle, and that represented the beginning of the bloody battle of life, because she went on without thinking, driven by the desire to change everything, to improve. Lidia never thought on stopping, she loved herself, her siblings, her mother, no matter what was happening around her or with herself.

At the tender age of eighteen, despite her perseverance, she was assaulted by demons that jumped out of the shadows to persuade her to give up everything and lose herself, tormenting her by making her confess that this life was too much, that she should give up. Twenty ways to take her life, stop suffering, came to her mind lying down at night, but the irony was that she was unable to do them. At the very least she needed to get out of bed to begin. She had given up her efforts a long time ago, her body did not respond, she would fall asleep exhausted from thinking about things that had no solution.

The next day, she resumed the responsibility of guiding her siblings through their routines and, in turn, fulfilled her own. Eliana would check her catheter, sit her down, give her breakfast, stimulate her to go to the bathroom, bathe her, carry her from one chair to another and to bed to change her. And they went out to work again in the afternoon. Olivia had just given birth to Zulema, her last daughter, a baby full of life and energy, who was always dancing, moving; jumping in front of the mirror she went crazy, was a new light at home. They moved from house to house, renting. Manuel rarely went to see them, who knows where he was.

Lili wanted to finish high school which she had left unfinished in the second year when she had the accident. Cirilo helped and encouraged her to do so.

One day, at the age of eighteen, Eliana married him on the sly. She had run away forever, Lili thought, and was now deprived of her sister's loyalty thanks to fate. By succession, now her mother and the next sister would bear the burden alone without Eliana. The future was as always: obtuse. Her mother and Lucrecia were left perplexed, staring without thinking so as not to speak, they already knew how to swallow the terrible saddened feeling.

Eliana had decided to slip away gently, without giving explanations, only telling her mother that she had gotten married without telling her. Olivia opened her eyes in such a way that she lifted her head stretching from the veins of her stubborn arms to the muscles of her skull, held her breath that leads to words and spat only a light sigh, knotted together with the blood that runs through every vein and the pain that widens and enlarges the heart when it feels exalted with resignation. They both fell silent, Eliana bowed her head and her mother watched her with disappointment. She was tired of the burden she had, the responsibility made her give up the fight.

Months later she got married in church. That day it rained and rained so much that there was one of the greatest floods of the “rio fuerte”, and it carried in its current all the ranches and jacales near the riverbank and invaded the roads that lead to all the towns by the side of the road. It arrived only six kilometers from El Aguajito, crossing fifty kilometers of roads to reach the sea, the desperate river took the old riverbed taking more than one in its creaking; it chased Uncle Lalo along the asphalt of the road to San Jose, with the water ten meters away, he ran without stopping. The Manina took the cochi, who recently had given birth, to the San Lorenzo hill, tied her to a mesquite tree and sat down to wait. No one came to Eliana and Cirilo’s wedding; that day was not auspicious.

Lili always had the dream of finishing a professional career. She believed she could do it. She passed what remained of secondary in a single exam, and asked the governor for help to study prep school, but she had to travel to Culiacan every semester to pick up her books, that was the support she counted on.

Eliana who was already studying at the university worked with Cirilo to get ahead and help her family, even if it was only with the groceries, sometimes with money. Olivia had already sold everything she had, even the dishes, so that at least her children had a house.

But Lili and her siblings still had a long way to go. It was during one of Manuel’s visits. Olivia was working and the three daughters were alone in the house. Manuel did not know how to calm his lust, and one day they couldn’t take it anymore. In confession they asked Lucrecia not to leave them alone with their father.

The next day they went to the Public Prosecutor’s Office, where all the information was described in detail. Eliana went to recognize him at the state judicial police station. Confused between pain and rage, she

did not have the courage to look him in the face, she managed to see him as soon as the edge of the wall was lost to peek out of the corner of her eye, he was going from one side to the other, like a captured coyote. When he felt the presence he turned to where she was. Hiding immediately, she returned the nervous, hurried steps, trying to get out of those dark, filthy walls immediately. At eleven o'clock at night, a thousand images that she didn't wish to recreate, flashed through her mind. She confirmed that it was him. She went out as if her conscience was chasing her.

That image would linger in her memory, the disconsolation of seeing him, she did not know if because of him, her sisters or herself. He was sentenced to fourteen years in prison, although a year later he was released with the help of his brother.

Olivia's heart was softened, and a week before sentencing she spoke to the judge to get him to let him go free, asking him to lenient.

The judge showed a wry grimace when she made this dishonorable request and did the opposite: was implacable.

8. MOM LEFT

Everything got worse and worse. Lucrecia looked for a job and left school. The mother began to associate with unsavory friends. She was invited to bars and discos, was no longer seen around the house, some days she didn't get to sleep. The two sisters took turns taking care of the children, until one day she never came back home. They decided to go looking for her, they asked here and there and finally they learned where to find her. After several months of that life, she went to live with Rosalia, a woman five years younger who, according to her, had rescued her from the bad life in which she had been living.

Lili could not bear the shame and discouragement. Now she and her five siblings were alone. She thought there could be no more tragedy in the world than her own, but still she went on. When Olivia went to see her children, Lili forbade them to speak to their mother because she was a bad influence and thus tried to protect them. Later she would come to her senses and went to look for her; they undoubtedly needed her.

- Damn woman, leave my mom alone! Mom, get out! We're out here!, come with us.

Repeatedly she did not look out, fear paralyzed her or perhaps Rosalia didn't want to share her. Olivia had lost the will to live, love for herself and her family she cared for so much. The misfortune was too much of a burden not allowing her to take a single step. She chose to run away from the pain without thinking about the suffering of her children, she was blinded and would remain so. Her change was forever, everything was broken. She wished to be born again at that instant and erase from her consciousness the damage of the events.

Lili worked as much as her limitations allowed her to, she took Paty with her to sell raffle tickets. Tony, who took care of the two little girls, had more responsibilities than she could conceive in her intelligence. Lucrecia worked too. Then, Lili made a decision, thinking that her mother would come to her senses and that she would be kicked out by Rosalia. She sent Tony to be an accomplice in her decisions, who collected Zulemita and Yuri's clothes, put them in a suitcase and took the two girls with him.

When they arrived at Rosalia's house, they urged her mother to come out to meet them, he threw the suitcases and the two girls and shouted at her that he was leaving her daughters there.

They left again, alone, abandoning the little ones to their fate. Everyone knew that Rosalia didn't care about them, only their mother. She was trying to protect her from what she thought, wrongly, that brought suffering to Olivia. But Lili was right: if she loved the mother, she had to love her children; if not, she should leave her free to go. In time Rosalia became like a mother to them.

Family disintegration is so upsetting for the children that they are always looking for an escape to happiness, usually unreal and ephemeral. After this, Lucrecia got pregnant, she made them see that they would soon be more to go on with life. Lili continued studying with effort. So she did something that she thought would not work, because there was no law that would protect a person like her. She asked for support from DIF and they offered her tax-deductible receipts to collect donations, which were barely enough to pay for a "combi" to transport her. Thus she entered the university to study Social Psychology, to fulfill one of her great dreams.

Cirilo and Eliana, on a trip to Hermosillo, bought a car of foreign origin to transport her and take her to the university. The excitement was short-lived. One day Hacienda picked it up arguing that it was outside the law, they were never able to recover it. They didn't understand explanations. The car was used to transport a handicapped woman to college. Obstacles always pursued her, not even with a sit-in outside the municipal palace and the threat of a hunger strike by Cirilo, did the director of Hacienda have any consideration. He managed to get the municipal president to listen to him, who asked him to leave, promising to give him another vehicle. This didn't happen either and, due to the pressure, he ended up giving Lili a foot of house with land. Her own house, with no services and more or less habitable, consisted of a large brick room with no plastering, in a new neighborhood on the edge of the city, surrounded by resettled people, modest and bad-faced, so it remained empty for a long time.

Tony "stole" Fabiola, as they used to say, when the tender age of fifteen does not allow for maturity nor measure the destiny that the uncertain future foretold. He, at sixteen, went with her to Juan Jose Rios, to the home of some distant uncle and aunt. He got a job painting walls, which as an occupation served him as therapy. Olivia, worried and with a conscience full of frustration, dared to claim him back home when Fabiola was already six months pregnant. That was the pretext to live with her, she installed him in Lili's still abandoned house. Those were busy times. Each one tried to make the best of their lives, although they were not yet able to do so. Lucrecia left

with her boyfriend, who at times seemed to be interested in her and her daughter's future, but that was not the case. Paty went to live with Eliana and Cirilo... Lili was left alone again, she was abandoned in spite of all her efforts. Her family was always the most important thing and she couldn't make it enough. Those were moments when sadness ran deep in her heart, only in those hard moments did she remember her physical condition, her helplessness to help her siblings, give them a better future, but she couldn't even assure it. Destiny told her that it was not time to change anything, everything would follow its course, and if circumstances favored her, one day she would achieve her dreams. Life had taught her a lot in a few years, she knew that she could not change events just as she was sure that her strength would never leave her until the day she died.

She went to the house of one foot with Tony and Faby. Another cycle of life began, other challenges that for many would be impossible in a wheelchair. She just went on without thinking, without questioning, without cursing, with full belief in herself, but without the faith in God that makes everything possible.

When the heat subsided, they would go on a pilgrimage through the northern towns, she, her mother and Tony with his wife Faby, to sell tickets along the avenues. Wherever they saw the most traffic, there they installed themselves with a block of foliated tickets, at ten pesos each, a jar in which they threw the coins, a long-sleeved shirt and a cap to protect them from the sun. The cold permeated to the bone at the border, the skin cracked, but not them, it was their only livelihood, there was no work elsewhere, least of all for Lidia.

In a few years they had swept away the northern cities, people no longer bought from them as before, they did not pay attention to them. Cars would fly by on one side, throwing dust on them, they would get installed on the speed bumps to see if people would take pity and buy something; it was a tour of cities that lasted for months.

Many times, they spent New Year's Eve in a hotel or motel room, depending on the city. They ate traditional snacks, lots of grilled meat, wheat flour tortillas, "sobaqueras", typical of Sonora, with shredded meat, fruits in syrup, nuts, lots of oranges in season, grapes and whatever they could find on their way to work.

As everything ends, as time went by there was no more business, the expenses of the truck were more than the profit. Lili had to look for something else. Besides, her body was getting exhausted, she was complaining about those long days, sitting, with spasms in her legs, with a bag full of urine, it was no longer for her, she had to stay at home.

Olivia continued with her same job, helping her children, sending money to Lili and her daughters, because later she came to her senses, she worked hard to make up for the abandonment of her most loved ones: her children.

It was Holy Week, they were arriving in Mazatlán in the middle of the hustle and bustle. It was one of Lili's last trips to work selling tickets with Cirilo, Eliana and the chuecos. There was Victor, a young man with myelomeningocele, who would become her boyfriend on that trip and they would last together for many, many years. He was a vegetarian and made Lili an ovo-lacto-vegetarian; he began to influence Lidia's life from then on.

Eliana got a job at the toll booth on the San Miguel bridge; Cirilo had to do his own thing, repairing electrical appliances in his house, but the intense heat was killing him. Because he was looking for benefits for the association for the disabled, he didn't take care of his body. To do the paperwork to obtain sponsorships for the chuecos, as he called them, absorbed all his daily life: scholarships and courses to integrate them into productive life, to remove them from the handouts and misery was a titanic task. The government did nothing, the streets continued without ramps, public buildings without elevators, public transportation without access, impossible parking lots, not even in hospitals. Everything was allowed for those who walked on two legs, not on crutches, let alone four wheels. He was bedridden for long periods, with burns on his feet up to second degree, with deep bedsores on his buttocks. He often cured himself with Isodine, a disinfectant liquid brought to him by his sister. He would put on a piece of aloe vera and gauze. Eliana was no longer around all day due to work.

They acquired a piece of land on the outskirts of Los Mochis surrounded by a canal and large plots of cempasuchil flower plantations in the back; on one side, there was the Ejido Mexico, with houses with awnings and palm porches, barrier streets, guamuchil trees and a few guava trees, and yes, full of mesquite trees. When it rained, it became a muddy, slippery river that could only be crossed by boat, almost until you reached the main street, which was asphalted, full of potholes, and went around the ejido to get back out to the Ahome highway. On the other side was the sugar cane road and, as its name indicated, it was surrounded by sugar cane fields. In the distance you could see the smoke when the cane was burned, then the loaded Batangas, up to five, pulled by a tractor, were sowing pieces of charred cane along the edge of the field. Cirilo would go daily to pick up the sweet, burnt cane, and with one bite he would tear off a line of the husk from end to end. That road that

led from the sugar cane towns, passed by the iron sheet sheds where the cane cutters stayed with their machetes, crossed the Juarez drainage, passed by one side of the Jaramillo neighborhood – on the other side was Campo Uno –, crossed the continuation of the River de las Cañas boulevard, the plant nursery and the Sinaloa park, which was once the botanical garden of Don Benjamin Francis Johnston, founder of the city in 1903 and who brought plants from many parts of the world and planted them there. Ahead was the Sugar Mill of Los Mochis, which would now be located next to the center of the city, surrounded by typical houses of those years, but built in the American style, on Rosendo G. Castro Boulevard, as well as the layout of streets and alleys in the purely gringo style. There lived the officials, directors and owners of that huge machine with chimneys and giant ducts that impregnated “the city of the winds with smell of sugar cane”. The black trail could be seen covering the entire downtown, covering the streets with soot, as well as the northern hats of most of the townspeople who swarmed daily along the avenues lined with palm trees, Ficus and cactus that, to tell the truth, provided very little shade and slightly lessened the heat and sleepiness it provoked.

The sugar cane road continued to the east as well, but next to it there were some tracks along which the Ingenio’s train left, and then joined the canal that led to Lili’s neighborhood, and then to the national railroad tracks. Much further on, through Camp 35, all the processed sugar was taken there, who knows where to. Those tracks crossed to the United States and to the south of Mexico.

9. AN INTERIOR LANDSCAPE FROM THE UNIVERSITY TO THE LITTLE HOUSE IN LOS MOCHIS

She picked up the paintbrush with her lips. She had placed the stretcher on her drawing table, small, embedded in the chair, at the height of her face, leaning on a kind of lectern, tilted to place the pencil. On one side of the dining room table she had the oil paintings.

On the pencil drawing, the finely drawn lines of the small figure of a seated woman seemed to rest in that brief space, wrapped in a blanket up to her waist, with a bare back and beautiful hair. Without color, it was still vaguely discernible that this was a woman with tanned skin, shiny jet-black hair, in contact with the mother earth that seemed to emerge as the trunk of a tree emerges from the root into the earth. In front of her, a basket of sunflowers that came to life, tender yellow.

That single drawing had taken her a week. Now came the hardest part. For the first time she faced the challenge, the emotion invaded her for not knowing if she was ready to give life to her drawing, to that woman she always brought in her inspiration, to those faces that since she was a child she had captured, with expressive slanted eyes, perfect cheekbones, soft fleshy lips, like a butterfly that for the first time shook its wings to cut the air and be free.

Those faces seemed vital in the charcoal drawing, with undaunted expressions, but this time there was no face. It was covered by the fear of putting the bronze tone on it. What would happen if she lost the life of the shapes with the colors? Then she decided and the paintbrush snatched a color, she mixed it to the desired consistency and continued all afternoon. Her lips were throbbing from applying more impetus than necessary, she didn't know how to measure the effort to hold it, the water in the glass was witness, trembled, took another, watched in moments before the doubt of whether she could draw, tint with colors her yearnings.

In the last year of college, Alma, her friend, asked her for seven paintings. Seven paintings without telling her the destiny of her work. And she confidently agreed. The first paintings would be proof that her talent was unquestionable. Then she asked for help from a teacher at the university, she wanted to give herself confidence, although she knew she could do it.

Then, during two months, she would undo herself daily, shading, coloring, closing her eyes and imagining the female figures, the features, the shades. Actually, it was not difficult. Ecstatic, she continued to finish her works: a mountainous landscape, a deep river, trees on the riverbank, blue sky, a horseman riding in the distance, at the end a womanly face, always. The seven works were ready. She gave them to Alma who trusted her talent and asked her for these paintings on request. She would receive the first plastic work of a great artist.

Painting was already a clear objective, a profession by which to live and transcend her old way of daily life. Her love for art, for painting, that gift truncated by fate that tried to rip her dreams out from her, her longing for art was stronger, she took the reins of her desires. Anxieties invaded her for four months. She waited in expectation, on the verge of giving up waiting.

One beautiful day, clear as hope, she was having coffee at the invitation of Alma, who received a call and handed her the phone:

- Lili, it's for you.
- For me?
- Yes.

A somewhat peculiar voice with a foreign accent greeted her.

It was John Grepe, the director in Mexico of the Association of Painters with the Mouth and Feet. He received her paintings and informed her that she was now a member of the association and had been awarded a scholarship from now on.

Lili's whole body seemed to shudder, she remained mute and her lips wanted to ask a question that her friend Alma guessed. Alma nodded with a look of tenderness and a smile of happiness.

She only managed to say thank you very much, while her face glowed with happiness and a lump stuck in her throat was waiting to burst. Her cheeks were flushed with emotion, she raised her arm and leaned her forehead on the hand held by the wrist bone, looked like a board, smooth with the fingers arched. The curls fell to figure a curtain covering her; this time tears were of gratitude. She took her first painting classes at the Museo Regional del Valle del Fuerte, from 1997 to 1999.

Nine hundred pesos a month. She had not worked for a long time. The sweltering heat of the summer months barely allowed her to breathe. The "pepsilindro" with straw had to be full of water all the time, she got wet every moment, her lower lips were acting as a fountain towards the crown of her head and, when it didn't reach her, she almost desperately asked for: "Pour

water on me”, sighing, since Lidia’s body wasn’t able to regulate its temperature, as human bodies naturally do; the normal thermostat was atrophied forever. The cooler in the living room was not enough to cool the invalid body, it was not enough to filter the fresh air from the sawdust wet with the hose coming from the faucet. Her body seemed to be cold, yet her body inside was warm, apathetic to her needs. For the umpteenth time, Lidia was left alone. Tony had to go to work. Lucrecia, seeing her alone, took her with her for a few months. Then she separated from her boyfriend and they went to the one foot house, the two of them and the newborn.

With only nine hundred pesos was not possible to buy medicines, necessary articles for her special survival, eating, and buy paints to fulfill the commitment made with the association to make more paintings; sometimes by hitchhiking, with the neighbor, with her sister, sometimes without eating.

With a few concrete blocks, twenty sacks of cement given to her by the municipal president, mud bricks bought by her friend from the Yarda, and money sent by her mother from the border – from selling tickets for the association’s raffles –, for labor, they were able to build her one more room and a bathroom.

Lucrecia had failed in her attempt to create a family. With Marilyn in her arms she stopped dreaming of living in a full home. Gabriel had deceived her all along by telling her he was alone, when in reality he had another family and a daughter born at the same time as Marilyn. The world sank when he didn’t even want to give her the surname that corresponded to her by blood; after all it was a very ordinary surname, perhaps the girl as beautiful as the clear and deep sky did not deserve such a discredit.

She arrived as Lili’s loving sister and companion to live life together again, but with other dreams, with new hopes. They were happy. They were living the candor of childhood, the fullness of carrying out what complements us as creative beings and full of images. Each dawn was not enough to materialize them all, because every night emerged new representations of what needed to be healed with colorful verses painted with repressed love, obfuscated with the astonished world that deceives and traps in sorrowful hysteria.

The mesquite tree at the end of the street, the road full of holes, bumps and ditches, the corrals of boarded fences, the cows and calves skinny from lack of pasture, was the price of drought every year. There was no more rain-fed farmland. The smell of manure pervaded the road at the edge of the dusty irrigation canal. It was necessary to pass “burning the tire” to avoid getting full of dirt, then turn in the poplar tree, or else continue through the drain full of

garbage, stinky. Thanks to the tules, you couldn't see much of the blackish waters, there were not many options to get to the neighborhood where Lidia now lived. But it was her house, she was no longer paying rent, no more suffering with the landlord every month.

As the years went by, there were more and more houses in that area, but were no longer neighborhoods of empty lots. They were subdivisions of houses developed by a construction company, with a garage and two black olive trees on each front.

Lili was never worried about being alone, nor was she afraid of the thieves "cholos" who passed by leaving a trail of burnt grass smell, she had many other things to worry about. She was at the end of her studies and did her professional social service at the Centro Regional de Rehabilitacion Integral of Los Mochis (CRRI) providing psychological counseling to people with motor and intellectual disabilities.

She had completed her degree among psychologists. Her classmates decided to name the generation after her: Lidia de Jesus Chaidez Lopez, generation 93-97. Her character and equanimity were accentuated every time there were bumps in the road; it was as if, instead of getting downhearted, she found strength everywhere; for every obstacle she overcame, she forged a more courageous goal.

10. THE WORK PROJECT

There was no support for them, that has always been the case. Ten percent of the municipality's population is disabled and there are (nor were) no job opportunities for most of them, that's why it was so difficult to get those who were begging off the streets. Others never went out on the streets, remaining cloistered in their homes for comfort or out of family shame. Many already had families: how did they provide support in their homes? All with special health needs, food, transportation, no medical insurance; gauze, healing materials, antibiotics, wheelchairs, even urinary catheters were expensive, how to finance these excessive expenses? Each one survived as life allowed, they were not considered as useful labor, much less intellectual.

She had graduated as a social psychologist, she always outlined to that. She is so kind-hearted, humble, without evil ambition nor greed, that she invariably cares for others, as if they needed her, as if the underprivileged were the others. Many of those around her, her parents and siblings, were like insects attracted by the light, that light that gave confidence and radiated security; she had become the protector, who always had the solution to everyone's problems, who had the most unlikely and varied friendships, in all positions and professions, she had won the sympathy of many people, of the children. Her immutable peaceful face learned to listen, perhaps her situation forced her to do so; she was not the owner of her body's will, she depended on others, only for that.

Some important events had taken place. Lucrecia married Gerardo, got divorced, and soon after gave birth to Leonardo, who was already two years old. Eliana left the city to live elsewhere.

It was the summer of 1999, the weather, as always, was extreme and forced us to stay locked up indoors, not wanting to move a bone. The hours went by and through the window you could see the empty street, the light of that invasive sun was dazzling and the curtains had to be closed so that the cold air conditioning would not get warmer.

Lidia was sitting with a stuffy look and her eyesight lost for moments, with the pencil in her mouth, moistened, peeling the paint and spitting it out at times; pensive, trying to make the most of the minutes that were slowly ticking by. Ten centimeters from the varnished board, the notebook open on a blank page awaited the charcoal of the pencil. Her arm, hooked on the right handle

of the chair, holding her; her legs, shaking only occasionally, spasming; the cylinder of water between her legs to cool her every now and then. Her mind did somersaults at the mere thought of undertaking the project. This time it wasn't starting a painting, it wasn't about palettes and easel; that was easy. Now it was about another facet of her life: the professional one.

Sitting on the bed was Victor, he pulled her out of her slumber to remind her what they were up to :

- Lili, what are you thinking about?
- On how to start. This project is important to me, you know that. I want to do it very well so it won't be rejected. It is necessary to contribute something in order to help many disabled people.
- Yes, I understand. How do we start? I'd better write, you'll get tired.
- You are right, what do you say if...

Victor was a man of few words. He had been able to understand her in a short time. Since they had become sweethearts, they were always together.

In her large project she described in detail the reasons why the municipality urgently needed an area of attention to the disabled and vulnerable groups. She proposed a coordination of care for people with disabilities, which cited human aspects. In the introduction she wrote:

Disability has a series of individual and social disadvantages that limit the exercise of human rights, the development of human potential and equal social opportunities. This situation affects the development of individuals and family and community environment by making people with disabilities a socially vulnerable group.

It is therefore proposed to create, within the administrative structure of the municipal government, a Coordination in the Direction of Social Action and a Municipal Program of Attention to People with Disabilities, with the purpose of facilitating actions that allow this population to attend to the solution of their needs.

The objective: to promote solutions for people with disabilities in the municipality of Ahome that allow the exercise of their human rights, the development of their individual potential and the equalization of social opportunities.

The areas of action proposed in this Program were very basic: population registration, health, education, employment, accessibility, transportation, art, sports, support for institutions and people with disabilities.

She presented it to the Director of the municipal DIF, who respectfully thanked her for the enormous work she had done, and told her that for now they could not finance this type of project, as they had many more important

needs. The handicapped were cared for there, as she knew, with what they could. There were many and they couldn't cope. She concluded by saying: "We do what we can".

She left the office of that woman who was only trying to do her job, nothing more; to comply, without committing herself more than necessary, without extra efforts, without really listening to the needs of the limited.

That long corridor, with armchairs in some consulting rooms, with few people actually, with slow employees like the bureaucracy, she went through it as fast as she could. This meant not only a future for her, but also helping those who were worse off than she was. It pained her enormously seeing the suffering of others, she didn't want anyone to suffer as much as she had suffered so far. In her thoughts, ideas crossed her mind like leaping monkeys, she was looking for the solution to this logical approach to justice that was made by looking without understanding the reasoning of others.

She didn't give up. More agencies to go to were waiting for her. Of course, she felt both anxiety and hope. She sighed deeply, but not out of discouragement. She seemed to always sigh for everything, out of weariness.

Outside, when they had passed through the exit door, the faith she always kept came to her mind, even more so at that moment. She had received many refusals and bad faces before, it was just one more added to her long record.

- Let's go, Victor, tomorrow we will see the municipal president, let's see what he has to say. They left, Victor propelling himself with every leap with his crutches, with both legs at the same time; she in the electric wheelchair. They got lost in the avenues on their way home. The road was very long, had to take Santos Degollado Avenue to where it ends at the railroad tracks, where the drain outlet and irrigation canal begins, and then continue, as almost every day, along the dusty mountain road that would take her to their home of dirt roads.

That afternoon she pondered a lot, trying to improve her writing, guessing where there was some blunder that could close doors everywhere, she didn't want to get one more.

Physical obstacles complicated the next day: thirty steps, several relentless sidewalks. She turned her gaze upwards, from the floor and with wheels it was perceived very high. As always, some charitable souls offered their arms to take her up, wheelchair and all, one by one, each step. She arrived on time for her appointment. The door was opened in a gesture of help. At the front were four desks with secretaries writing down the names of those summoned. A school-like-set-up surrounded the center of the Salon de Cabildos. The Chino Valenzuela, the municipal president, conversed at the

other end with some petitioner. Appointments were brief and specific, there was little time for each one. Lidia, nervous, had to be clear and direct. Start with something that would interest them to continue listening to what was on her mind. The aldermen paid attention to her from the beginning. The municipal president was pleased. Maybe it was going through his mind: “I have to do something good. This is the opportunity. I’m going to say yes, who cares, she wants to work, I’ll give her a job”.

- Miss Lidia Chaidez, we will analyze your proposal. Please leave us a copy. We will give you an answer next week. Call me back.

- Thank you very much – she felt anxious inside.

A hope lit her way back home. It was not easy to get a job in that small town, and the chances for a disabled woman were nil.

She would get it. They had seen the initiative and confidence required to take that step in an almost imperceptible young woman, leaning back in a chair, accompanied by a man on crutches, proposing, outstripping the rest. At least she was good looking.

Two months passed after the interview with Chino Valenzuela. Her project was approved and the position was hers.

She got up early, the starting time was at nine o’clock in the morning. She asked her sister to dry her hair. She also put eyeliner on her, curled her eyelashes and put mascara, powdered her face, put her lipstick and left a little that she spread herself, then the blush.

She looked at herself in the small mirror folded between her clenched fingers. She adjusted her blouse which she pulled tightly down to her waist and pulled her pants to line up her waist. She straightened her feet and fastened them with a special belt to the chair’s flaps. She hung her backpack on the back, full of notebooks and notes with guides she thought she could use, and her project strategically divided into parts; she was ready to go out for her first day of employment of a lifetime.

She had to get a ride with the neighbor. Lucrecia put her in the van, she was focused on the time it would take her to get there, she did not want to be late. They looked for parking inside the City Hall facilities. There was no special one where they could get off, so they had to maneuver to the first free sidewalk and ask for help to passersby.

With a fluttering heart and an anxiety that she did not manifest, she began to bite her nails with her elbow wedged in her thigh. She looked around to start adjusting. From now on she would be part of the infrastructure: she would have to identify steps, sidewalks, locate the best way to get there with fewer obstacles, glide gracefully like a surfboard over fierce waves and get around them, become familiar with faces that were part of the colloquial

landscape, of such figures eternalized on the firms. Before that, she had no need to discover strategies for access to that esplanade.

Lucrecia took her by the handles and Lidia pointed out the path that was now clear to her. The dynamic ended in front of the entrance. She stopped, someone distractedly emerged and hit the tips of the footrests and with an indignant gesture, rubbed. She apologized and went on. The reception was pitiful. From that rostrum she appreciated the exacerbated panorama. The vehicle that supported her would barely pass the reduced frame and two meters more at the most. Inside, incessant calls, interrupted greetings. She was intimidated for a second. As she had expected, a few moments had passed and no one perceived her figure in that space. She didn't crave special attention, much less privileges that would make her colleagues uncomfortable. Some sensitive soul held the door and invited her to follow the way.

For her arrival, a used desk had been placed in front of the entrance to the Social Action Department. There was one more step to jump before entering through the door; a space where barely a chair could fit. There were several empty drawers, but not a pencil nor a sheet of paper nor a work tool, much less a phone line. More than anything else, the desk seemed like a hindrance in getting to the offices. In itself, already crowded, there was barely enough room to move around. The mad bustle of women's voices intertwined with each other was more reminiscent of a call center with cramped cubicles than of the offices of H. Ahome City Hall.

The light came in with her smile, the pitiful whispering died down to steal a few moments of curiosity. Socorrito, a loving, charitable woman, proud of being so, came out to introduce Lidia de Jesus Chaidez Lopez as the person in charge of a new project of "attention to people with disabilities and vulnerable groups". She didn't know how to put together her first day's work. There were no external tools and no technological arms, but she wanted to show that a new existence was beginning for her: the year 1999.

With a lower salary than most of her colleagues, no budget, no vouchers, no assistant to give her a glass of water and no decent space. It was all a stopgap, but she would know how to make good use of the few resources granted to her.

The first months were titanic. Lucrecia ran with her through the lost streets that surrounded the neighborhood Praderas de Villa, which was far from any hamlet attached to the city. They passed corrals and thickets that seemed endless. After crossing the two bridges over the canal and the drain, they were relieved. From there to the office it was only half an hour pushing her sister, but already on the paved streets.

She showed up to her job day by day. People in need came asking for support: an elderly woman with barely enough to eat and without a cane to support her weak skeleton, a father anguished because his son needed rehabilitation, people who did not have a wheelchair to leave their homes and be transported, others had no money for medicine or doctors, other wanted to work, others needed training, since they never went to school. Every day there was a parade that grew bigger and bigger.

Lidia remained behind the desk. People had no choice but to wait outside to bring the problem to her. She listened to everyone. She asked Mariaelena to make a request form that people could fill out and she would attend to them. She made that promise to everyone. Maybe they believed in her because she knew how to put herself in the place of each person, she knew all kinds of needs, all urgent. She listened patiently. Apparently, they were finding out that she was there to serve them and believed that she had all the resources to solve the huge, basic problems, but she had only been given the power to listen. Very soon, acting would be part of her powers and her own initiative.

The telephone line of the secretary of another area served as a line for her as well, she got a directory of phone extensions, government agencies and public and private institutions; followed calls to schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, visits to businessmen, officials, managers and many more; official letters, requests...

Many kind people began to support her work by obtaining scholarships to study at the Work Training Centers and universities; exemption from payment for public transportation; access to sports facilities; medical consultations, free medicines and donations of wheelchairs and orthopedic devices; agreements with associations; discounts on property and water payments; car license plates with identification for the disabled; three hundred monthly groceries to be delivered to the needy; donations of shoes, clothes, toys at Christmas; management of ramps on sidewalks and preferential parking in public and government buildings.

In order to start the management of the elevator in the building where she works, she had to follow an endless list of procedures, such as the needs that arise on a daily basis.

Her charm opened the doors of many people and she herself created a line of help and communication, formed her own directories of people who were willing to support her in any way and that she still keeps today; approximately three thousand beneficiaries continue to receive the support of her efforts, thanks to the entrepreneurial spirit that has kept her working hard for a long time.

11. LUCRECIA. HER NEW SUPPORT

Lucrecia found in Lidia the support she needed to move forward with her goals. In turn, Lidia needed someone she could count on unconditionally, they continued their life together, complementing each other. Lucrecia prepared her and took her to work every day, and Lidia watched her children in the afternoons, when she would go to the university to study law. Lidia took the opportunity to continue painting, but not without being attentive to her nephews, directing Marilyn all the time, attentive to her brother Leonardo. With Lidia's salary and painting scholarship they could continue on their own.

The year 1999 was for Lidia a year of many challenges and growth in all senses. Maturing as a person, achieving accomplishments and success in her projects made her see life from very different angles. When she got home, she would take time to breathe, meditate on what had happened during the day. Sometimes, on the sidewalk she would observe her life and the meaning it now had, painting in her palette all the surroundings; as an incentive, it was her best therapy.

The work became arduous, demanding. If she didn't follow through, she knew no one else would. Not having a vehicle to commute to work complicated the work and made it difficult every day. No one knew for sure how she got to her improvised office.

Time went by, and sometimes that's how complicated things get solved. She bought a used vehicle with the savings from her two salaries, later at the border she would get a van adapted with an electric ramp.

All her work began to generate numerous recognitions and she became part of recognized public providers, pillar and face of social action in the face of the demand of the underprivileged that the government had the obligation to fulfill. This was achieved through Lidia.

Someone who has always faced discrimination and indifference from many did not care about the attitude of unconscious people. She was only interested in contributing and that the resources would reach those who needed them. She has always worked overcoming the walls of apathy and economic obstacles, in that way she has been able to proudly contribute her work and commitment with immeasurable love for her fellow man.

In 2001, the State Law on the Disabled was passed, but it has not been implemented because there are no regulations governing it, and it continues to be ignored.

First they were called handicapped or invalids; some, more pejoratively, referred to them as cripples; among them, crooked, then disabled, now they are called “differently abled”. They have been changing the name not only to differentiate them from others, but also to continue discriminating against them. Lidia is a reliable witness when it comes to exposing the progress of true integration into society. Very little has been achieved despite considerable effort.

For several administrations and changes of government, Lidia has continued her titanic work. She has been asked to give motivational lectures in high schools and universities, and she has received public recognition for her tireless work, which gives her more energy to remain on the path of love, empathy and true compassion.

12. AND AFTER 1999... A CONCLUSION WITH THE MOUTH AND HEART

Lidia continued in her creating process; the will she had developed was endless. She formed her own environment forged in her own way: the smile of life, she always looked at the positive side of everything that crossed her path, good or bad, she was always guided by something more than a simple desire, by her inexhaustible spirit, like a fountain that emanates from the deepest of the planet, from inexhaustible springs of pure and fresh, uncontaminated water. Thus such was Lidia's spirit.

On that day in 1999, she felt that she would discover something else. She was anxiously waiting for Fabiola – her dearest friend – and put aside her work obligations. She forgot for a day about the calls to the civil servants to explore this other facet of her altruistic spirit, which also fulfilled her completely.

She told her friend that she had a chance, something different to see her life from another angle, not only from the one that fate had marked her with an unfair disease, like all diseases, which was also silent and would gradually charge her for everything she owed to destiny. She would slowly lose muscle mobility, until she could no longer walk; legs, arms and with time, which she hoped would be long, would become paralyzed, just like her heart, as had already happened to one of her sisters, who recently passed away.

Fabiola accepted Lidia's invitation to see the colors of her unhappiness in a different tone, the deepest; the one that comes from the unconscious is stronger. She accepted because she had no more escape routes. Art was not her vocation, perhaps she did not have time to know what it would be nor to choose one, because in addition there was the economic necessity.

Lidia took her in and taught her to paint. She always told her that if she learned, she could send her paintings to the Painters Association to get her a scholarship.

That day Fabiola arrived in the "combi" that Lidia had paid to take her from her home in Colonia 72.

She arranged to meet her in the afternoon, when the body feels adapted to the day and the eyes are more awake, because Faby did not want to miss a

single moment of retention. Lili prepared a sketchbook and special pencils for her. She was her first student at her house.

She would share a piece of pure essence, something intimate that had slowly sprouted and perfected. It now emanated from her and was to imbue others with nature, the part of us all that has nothing to do with the external nor the physical.

Fabiola began to recognize in herself what Lidia had shared. Life gave her a turn when she discovered that the external was fleeting, as well as the world around them, only the will and the happiness with which they would travel their path from now on would remain in them. She forgot what hurt her and began to draw the lines that would lead her to freedom. In addition to her emotional independence, she got the scholarship in a short period of time to achieve economic autonomy as well.

From that day on she showed up for her classes punctually. The story of her end had not yet been written, there was still much to be accomplished to purify her soul.

WORKING DAYS...

Now the days were agile, she could intersperse the love of life that art gave her with her responsibilities at work, in the altruism practiced from a desk that, day after day, had the same purpose: to help others. The only thing that increased were the people in need of a little light that she gave them because they felt calm and confident when listening to her sweet and slow voice.

The commitment was real. The work for her was a challenge every afternoon, when the bones in her body arched from fatigue and sent a message of discomfort and sometimes pain to the brain.

She also began to adapt to her classmates, and they, in turn, began to have the patience that Lidia needed from them. Little by little she gained self-confidence; there were no intellectual barriers to reaching her goals. No one knew that the calls she was making were coming from someone who couldn't even dial the numbers on the phone. Although there was no reason for them to know about it. She handled philosophically, she felt there was time to wait.

In addition to skillfully combining her artistic vocation with her work at the City Hall, she also collaborated with psychological counseling at the Association for the Disabled. She always tried to integrate into society those who were confined to their homes, bitter, hopeless.

She had found in her life the balance between work that makes us worthy and the gift with which she was born. She was always inspired by her

work and continued to send to the Association of Painters, every year, five to eight paintings that she chose conscientiously. In that year, 1999, many events had happened that marked her life.

She sat Tony, her brother, in a squatting position and held him as a model for several hours on different days. She asked him to become pensive, self-absorbed, and Tony did well, he was always in that state, maybe that's why she chose him. He laughed instead of complaining, he was docile and insecure, he had many gifts that he never knew how to make good use of, such as cooking or dancing. He enjoyed his fears and reflected them in a gentle face, submissive. She painted and blurred him, leaving him as a stain in an impressionist painting.

With that work came the first call for recognition in her inaugural competition. She won first place in the Municipal Prize of the Ahomense Plastic, with the oil painting "Si mismo" (self), which now remains in the Museum of the House of Culture of Los Mochis. It was September 2000.

The following month she attended her first group art show at the Association of Painters with the Mouth and Feet in Mexico City. She would see John Grepe again, who had come to meet her a few months earlier at the house of Los Mochis. A kind man who had in his humble look a similarity of features to Lidia.

Thus she continued her trajectory as an inspiring artist for many people, without being disturbed more than the minimum when she encountered indifference and discrimination, which happened from time to time, to make her feel that there was no end to the challenges. That's the way the world is, there are no more explanations that seem logical and make sense of the attitudes of others.

Other fruits of her inspiration came and grew stronger and stronger and she tried to create relentlessly. In the oasis of her brushstrokes she found relief from every obstacle she encountered. In her home, which was becoming more and more stable, with Lucrecia's children growing up, she had the satisfaction of having achieved independence. From then on, everything was an unceasing triumph.

In 2001 she participated in the collective exhibition at the Universidad de Occidente, she returned to the corridors that saw her go through with wheels, several years, steps that she had counted every study day up to the third floor in some bimester, when she was pulled step by step. Her women captured on canvases were already applauded and recognized. They were

requested in 2003 for exhibitions in the city of El Fuerte and at the Universidad de Occidente again, by the Club de Mujeres en Arte (Women in Art Club).

She found the path to follow without hesitation with specific goals. Even in love she found the complement of everything. Because she still needed to develop another facet, that of her own family, which she could feel as her own and which was the continuation of the one she had experienced all her life and which was still under her care: her mother, siblings, almost all of them, even her father. Now she protected them as always and, as long as she was alive to do so, she would continue on this path.

Lidia dressed in white with a trousseau specially made to her liking and usable with the electric wheelchair. Her make-up was done by the experts who make brides inevitably beautiful that day like no other in life, but her happiness was singular, what shades of life she would leave captured in that painting that was now titled *La Dicha!* She was achieving everything that in illusions came to foreshadow in the distant: she and Victor got married in 2004.

Then Lucrecia, her younger sister, knew that she had finished the cycle she had begun five years ago at her sister's side, when they both needed and loved each other dearly. Also that year she finished university as a law graduate and looked for a place to move with her two children, moving away very little. She had to leave room for her sister to discover her new work, even though there was no distant place within the city that they couldn't travel within an hour.

From now on, Victor knew that he would be the extensions that Lidia needed to subsist, she had him to perform all the feats that had previously belonged to her mother and siblings; had time to analyze that destiny. In thirteen years of courtship there was nothing else to think about, the heart guided them because, to people like them, there is nothing else that seals the way than the union of the spirit.

It seemed out of the ordinary, but it was not. Lidia worked to earn their livelihood, provided her home and food. Victor showered her with attention, became familiar with the kitchen that was adapted to the stature of a wheelchair user, and knew how to prepare vegetarian food exceptionally well, do laundry and drive to take her to the office. He began to meet her physical needs, there was no more to say nor opinions to hear. They were beyond any conventionalism: they always were!

Adjusting to their new life was not difficult. Being in a marital relationship would only cause curiosity for some. All the changes for the better

were easy to integrate into their routines after they had learned the hard way to cope with the normal events of existence.

Lidia's life had become stable in every possible way, except for her health. Time did not spare her paralyzed body, which over the years, transformed like that of any other person. Although she had many activities and her life was full of satisfactions, sometimes physical fragility slowed her down, as well as infections and hot flashes.

Although the doctors told her many times to go to a cooler climate, she never paid the slightest attention. There was the land that rooted her. Maybe she always felt within herself the commitment she acquired as a child for being the eldest, she always remembered what her mother instilled in her: the principles and values of respect for the coexistence of people. She always told her that she had to take care of her younger siblings; those words were stuck in her heart. Maybe it was the love she had to spare. She was attentive to everyone. Almost every day she received one of her siblings, her father, already old, atrophied and with the appearance of an indigent, all in need, how ironic, as she received so many others who, with more physical mobility, felt invalid. Even with tired bones, welded together at the spine, there was no excuse for her. For, after her, who was more of an invalid?

Her grandmother died in 2007 and it was a hard blow. In excellent health, she passed when she was eighty-four years old. There was no longer any reason to go every weekend to enjoy the beautiful scenery, she was the watercolor that adorned the horizon that everyone wanted to observe in rapt attention. The painting had lost its beauty and was left empty, soulless. The house of memories began to crumble. It also felt that there was no reason to continue, was tired of so many years of standing, without getting sick. As if by enchantment it began to collapse in half, some said that the Manina was inside and they saw her swaying in the rocking chair.

13. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SCHOOL OF PAINTERS WITH THE MOUTH: THE FIRST WORKSHOP

Stories were linked along her way, one leading her to another and the other to other disabled people from car accidents, just like her, or from limiting illnesses. After discovering her initiative to encourage others, she met six more potential painters whom she visited in their homes to encourage them and then invite them to her home, where she would start a school for courageous and creative artists; she would teach them to paint. Her home was open to all of them and opened a painting workshop in 2005, she picked them up in her own van with a ramp to attend each class, taught them, told them how to make their own easels adapted for each need and chair or bed.

She met Gilberto who was permanently in an orthopedic wheeled bed due to a disease that progressively atrophied his joints. Although he was very positive-minded, he never left his home, which he used as a den, connecting to the outside world through the computer. He did not dare to look at the world again from that huge contraption that was his bed. The immobile muscles had stiffened his body to the point that he could not sit up. Lidia visited him to show him that he could be useful and take care of his life in a dignified way. He began taking classes with her and, soon after, became a fellow of the Association of Painters, one of the most talented and creative who now make a living from art.

Victor Manuel Reyes, one of Lidia's first students, also began a new stage in his life thanks to painting, and as a scholarship holder of the Association he can now support his family as a disabled artist.

Claudia Carolina, Lidia's student who, like her, had spinal cord compression and became a quadriplegic, came to realize one of her biggest dreams that she did not think possible to achieve in her current physical condition.

Mary Romero, with childhood polio, developed arthritis and osteoporosis as an adult. After Lidia's insistence that she take her workshop, she attended one day. She has been painting with her mouth since 2008.

Ana Rosa Torres enrolled in Lidia's course and learned to paint with her mouth; she has rheumatoid arthritis and now helps her family to get forward.

Alicia Leon got rheumatoid arthritis and lived on charity with her daughter outside a church. Fortune allowed her to learn about Lidia's painting workshop and that has given her hope for her life. After not having enough to live on, she now supports her family with eight thousand pesos a month.

For Gabriel Cortes, it is the best thing that life has inspired in him, since he has an illness from birth and comes from a very humble background.

Raul Ortiz Carrillo became a quadriplegic after diving into the Fuerte River. Since 2009 he became a painter.

Enrique Trasviña, quadriplegic due to a work accident, fell from a billboard. He has been a painter since 2011.

Edith Herrera, with infantile paralysis, takes classes with Lidia thanks to Fabiola.

Jaime Adan Fierro, severely brain-damaged, now takes classes with Lidia...

Victor Leopoldo Zamorano, now deceased, was also her student. She is now training four more students.

All of them have joined the Association of Painters with the Mouth and Feet. Currently, it is the city with the largest number of scholarship holders in the world, fifteen are enrolled by a single teacher: Lidia de Jesus Chaidez Lopez.

VOCATIONAL CLASSROOM

In 2006, Lidia was given a classroom at the "Escuela Vocacional de Artes de Los Mochis" (Los Mochis Vocational School of Arts), on the ground floor, to be used one day a week, on Fridays. She no longer had to receive her students in her house, which was always full of wheelchairs. At least she had built a large room to maneuver freely. She also obtained material to help the newcomers paint the outlines of their new existence. With open arms and a frank smile she welcomed them. They looked shy, overwhelmed, because with good reason they felt insecure.

She also summoned the students she used to teach at her home, most of them mouth-painting students and some disabled person who painted with the hands.

Little by little more and more people joined in, interested in proving that they were useful people. Within that classroom they kept out limitations, external environment that sometimes was so hostile and demeaning. They

forgot about all those humans who looked like mannequins watching them at every step and adopted the role they could now play to stop being a burden in their family and social circle. They did not need charity nor compassion to continue their existence.

Lidia's painting workshop would help them regain faith and self-respect by healing the emotional wounds caused by the hard blows of the human condition.

The Association, founded altruistically to give back to beings their creative capacity, was the instrument for them to achieve purification through renewal, because there was no other way but that.

Helping others gave Lidia the tools to discover true human value. She now has thirty students with motor disabilities, and every Friday, on a voluntary basis, she shares with them her experiences and knowledge in the creative arts and the art of life.

Perseverance is able to reap the fruits of what has been sown with hard work. Conaculta asked Lidia to teach painting classes at the same Escuela Vocacional de Artes (EVA) (Vocational School of Arts) to children with intellectual disabilities, on Saturdays. The salary is low because she shares it with two people who are a necessary support to control them.

For the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the city they chose several personalities that are an example for the citizens. They placed a billboard at the entrance of Los Mochis with a photo of her painting, with a caption that reads: "I fill the city with my creativity. I love Los Mochis". It stayed there for two years. Olivia would walk by and stop to look at it, proud of her eldest daughter. When she found out it would be removed, she immediately picked up the canvas, folded it and took it home. She has received many more recognitions since her work precedes her, she is always taken into account as the proof that everything can be achieved.

Thirteen years have passed between obstacles and administrations that come and go within the Ahome City Hall, but Lidia has remained over all events.

The goal that was set from the beginning has been achieved, although she says not in its entirety. There are many different ideologies and bureaucracy that do not allow progress in social projects. She is currently waiting for the direction of the same area she coordinates to be established, approved by the government, which has not found a way to establish itself because it involves allocating a budget, among many other things. She wants this project to be given the green light to retire knowing that her work will not go with her.

After all that time of work, she knows that there is still a long way to go. She took the first steps and knows that she could do even more, but her weak body is often tired. The pace of her work is hard and she has decided to retire. She is waiting for a solution to her pension from IMSS and for the resolution of the lawsuit she filed against the Ahome City Hall because she was removed from the union, in addition to being at risk of being fired for claiming this fair right.

14. AN ENDING THAT CONTINUES IN CREATION AND COLORS OF THE SOUL

Lidia has achieved what few people in her physical situation: to materialize the desires for which she has worked hard all her life. Her condition remains humble in all aspects. Material things are temporary and she, with her art, has shown that there is no doubt about it; she has transmitted it through her canvases, where she has left part of her essence, in each one, because they are like her children, and every time they have to leave, it is hard for her to let go of them, her works of life.

She acquired the small plot of land with a room next to her house, which she is paying for little by little to adapt it as her school. She hopes to finish soon, as possibilities and time permit. That is her dream to materialize now: to dedicate herself only to the school of painters that she leads and to continue encouraging other disabled people who need an incentive to continue life without sadness.

All the time in this life has gone slowly, but without a step backward. This is how will reach the culmination of every goal that forges.

Now her next goal would be dedicating full time to art, to taking specialized painting classes, to her students and to herself. Her fatigued body can no longer support the strict daily work. She needs time to rest and regain physical health in her wheelchair, travel more often to the beach, eternal source of her inspiration.

Lidia continues loving and respecting life: “I have improved my self-esteem. Everything I do gives me great satisfaction. I am a better person and learn more every day, because I support everyone with affection, they love me, respect me and see me well”. Those were her words in one of the many interviews she has given.

She has many more goals on her way. In front of her she glimpses a happy and fulfilled world, she feels fulfilled in every aspect. What she would like to hear is that they have found a cure for her spinal cord injury. Since she was a child, doctors always told her that they would soon find a cure, and before she dies she would like to walk again.

She was once asked if she would change her life if she could. She told them she would only do so if she could know that she would be as happy as she is now.

“Life is simple, we always complicate it. Disability is not a limitation. Maybe it only prevents us from running with our feet. Disability is a human condition, not a problem. Problems can be solved.”

Lidia is a blessing and a role model for all those around her. She has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that there are no obstacles to success, despite the discrimination in which ten percent of the disabled population in Mexico still lives and that continues to exceed the qualities that as human beings we all possess indistinctly.

The fight isn't over. She is the tireless warrior that we all must keep immutable, and as long as her spirit continues enhancing our landscape, her example will remain intact forever.

“When I paint I totally forget that my body is like this...”

Graciela Enríquez Enríquez
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