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How to Survive The Zombie Apocalypse As An 82-year-old Guatemalan Grandma

“Brains... We want brains...” That’s what your typical zombie would say during the zombie apocalypse. Now imagine- you’re fighting off zombies when all of a sudden you see a little, old Hispanic grandma riding the back of an army truck fighting off the brain-eating zombies. She’s screaming what you think are Spanish words but it doesn’t matter because it’s a little abuelita riding the back of an army truck. This image is what Melissa Lozada-Olivia portrays in the image of her audience. Lozada is a Guatelombian, Guatemalan-Columbian, who spends her time writing poetry, novels, and screenplays. In her poem, “How to Survive The Zombie Apocalypse As An 82-year-old Guatemalan Grandma,” she embraces the struggles of Hispanic women and portrays them as warriors in the real world, which can be utilized in the film industry.

Melissa Lozada-Olivia's poem embraces the role of women in Latin culture through an 82-year-old Guatemalan grandma. Hispanic women grow up in a family where they must give more than what they have. They’re expected to leave their families behind, sometimes even their own kids, in order to provide a better life. They wake up every morning and take on the cooking, cleaning, and education roles. They are expecting to be there every morning and every night. This is “la batalla” that Hispanic women continue to fight, “centuries of back-breaking labor the corn crumbs you turned into meals for your family forever your mother’s disappointed face...”(Lozada-Olivia). Olivia describes an 82-year-old grandma as someone who was capable

of turning pieces of corn crumbs into meals for her whole family. Food is a key element in Hispanic culture and it is all about making things work. Grandmas are expected to have that maternal instinct, not only with their own but with their nieces and nephews and the generations to come. That motherly instinct to nourish and provide a full meal on the table even if that means turning to “meal crumbs.” And through all this, a grandma does it with love. As generations come, Hispanic grandmas are seen with such loving-tendered hearts. Grandkids look up to their grandmas because they see years and years of struggle. The struggle of a grandma to raise a family from nothing to a family of everything. A family who won’t have to fight tooth and nail to eat a single meal. Olivia also refers to the grandma as a “warrior abuelita zombie destroying abuelita” in her poem. The word abuelita is surrounded by affection and love. Love that is a sign of gratitude.

The poem demonstrates signs of gratitude towards Hispanic grandmas. Lozada describes how an 82-year-old grandma was able to fight off zombies, brain-eating corpses that have a drive to eat the living. In her poem, she describes how strong-willed and unfrightened this old lady is to take such disturbing monsters. Lozada states “The zombies passing by you in every direction like all the years you have lived *esperame* I’m coming girls wait for me.” The Spanish word, “*esperame*,” is woven into the quote and the phrase “wait for me” is also expressed in English. Olivia might do this to catch the attention of her audience in both languages. The grandma has migrated to a new world of English-speaking but she wants to remind her girls of the language they grew up in, bridging both cultures together. The zombies are compared to the years that the abuelita has endured. The years of hard work. The years of maintaining a family. Years of staying up late to help kids with homework, to prepare lunch for the man, to make sure the kids don’t wake up, to make sure the dogs are fed, etc. Years of dedication. Lozada-Olivia is not

specifically saying thank you but she is shedding light and embracing years of strength. An example of dedication can be seen in the article “Primero Madres: love and mothering in the educational lives of Latina/os,” where Hispanic women are “challenging traditional ideas of feminism, as they become activist-mothers, and how this activism served as a tool for survival (or *sobrevivencia*) in their everyday lives”(Velazquez 509). Hispanic women build their lives on “*sobrevivencia*” because that is how they were raised. Raised to fight against all odds, not for themselves, but for their families. This is a call to action to redefine the norms of Hispanic women. Girls tend to grow up in a household where they are expected to do the cooking, the cleaning, the role of a babysitter, etc meanwhile they are also expected to go to school and earn straight A’s. They are expected to come home and tend to the wishes of the house but what about their own goals for the future? Or what if they want to join a club or try out for a sport? They deserve the same support that young boys are given to be free and enjoy. But this is exactly what Hispanic women are fighting to change. This “*sobrevivencia*” and role of “activist-mothers” is to fight for their daughters. They fight to give them a better future than they had. They don’t fear standing up for their children because they know one day they will be able to redefine the norms of Hispanic women in society and create a future for the young.

Melissa Lozada-Olivia’s poem would be a great film because it would represent the Hispanic culture in women who are anything but the oppressed picture they have been portrayed as. In the Hispanic culture, a grandmother, mother, or any woman seen as a mother figure is described as strong. The poem draws this picture in a very exceptional, unusual manner. The 82-year-old grandma is preparing herself for the zombie apocalypse, she is ready to take on the battle, and Lozada-Olivia states “Leave your apartment push back your sleeves and wrap a red scarf around your mouth prepared for *la batalla*.” Olivia repeats the phrase “your” in some sort of

instructional manner. She's directing the abuelita's actions and informing the audience on how to prepare themselves for "la batalla" A guide to survival. This reinstates how surviving the world in the shoes of an old Hispanic grandma can be portrayed as surviving the zombie apocalypse. The abuelita is set to leave it all behind, with nothing but a few pieces of cloth, and set out into a world of chaos. This portrays the women of the Hispanic community with nothing but courage. They will fight against everything in their path if that means fighting for the future of their generations. Abuelitas have paved the way for generations. A lot of opportunities Hispanic children and teenagers have today are because someone who grew up with nothing gave everything for a better future.

This film adaption of the poem would shift how Hispanic women are viewed in the eyes of a degrading society. For many centuries, women have been set to limitations and barriers. But despite such borders, they have continued to rise and fight. They have pushed through and worked hard, not for men or anyone else, but their themselves. Lozada shows the strength of an abuelita as she "ran away from the man who stopped reaching for your hips and started reaching for his beer his belt the whispers of puta and bruja." Offensive words have been used to try to intimidate and suppress women but there's a point that's reached where women say no more. No more words, no more abuse, no more pain. They set out and leave a life of suffering to create a life of opportunities. The article "He Has Me Tied with the Blessed and Damned Papers: Undocumented-Immigrant Battered Women in Phoenix, Arizona," researches how Hispanic women struggle to seek safety from the abuse from crossing the border and remaining illegal. It states "The border can be an emergency exit or an escape from a violent and controlling spouse. But the border also can be a prison, containing women and thwarting their escape from the near-total institution of battering. The border can be a resource and a strategy of survival but it

can also be a means of violence and illegality”(Salcido, Adelman 9). It seems that women can't catch a grasp of fresh air as there is always something chasing behind them. As Hispanic women leave their countries and the life they lived in the past they face a new fear. They struggle to cross the border and face hostility from outsiders and those who want nothing to do with them. They like it's them against the world, the same way one could feel during a zombie apocalypse. These women feel outnumbered, they feel lonely. They face harsh words and actions. They struggle to trust strangers as they may come from a past of abuse and dishonesty. But above all that, they remain strong. Most of the stories we hear from abuelitas are about how they had to fight against those who wished nothing but torture for their lives. Whether it's from physical abuse or politics, women are chased around. But through all this, they continue to fight. They remain strong and warriors for their kids and grandkids, even if some battles simply can't be won. This is the kind of picture that Lozada's poem would capture through film, a picture of a warrior Hispanic abuelita fighting against all odds.

Creating a film based on Melissa Lozada-Olivia's poem would shed light on the reality of the Hispanic community. The Hispanic culture in America is seen as a minority. Movies based on Latinos tend to always tell the same story. A story about drug dealers, laborers, criminals, and even sex objects. These are the stereotypes that are portrayed by filmmakers who write only what they know. They only see the bad in a community where they don't want to see any of the good. Why are Hispanics always the victims? The victims of discrimination. But the story surrounding an 82-year-old Guatemalan grandma would change the game. A story created where Hispanic women are the heroes. Lozada portrays these warriors with nothing but “all ready to survive with just head just mouth just heart just hands just sweat just eso eso y eso.” The filmmakers would bring an average-looking Guatemalan grandma who is nothing but average. They could pan into

each body part that Olivia uses in her poem to highlight all they have. Filmmakers would tell the story of a hero who sacrificed all they had for survival. Hispanic women are portrayed as powerful not only in heart and mind but in love. Focus on the fact that Hispanics are a majority living in a world where they are seen as a couple of servants ready to do the job nobody else wants to do. In her interview, "Border women: An interview with Josefina Lopez," Lopez argues that "Because these white men have maybe never known strong-willed women like me... unfortunately they don't know much about Latina women, except that they fantasize about us..."(8). Yes, it's true, filmmakers can't write what they don't know but they can't create a story about what they think they know. And this is what most filmmakers have portrayed in stereotypical Latino cinema. No, they can't be blamed for not knowing, but they can be blamed for remaining naive. This poem does the opposite, it shows the reality of Hispanic women fighting their zombies, and their everyday hardships, to make sure their kids and grandkids have a story to tell. A beautiful story that would make for a beautiful film.

Creating a film based on Lozada-Olivia's poem would shed light on the struggles of Hispanic women and embrace their warrior-like capabilities. Turning her poem into a film would bring this amazing story of an abuelita fighting against the world to life. The poem compares the zombie apocalypse to the life of an old Hispanic grandma who fights against all odds to protect her family. Turning this into a film would turn words into visuals. Phrases like "Zombies are lying around you like old platano carcasses run into the street and flag down an army truck with your red scarf" bring to life a world of battle and destruction. The music behind the scenes gradually gets louder as the audience is ready to see the abuelita take charge. The audience is tense and is ready to see how a little old grandma will fight off brain-eating zombies. It would bring humor to a story that is nothing but easy. The title, "How to Survive the Zombie

Apocalypse As An 82 year old Guatemalan Grandma,” alone has a sense of humor that could be embraced in through visuals. This story would bring something different, something unique, and something awesome to an audience. The scenes of the abuelita using nothing but her hands, her mouth, her head, and her heart to attack zombies coming from every direction as she rides away on the back of an army truck. Scenes of the abuelita shouting to her granddaughters that she is on her way, to wait for her as she’s almost there. Expressions not only in English but mainly in Spanish. To portray and embrace the Hispanic culture. Making the film bilingual would attract a larger audience but also speak to a larger audience. Using terms in both languages to blend them and demonstrate that the world they live in does not only revolve around one group of people but around hundreds of them. Incorporate scenes of an abuelita coming to a country with nothing and making a life out of nothing. Making meals out of corn crumbs, facing hostility and abuse, and above all, doing it all on her own.

A poem of an 82-year-old Guatemalan grandma encapsulates the struggles of Hispanic women in a world where they may seem like nothing but servants into strong-willed warriors ready to take on any mission. This reality tends to remain restricted for many, maybe because they simply don’t know or maybe because they don’t want to know, but this is not a time to be secretive. There’s a world right now where Hispanic women are fighting for their lives, where they are leaving everything they have, and where families are being broken apart, but it is time for no more. It is a time for a change. It is a time for this reality to be known to the world. It is time to sit an audience down and show them how much power a community has to create a change. Whether it is creating a movie for millions of people to see or creating a poem for millions to hear, Melissa Lozada-Olivia has and is continuing to reveal this untold story.

Works Cited

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