

A Legacy of Love and Resilience



by Margaret McDonnell

A Joyful Encounter

To tell the life story of Teresa Wroblewski, one must begin with the story of her parents, as their influence upon her was an important part of her journey. Her mother's impact was especially profound, existing as the principal example of strength and optimism that helped in forming Teresa into the woman she ultimately became.

The year was 1931, and the winds of change swept through the cobblestone streets of Barcelona, Spain, like a long-awaited breath of freedom. From the grand balcony of the Palau de la Generalitat, Francesc Macia's voice echoed with conviction as he declared the birth of a Republic from the grip of an oppressive military dictatorship. "Catalans, interpreting the feeling and hopes of the

people, who have just granted us their vote, I proclaim the Catalan Republic.”

The Catalan people were euphoric, considering the relief that comes with freedom. They would take to the streets, celebrating the advent of this new era, which allowed them to openly embrace their language and culture once again. Their minds and hearts were collectively at peace with hopeful optimism as they proudly witnessed a Republican flag replace the Spanish flag of old, signifying the new voice of a once wounded people.

In the heart of the bustling city, amidst the Art Nouveau architecture and the lively markets, lived a young couple named Amparo and Jose, affectionately known as Pepe. The beginning of their love story was as vibrant as the city they called home. Amparo Muns, a charming woman whose whimsical nature attracted all whom she encountered, worked as a seamstress in a factory. Though she had many friendships and plenty of interested suitors, she remained aloof when it came to relationships of the heart, focusing more on the joy of friends and family than contemplating the notion of settling down.

It happened one afternoon, however, when Pepe Latorre, a young man who worked as a painter in a car factory, made her acquaintance, in need of a newly sewn hat. Amparo obliged and began asking him questions regarding his choice of style and

fabric. As she began measuring the circumference of his head, as was necessary for the hat making process, the two commenced with casual conversation.

Pepe, though quiet and reserved, was instantly drawn to Amparo's open and friendly nature. Maybe it was the way her personality contrasted with his own that caused his heart to flutter, or maybe it was her physical beauty that he couldn't deny. There existed a confidence within her that struck him, resulting in a secret affirmation to see her again.

Once the measurements were made and Pepe departed from her company, Amparo went to work, constructing a hat that would please the young man. All the while, she thought about their brief encounter, and, as she reminisced, she couldn't help but smile. Hours later, as she ended her workday and headed for home, Amparo discovered that Pepe, the object of her afternoon thoughts, was standing just outside the factory door, patiently waiting to walk her home.

Over the next several months, Amparo and Pepe spent more and more time together. Soon, they developed a genuine fondness for one another, admiring each other's differences. While Amparo remained the life of the party and the center of everyone's attention, she appreciated Pepe's ability to find comfort in the quiet moments. While Pepe was hard working, maintaining two jobs, he valued the time reserved for

recreational activities like handball and dominoes. The two were playful and affectionate toward one another, instantly becoming the envy of those who knew them.

It wasn't long before the couple married and welcomed Teresa into a world brimming with promise. Teresa was a delightful child and the source of her parents' joy. She had a special relationship with her grandfather, who was the subject of her earliest memory, having spent so many summer afternoons with him at the beach. The two often searched for seashells along the wet sand, as the cool Mediterranean Sea tumbled across their toes. These were memorable times, as the love and laughter of family gatherings were consistent reminders of a happy existence. Soon, however, this joyous way of life would be overshadowed by the impenetrable darkness of war.



Teresa's parents, Amparo and Pepe, 1931.



Teresa's first
professional
picture, 1933-34.



Two-year-old
Teresa, 1934.



Teresa playing on the rooftop
with her kitchen, 1936.



Teresa, 2-3 years
old, with parents
and Tia Pepita.



The Muns family. Baby Teresa in her mother's arms, 1932.



The Latorre family, 1935.

Echoes of Resilience

The Spanish Civil War tore through the tapestry of their lives, leaving behind scars of loss and uncertainty. It devastated a culture deeply rooted in the beauty of the land and the vibrancy of its people. A country inhabited and loved by so many writers who felt compelled to document their devotion in the settings of their novels.

“The sky was a brilliant blue, and the air was filled with the sweet scent of orange blossoms. It was the kind of day that made you want to forget all your troubles and just soak up the beauty.”

- Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*.

Teresa was four years old when, in 1936, Francisco Franco's Nationalist regime controlled the fearful minds of the Spanish people as it attempted to overthrow the Republican government. Starting their battle in Madrid, Franco and his troops soon made their way to Barcelona. With the help of Hitler, they were fortified in their quest for domination, determined to bring the Catalan people of Barcelona to their knees once again.

Soon, exploding bombs became a common sound throughout the city, just as crumbled buildings became the backdrop of every neighborhood. What used to be the heartbeat of a Spanish nation suddenly stood in quiet submission, desolate amid the shambles of warfare. The city's vibrancy was lost. Rations were few as food quickly grew scarce. Bread was in short supply, milk and sugar were practically non-existent, and ration lines were endless.

Regardless of the staggering realities, Teresa's mother would find a way to provide for her family. Through it all, she remained a beacon of strength, her resilience shining even in the darkest of times. Though Franco gained control over the larger farming areas, she used her small farm connections to get what she needed. She'd barter with farmers, even pulling the wool from mattresses to trade for food. In one instance, with Teresa's help, she sneaked past the guards with an entire ham under her skirt. She defied the odds to ensure her family's survival.

Teresa's mother continued to work in the factory, sewing amidst the commotion of war. One day, the electricity failed, and the large factory building was in darkness. She managed to soften the atmosphere with her beautiful singing. Her voice echoed down the corridors and through every nook within the factory walls. Even the exploding bombs outside could not compete with the beauty of her voice, acting as a welcomed distraction. Her singing lightened the heaviness that hung in the air, as it was meant to entertain the women whose nerves were weak with worry and fear. Even though Franco's iron grip tightened around the nation, her spirit remained unbroken, a testament to her indomitable Catalan pride.

Young Teresa recognized her mother as a pillar of strength and inspiration, not only for her family but for all those who knew her. She frequently heard her mother say, "There's always tomorrow," as if the events of tomorrow might be cause for joy. Though each day resulted in the same pangs of hunger from the relentless search for food, Teresa knew that her mother's optimism was necessary if only to provide an inkling of hope for a new tomorrow.

Hope was often coupled with unforeseen circumstances that resulted in great setbacks. In 1938, six-year-old Teresa contracted Typhus. It was another devastating reminder of the direness of the time. During war, deaths from bacterial

diseases such as Typhus were just as common as deaths caused by hunger. Hospitals lacked space, medication, and staff while ambulances were often targeted by Franco's Nationalist forces. The likelihood of a child surviving such an infectious disease was low. This realization had a major toll on Teresa's family. They worried about her as the symptoms grew worse and she lost her hair. Her parents were fearful they might lose their only child if medical attention was not received. Luckily, Uncle Ramon, her father's brother, a Republican military officer, sent a German doctor to attend to the sick child. He would end up saving her life.

As a Republican military officer, Uncle Ramon's loyalties made him a target for Franco. This caused his family much worry. Stories of Republican officers being captured and killed was a reality that constantly loomed as a threat to Ramon's safety. Considering this, he moved to France. Meanwhile, his wife Dolores and their two children moved to Northern Spain where Dolores's family resided. Soon, however, Dolores grew weary of the pressures from Franco to give up her exiled husband. If she assisted the government by returning Ramon to Spain, the pressures would end. Franco's threats lay on deaf ears, however, as she ultimately decided to move herself and her children to France to reunite with her husband and start a new life. Dolores believed they would remain exiles together until the end of the war, at which

time they would return to Spain. This was her hope.

However, it wasn't until the Spanish Civil War ended and a new war began that France would face their own battle. In 1939, Franco's Nationalist party won the war and had complete control over Spain. Hitler's stake in the Spanish Civil War would be a precursor of things to come, leading the way to an even larger conflict that would bring an entire European territory to its knees, once again at the discretion of a fascist dictator.

A Reluctant Nation

As The Spanish Civil War came to an end in April of 1939, the Latorre family and the entire Catalan population remained helpless at the hands of Franco's control over their daily lives. As anticipated, he immediately forced them to relinquish their language and culture. Despite the new ordinances, the Catalan people were tenacious in finding ways to keep their culture alive. They spoke their native tongue in the secrecy of their homes where they continued to practice religious and cultural holidays as clandestine ballads to a proud heritage.

In the fall of that same year, a new war began. This time, Adolf Hitler was at the helm, and he intended to dominate most of the world. When he and his army of Nazis

attacked Poland in September of that same year, it would result in a response from Britain and France that would lead to a second world war. For Hitler, The Spanish Civil War was a practice drill that provided invaluable experience to his military, but Franco would not garner any thanks. Though he offered to join Hitler's efforts, he was rejected. Thus, Spain remained neutral throughout WWII.

France was the first to suffer the impenetrable wrath of Hitler's conquest. The bombs that he tested in Spain throughout the duration of Franco's war were now proving to be profitable entities in his encroachment upon France. As Hitler gained leverage and wreaked havoc in this new offensive task, two of his early victims would bring the undeniable horrors of war to the Latorre home once again. Uncle Ramon's wife Dolores and young daughter Isabelle were killed when a German bomb hit their house. Though Ramon and his son survived, the loss they carried existed as a cruel reminder of the tragedies of war.

As the world was in chaos fighting the renewed ideals of another fascist dictator, the Latorre family did their best to normalize their new way of life. They continued to work, Teresa's mother as a seamstress and her father as a mechanic, and six-year-old Teresa started Catholic school. Teresa loved school and enjoyed the close friendships she made. She had a special fondness for her second-grade teacher, Ms. Camilla, who brightened each

day. The teacher's youth, attention to fashion, and natural beauty made her every student's favorite. Ms. Camilla made all the children feel loved and important. If Teresa was struggling in math, she would take the time to help her after school, guiding her until Teresa was able to understand the concepts and complete the problems on her own. Ms. Camilla was unwilling to allow any of her students to struggle alone. This was Teresa's introduction to education, and it remained an important factor in her developing a love for learning.

Under Franco's rule, girls were not allowed to continue an education beyond the age of sixteen, and a university education was reserved only for those with wealth and connection. Teresa's fate was that of her mother's, but it was her mother who instilled in Teresa the value of education. Having had only a third-grade education, her mother desired more for her children.

Over the subsequent years, tragedy struck repeatedly, claiming the lives of Teresa's three infant siblings. Each loss was another bitter reminder of the fragility of life. Soon after his birth, baby Joseph was infected with Diphtheria, a bacterial disease. Reminiscent of Teresa's experience with Typhus just a few years prior, the worry over the possibility of losing a child was once again all-consuming. Though Teresa had been blessed with a full recovery, her baby brother's battle was soon lost. Three years

later, baby Vincenta passed away from pneumonia. One year later, another baby girl, born breech, entered the world only to leave it. Having died upon birth, this child remained nameless until her big sister stepped in. Thirteen-year-old Teresa insisted on seeing the baby. When the nurse led her to the room where her sister lay, Teresa instantly recognized how much the child resembled their mother, both having the same black curly hair. Right then, she named her sister Amparo, giving the child the dignity she deserved. Losing three siblings was devastating for Teresa, but seeing the sorry in her mother's eyes made it even more difficult.

When Teresa's mother became pregnant for a fifth time, she feared the worst outcome. By now, the idea of bringing a healthy baby into the world again seemed an unattainable dream. The grief that came with losing her three babies still lingered, each loss existing as a palpable reminder of an unbearable pain. How could she bear the same pain again? She wrestled with the worry but was defenseless against the child growing inside her. She had only her faith to turn to, summoning St. Carmen for guidance and protection. St. Carmen, after all, was an advocate for women, having fought for the rights of Spanish women while she was alive. Why wouldn't she provide protection from the heartbreak of losing another child?

Early in her pregnancy, Teresa's mother approached her uncle for money to

buy brown fabric. Once the fabric was purchased, she sewed a brown dress that replicated the dress worn by St. Carmen. She needed a miracle, and St. Carmen was her only hope. She committed herself to wearing the dress for the duration of her pregnancy. She went to Mass and prayed specifically for the saint's intercession in bringing her guidance and protection. Teresa saw her mother's dedication and followed her example by praying to the saint each night so that a healthy baby brother or sister would arrive and remain, making their family complete.

In 1945, when Teresa was fourteen, the Latorre family was blessed with the miracle that had been the subject of their prayers for so many months. There was no question that St. Carmen interceded in blessing them with baby Maribel. Encouraged by this miracle of faith, they somehow knew that their family was now complete, and their sorrows of loss were behind them. There finally emerged a glimmer of real hope, a symbol of renewal.



Teresa (after Typhus) with Tia Pepita and Cousin Isabel, 1938.



Teresa in school with cousins Juan and Isabel, 1937.



Teresa at 7-8 years old.



First Holy
Communion,
1942.



Teresa with her
father going
shopping, 1944.

A Bittersweet Farewell

As Teresa navigated her teenage years under the looming shadow of dictatorship, her thirst for knowledge burned brightly. Her mother, a beacon of unwavering determination, instilled in her the belief in the power of education, a legacy that would shape Teresa's journey in the years to come. Her eagerness for independence following school led her to begin working at her aunt's ceramics shop. Making money gave her a sense of pride and allowed her to establish responsibilities that mirrored those of adults. At sixteen, she worked during the day and attended accounting classes at a technical school in the evening. Though she was not able to enroll in a university, she still had the

desire to expand her mind through education to achieve more from life.

Working with her aunt was not an ideal situation for Teresa, as Aunt Pepita, just ten years older, liked to boss Teresa around and proclaim her authority. One day, she insisted that Teresa work late, keeping her from her evening classes. This aggravated Teresa so much that she intentionally broke a candle holder one afternoon after being subjected to her aunt's domineering ways. Teresa, like her mother, was strong in mind and spirit, making her feelings known. Though her father scolded Teresa for the incident, she stood her ground and cried that her actions were justified. Though she was sorry for the candle holder, she wasn't sorry for reacting to her aunt's intolerable treatment. Teresa's father was caught in the middle, between his daughter and his sister, but he eventually resigned himself to the fact that his wife's strong will most definitely trickled down to his daughter. He was helpless to change it, but he insisted that Teresa continue to work for Aunt Pepita. Teresa did as she was told, but confided only in her mother when she accepted an ironing job at a local factory. There, she was able to work while continuing her accounting classes.

At nineteen, after three years of working, taking accounting courses at night, and completing the community service that was required of teenage women, Teresa was eager for change. In 1951, the winds of

change beckoned her, this time leading Teresa and her family to the shores of Venezuela. There, they would reunite with Uncle Ramon.

One significant moment Teresa remembers from Barcelona was when she, at age sixteen, and her father saw a movie in the city. It was a fair day, and downtown was busy with pedestrians and taxicabs crisscrossing the streets. Teresa was delighted to be spending a day alone with her father. She adored her father. He was a kind and affectionate man who rarely raised his voice. The doubts and uncertainties that awaited them on another shore existed beyond their reach and into the future. On this memorable afternoon, father and daughter would celebrate Barcelona, the only city they knew and loved. Teresa dressed up for the occasion, wanting to look as special as she felt, alongside her father who wore a fine suit and hat. They walked hand in hand through the city. After the movie, Teresa's father arranged for them to sit for a professional portrait. In the picture, Teresa stands next to her seated father, her hand resting on his shoulder, and her smile alluding to a happiness for things to come. Saying goodbye to Barcelona was bittersweet because of the fond memories like this that resonated with Teresa for years to come.

A New Home and a New Independence

In February of 1951, the Latorre family traveled to Caracas, Venezuela, by cargo ship. The journey took a couple of weeks, but it was an experience that Teresa welcomed, as she was eager for adventure at nineteen. She felt a mixture of excitement and reluctant anticipation as the large vessel crossed an endless expanse of sea. There existed a great sense of community on the ship with travelers from all over the world. Despite their various backgrounds, the passengers mingled and shared stories with one another, feeling a sense of unity with every common tale.

When they finally arrived in Caracas, Venezuela, they were greeted by what she could only describe as a lush jungle landscape,

a stark contrast to the cobblestone streets and artistic skyscrapers of Barcelona. They waited three days at the port before immigration gave them the necessary permission to move on. The long wait, coupled with the incessantly heavy rain, dampened Teresa's initial excitement, replacing it with a sense of trepidation.

Once they received the necessary paperwork from immigration, they traveled by plane to Barcelona, Venezuela, where they were to meet Teresa's cousin, who would drive them to her uncle's house. While the family waited at the airport for their ride, they encountered a stranger whose actions would leave a lasting impression upon Teresa. Young Maribel, tired and hungry, whined for food. Their journey had been long, and they were without money to buy something to eat. Seeing that the child was hungry, a woman nearby offered Maribel and Teresa a sandwich and soda. Teresa, though hungry, refused the offer for herself, but the woman's actions would elevate Teresa's view of strangers. For a stranger to give something while receiving nothing in return was new to Teresa, undoubtedly influenced by the human desperation propagated by war. This was an insightful moment that Teresa would remember for the rest of her life.

Teresa and her family continued to wait for her cousin to pick them up and take them to Uncle Ramon's house, but he never arrived. In the end, they settled for a taxi to

take them to their destination. Later, they discovered that there was some kind of miscommunication, which led to the cousin arriving at the airport too late.

Once they settled into their new environment, Teresa and her family grew to love Venezuela. They found a house in El Tigrito, and Uncle Ramon lived nearby. Teresa's desire for independence resurfaced, although finding work proved challenging at first. Despite her father's suggestion to return to Spain and her aunt's ceramics shop, Teresa refused to take a step backward. Fortunately, her mother, Teresa's most dedicated advocate, came to her rescue.

One day, when a man from the utility company came to their home for a routine inspection, her mother seized an opportunity to help Teresa attain the independence she desired. Casually approaching the man as he worked, she suggested that hiring Teresa as a secretary would streamline his paperwork. Intrigued by the idea, the man hired Teresa on the spot, thanks to her mother's persistence.

Starting her new job brought Teresa immense relief and a sense of accomplishment. With her accounting skills from Barcelona, Teresa contributed to the efficiency of Mr. Batiuk's office. Soon, she befriended Mr. Batiuk's wife, Catrin, who constantly boasted about her brother Henry. Teresa remained skeptical until the day Henry paid a visit to the office.

It was 1951 when Henry walked through the doors. He stopped at Teresa's desk to greet her, and the two began to talk. Teresa blushed, as Henry was truly quite handsome. Days later, Henry came by the office again. This time, he came to offer Teresa a ride home, as young girls were not allowed to walk the streets alone. Teresa accepted his offer and began to understand Catrin's motive for boasting so incessantly about her brother. With that first ride home, Teresa began a long and memorable journey with Henry.

She soon learned that Henry Wroblewski had a compelling story. One of five children, he grew up in France until, at the age of eighteen, he was kidnapped and moved to a labor camp in Germany. For two years during World War II, he endured the trauma of forced labor, alongside other young men from France, Belgium, and Italy. Following the war and his sudden release from the camp, little work was available in France. The city was destroyed, and the economy was ruined, making life for a twenty-year-old man grim. Seeking better prospects, Henry and his brother John responded to an ad in the newspaper that promoted opportunities in Venezuela.

By the time Teresa met Henry, he was well established in his career with the Gulf Oil Company. After a short courtship, he asked Teresa for her hand in marriage. It happened on an evening when Teresa and her family

celebrated her Saint's Day. In addition to celebrating the day honoring one's birth, many Spaniards celebrate their saint's feast day. It was on this occasion that Henry decided to ask Teresa to marry him. Although she was caught off guard, never expecting Henry to ask for her hand in the presence of her entire family, she said yes.

Professional
portrait of
Teresa and
Pepe, 1948.



Last picture of
Teresa and
family in
Barcelona,
Spain, 1950.



Teresa's mother and sister with her daughters, Cristina and Elizabeth, in Venezuela, 1959.



Henry, 1951.



Teresa and Henry going to a friend's wedding, 1952.

Wedding Bells and Disarray

The wedding took place on August 2nd, 1952, on a typically hot early afternoon. The church service went off without a hitch, and the reception was held at a small Italian restaurant. Everyone in attendance enjoyed the celebration, but that would soon change. When strangers tried to crash the party, Henry's brother John responded with a physical altercation. When Henry received word that his brother was taken to jail, he left his bride to rescue his brother.

By 3 am, nearly everyone had departed. Teresa was left alone in the parking lot, wondering where she was supposed to go. It was her wedding night after all, but her new husband was nowhere nearby. When her father approached, saying, "You come home

with me,” Henry’s little sister responded, “No, no, you can’t. She’s Henry’s wife now.” Her father argued, “She may be his wife, but the marriage isn’t consummated yet, so she’s coming home with me!” In the end, Teresa waited until her husband arrived, and the couple spent their first night together in their home.

The marriage got off to a rough start with a disastrous wedding night followed by cancelled honeymoon plans due to a mix-up with Henry’s passport. Though Henry had been living in Venezuela for several years, he was merely a resident without citizenship. This prevented him from obtaining a passport. By the time the passport issue was resolved, and Henry was a legitimate Venezuelan citizen, Teresa was pregnant with their first child.

The couple spent their first years of marriage living with Henry’s family, under the watchful eyes of his mother. She was a bitter woman who was angry most of the time. Teresa did her best to empathize with her, knowing the woman had a hard life, which included an arranged marriage resulting in abandoned love. Regardless of Teresa’s ability to find compassion, it was a difficult time for her. She felt judged by her mother-in-law, the woman she most wanted to please. She felt like an outsider among her husband’s family, as they spoke French and Polish in her presence. Even though she was certain they were talking about her, judging her every

move, Teresa managed to keep her composure and carry on. She missed her own mother and yearned for her support when uncertainty and loneliness persisted. Teresa grabbed every opportunity to spend time with her and confided in her the worries that persisted. Of course, her mother championed Teresa, urging her to be strong, reminding her that tomorrow was another day. “There’s hope ahead of you,” she often remarked, promising change would come.

Things did get better, or, at least, Teresa’s thoughts were averted when the children came along. Cristina was born in May of 1953, and two years later, Elizabeth arrived. Having two daughters made their family complete, and Teresa was hopeful that they would soon find a house of their own.

When Henry’s brother John and his wife Lily returned home from vacationing in the United States, they brought with them home movies that would plant the seed of inspiration into the minds of Henry and Teresa. Henry was especially taken by the images of America. Seeing The Queen Mary come into New York Harbor, the activity that surrounded it, and the happy people living their lives in a prosperous country full of opportunity and fulfilled dreams, he was instantly taken. Though Teresa suggested they first vacation in America, Henry was determined to move there. He insisted, “If we go, we stay.” Finally, after eleven years of living with Henry’s family, Teresa found

herself intrigued by the idea of moving to the United States. Finally, the chains that bound her would be broken.

Crossing Continents: Trials and Transitions

Although Teresa's mother was sad over her daughter's move to America, she was happy for her. She understood that it was a necessary move for Teresa. Living with her temperamental mother-in-law and feeling like an outsider among her husband's family was a desperate situation. Finding a home of her own would allow Teresa to grow into her own as a wife and mother without the influence of others. She could become her own person and raise her children as she saw fit.

Preparing for the move was an ordeal. In addition to gathering the appropriate paperwork to obtain a green card, they had to prove they were healthy, had proper vaccinations, and had money saved for the relocation. Once Teresa and her family

received permission, they traveled by ship to New Orleans. There, they met a friend who drove them all the way to California.

They hit the road in a Cadillac, filling it with four adults, two kids, and lots of luggage. Though the journey was a crowded situation, it gave the newcomers an opportunity to see more of the country. From the swamps of Louisiana to the flat lands and hills of Texas, to the red rocks of New Mexico, and finally to the vast deserts along Arizona and California, they were in awe of the diverse landscapes. Their travels ended in a rented apartment in Baldwin Park, east of Los Angeles.

Teresa was impressed by the cleanliness, organization, paved roads, and police presence in the United States. They lived next to their friends in a duplex with a kitchenette, living area, bathroom, and two specious bedrooms. Teresa appreciated the amenities that made tending to one's house and family easy. She held the electric washer and drier in high esteem, as it freed her to complete other tasks. She enrolled nine-year-old Cristina and seven-year-old Elizabeth in a nearby school and was eager to find herself a job. The most pressing concern was the language barrier. Though meeting new people and adapting to the American culture and language was hard for her daughters, it was especially hard for Teresa. Her inability to communicate with the other parents when dropping her children off at the bus stop

bothered her. She longed to learn English but knew she must immerse herself in the community to do it. For the first year, Teresa cried regularly, distraught over the isolation she felt and her inability to change it. She knew that the only way for her to forge ahead in this country was to find a job. The person holding her back, however, was Henry.

Just two years later, before Teresa had a chance to truly engage in the American culture and language, Henry impulsively decided to move the family to Spain. Though he had been only a visitor to the country a couple of times, he loved Spain. He planned on moving the family and opening his own mechanic shop in Barcelona. Teresa reminded Henry that Franco was still in power, and any notion of prosperity would end in disappointment. Despite her reluctance, Teresa acted in good faith and supported her husband's wishes. This time, however, she would take all the new amenities that were available to her in America. The washing machine, dryer, and refrigerator moved with them.

Being in Barcelona, after so many years away, reminded Teresa of the love she still held for the city. She welcomed the memories as she walked the familiar streets and alleys of her youth. Teresa was determined to buy an apartment to ensure they were there to stay. The city was made up of large flats with beautiful balconies overlooking the city. Teresa soon found an

apartment and secured a loan, but Henry put a stop to it. Once he realized that starting a business under Franco was nearly impossible, he insisted they move back to the United States. Henry's impatience and impulsivity frustrated Teresa, but she did her duty as a wife and followed her husband back to America. This time, they would go to Miami.

They traveled by ship once again, but this trip did not fare as well as the others. Eight-year-old Elizabeth grew terribly sick along the journey, having contracted Meningitis. As they approached the Atlantic Ocean, just off the shores of Florida, the coast guard was alerted of the emergency and rushed Elizabeth to the hospital. Because Teresa spoke very little English, it was decided that Lily, Henry's sister-in-law, would accompany her as an interpreter. When they arrived at the hospital, Teresa felt an overwhelming helplessness because of the language barrier. Though Lily was there to assist, Teresa's inability to communicate with the doctors frightened her, resulting in confusion over her daughter's condition. The uncertainty over Elizabeth's survival was so dire that they airlifted Henry to the hospital. The next few days were long and grueling, as Teresa was only able to see her daughter through an isolation room window. After receiving a spinal tap and spending four days in isolation, Elizabeth finally recovered. The family was overjoyed, but the experience was

a pivotal turning point for Teresa, as it once again confirmed her need to learn English.



Teresa and Henry on their wedding day,
August 2, 1952.



Wedding day with sister Maribel
and nephew Bernardo, 1952.



Teresa with
Cristina and
Elizabeth in
Venezuela, 1960.



Cristina and
Elizabeth in
California,
1963.

Miami: A Journey Toward Independence

After arriving in Miami, Teresa took the lead in purchasing a home and finding a way to learn a new language. Henry maintained his belief that renting a house was the better option. Maybe he feared the idea of being anchored to one location. He did, after all, have a nomadic tendency that kept the family on the move. Teresa, however, saw the profit of purchasing a home. She knew the value of an investment and was willing to stand her ground. Maybe it was her maternal need to nurture that persisted. For her, owning a home meant that she could establish her own identity as a wife and mother, encompassing all that was most important to her. She would fill their home with items that reflected her personality and style; and she'd

cook meals and host parties that would create memories for her children and grandchildren. Creating a nurturing space for her family was important to her, serving as a priority that would sustain her happiness.

In 1964, Teresa finally got her way. She and Henry purchased their one and only home. It was in this home where Teresa grew closer to her husband. For the first time, the two had intimate conversations after putting the kids to sleep at night. Henry sat on the couch as Teresa sat on the floor next to him, with her arm draped over his knee. She listened to him as he revealed more of himself and his past. He told her of his experiences as a child and his years in the German labor camp. She soon discovered the complexities of her husband and was able to exercise an empathy that she never had before. She no longer felt the need to shelter herself from the questioning eyes of her in-laws. She was no longer a guest in someone else's house. This was her home, and she was free to dictate the boundaries by which her family grew to know and love one another. She felt proud of what they were creating together.

On a personal level, Teresa still struggled to find her independence outside the home. Although she was growing closer to her husband, Henry was adamant about keeping her from working. Her eagerness to learn English persisted, however, and it soon led her to her first job. Burger King paid her only one dollar per hour, but Teresa

appreciated the opportunities it provided. Everyone loved her dynamic personality, hardworking nature, and willingness to help. As she interacted with coworkers and customers, she found herself understanding and speaking English. The other employees made her feel important and helped her gain confidence by placing her in various positions within the restaurant. Over time, her self-worth grew, and her happiness surpassed her expectations. She soon realized that her scope of happiness expanded beyond the walls of her home and into the working world.

Los Angeles: A Journey of Generations

In 1967, after spending just two years in Miami, Teresa and her family moved back to California. This time, they rented an apartment in Montebello. Teresa remained hopeful that they would own a house again. She spent the next few years looking at the real estate section of the newspaper and visiting open houses, on an endless quest to find them their perfect home. She wanted to feel the same pride of ownership that she had felt in Miami and often wondered why her husband didn't share the same desire. She knew Henry didn't care for Los Angeles even though he had a good job with California Carthage Company. Despite Henry's complicated way of thinking, Teresa made the

best of it by considering the bright side of every situation.

She couldn't help but think of her mother when contemplating the degree to which her glass was full. She needed only to reflect upon her mother's positivity in the face of poverty, hunger, war, and loss to conclude that her glass was half full. Teresa needed only to compare her own daughters' health and happiness to that of her mother's three lost babies to reaffirm that she was indeed blessed. If Teresa ever had a notion of feeling any degree of self-pity, she would only have to think of her mother to rescue her.

Teresa gave up on her search for a house, accepting her husband's wishes despite her inability to understand them. She was committed to moving on and cherishing the moments that were ahead of her as her daughters became adults and her family expanded.

Cristina married Richard in 1974 and soon welcomed her daughter Michelle and son Phillip four years later. Teresa and Henry, Yaya and Pa respectively, loved the thrill of being grandparents. Teresa immersed herself in her grandchildren's lives, making them her focus and most cherished prize.

Michelle, the first to arrive, was feisty and strong, bringing tremendous energy into the lives of her grandparents. One day, at six years of age, she heard Pa raise his voice to Yaya. Those angry words left a sour impression upon Michelle. She immediately

stomped into the living room where Pa sat. Positioning her little body directly in front of him, with hands on her hips, she scolded him. “Don’t talk like that to my Yaya,” she demanded. Teresa overheard this interaction from the kitchen and couldn’t help but laugh.

Phillip was Cris’s second child, born in September of 1980. Though he was considered the quiet one, he had his moments of mischief as a child. One evening, when the entire family gathered for dinner, Phillip sneaked under the table, on a clandestine mission to mess with Pa. Little did they know that the quiet kid, the one considered the little angel, was tying his grandfather’s shoelaces together. The dinner proceeded as usual until Pa attempted to stand up.

As her grandchildren grew, Yaya became everyone’s favorite person, giving her a renewed sense of gratitude. Though the grandchildren had a deep love for Henry, they had a special attachment to Teresa. If Pa decided to take them to the animal farm, Yaya had to go along. Maybe it was Yaya’s playfulness and humor that stood out the most. Maybe she simply had an innate sensibility for connecting to children on a level that made them feel recognized and appreciated.

Being a grandmother allowed Teresa to connect with her mother to a greater extent, multiplying their shared experiences. Cris and Liz have fond memories of their grandmother’s visits to America. Though she

lived most of their lives in another country, on another continent, over three thousand miles away, she often made surprise visits to satisfy her own aching need to see them. Even with a language barrier, she courageously made these trips, remaining a huge presence in their lives. They recognized their grandmother as an extension of their mother, with the same enthusiasm for life and love for people. They knew how much Teresa needed her, finding solace in a mother's reassuring words and craving the guidance that only a mother can provide.



Teresa with her parents in Miami, 1966



Teresa and Henry with Pepe and Amparo,
Miami, 1966.

Bearing Grief, Building Bonds

In 1985, Teresa suffered a terrible setback when her mother became seriously ill. Henry urged Teresa to fly to Venezuela to be with her. Without hesitation, she boarded a plane to Caracas and then connected to Barcelona, Venezuela.

Upon her arrival at the airport, Teresa was met by her cousin and his wife. She thought the couple would take her directly to the clinic to see her mother, but instead, they took her to their house. This delay seemed unreasonable to Teresa, and she grew more and more anxious to be by her mother's side.

The couple argued. The wife stated, "She doesn't have to go now. We can wait until tomorrow morning." This lack of urgency confused Teresa, but her cousin confirmed, "I

made a promise to my uncle.” Finally, they agreed to go.

Though relieved to be on her way to see her ailing mother, she suddenly felt a sense of dread when they drove past the clinic. Immediately, she knew the reason for the delay. She didn’t have to question her cousin, as she realized that she was too late, and her mother had already passed.

She was overcome with tremendous sadness at the shock of it all. Instead of arriving at the clinic, they arrived at the mortuary where her father was waiting. Upon seeing him, Teresa was overwhelmed with emotion and fainted. This would initiate an important chapter in Teresa’s life moving forward, as it would be in the absence of her dearest confidant and most reliable source of comfort.

She never forgot the loneliness she felt the day her mother was buried. Henry did not make the trip to Barcelona to attend the funeral, and Teresa never knew why. She felt neglected by her husband during the hardest moment of her life, and it created a deep wound that would never fully heal.

Though her mother’s absence left a void, Teresa would find comfort in the memories her mother left behind. She would often reflect upon the strength and optimism that exemplified her mother, promising to live her own life with the same vigor. Amparo, the feisty and fun-loving presence would live on in the embodiment of her daughter. Teresa

would take her place as the bright spirit that descends upon every social gathering, emitting the same playfulness and humor. The same generosity would extend to her growing family's needs, and she would impart the same wisdom to a new generation. Teresa would display her mother's courage, remaining hopeful in times of despair and commanding the same respect she deserved. Teresa would move forward while holding tightly to her mother's memory as her guide and her greatest gift.

In the summer of 1988, Teresa summoned her mother's tenacity, and it changed her life. She loved being a grandmother to Philip and Michele, but the duties required of her left her time to spare. She was eager to work again and regain a greater sense of her worth, but this time, she wouldn't let her husband stand in her way.

One day, Cris informed her of a job posting for a cafeteria worker at her children's school. Teresa jumped at the opportunity despite her husband's resistance. At this point, Teresa found herself much more courageous when it came to doing what she wanted rather than answering the unreasonable demands of her husband. There was no reason why she shouldn't have a part-time job while fulfilling her duties as wife and grandmother. Despite Henry's objection, and with her daughters' encouragement, she filled out the application. To her delight, she was called for an interview.

On the morning of the interview, Henry scowled as he watched his wife ready herself with an excitement he had never seen before. She made sure that she looked the part with a conservative outfit and just a hint of color on her cheeks and lips. Though she was understandably nervous, she was confident and excited at the prospect of working again. With her purse strapped around her shoulder, she walked with determination past her grumbling husband and out the door. "He'll get over it," she told herself, as she started the car.

The interview at Orange Grove School went well. Teresa was comfortable as three teachers looked over her application and asked her questions about her education and experience. She was truthful about her limited education in Spain and her experience taking care of children as a mother and grandmother. She explained that her cooking skills were notable, as she had been making meals for her family for over thirty years. The skill that seemed to resonate the most, however, was her fluency in Spanish. By the end of the interview, they offered her the job. Surprised by the suddenness of it all, but delighted nonetheless, Teresa accepted their offer. As she drove home, confusion began to build, as she wasn't quite certain what she had agreed to.

The following week, Teresa started her new position at Orange Grove School. Mrs. Kelly, the school principal, was the first

to greet her. As Teresa followed Mrs. Kelly down the hall of the school building, uncertainty grew. She thought she was being led to the cafeteria but ended up in a second-grade classroom. Nerves surged as questions filled her mind. Insecurities overcame her as she considered whether she was up to the task of teaching when she had her own struggles with English. Somehow, she found the courage to ignore her doubts as she sat among the children. It didn't take long for her to feel the warmth of the students as they took to her, immediately trusting in her guidance.

As the months passed, Teresa found indescribable happiness as a teaching assistant in a kindergarten classroom. She enjoyed the children and felt a great sense of purpose in the work. Before long, she was facilitating reading circles, writing English words on the chalkboard, and encouraging her students to participate. The students adored Teresa, embracing her as part of their school family. They thrived from her enthusiasm, and she appreciated being needed again.

Miguel had a special place in Teresa's heart that first year. Every morning, the five-year-old arrived at school with tears streaming down his cheeks. His mother could not console him before she left, and his teacher could not find a way to calm him down. Teresa was his only source of comfort, as he gravitated toward her. Every morning, and throughout each afternoon, he found his place by her side. He followed Teresa around

like a small pet, keeping his eyes on her, and noticing her every move. Miguel is just one example of the impact Teresa had on children over her sixteen years of teaching. Her kindness and affection were long lasting, doubtlessly resonating within the hearts and minds of so many adults today who stop to reflect upon their kindergarten experience at Orange Grove School.

In addition to forming special bonds with the students, Teresa made lasting friendships with the teachers and other aides with whom she worked. She especially liked and respected Mrs. Kelly. As principal of the school, Mrs. Kelly was responsible for making sure that everyone on her faculty was licensed. She approached Teresa about the need for her to pass a district licensing test. Knowing Teresa had only a limited education with a few accounting courses, Mrs. Kelly assured her she'd pass. She gave Teresa the necessary books to help her as she studied. Teresa spent hours in the library studying the books and taking notes. The job she loved was on the line, and she was determined to keep it. Despite Henry's discouragement, insisting that she wouldn't pass, she proved her husband wrong. Teresa passed the test and got the license, showing her husband that her true potential lay beyond her role as wife and mother.

While she found joy in her work, she found as much joy in her expanding family. Elizabeth married Greg Gorski in 1990 and

had her first child, Alex, in July of 1991. A year and a half later, Stefanie came along. Yaya became the center of their world, the ever-present figure they relied upon and adored. She was responsible for picking the children up from school, and they could always convince her to stop at Burger King.

On one occasion, the car wouldn't start, so Teresa walked to Presbyterian Church Pre School. As she, Alex, and Stefanie walked back home, Stefanie whined, "Yaya, I can't walk another step! Pick me up!" Teresa, the kind and understanding grandmother, picked up Stefanie and carried her all the way home. If Alex forgot something at school, Yaya would come to the rescue every time. They'd trudge back to campus and search for a janitor to open the locked classroom. If any one of her grandchildren was in a predicament, Yaya was there to help. They never feared being judged by her for their mistakes.

They counted on Yaya's kindness and her protection. One afternoon, they stumbled upon a rattlesnake as they walked up the driveway to the breezeway. Yaya grabbed Alex's baseball bat and destroyed the snake with one strike to the head. The kids cowered as Yaya swept up the remains and threw them in the trash. In every circumstance, they trusted her to help and to defend.

Even as adults, their deeply rooted connection and love for her remains. Alex still calls her every night to say goodnight, and

Stefanie drops everything to respond to Yaya's needs. The affection they hold for their grandmother is endless.

The love of her growing family was Teresa's consolation when her father passed away in 1992. Though he lived in Venezuela, Teresa remained connected through visits and phone calls. He had been her reliable refuge, his kindness and affection existing as constant anchors throughout her life. Losing him was difficult, but she would find comfort in knowing that her parents, her greatest sources of strength, were reunited once again.



Teresa and her mother in Baldwin Park,
California, 1963

Echoes of Love in a Legacy

In the last years of his life, Henry experienced health complications. An aortic aneurysm, blockage, and congestive heart failure were the repercussions of years of recreational drinking and smoking. Though the doctors repeatedly advised him to stop the unhealthy habits, he stubbornly refused. His refusal frustrated Teresa, as she knew it would ultimately shorten his life. In 1999, Henry suffered a heart attack that was fatal.

Following her husband's death, Teresa relied upon her family and her work to fill the emptiness. Having had Henry by her side for so many years, the transition was difficult. Though her job and grandkids kept her busy, the quiet nights alone reminded her of the loss. Her marriage wasn't perfect, but Teresa

loved Henry and being his wife had become her identity. She would have to adapt to life without her husband by finding a new identity as teacher and grandmother, and it would satisfy her need over time.

She was no longer tethered to the wishes of her husband, battling independence while pacifying his needs. Together, they had embarked upon a journey filled with challenges and triumphs, but now Teresa would forge her own path that would take her to the center of a vibrant and growing family. Her experiences would now be shared with the grandchildren and great-grandchildren she would help raise.

In addition to being an important presence in her grandchildren's lives, she was an incredible help in caring for her great-grandchildren. After retiring from Orange Grove Elementary School in 2004, she selflessly stepped in, making personal sacrifices to provide care and to assist whenever she was needed. She helped Michelle with Adrian, picking him up from school and being the trusted guardian while his parents worked. The same charitable action was done when caring for the twins. When any of the great-grandchildren got sick, Yaya stepped in to care for them. All of this was done out of love for them and a sincere belief that it takes a family to raise a child.

Teresa's own legacy grows, woven into the intricacies of her family's story. Her resilience, her determination, her unwavering

love are the gifts she passes down to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. A collective testament to the enduring power of the human spirit, forever to be remembered and shared with generations to come.

Amidst the joys of motherhood and the triumphs of an unexpected career, there lingers the echoes of loss – her beloved country, her mother's passing, and her husband's departure. Yet, through the tears and the laughter, Teresa finds solace in the love of her family and the memories of her mother's unwavering strength. A mother's legacy is often recognized in the lives of generations of women who follow her, resonating in the same acts of courage and hope.



Teresa with her sister Maribel and her daughters, Cris and Liz, celebrating her 92nd birthday.



Teresa with the Gorski family.



Teresa with Cris and her family.



Teresa with her grandson Phillip and his wife Ali.



Teresa with her sister Maribel, Maribel's daughter Mari and husband Earl, Maribel's son Sergio, and the Gorski family.

