PERSONAL ESSAY

How to know someone you've never met

// BY LIZETH ORTIZ-CALLEJA



COURTESY OF LIZETH ORTIZ-CALLEJA

Raindrops hit my windowpane and the melancholy inside me grows. I start to miss California, the laughter of my hometown friends and late night In-N-Out burgers. But nothing hits harder than the emptiness I feel without my mother's presence. I miss her cooking, her booming voice and the warmth of her hugs. She is still living, but 3,000 miles away from me.

Homesickness is rarely about a place. It's a familiar face, a cat waiting on your bed, the small rituals in a house that you no longer live in. Our call logs home are proof enough.

This yearning for home is not a new occurrence in my family. I have seen my parents live it every day for all 19 years of my life. Twenty-two years ago, my mother and father left Mexico, leaving behind a piece of themselves they couldn't carry across the border.

I never met my mother's mother. When she passed away, I grieved not the memories I had of her, but the lost opportunity of knowing her love. While studying abroad, I was asked to write a short story about her. My classmates around me wrote with ease, writing about grandmothers who had spoiled them rotten. My pen and paper didn't touch for a while. I didn't have those memories. How can I write about someone I never knew?

The image of my grandmother, Juani, is trapped in a wooden frame beside my mother's bed. Every morning before she leaves, my mother prays for a blessed day and gives a kiss to the picture of her parents.

When her children and grandkids all get together and the wine runs out, the stories of my grandmother's love start pouring out. One of my favorite stories is the origin of my mother's name. My grandmother was 42 years old when she was pregnant with my mother. Worried about her own age, she entrusted my mother to the Virgin of Talpa to ensure that she would be born without complications. So when my mother arrived healthy, my grandmother named her after the Virgin herself: María del Rosario.

My Juani was a short woman. She always wore her hair in a braid — black strands mingled with gray. Her skin was olive, marked by brown spots and the wrinkles that appeared whenever she smiled. Her eyes were just like my mom's: warm and brown. She was the woman who taught my mom how to cook the meals that bring me so much bliss and how to prepare the remedies that make me feel better when I am ill. She was the woman who let her daughter build a life far away — much like my mom did when I went to a university across the country.

My mom didn't have the same privilege I do of returning home. Although I'm stuck in New Haven completing problem sets and midterms until the holidays, I get to go back to California. It has been 22 years since my mother left Mexico and nine years since my grandmother passed away. My mom will never see her mother; she will never hug or kiss her again.

Maybe my mom doesn't see it, but mi Juani never left her. I didn't have the chance to meet her, but the stories I've been told remind me so much of my mom. The picture by my mother's bed could be a photo of my mom 30 years from now. The love my mother gives me is a reflection of how her mother treated her.

And now, I carry that with me at all times. Whether I am flipping tortillas for quesadillas at the Silliman buttery, listening attentively to the heartaches of my friends or doing gestures of love for those around me, I am reminded of how my mother moves through the world. She can't be here with me but her tenderness lives on at Yale. It is the greatest inheritance I have.

We are all far from someone we love. Someday, we will lose some of them for good. But distance doesn't erase them, and neither does death. They live on in the way we cook, the way we comfort, the way we pray before a long day. As long as we keep loving the way they taught us, they never really leave.

My grandmother lives in my mother, and my mother lives in me.

I once wondered how to write about a woman I never knew. It turns out I've known her all along.

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PERSONAL ESSAY

Cerebral decay in 72 hours of algorithmic deprivation: a study

// BY CLAUDIA LOIZAGA

A team of Yale undergraduates set out to investigate why everyday conversations feel overwhelmingly understimulating and devoid of narrative velocity. They isolated an anonymous test subject from all short-form media, doomscrolling and algorithmic input for 72 hours.

The researchers isolated the subject in a windowless study room in Bass Library, depriving them from all devices, providing them only with analog stimulation. This included classical novels of the Western canon, a medium of intellectual stimulation entirely unfamiliar to the subject. Over 72 hours, the team recorded observations in the subject's changes in behavior. Find the test results below.

Observation log

12 hours: We have decided to call this stage Mild Inconvenience. The subject exhibits moderate physical distress when attempting to receive stimulation in reading "The Iliad." They repeatedly swiped up on the pages of the book, expressing confusion when the paper failed to auto-refresh or display comments. When they were asked their thoughts on the chapter, the subject's lexical range only contained words related to gastronomy. "Homer ate with this" and "Wow, Achilles cooked" were frequent comments. This could be interpreted as a sign of evasion or genuine inability to process our request for their personal opinion. We hypothesize the confusion is due to a lack of access to other people's opinions, causing the subject to be forced to process a thought of their own.

24 hours: This stage will be known as the Split Screen Craving stage. We attempted to engage the subject in conversation to observe the effects of dopamine deprivation. They began showing acute distress. The most notable manifestation was the subject's inability to look at the person talking unless someone else was actively cutting a piece of kinetic sand or playing a simple mobile game right next to their head. Additionally, the subject became visibly restless if the speaker took a breath or paused between thoughts, mistakenly believing this was due to internet lag. Other than Subway Surfers, researchers found the second best way to keep the subject's heart rate stable was to squeeze and manipulate slime in front of them.

36 hours: The consequent stage is the Syntactic Collapse. At this point in the experiment, the primary language center begins to degrade. When the subject was asked standard questions like "How was your lunch?", they were unable to form full sentences. The team wants to highlight that the subject interrupted to request coconut water. After various attempts to engage in small talk with the subject, involuntary physical and vocal spasms were recorded at four-minute intervals, including obsessive tracing of the jawline and repeating the name "Nina." We additionally noted an immediate 40 percent drop in conversational engagement when the topics became "too deep," according to the subject. We believe this alarming linguistic deterioration can be attributed to the lack of dopamine peaks every five seconds, causing the subject to co-exist with boredom.

72 hours: The final stage of the investigation is known as Complete Catatonia. To finalize observations, we investigated the effects of re-entry into a normal social space; the subject was exposed to a standard five-minute conversation about class schedules. The subject's brain activity flatlined due to the total absence of sub-second dopamine cuts. This resulted in their collapse onto the Cross Campus grass while muttering about their loss of social status: "This is crazy aura loss."

Conclusions and Recommendations

After spending two weeks analyzing our observations and results, we have come to the conclusion that human conversation is no longer capable of competing with three-second algorithmic pacing. As a result of our fast cognitive deterioration as a species, we advise immediate administrative intervention. Discussion sections must be capped at 15 seconds in length, and professors must incorporate ambient video game footage into all lecture slides to maintain baseline eye contact. The only exception for the inclusion of this footage is if the professor is simultaneously cutting kinetic sand or stretching slime as they speak. Until these protocols are implemented, we recommend that all students avoid prolonged eye contact with physical books, as exposure to uncurated thought carries a severe, documented risk of existential panic. Or, at least, implement informal comment sections in the book margins. Further research is required to determine whether this report itself has exceeded the average human attention span.



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WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:
SENDING LOVE LETTERS