

The Final Goodbye

By Aracelis Rivera



The lonely walk down the hospital corridor towards the room where my mother lay in a hospital bed was the most terrifying walk of my entire life. No words can express the feeling of anguish at not knowing what I would find when I reached my destination. My mom had been sick for three and a half years and despite my fervent prayers she became progressively worse. This last time she'd suffered cardiac arrest while undergoing kidney dialysis.

I slowly opened the door and found that Mom was sharing the room with another patient, but the curtain had been drawn between the two beds.

I searched Mom's face looking for a glimmer of hope, but she faced me with resigned defeat. The wind had been knocked out of her like a fighter who has been beaten mercilessly, no longer able to stand, looking towards his corner, begging his trainer to throw in the towel.

"Nena," she calmly confided. "Lla llego mi tiempo. Yo no salgo viva de aqui." ("My time has come. I won't leave here alive.")

Hearing her say the words pierced my heart so deeply that I felt the blood spill into my body. I wanted to scream, "No! Fight, Mama, fight!" "But I knew she could not. Her frail body had taken a beating, her heart was too weak.

I sat with her all night and we talked about many things: the grand-kids, my dreams, my failures, all the things "she" wanted to talk about. We laughed about many things, we cried about many things. I didn't let on but I was crying more for myself than for her.

You see, I'd been the strong-willed child, the rebellious teen, convinced my mother didn't love me and I'd spent the better part of my life challenging my mother's authority, arguing with her, and because of my

rejection we'd grown apart. But God, in His infinite wisdom, had seen to it that we have this time together to make things right, to resolve our conflicts, to share our love.

I read the 23rd Psalm—Mom's favorite—and we talked about religion and what we believed about life after death. Still, I was unsure about her salvation and silently prayed God would give me the courage to ask.

Then a miraculous thing happened! The curtain that separated the beds opened and a the woman patient, with the help of whom I believed to be her husband, slowly crawled out of bed onto one of the chairs facing my mother. She told us her story of working as a missionary in Central America for thirty-five years.

She smiled at Mom and told her, "Yo hablo Espanol."—then staring directly at me she whispered—"I will pray with your mom tonight."

The night seemed endless as I sat in the family waiting room praying for a healing.

The following morning, I roused myself from the couch, and left the room to wash up and get a cup of coffee, but before leaving the floor, I walked inside the CCU unit to see how Mom how spent the night. I crept towards her room, and almost went into shock to see my Mom had been placed on a respirator during the night. The door to her room was ajar and I saw her frail veined hand wave for me to come closer.

I ran to her arms and pressed tightly against her. The machine unnaturally forced her chest to heave up and down. I could hear her weary heart struggling as she held me tightly against her breast. I made comforting sounds between sobs of despair. The nurse came in and told us they would try to remove the respirator later that morning. When I raised my face to look in her eyes she smiled and shook her head. And I knew: She was saying "Goodbye."

A few weeks after the funeral I had a dream, and in the dream Mom was laughing, telling me not to worry, that she was happy. It was then I remembered the missionary who spoke perfect Spanish and I realized what should have been obvious at the time. The Everlasting God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, had sent that missionary to make sure Mom went with Jesus when she died.