



SUBSCRIBER EDITION

[News](#) [Sports](#) [Business](#) [Politics](#) [Opinion](#) • [Food & Drink](#) [Climate Change](#) [Personal Finance](#) [Public Notices](#) [Obituaries](#)

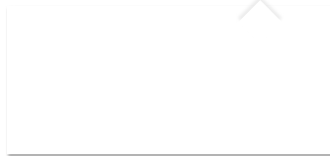
MIAMI STORIES

Miami Stories: Filipino writer forges bond with 'viejas'

By M. Evelina Galang

Special to the Miami Herald

UPDATED NOVEMBER 03, 2015 6:19 PM





M. Evelina Galang *Courtesy*



Only have a minute? Listen instead

Powered by **Trinity Audio**

00:00

I moved to Miami after returning from my Fulbright Scholar Program in 2002. The same muggy air, car horns, heat that I left in the Philippines greeted me as I walked out the doors of Miami International Airport.

The cab driver spoke to me in Spanish and I understood everything he said, but I was slow to respond. I had spent the last year speaking Tagalog, a language full of Spanish words after 300 years of colonization. When I instinctively replied to him in Tagalog, he just kept on, unfazed, in Spanish.

My job at the University of Miami started right away. For the first year, I lived in Kendall, or “Kendalia” as I liked to refer to it. It took more than an hour in rush-hour traffic to get to and from the Coral Gables campus. In Manila, traveling five miles from Quezon City to Makati had taken an average of two hours each way. Now, instead of getting anxious, I could let go of the frustration and instead spend time listening to the Latin stations, dancing in my car and practicing Spanish.

TOP VIDEOS

AD

In 2009, I moved to a neighborhood along Coral Way, a historic urban boulevard that runs through Miami from Brickell Avenue to 37th Avenue. My house had been built in 1939 along with other bungalows and mission revival-style homes. Everyone on my street spoke Spanish almost exclusively.

My *casita* stood between two houses of the same style, and within these houses lived *viejas*. On the right, there were three widowed sisters — Marta, Olga and Paula. On the left was Elsa, also a *soltera*. The women were best friends, and I'd see them on the sidewalk in front of my house, sometimes laughing together, sometimes shouting in anger. Right away, they befriended me, a single woman much younger than they were and never married. They called me China even though I told them, “*Yo soy Evelina, la Filipina. No soy China.*” They laughed at me, calling me China anyway.

Get unlimited digital access

Try 1 month for \$1

CLAIM OFFER

Elsa was a small and quiet widow. From afar, I never knew how she was feeling, but face to face, I could see it in her eyes and in the path of her delicate wrinkles. Every day I would notice her standing by the chain-linked fence in her front yard, watching the street, waiting for the mail, and talking to passersby.

One afternoon I brought her a mango from my tree.

I can hold a polite conversation in Spanish, but when it gets *malalim* — deep — I mix my languages. Sometimes Tagalog comes out when I mean to speak Spanish, or vice versa.

Elsa recounted the story of her life to me at her kitchen table. She had suffered bouts of depression since she came to this country. Never in Cuba, only in this country. She wouldn't even say it — the United States of America. *Solamente en este pais, pero nunca en Cuba*. These days she felt nervous constantly. Everyone she loved had died — *su mama y papa, su esposo y hermana*. Seven years ago, her husband and sister had died months apart. Though she had the *abuela* sisters, who took her everywhere, and a daughter in Boston, she couldn't calm her nerves. The noise of her memories crowded her head, kept her up at night.



Miami Herald  **DailyChatter**
Independent · Non-Partisan · Fair

The Miami Herald is partnering with DailyChatter to connect you around the globe.

Sign up to receive the only daily newsletter dedicated exclusively to world events.

Subscribe for only \$2.99 a month.

SIGN UP See Order Form for Terms and Conditions



The Solution.

888.395.0001

Leighton Law
TRIAL LAWYERS

© 2022 Leighton Law, PA.

We sat for a long time. She picked up the mango, smelled it, and handed it to me. “*Que rico,*” she said.

I told her she needed a *novio*. She laughed.

When I married last year, Elsa quickly took to my husband, who spoke absolutely no Spanish. They exchanged words each day. She sneaked up behind me one day to tell me my husband was a good man. “*Y guapo tambien,*” I told her jokingly. Yes, yes, he’s handsome, so be careful, she said, women will try to take him away from you. She gave me a look. I told her I’d be careful. No *mujer* would come between us. We laughed and then she told me she liked my dress. A moment passed, and she said, “*Tu esposo es una buena persona.*”

Last month, when my husband and I came home from a trip, nobody was standing at Elsa’s gate. On the fence and the trees nearby, someone had posted “No Parking”

signs.

“Something’s wrong,” I told my husband.

“It could be anything,” he said.

For days, the neighborhood was quiet. The *abuela* sisters were nowhere to be seen.

One day soon after, my husband came home and told me he had found out what happened to Elsa.

“Who told you?” I asked him.

“Olga.”

“What did she say?”

“I don’t know. It was in Spanish. But she was talking, talking, talking and she went like this.” He put his hands together and leaned his head on them with his eyes closed. “And then I said, ‘She died?’ And she said, ‘*Sí, sí, sí.*’”

Elsa was not the first to pass away since I moved into this *casita*. There was an old man across the street during my first year. And last year, Marta, one of the *abuela* sisters, died of a brain tumor. Now Elsa. I like to think the spirit of these *viejas* are circling the bamboo, the mango and the avocado trees, whistling love songs, blessing us from afar. I like to think they are a part of a Miami that will never die.

They have taught me that you don't need the right words, or even the same language, as long as you are willing to sit with one another and listen.

M. Evelina Galang is the author of “*Angel de la Luna and the 5th Glorious Mystery*” (Coffee House Press), “*One Tribe*” (New Issues) and “*Her Wild American Self*” (Coffee House Press). She directs the creative writing program at UM and will be appear at the book fair on Nov. 21. For more information, visit <http://miamibookfair.com/authors/>.

Tell us your story

HistoryMiami invites you to share your Miami Story.

TO SUBMIT: Submit your story and photo(s) at www.HistoryMiami.org. Your story may be posted at MiamiHerald.com/miamistories, published in Sunday’s Neighbors print edition and archived at HistoryMiami.org/miamistories.

ABOUT MIAMI STORIES: This project is a partnership between HistoryMiami, Miami Herald Media Co., WLRN and Michael Weiser, chairman of the National Conference on Citizenship.

This story was originally published October 29, 2015 4:31 PM.

Conversation

Your voice matters. Discussions are moderated for civility. Read our guidelines [here](#)

Commenting as **Guest**

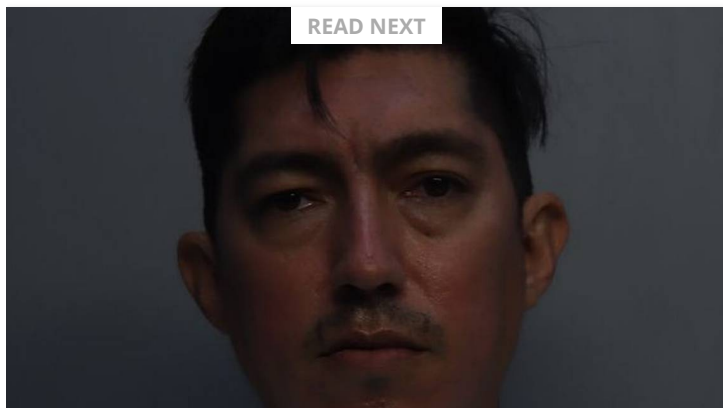
 [Log in](#) [Sign up](#)

Be the first to comment...



Powered by  OpenWeb

[Terms](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Feedback](#)



READ NEXT

CRIME

Florida murder suspect wanted to take ‘soul’ of man

TRENDING STORIES

Federal agents raid Florida Keys house, by land in armed SUVs and by water in a raft

UPDATED DECEMBER 16, 2022 5:05 PM

Baby June was found floating 4 years ago. Florida cops tell how they solved the mystery

UPDATED DECEMBER 15, 2022 3:18 PM

1,000 tons of space debris was unleashed when NASA spacecraft slammed into asteroid

DECEMBER 16, 2022 7:45 AM

Officer working at Walmart runs woman’s plates to follow her on Instagram, police say

DECEMBER 15, 2022 6:41 PM

living with his ex and daughter, cops say

BY CHARLES RABIN

UPDATED NOVEMBER 29, 2022 3:49 PM



Jose Aranibar-Camacho was ready for violence. The single father of a little girl had prepared a blood-clotting treatment and a tourniquet in case he was injured. Then he drove to his daughter's home and sat in his car with a gun in his hand for over two hours, police said, waiting to take the "soul" of the man who had moved in with his ex-girlfriend.

When the chance arrived, police say Aranibar-Camacho didn't flinch. He somehow entered apartment 7 at the Belle Isle apartment complex in North Bay Village just before 8 a.m. Monday and shot and killed his ex's lover. Then he shot her several times in the stomach.

KEEP READING →



CRIME

Hialeah Gardens cop pawned agency-issued AR-15, stole partner's credit card, police say

UPDATED OCTOBER 07, 2022 10:11 AM



MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Ukraine outreach: Miami Beach and Miami move to make Odessa a 'sister city'

UPDATED APRIL 11, 2022 3:09 PM



MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

'We need help in Miami': Former police chief begged for federal investigation

UPDATED JANUARY 10, 2022 9:46 AM



EDITORIALS

You've won, Mayor Suarez. But you have to be more than Miami's chief marketing officer | Editorial

UPDATED NOVEMBER 03, 2021 2:02 PM



MIAMI STORIES

For quarantined New Yorker, Miami-based group fosters creativity — and fends off despair

UPDATED MARCH 24, 2021 3:11 PM



SPONSORED CONTENT

Celebrate Art of Black in Miami

BY GREATER MIAMI CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Take Us With You

Real-time updates and all local stories you want right in the palm of your hand.

 [MIAMI HERALD APP →](#)

[VIEW NEWSLETTERS →](#)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

[Start a Subscription](#)

[Customer Service](#)

[eEdition](#)

[Vacation Hold](#)

[Pay Your Bill](#)

LEARN MORE

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Archives](#)

[Reviews](#)

[Sports Betting](#)

[Personal Finance](#)

[Coupons](#)

ADVERTISING

[McClatchy Advertising](#)

[Place an Ad](#)

[Place a Classified Ad](#)

[Place an Obituary](#)

[Staffing Solutions](#)

[Political Advertising](#)

COPYRIGHT

COMMENTING POLICY

PRIVACY POLICY

DO NOT SELL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION

TERMS OF SERVICE