THE PYRRHIC VICTORY

by

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***The Beginning…***

Everything happens for a reason...we constantly hear this phrase or repeat it without realizing its power, we say it when we want to soothe ourselves during the moments when we can’t find answers to our questions. I can’t give you the answers to your questions, but I hope that you might find them yourself and digest the reality that comes with the understanding of that phrase. Everything DOES happen for a reason, but we can only see that when we look back: you can’t connect the dots looking forward, you can only connect them looking backwards…

Not many people know that my biggest dream was to become an actress but not just an actress. Even as a kid, I wasn’t interested in child play, all I knew and could think about was that I was going to become a famous Hollywood actress. Now I feel kind of ashamed to even think about it as it seems unreasonable. Now that I voiced the thought of being ashamed of my dream, I feel even more ashamed that I have given up on my dream and betrayed myself.

When you’re a kid, you’re not afraid of dreaming big, and if you don’t dream impossibly big then what’s even the point of dreaming? Dreams are made for the purpose of coming true, it’s simply why they exist because they need to come true. Kids are all about ambition and now that I look back at myself, I feel like crying because of losing that naiveness of a child who had so much ambition and who believed in miracles. Back then, I didn’t think about difficulties and the thousands of barriers that I needed to overcome to fulfill my dream, I only thought that it HAS TO happen because there’s no other way. I know you might think that every child, at some point, wants to become a Hollywood actor but for me, it was the sole purpose of my existence. I didn’t think of it that it’s something that I need to strive for because it was a given, I was born for the purpose of fulfilling that dream and there was no other possible outcome.

***Greatness***

Ever since I was a little girl I knew; I just knew that I came into this world to make a difference. I honestly don’t know, maybe every person on this earth feels like they’re meant for greatness or maybe that inner feeling came from the fact that I was born on my mom’s 5th month of pregnancy, weighing just 1.4 pounds. I was always told that me staying alive had no other explanation than it being a miracle because in 1999 in Armenia we didn’t have the fancy incubators that we have these days and there were no technologies that could help or prevent something. My fingers were as slim as matches, my ears were as transparent as flower petals, my eyes were as big as two olives and my whole body could fit into the palm of my mother’s hand. I always felt that God or the Universe kept me alive because I had a mission to fulfill in this world and I honestly felt that I was meant for greatness.

***Mediocrity***

All my life I thought that I can’t simply be like others, I’m one in a million and there was a reason that I survived 20 years ago. I thought that I have a mission to fulfill in this life, otherwise God wouldn’t have saved me if I would’ve been mediocre. I hate the word mediocre, it’s even worse than being “below average”. If someone ever looks at me and thinks “meh, she’s average” that will be the death for me and I’m not talking about my appearance. Even being below the average is still a deviation from the norm, it’s negative but it’s still different; anything but average and mediocre. Even in the most primitive things I need to be different and set myself aside from the crowd. Most people are made in a way that they like to follow the crowd and copy others because it’s easier than being different, but I’d rather be called crazy than average.

***Inner child***

I think that one of the most important but also the hardest thing in life is to have the ability to keep the child in you. Only a child is able to perceive the world in its true sense with pure eyes: eyes that haven’t cried any tears of pain and haven’t seen any hardships and can only see the good in this world. Kids are pure, they trust, and they never have ulterior motives. They just live to enjoy life and don’t need a reason to be happy, they just are. Now, I pray that I’ll be able to reach the 13-year-old Maria who was truly happy, who loved life just because it existed and who was more ambitious than anyone I’ve ever met. Honestly, if I think about it, the people who have reached that unimaginable level of success are just people who haven’t given up and who have kept believing in themselves no matter what just like a child believes in his/her heroes.

***Armenia***

A couple of years ago, I hated Armenia. I used to roam the streets of Yerevan and wonder what I was doing there. When my parents took me to a wedding, I thought that they did it to punish me as Armenian music seemed like a method of torture to me. I hated everything Armenian: the music, the food, even the nature. I thought that I had no future here and if my parents want to ruin my life, they should keep me in Armenia.

***Parents***

As a kid, never did I ever ask anything from my parents. I never asked for toys, candies, or dresses and my poor parents were the ones who felt bad. They used to take me to the best store in town and BEG me to ask for something. My dad spoiled me tremendously and honestly, I’ve never seen a father treat a daughter the way my father does. He doesn’t treat me like a little spoiled princess but as a queen. I always feel bad when he apologizes to me when sometimes things are rough and he’s not able to provide the best of the best to me. He caters to my needs even when I don’t ask for anything and my biggest blessing is the fact that he wants to give everything to me and it doesn’t matter at all to what extent he’s able to do it.

I know that there are hundreds of people who live in better conditions than I do but I also know that there are millions who don’t have half of the things that I have. I’ve had the fortune to travel to the most beautiful cities in Europe, eat great food, and sometimes spoil myself with expensive clothing. We may not be rich but we’re above the average and I’m thankful for everything and when there are days that we don’t even have money for gas, my dad apologizes to me because I can’t go to the Northern Avenue to sip an overpriced coffee in a posh café. My dad is kind of extreme like I am, he’s a connoisseur of food and has been to the best restaurants all over the world. He likes to eat and truly enjoys different cuisines and he raised me to be just like him.

He’s extreme in a way that he may give the last money that we have to go to a restaurant and not even take a second to contemplate about it for which, my mother gets mad at him. Basically, we may not travel for years but when we do it has to be the best hotel, the best restaurants, and shopping.

Remember when I said I never asked for anything? Well, I lied… I would be an ungrateful and ignorant little brat to think that “So you guys have money to take me to Paris but you can’t take me to US” which is the only thing that I ever asked for. But I was a kid and I was stupid, I didn’t understand and didn’t appreciate what I had.

*Mom*

My mom is my idol. She's the epitome of femininity, grace, and elegance. She's the ultimate woman. No Angelina Jolie or Monica Bellucci can compare to her beauty. She's my Goddess. Her sense of style is out of this world. She dresses thousands of times better than I do and when I complain that maybe my dress is a little too short she tells me that it's like I just arrived from the village. She's so graceful in everything she does and so feminine that I can't help but wish to be like her. Even when she's doing a masculine job or the most casual thing she does it with so much grace that it looks like she's dancing. She's my ultimate role model and icon. She used to tell me that when a guy took her out, they gave her flowers and gifts and they were the one to thank her. As a kid, I was so mind-blown by that fact as I couldn't understand why would someone give gifts and be the one to say thank you. My mom said, "They say thank you because *I graced them with my presence*". Jesus Christ, this is legendary!! So, that it became my dream, to become the type of a woman that people feel fortunate just to be around with. That has nothing to do with arrogance and selfishness, but it has to do with inner peace and elevation.

***Walk of Fame (2015)***

My name’s gonna be on the Walk of Fame (rhymes nicely, right?). The Red Carpet was just made for me to walk on. The VIP raiders were invented so my exquisite tastes could be satisfied. The designers invented Haute Couture so my wardrobe could be as unusual, extravagant and fancy as I am. The limousine was invented so I, being the foodie that I am, could enjoy a steak and a glass of the most expensive champagne on my way to the Oscars, which was organized so I my work could be appreciated by the elite of the elite, who will get the chance of being Graced with my presence.

***The Oscars***

Every year, I used to wake up at the crack of dawn because of the time difference, put on my mom's evening gown, her red lipstick and ridiculously high heels and watch the Annual Academy Awards ceremony. And when the time came to announce the winner for the " Academy Award for Best Actress" I would just hold up my tiny little Oscar Statuette pendant that I always wore around my neck, and give a speech "I'd like to thank the Academy Awards for this opportunity..." and I used to be so happy at that moment, so innocent in my own little world of dreams where anything was possible even for an ordinary girl like me, from a tiny little country, of which existence millions of people don't even know about.

***Travelling to US, 2015***

Today I’m going to an interview at the US Embassy...Gosh, it feels like I’m going to take all of the exams in the world at once, to say that I’m nervous would be an understatement. I’ve heard that you should expect the unexpected. It’s like the lottery, you never know if you’re going to get the magical “OK” or not. My legs are shaking, and I bet that if I weren’t a kid, I would look extremely suspicious with my nervous smile, shaky legs and possibly a sweaty forehead. I know that the workers here are very diplomatic and “strict” so I’d just have to face it and go in. Okay, this guy doesn’t look so scary, he’s even smiling but I bet he’s thinking “hahaha silly girl, you think you’re going to get to the US? Ya wish…” ok, and here goes my overthinking again. Wait, did he say something? Did he say OK? OK what? What do you mean OK? Oh, I just said that aloud...OK… I’m going to the US???? ME???? Can you believe this?? I”M GOING TO THE USA!!!!

I couldn’t believe that I was going to that holy, out of this world paradise which I only saw in my dreams. Instead of watching cartoons I would open up Google Earth and learn the names of the streets in LA, I would count all the stars at the Walk of Fame imagining that the next one would be mine. I would google all of the stores and supermarkets that there are and dream of going to Target and buying a Twinkie. Every single night I would close my eyes and see myself getting off the plane at LAX and seeing the Hollywood sign and I would cry and kiss the ground because my dream came true, and I was in LA: in HOLLYWOOD. So, when we got out of the embassy I couldn’t believe that after all those years it was going to be real. I cried so hard that my mom had to hold me so I wouldn’t faint from my shaking knees. I cried the tears of happiness for the first and only time in my life but as they say, “Nothing lasts forever” and I would feel the biggest disappointment in my life only a couple of hours later…

***Los Angeles (expectation)***

The City of Angels...it’s the city of stars, A-list celebrities, glamorous parties, exclusive clubs and couture. In this city (here), you don’t walk on the streets, you walk on the Red Carpet, here you don’t eat ice cream, you eat organic frozen yogurt, here you don’t dress up to go out on the Friday night, here every night is Friday night, here you don’t have to buy meet and greet tickets to casually snap a picture with Rihanna, you randomly see her in the grocery store (an overpriced and “everything organic” one but still), here you don’t need to wear pink sunglasses because life is colorful without them.

***Aunty***

Just because my parents had me when they were over 35 and I have no siblings I always thought that God forbid if something would’ve happened one day, I always knew that I still have a family in Los Angeles, and they’ll be like a rock to me. My aunt was always very inspiring to me and I looked up to her a lot as a child but as years went by, we drifted apart because of the distance. Although she was in LA, she always showered me with gifts and attention but as I grew up the love, the presents, everything became less. Still, every night I would close my eyes and picture my plane landing at LAX and my aunt welcoming me with open arms.

The whole day it felt like I was walking on clouds, in my mind I was already in LA sipping a Starbucks Frappuccino and waiting in line for my very first audition. My daydream got cut short with the ‘Bing’ of my phone. It was an email from my aunt and the subject was “CONGRATULATIONS!!” So naturally, I thought that she'd heard the good news and was already adjusting my room but as soon as I read the email I froze:

Hi Maria

I'm really happy for you. I know you've been wanting to come to the US for a few years now.

As you know, your mother and I don't really get along. I think it would be best if you came alone. If you decide to come alone, I will do everything for you, and you can stay here with us. If your mom comes, unfortunately that will not be possible. Please know that I love you very much and I am always here for you. Call me.

I dropped my phone and with that fall it felt like my life fell apart too. Now, as I look back it doesn’t feel like the end of the world but at that moment it did. My mom is everything to me, she was the one who spent countless sleepless nights at the park near my hospital because the doctors wouldn’t let her see me for months when I was born. She was the one to bathe me in sterilized water and purify the air so I don’t get sick. She was the one who took care of me when I got sick and brought sliced fruit to my room while I watched TV. I would be nothing without her and if she’s not welcomed then I’m not welcomed either. I know that my expectations overall were unrealistic but whatever concerned my family I didn’t doubt for a second.

When I woke up the next day it didn’t matter to me that I was going to LA, I kept looking at the tickets in my hand that I dreamt to hold for so many years and begged myself to feel something but the only thing I felt was emptiness. I constantly tried to recall the feeling of excitement and remember the reasons why I wanted to go there in the first place, but nothing seemed to matter. I grew up in that moment, the girl who used to wear pink shaded sunglasses and jump around from the excitement of achieving the impossible was replaced with a girl whose glasses were yanked away from her in the school hallway and broke into pieces in front of her eyes, just like her dreams.

***Emotions***

I’m the only person who’s responsible for my happiness. I’ve come to realize that the things that we go through are just situations that are neither good or bad, they’re just that: situations, and what makes it either good or bad is our response to that situation and that’s when it becomes an experience. No one is responsible for the way we feel, except ourselves (or us?). Even when there’s no denying that someone did something with the intention of causing us pain, it’s still our choice how we respond to it. At first it seems like the world is crumbling your feet and you can’t fathom the reason why that person would cause you that much pain, or why would God let you face this hardship or why would the universe treat you this way? The shock is numbing and the only thing you feel isn’t anger, hurt or even disappointment, it’s...emptiness.

***Reality, 2015***

Now I realize that I can’t sit around and wait for someone or something to make my dreams come true, because they’re my dreams and no one is responsible for making them become a reality except myself. So, I’m going to find the best acting school there is and just take my chance. This Christmas I’m not going to run to the Christmas tree, instead I’m going to run to my gate at the airport.

I’m at a turning point in my life at this time. Everything is the same but still different at the same time. Since I moved to USA to pursue my dreams; my life changed drastically. New country, new school, new friends. My environment changed but it didn't change who I am. I came here determined and motivated to get a good education, to make my life better, the way I imagined and even the hard circumstances can't stop me. Nothing Great ever came easy.

The concept of the American Dream brought me here. By hard work, faith and determination anything is possible. I hate the word impossible, and I just can’t understand the people who accept that as a reality. I always tell myself that being realistic is the most common path to mediocrity.

There were a lot of people who told me that I'm aiming too high, but I challenged myself and I did it. I am here now and all these challenges along my journey made me the strong, brave, determined and unstoppable girl that I am today. And now people actually believe in me, even when sometimes I don't believe in myself. When I first arrived at the airport, I felt so small, so useless in this big city but the next morning my friends called me and told me how much they believed in me, how proud they were and that's t was all I needed. Now I'm challenging myself every day, I'm going forward and there's nothing that can stop me along my way.

***New York Film Academy, 2015***

I can’t believe I got accepted to the 4-week acting program at the New York Film Academy (NYFA) in LA and my parents didn’t even know that I applied, now they won’t have any other option but to take me there. These are going to be the best 4 weeks of my entire life, I mean I can’t believe I finally arrived in LA, let alone live in Studio City, right across from Universal Studios and Warner Bros. this is more than a dream come true. So, every day I’m going to have classes from 9-6, every weekend we’re going to go on a trip and each Monday is Backlot day! I’ll tell you about it a little later...as for now I’ll get settled in and meet my roommates, I hope we’ll get along.

Today is the first day of my classes and I’m extremely excited but also nervous. I always knew that I wanted to be an actress, but I never actually knew if I’m even good at it. I mean what if I’m not talented enough and I’m really bad at it? That’s the only thing I ever pictured myself doing and if it’s not my thing then what is?

“Maria, are you planning on going out from the shower anytime soon? We’re gonna be late for class!”

Oops! I totally drifted off for a moment there, some deep thought for the shower huh.

“I’ll be out in a second Mil!” Wait, it was Milena, right? I mean I’ve only known the girls for half a day and since Vivian’s in the directing program and her classes don’t start in another hour that’s definitely gonna be Milena, I mean her German accent is kind of a teller duh, plus I bet Marina is already making out with some guy.

My first class is called “Casting Techniques” hmmm, sounds very interesting and intriguing. It’s a class of about 10 people and I already know Milena, so I guess it'll be pretty easy to get along with everyone. We’re all sitting in a circle with our teacher in the middle. The guy sitting next to me is Alejandro and his appearance totally matches his name: tan, dark hair and eyes, and I guess that he’s a football fan since he’s wearing a jersey from FC Barcelona...where he actually turned out to be from.

The girl sitting right across from me is Elizabeth (with a British accent) but we call her Lizzie. She’s blonde, tall and skinny and we’re all captivated by her accent and the way she says “Can I have some Wotah?”. Next off is Esthercita Ortiz Almodóvar, yup you guessed it, she’s a Latina and she’s from Puerto Rico (this also should be said in a Spanish accent and with a purring sound like PueRRRRto RRRRico). Esther is tan, curvy and has the most bright and contagious smile in the world. We also have Valentina who looks so much like Jennifer Lawrence that for a second, we freaked out when we met her. We are all so different from each other, yet we all share the same dream.

Okay, now that the introductions are out of the way we have to actually start rehearsing and the teacher gave us a script for the commercial of Pizza Hut which we have to play out. First, we’ll have to do individual skits and then we’ll be paired up with each other. Now when it’s my turn my teacher holds up his hand in a fist, pointing towards me like a camera and says “action”, now I have a really hard time remembering my lines because that hand thing is so funny, and I just burst out laughing at the thought of me messing up my lines and him scolding me with that “hand”.

***Backlot Day***

Today we’re at the Universal Studios backlot to shoot some scenes with the directors from the directing camp. I’m extremely nervous and excited at the same time because I get to be the “A-lister” from the acting camp since I have to play most of the gigs and basically have to run around from one shooting scene to another. The first scene that I get to do is a pretty dramatic one as I have to faint in the middle of the street. We’re shooting it at the “Eastern Quarter” which basically looks like “Agrabah” from Aladdin mixed with American Wild West. Just as I start picturing how awesome I would look dressed as a cowgirl or as an Arabic princess I hear someone screaming “Action” and the snap of a clapperboard snaps me out of my amazing daydream.

I abruptly hear, “Maria, dear, is there a problem?”

“Oh, no! I’m so sorry... I just zoned out there for a moment.”

“Well, you better concentrate because this is the exact same spot where Johnny Depp had to fall on in “The Pirates of The Caribbean”, so you better do it some justice!”

Oh, Imma do it some justice, alright! At this realization, I basically start making love to the wall that Johnny Depp has touched, as I start gently caressing the wall as if it’s Depp’s cheek and I lean in to kiss that holy stone while simultaneously sliding my body down the wall to soak in all the molecules that Depp has encountered with. This obviously makes everyone laugh and sets a good mood for the shoot. After a couple of takes, we get the perfect shot and I leave to enjoy my well-deserved lunch break. Unfortunately, I have to eat alone as all of the other actors only had to play a single scene and they have already wrapped it up, whereas I have 3 other shoots to attend to. I choose to sit right in the middle of the backlot under a tree, which gives it a more secluded feeling.

I start looking at my surroundings and I realize that I’m at the Universal Studios for Christ’s sake! It’s like this whole experience felt like a lucid dream: I was conscious and, in the moment, but I didn’t grasp the reality. I knew where I was and what I was doing but I didn’t realize it. When I finally grasped the sense of reality and realized just what was happening to me, I couldn’t help but pity myself.

I know, I know, right now you’re probably thinking that I confused a word, or I don’t know what “pity” means because I was the one who so desperately wished to come to LA and become an actress, and now, when I finally have that I should feel grateful for what it’s worth and definitely not pity. That’s exactly what I thought myself. I couldn’t help but think to myself: “You’ve always wanted to come to LA, well you’re here” “You’ve always wanted to act and you’re here doing what you love.” “Not only are you in LA and you’re acting, but you’re at the freaking Universal Studios also mimicking the steps of Johnny Depp! What more could you wish for? This is much more that you ever imagined!”

I realize that I have to feel grateful, I need to feel grateful. I mean all of my dreams came true and I’m supposed to feel happy, I’m supposed to feel like I’m at the top of the world, like I won the Powerball, like I earned superpowers, like I got handed the keys to heaven, but I don’t even feel half of that, I don’t even feel content. I’m so angry at myself, at the universe, at life for making me feel this empty. I don’t want to be ungrateful, I don’t want to be hateful, I don’t want to be unappreciative and miserable, because up to this point, I could only see the good in every bad, but now I manage to find something bad in everything that is good. I don’t want to lose my childish and naive sense of reality: where everything is as it’s supposed to be, where families don’t betray, where dreams bring you joy and where reality doesn’t turn out to be so empty. I guess this is the moment where I grow up: that one email from my aunt was enough to shatter my little world, where everything was possible.

***Maturity***

Today, we have a guest lecturer, who’s a famous scriptwriter and she’s going to host an interactive workshop, where we have to answer some questions and based on that reflect on our acting experiences. She asked some questions that seemed very basic at the first glance, “What are you afraid of ?”, “What are you grateful for ?”, “What would you change, if you could ?” etc. and everyone started giving out expected answers, that they’re afraid of sharks, spiders etc., that they would end world hunger if they could and I didn’t even realize that I haven’t thought of a single answer when I got called to sit in the middle. I sat right in the middle of the classroom facing everyone and she asked:

“What are you grateful for?”

“My parents”

“What are you afraid of?”

“I’m afraid of the world that I bear inside my mind and my heart, not becoming my reality”

“What are you escaping from?”

“Reality…”

The woman started clapping and soon the whole classroom followed, and only then did I realize that I have tears in my eyes, but only this time, those weren’t tears of pains or disappointment but rather tears of relief and dare I say pride.

That one single “interview” awakened something in me, I started seeing myself as others saw me: mature and worth of admiration. I didn’t realize that during this whole time I was healing myself, I wasn’t trying to make myself feel things but rather I just questioned myself for feeling certain things and diving deeper into my own understanding. I came to the realization that it’s okay to feel or not to feel, that it’s okay that things don’t turn out to be the way you expect them to be, that it’s okay that the biggest aspiration may turn out to be the biggest disappointment, because you can’t ever predict what’s going to happen and that’s the beauty of life...to expect the unexpected.

I could never expect that one day I could have everything that I could’ve ever possibly wished for and feel unhappy. My mornings got filled with dread and my evenings got filled with sadness. I had a great time at the Camp and gained many good friends but after that little episode of happiness ended all there was left was that city…LA. There was a time when those two letters were like a prayer to me, but they became exclamations of sadness and loneliness. That city was a pit of emptiness and so was my heart. Only when I reached the bottom of that pit did I understand that what I already had was in fact my happiness. Only after losing something do we realize the true value of it. Only after feeling bitterness do we realize the taste of sweetness. Only after “losing” Armenia did I realize how blessed of a life I had there.

***Returning to Armenia (2017)***

I suddenly realized that not everything that you wish for, is in fact what you need. One day you might achieve everything that you’ve ever wanted and even more but not feel happy. Only after being far away from my homeland did I realize how much I love it. I missed going out with my friends and getting a cup of coffee at Cascade while running away from stray dogs, I missed how everything was so close to each other and that I could get to my workplace in 5 minutes after my classes ended, I missed the grandpa sitting near our building, I missed the taste of the water fountains near the Republic Square, I missed my smile when I was there...

***Connecting the dots looking backward...***

If my aunt hadn’t sent me that email...

I would’ve never changed my worldview and start appreciating what I have, instead of craving things that I didn’t have.

I wouldn’t have made the decision to come back to Armenia and live a fulfilling life and start discovering myself.

I would’ve never gotten into the American University of Armenia that later became like a home to me.

I would’ve never gotten the chance to meet the amazing people that changed my life and perceptions of this world.

I would’ve never gotten the chance to achieve the great things that I did by 19 years old...

***Getting a Job (2018)***

When the Velvet Revolution happened, I wanted to get a government job because I knew that the current staff workers were no better than me. I thought that I have good communication skills, soft skills and most importantly I know English so why not? I knew some people that went to work just to drink coffee chit-chat and did absolutely nothing and it didn't matter if I was only 19, because I knew that there was nothing that I couldn't do that others could. I desperately wanted to work at the State Revenue Committee because I had friends there, but I didn't want to get that job only because I had connections, so I didn't tell them. Instead, I tried to apply for internships at the Ministries of Education and Culture but got no response.

I realized that I need to let everything go because whatever is meant to happen will happen. Months passed by and I've already forgotten that I wanted to get a job when I saw a post on Facebook saying, "If you want to be an MP's assistant and know English fluently, comment here". I didn't know that guy in real life and as he always posted funny things, I thought that he was joking at first. We got to know each other and 2 days later I thought that I should "remind" him why I texted him in the first place, so I subtly opened up a conversation about the National Assembly. Apparently, there was some kind of a misunderstanding as he asked me if I now know for sure that I want the job, but I wanted it ever since the beginning. The second I told him that I'm sure, he opened up a group chat and introduced me to my current employer. After going to the interview and getting the job I got home super excited but didn't tell my parents anything. Only a week after, on my dad's birthday did I tell them that I got a job and not just a regular job but one at the National Assembly and to say that they were shocked and amazed would be an understatement.

***Purpose***

Today I'm wondering about my future. What's the purpose of this life? To achieve something great even though it means sacrificing your "life"? Or to live in the moment and enjoy the ride which is called "life"? I've always wanted to be different and wanted to achieve something great by doing something no one has ever done before, or no Armenian has done before. I used to wake up with so much determination and ambition every morning because I thought that today I'm taking a step towards achieving my dream. My mom used to take me to all type of classes possible as she told me that an Actor has to know everything: sing, dance, swim, fight, and talk multiple languages as it'll count as an advantage. So, I had a schedule. One day it was karate, the other day it was ballroom dancing and so on. My parents used to pick me up from school and take me to vocal lessons, then pick me up from there and take me to the other lessons. Every week, for years. They invested in me and they invested in my future as much as they could.

Today, they're telling me that they are very proud of me and my ambitiousness but I'm not. I mean I am proud, and I like showing off the fact that at 19 years old I'm working at the most powerful institution in Armenia, but I still feel like that's not enough. I know that I'm very hard on myself and I'm a perfectionist, but I can't help it. I'm always in a hurry and I'm always thinking about what will happen next. Even at 14, I was so extreme that I would think that "OMG, what will happen in 10 years if right now I put my left leg in front of my right one, how will it affect my future?" I thought that I needed to become a teen sensation by the time I'm 18 and it didn't happen.

Now, I see why it didn't and why it was unrealistic for me but as kids, we don't see the reality. I used to see everything in pink. The USA was the best place on earth for me. No, not earth because I thought that such place existed only in heaven. I thought that Hollywood was this magical place where all the dreams come true, and everything is so beautiful. I used to close my eyes each night and picture myself landing at LAX, walking down the stairs of the plane in my jeans and my Mickey Mouse jacket and kissing the Holy Ground of America. I was so ungrateful and didn't understand that I'm so lucky and so fortunate to travel the world at this age. Instead of appreciating what I had I was thinking about what I didn't have.

Today, I'm eternally grateful for what I have, and I feel blessed. Yes, I still aim for more and I always think that you should always grow and become even better but that doesn't keep me from appreciating what I have right now. My mom used to tell me, and still tells me when I complain sometimes that you should feel fortunate for what you have: you have a roof over your head, food on your plate, clothes to wear and parents by your side when there are people that don't. You may be living worse than thousands of people, but you live better than millions of people.

Now I see...and I'm so grateful. I'm so grateful for my parents and for what they did for me as no matter what I do I can never pay them back. As great as I become, I will always feel undeserving of being their child because they are everything.

***On the Road to Damascus...***

Have you ever been on the road to Damascus? I bet you have or you’re about to start your journey even if you don’t realize it...don’t be surprised because at one point or another, all of us are on the road to Damascus…

Before starting my own journey to Damascus, I was on standby, because I Hated...

I hated Armenia and every single night I used to sleep with the thought of moving to L.A.: as I closed my eyes, I would imagine myself landing at LAX in my Mickey Mouse sweatshirt and getting a yellow NYC cab to Hollywood (stupid I know, I was blonde even before dying my hair), the wind would be blowing through my hair as I would gaze at the Hollywood sign in an awe. Now, the only thing that makes me stare in awe is a good ol’ juicy hamburger ...and handsome men in suits.

Because...

***As I began to love myself, I stopped craving for a different life, and I could see that everything that surrounded me was inviting me to grow. Today I call it***

***“MATURITY”.***

**This is when my journey to Damascus began, when I started LOVING...**

Only when I got the chance to move to L.A. did I realize how much I love Armenia. As the famous Armenian saying suggests, “Go die and come back, then I will love you,” because most of the time we take for granted what we have and only after losing it we start to see the value of it. Only in L.A. did I realize how good of a life I had back home in Yerevan, where everything is alive. I stopped worrying about my future and how my present actions will affect me 10 years later, as I did before.

What if I stay in LA and go to the best university but still feel unhappy?

What if I go back to Armenia and ruin my life by losing the potential success that I could achieve in LA?

I stopped worrying about what “ifs”, because...

***As I began to love myself, I understood that at any circumstance, I am in the right place at the right time, and everything happens at the exactly right moment. So, I could be calm. Today I call it***

***“SELF-CONFIDENCE”.***

I started wondering what’s the purpose of life: to live every day like it’s your last and create unforgettable moments, which will turn into precious memories, or to achieve something big and unprecedented? Now, I believe that each person has their own kind of happiness and there is no use in searching for the answer because there is no single right answer, we just have to live and see, because...

***As I began to love myself, I quit stealing my own time, and I stopped designing huge projects for the future. Today, I only do what brings me joy and happiness, things I love to do and that makes my heart cheer, and I do them in my own way and in my own rhythm. Today I call it***

***“SIMPLICITY”.***

I used to overthink and overanalyze every little thing, starting from the way someone greeted me in the morning, up to examining the way that I breathe. I made myself the prisoner of my own mind, I deprived myself from the ability to live in the moment and enjoy life as it is. I spent so much time thinking of why, who and how that I forgot that the answer is simple...just because…

As told by my dad, “Don’t let anyone or anything disturb your peace of mind,” - a philosophy that I’m learning to tame because...

***As I began to love myself I recognized that my mind can disturb me and it can make me sick. But as I connected it to my heart, my mind became a valuable ally. Today I call this connection***

***“WISDOM OF THE HEART”.***

I overthought every step that I took and every action that I made, as I was worried about the future and succeeding, but in reality, all I did was lose.

I lost the time that was meant for me to enjoy the present and be thankful for what I already have…

I lost the opportunities that I had in the present because I worried too much about the future…

I lost the ability to see all the beauty that the world has to offer…

But...

***As I began to love myself, I refused to go on living in the past and worrying about the future. Now, I only live for the moment, where everything is happening. Today I live each day, day by day, and I call it***

***“FULFILLMENT”.***

***Nowadays,***

***We are constantly running...towards or from something?***

***We burden ourselves every day by thinking...***

***the what ifs…***

***the right and wrong…***

***But in reality...***

***We no longer need to fear arguments, confrontations or any kind of problems with ourselves or others. Even stars collide, and out of their crashing new worlds are born. Today I know***

***“THAT IS LIFE”.***