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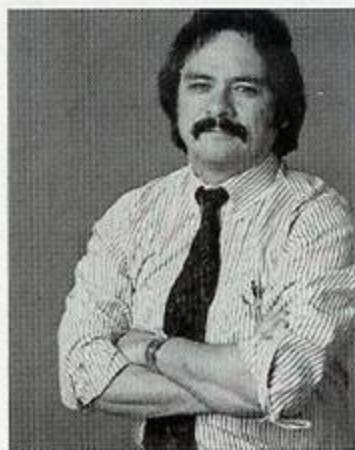
RAMIRO BURR

"Band of Brothers" (page 110)

A seasoned San Antonio Express-News music columnist, Burr bonded backstage with Los Tigres del Norte at a typically rollicking show. "I've been to at least 10 Tigres concerts in two decades. Their lyrics resonate with generations of fans."

Current anthem: The Shins, "Phantom Limb"

Why Texas rules? "Musical richness, wide open spaces and big-blue-sky days."



MICHELLE HERRERA MULLIGAN

"Moment of Truth" (page 100)

Herrera Mulligan bravely revisited the day she came clean to Miami about her difference of sexual opinion. "It was like transforming a glacier into an iceberg—painful and slow."

Current anthem: Bryan Vargas & ¡Ya Está!, "Guerreros Africanos"

Will your mom read this? "I'm not showing it to her directly—I gotta do something to keep the peace!"



DAVID BLACK

"Sweet Escape" (page 124)

A Manhattan-based lensman for Men's Vogue and The New York Times Magazine, Black shot this month's road trip-themed fashion spread. "The best part was escaping the winter and enjoying a beautiful California day!"

Current anthem: She & Him, "This Is Not a Test"

Dream car? "I'm weirdly obsessed with big '70s Volvos and Mercedes."



EN CASA

DAMARYS OCAÑA

"No Going Back" (page 114)

Latina's writer-at-large unearthed the powerful stories of Latino ex-soldiers who deserted due to the Iraq war. "They made the tough decision to go against their training and follow their moral compass."

Current anthem: Arctic Monkeys, "A Certain Romance"

Gutsiest move you've pulled? "Paragliding in Germany. I ran off a 6,000-foot-high cliff—it was terrifying and exhilarating!"



Moment of Truth

IT TOOK 27 YEARS, BUT THIS MEXICAN AMERICAN DAUGHTER FINALLY LEARNED TO SPEAK HER MOM'S LANGUAGE—AND NO, IT'S NOT SPANISH. BY MICHELLE HERRERA MULLIGAN

ESSAY



WHEN MY MOTHER asked my brother and me to sit down in the living room, I knew I was screwed. Though I was a grown woman and had long ago left Illinois to live in New York City, the dark look in Mami's eyes still sent tremors down my spine.

She took a moment to consult her Bible, her longtime life raft, before she finally spit out the purpose of our powwow: owning up to our greatest sins against El Señor. She started with my younger brother, asking him to read a Bible passage she'd earmarked for him ("You shall put no other gods before me") and confess what he'd done to go against it. The worst she had on him was an unnatural obsession with *Buffy the*

Vampire Slayer, so I knew the whole thing was hysterically overblown. But when my brother's awkward defense had crumbled, she pulled out the pièce de résistance: my birth control pills. Uh-oh. But the fact that her little girl was no longer a virgin meant something possibly bigger than sinning against God. She said it herself when she finally looked at me, the infamous pink package clutched firmly in her hand: "I feel like I don't even know you."

Having a daughter meant everything to her. Her relationship with her own mother had been strained by years of neglect and misunderstanding. So she suffocated me with the things she never had: dolls, dance lessons and dresses for school functions I had no intention of attending. I fought her every step of the way, but usually gave in to some version of her demands, caving when she mentioned she had lived on the streets in Mexico.

So I molded myself into her idealized notion of girlhood in the United States—a hard-working nerd in blue Dr. Martens and matted hair who put family first—and answered her interrogations obediently. "Do you believe sex should only be between married people?" Absolutely. "Would you drink alcohol if someone passed it to you at a party?" Never.

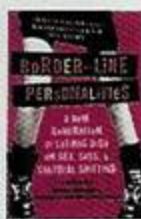
When I left for college in Missouri, the life I was living and the one I presented to her grew further and further apart. I called home weekly with news of semispiritual mini-epiphanies, sanitized lessons drawn from my time abroad in Mexico and silly, G-rated stories about dates gone wrong.

Things got tougher when I moved to New York, where I found ways to end our conversations when they turned too personal. I no longer had the time or inclination to explain myself; I barely had enough energy to pay my bills. We saw each other less, and often got into arguments when I did visit. But she always got to me, and before I knew it I'd be singing at a church service I didn't believe in. Then I'd fly back to New York, feeling like I'd done my duty.

Then, on one of my trips home, she found the pills while she was cleaning the guest room where I was sleeping. Never mind that I was 27 and in a relationship. She looked at me as if someone had exchanged her daughter for one of those gum-smacking gringas she'd seen at the mall. I was furious that she had invaded my privacy—yet I still felt ashamed. Not because I was sexually active, but because I'd hidden such a huge part of my life, afraid she would reject me.

"Are you taking these for medical reasons?" she finally asked. I could have made something up; she'd given me a way out. But something about the way her left hand was shaking made me realize she deserved better. She just wanted to be my mother, to be close to me. She deserved the honest answer. "No, Mom," I said quietly. "I've been taking them for a few years now, and not for medical reasons."

We barely spoke for the rest of that weekend, but it marked the start of a new phase for us. I learned a new language I become more fluent in each day: the truth. And in exchange, she offers me the only thing she can, even though it means fewer church visits together and more bite marks on her tongue: her acceptance.



Michelle Herrera Mulligan is the coeditor of *Border-Line Personalities: A New Generation of Latinas Dish on Sex, Sass, & Cultural Shifting*.