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Author

Vega, Christine

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EL DÍA EN QUE LLOVIO OBSIDIANA

CHRISTINE VEGA

Mexican Indigenous spirituality has been my lifelong commitment to prayer and vision towards my personal path of healing. *Ceremonia* has given me strength to resist and thrive in dichotomous worlds like academia and the red road, particularly as a Chicana Scholar Momma. It builds in me strength to speak back and confront patriarchal marginalizing experiences, but also to find balance within myself. I do not always arrive, but I get there on some days and other days, I begin the journey once more. My *cuento* is of the ways I navigate fear and doubt negotiated by having had a baby while in graduate school. It also embodies the work of introspection and ceremony, guidance and trusting in elders, the *concejos*, and as importantly, trusting my inner knowledge. This *cuento* is centered during my own ceremonies. I share it because birthing is a *ceremonia*, a very personal spiritual and physical one that took me in and out of the awake world. I walk you, my reader through my thought process and also my constant in-betweenness of my roles and paths of spirituality commitment and academic responsibility.

It was the third day, the third round, *y yo con mucha sed*. I remembered the *madruga* water, *un regalo de cumpleaños*, gifted by creator the thunder beings that visited with the thunderstorm. The sacred *agua*, collected by the tarp above me was fresh with maple leafs and twigs. I collected it with my freezing hands and drank cautiously whispering a prayer of gratitude and anticipation, “Water is life! Thank you creator for sending me this *agua*.” It was the best birthday gift I ever received. I didn’t feel the hunger much, but I did *la sed*. Drinking was a reminder that many around the world die of thirst, especially women and children and I felt that pain. That year, I prayed for a baby. And with praying, I don’t mean religious prayer; I mean asking the universe and all creation for it. I asked for it to arrive before I turned 32, and if you are ever warned the elders will tell you to be very careful for what and when you ask for things, they will manifest. The desire I negotiated was conflicting, because I felt the need to choose my roles as a student, a partner, and cisgender woman. I desired a chance to raise my own child with the opportunities I never had. Both my *abuela y mi mamá* were young mothers and

struggled to make it as immigrants in U.S. I feared I wouldn't be a "good enough," despite my education and positional privileges.

And with each step, a vibration, each day, a new beginning at life. Four days, four rounds, sweat lodge, prayer, fasting, no water, una ofrenda of the flesh would strengthen my connection to creator and send an answered prayer; my seed.

During the first year of my doctoral program I was feeling excited and motivated to pursue my academic training. I was delving into my schooling so deep that my spirituality began to diminish. I was gently reminded about my *ceremonia* prayer on Spring Equinox, 2013. Two Spiritual brothers were running with the *abuela* gourd, filled with sacred waters from the Azusa Spring making their way to the Tongva Springs in Santa Monica. Our brothers, the runners and the *agua* needed a resting place and an *altar* for the traveling sacred *abuela*. They chose my home and gifted my soul sister Ale and myself, *semillas de maíz*. For us, the corn is sacred. It grounds us to mother earth, as importantly it means life. The *maíz* also represents the direction of the south, where the born and unborn rest, awaiting the call of mother to make the journey to the womb. The *abuela's*, body carried a message; life *en ella, el agua, atl* meant life in me.

I felt something shifted within. I had peculiar physical symptoms, and I was unable to distinguish them between my moon ceremony or *algo más*. Maybe I should take a pregnancy test? Nervously, I peed on a stick reading two RED lines! "Oh Shit! I am pregnant." Freaking out, I shared the news with my partner. He held me while waves of uncertainty flooded my entire body. I questioned my capacity to be a "good" mother. Could I really do this? He held my hand, kissed my forehead and reassured me that we would figure it out, *juntos*. Holding my *pancita* I asked my unborn child, "Baby, are you sure? How will we finish this Ph.D.? How will Daddy finish his Ph.D.? How will we do this?"

During my pregnancy I experienced microaggressions, hurtful comments asking me if my pregnancy was planned or if I was dropping out of the Ph.D. "Damn, that's gonna' be hard girl!" I self-isolated to protect my spirit and my unborn baby. I imagined this is how a 13-year-old-self would feel like. At that age, my mother heavily policed my body. Although we never had "the talk", including menstruation, sex, and pregnancy, I was not trusted with my own body, my power questioned, my agency checked. At 32, I felt the same infantilization.

Not all interactions were negative. I knew my advisor would be happy to support my partner, baby and I. It felt I was breaking the news to my *apá*. Nervously I said to him during one of our academic check-in's "I want to share that I will be contributing a picture to the shrine

of babies you have there,” I pointed my finger towards a bookshelf dedicated to all of his advisees’ babies and children. He congratulated me *con mucho gusto*, “YES! Another baby! We’re gonna’ work this out! You’re going to be fine!” That was exactly what I needed to hear to undo the many fears and doubts I had about completing this program. Slowly, the support within my academic reach began to show support towards me, and anticipated the arrival of my son.

During my third trimester, I was tired, hungry, and too swollen to stay focused during class lecture. I desired to be around the folks who embraced and supported my pregnancy. But, I also needed rest. My younger sister came to stay and helped prepare for baby’s arrival. She shadowed me everywhere as I waddled through campus. One morning, while trying to catch the bus across the street, we waved to the bus driver. The bus driver saw us, coldly shrugged his shoulders and drove off. Tears rolled heavily down my face as I hauled my rolling backpack holding my *big panza* through the busy street. He left me for the fourth time, and in this instant I knew it was time to stay home. Weeping I ranted about how unfair it was to be seen and unseen, “I am tired of this shit! I hope he doesn’t have a wife, or a sister, or a mother who he treats this way!” After that day, I decided to stay home. I nested, organized, slept, ate, and watched all the Netflix I could.

Una noche en noviembre, I craved *chiles en nogados*. We went to a popular Poblano restaurant in Bell and I ordered myself a big *agua de limón con chia* y my favorite comfort food, *el chilito*. I inhaled that *chile pero por tragona* (or so I thought) I felt a sudden shift, both physical and spiritual. *El músico tocando boleros y rancheras, stops in front of me* gently catches my wondering gaze, and tells me “no se ponga triste.” I stare at him blankly and respond, “esque estoy cansada.” I was beyond exhausted and didn’t understand why. *Y esa noche*, I couldn’t sleep. I thought *que el chile me hizo daño*, maybe it was too *pesado*. *Pero*, it wasn’t the *chile* it was contractions! After feeling three in a row I woke my partner and through the pain every five minutes, I couldn’t stop to thinking about the midterm I had to submit the next day! “Dear Professor, I apologize for the late submission. I am/was in labor!”

And with each push, a vibration, that day, a new beginning at life. 20 hours, like sweat lodge, a prayer, fasting, no water, an ofrenda of the flesh would strengthen my connection to creator and I birthed my answered prayer, my seed.

Born with the rain, the thunderstorm, el agua, from all corners, Janitzio Itztlaloc came to our lives. My Lluvia de obsidiana, my obsidian rain.

Y aquí estamos, two years later. I breastfed my child during a statistics take-home final and a damn fever due to mastitis. I faced numerous

attacks of my performance as a mother, but was often countered by great acts of kindness by *colegas*, *familia*, and homies who dropped off food, held the baby so I can finally shower. Friends helped me with assignments took me for pedicures and boba. *Tías y tíos* and friends washed dishes and helped clean while dad was in the middle of qualifying exams and fellowship applications. We all sacrificed a little. We all did this together in *comunidad*.

And with esa sed, hard to quench because the heat of the sun and the ceremony is overpowering, reminded me to pray a little harder. With each step, with each vibration, a new beginning at life, the best teacher and the best learning is being a mother to my son, my most important maestro.

His existence has led me to start the healing of inter-generational traumas passed down by my *abuelas y mi madre*. I piece myself together with the love and support of my spiritual *familia*, my community, my partner, and now with my son. And slowly, by walking between two worlds, one western and that of the red road, I am able to find refuge within my own healing in the messiness of “in-betweeness.”