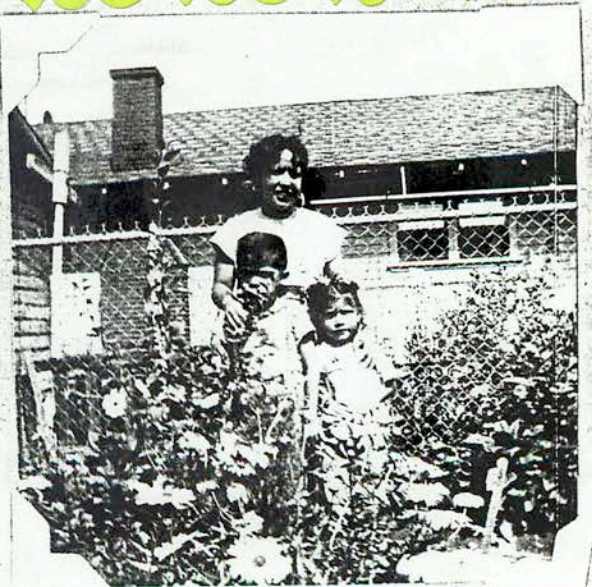
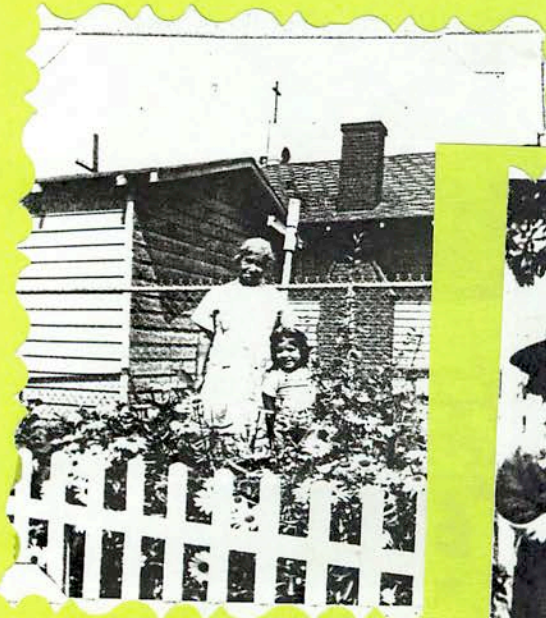


JUNIOR AND LA VEVE

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LITTLE WOLF PUBLISHING COMPANY

DEMING EL PASO LOS ANGELES

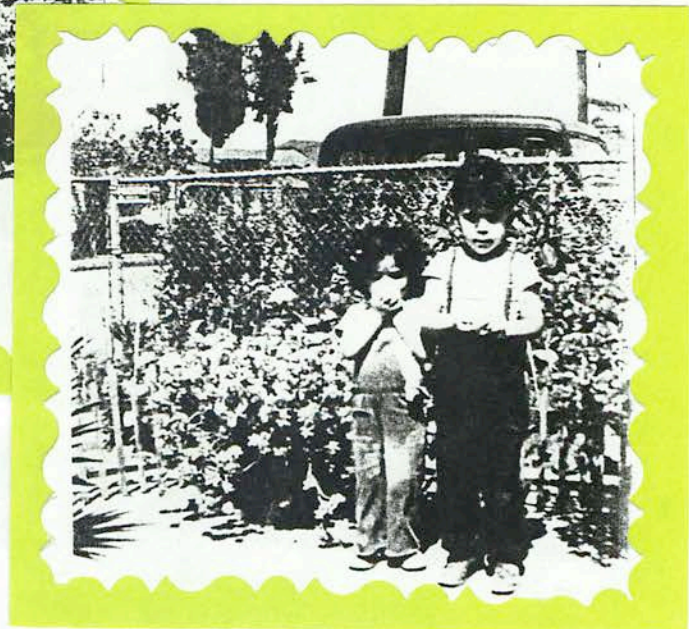
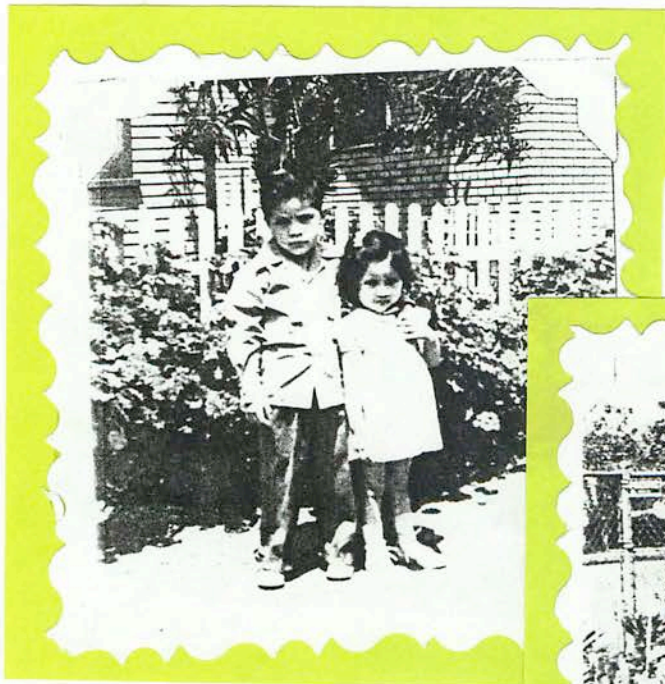
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DEDICATION

To Jose Manuel Villalobos, Jr., my big brother, father figure, mentor, and best friend.

You died too soon, hermano mio.



“Why doesn’t he die and get it over with.” Harsh thoughts, but I couldn’t help it. When you’re only 4 years old and your world is filled with “be quiet,” “leave him alone,” “go outside,” “muchacha maldita,” “not now,” “go away,” How was I to feel?

Go away! So I did. I went away. At least on an emotional level. I went into a world of my own. I was the only child who wasn’t heard or seen in my neighborhood. People often remarked to my mother and Lita what a good girl I was. “She’s so quiet,” they would say. Little did they know. How could they. I rarely spoke to anyone. Some of them actually thought I was a mute.

I became a loner. I learned to do everything all alone. Until one day!

He called to me. “Come here, veve, he said softly. It was just above a whisper. “I can’t. Lita said to leave you alone. “I’m lonely, veve.” “I can’t go into your room.” “Lita said she’ll hit me if I do.” “She says I’m a bad girl.” “I’m lonely, veve.” “Please talk to me!”

He sounded so sad. I wanted to cry. I touched his door. I took a deep breath. “Are you still there, veve?” he asked shyly. “All right,” I said finally. I took hold of the door knob. My hand was sweating and shaking.

“Que haces allí?!” Lita was standing right behind me. The rage in her voice was so strong it made me tremble.

“Nada, Lita, nada.” My heart was pounding. I cried as I backed away cowering in fear. “Vete pa fuera, muchacha maldita.” She took a step forward. I screamed and fled blindly out the back door stumbling over whatever happened to be in my way as I ran. Run! Run! Run! I ran as fast as I could until I reached my hiding place behind the garage. I cried and trembled, my heart pounding so hard I thought it would explode. I stayed rolled in a small, human ball until I was sure she hadn’t followed me. I stayed there until I heard my mother’s voice. It was dark now. “Mijita, donde estas?” I didn’t move. I didn’t answer. I made myself as small as I could. She didn’t see me.

At that time, I wasn't really too sure about my mother's loyalties. After a while she gave up and went away. The next voice I heard was filled with love for me. "Come with me, Baby, time to go inside." My Uncle Paul had found me. I always knew I could count on him to be there for me. Hand in hand we went into the house. "No le digan nada," he said to them. I went quietly to my room.

The next day there was hell to pay. Uncle Paul was at work. My mother was at work. It was just me, Lita, and a bedridden boy. As fast as my little fingers could move, I got ready and went outside. She called me back so she could braid my hair.

She never stopped telling me what a bad girl I was. Finally, she finished and shooed me outside. As I walked around outside, I heard some crying softly. I tiptoed to the closed window. I peaked through the window. “Why are you crying, I asked. “I’m lonely, veve, he answered weakly. I didn’t answer him. “Please, veve,” he pleaded, “I need you.” He would say that I grumbled to myself. I swallowed hard. I took a deep breath. Standing on tiptoe isn’t easy. I grabbed hold of the window sill. “All right,” I answered. I didn’t sound eager. “I’m sorry I bother you,” he whispered. That’s it big brother, make me feel like a rat. What a life!

I sighed! Another deep breath! “Are you still there, veve?” “Yes, I’m here, but I can only stay a little while so Lita doesn’t catch me and get mad at me again.”

**“Don’t worry, I won’t let her hurt you,” he promised. “Really?” “You can do that?”
Wow! I developed a new respect for my big brother.**

