

# Love y Los Buenos Frutos <sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Kayla Enriquez is a Cal State LA first-generation undergraduate student. She comes from a Mexican-American background from the city Reseda. She grew up learning to set a good example for her younger six sisters. In this piece, she shares personal quotes from throughout her life that have affected her on her journey as a first-generation college student. Despite all these harsh and empowering words, love is always there to remind her of her purpose. Through all these difficult times, giving up is never an option.

“Hello? Hola? Do I need to speak to you in alien for you to understand?”

I started dance lessons at the age of 3 which eventually became more competitive throughout the years. This cycle of dance continued for the next six years until my parents realized that I was unable to balance about four hours of dance every day after school with my grades. Some of the instructors in this dance community never recognized how badly their words affected young individuals like myself. When I was unable to properly learn a dance move like the teenagers that were in my jazz class, the instructor began to treat me as if I was an alien because I did not always understand her high expectations as a nine-year-old. Little did she realize that these words made me feel ashamed for sometimes understanding Spanish more than English. I practiced dance with love because I wanted to make my parents proud, yet it was not until this moment when I realized that I no longer wanted to dance with toxic people that discriminated against me for my culture.

“*No me quieras tanto*<sup>2</sup> because one day you might not love me as much as you do today.”

Whenever my dad hugged me, he’d always ask me how much I loved him, and I would always tell him that I loved him with all my heart. However, he always told me not to give him this much love because he worried that I would not love him or my mom this much as I got older. During the “rebellious” years of my life, the conflicts between my parents worsened and made our relationship uneasy. To this day, I am not proud of the actions I did to disappoint them. These actions would consist of spending time with people they did not approve of or going to places I was forbidden to go for my safety. Despite our aggressive arguments, I know that my parents love me so much to the point where they would not hesitate to sacrifice their needs for my success. Some nights, they would come home from work at one or two in the morning and still woke up three hours later to take me to school for my JROTC competitions. Their love for me strongly supports my dreams and passions to make sure I receive the best.

“Kayla? Where is Kayla? I want to see her.”

When my sister was about to get surgery for her appendicitis, I got the chance to speak to the main surgeon. She was a young Hispanic woman that inspired me to pursue a career in the medical field. She promised me that my sister was in good hands to relieve our family. After hours of waiting for this procedure to be over, my parents were able to see her before the rest of my family was. The first person that my sister asked for was me and that’s when I realized how much of an impact I have on all six of my younger sisters. They all look up to me for all the achievements I have received and have thanked me for helping them with schoolwork and other life activities.

They inspire me to pursue my dreams with love. Yet, this pressure to be such a good example can sometimes be draining.

“I don’t think I was ready for a relationship but I really don’t want you out of my life.”

My first heartbreak was very difficult for me to get over with because I cared so much for this person. Meanwhile, this relationship was also interfered with by the COVID pandemic in 2020. My academic work began to become more of a challenge as I had to balance shifts helping my parents with the family business, my emotions with this break up, and responsibilities I had at home. During this isolation period of my life, I felt as if I had lost many opportunities for me to stand out in my college applications. I felt as if I did not do enough my freshman year of high school such as join clubs, receive enough awards, apply for more scholarships, have perfect grades, or get enough hours of volunteering. Ultimately, I made the decision to avoid serious relationships for a while to focus on bettering myself which is not easy when you don’t want to express yourself to prevent your parents from worrying. You cannot love someone else until you love yourself.

“You’re so beautiful.”

Trying to impress people often left me with great disappointment. I often worry about not being as beautiful from the outside and inside like other people are. Through my darkest times, my best friends are able to remind me that I have to keep pushing through life. Keeping up with the “grind” of helping my family business, school, family activities, etc. is not always easy. It can also be very easy to forget that it is okay to cry or take a moment to breathe as I rest. Having a strong support system filled with loving and caring friends allows me to continue my college journey as a first-generation student.

*“Eres una hermosa flor en un jardín. A todo el mundo le encanta recoger flores. No dejes que la gente te moleste, deja que te valoren. Sigue dejando buenos frutos por donde vayas.”* <sup>3</sup>

People often take advantage of los buenos frutos that people have to offer. They don’t recognize all of the effort people put into their work and relationships. When it comes to my friendships, I often don’t mind not receiving as much as I give. Yet, I end up becoming so emotionally drained, and when my mother notices she reminds me that not everyone is worthy of this flower I am. The flower that can leave good fruit wherever she goes. Not everyone is worthy of this fruit. My mother reminds me of these words from time to time.

“ZERO IN KNOWLEDGE!”

One of the most life changing opportunities I received was being involved in the high school JROTC program. Although many people made fun of students wearing the uniforms every Wednesday or marching on Tuesdays, I was able to grow and learn that leadership is the art of influence. When I went to the biggest competition of the year in my first year of being in this program, one of the personnel inspectors decided to take advantage of my fear. He yelled in my face saying ZERO POINTS IN KNOWLEDGE. I felt extremely humiliated because I immediately began to cry. However, this made me realize that the reason I cried during this inspection was because I put a lot of love and passion into activities I’m truly passionate about.

“Congratulations! You have been selected for admission.”

Navigating through the college application process was not the easiest for me. At first, I thought that giving up this college application process for enlisting in the military would have been

a much simpler option. I feared that I was not as smart as other students that were also applying to the colleges I applied to. When I received my college admission decisions, I was extremely humbled, as nursing is a very competitive field. I was put on the waitlist for the nursing program here at Cal State LA, which left me with many questions and thoughts such as “Is it too late to join the military? Why didn’t I go to a community college instead? If I was just a little smarter, then a stable future would have been guaranteed...” However, I realized that no matter what route I decided to take, patience is required. Especially since I’m guiding myself without college advice from my parents. Recently, I had a strong feeling of disappointment because I had to rearrange my life to become a nurse one day. It wasn’t until a couple of days ago that I received an email regarding my selection for the Cal State LA nursing program. I’m filled with joy knowing that I will be challenged to complete this program, but also nervous because I’m not sure if there are several first-generation students amongst the other 69 students admitted.

“Focus. These next three years won’t be easy.”

Love brings me joy. My mom reminds me that everything I do should be done with love. I may look back to this narrative years from now and laugh at how much my expectations have changed or what remains the same. I hope that the love I spread throughout my life leaves buenos frutos for everyone to admire and share because my goal is to help and impact others with their lives as a daughter, the oldest sister, a Mexican-American student, a best friend, a classmate, peer, niece, cousin, mentor, mentee, and ultimately, a first-generation student. The love coming from this simple yet so beautiful flower will blossom and leave buenos frutos for the world to cherish.

*\*Translations\**

1. *Buenos Frutos*: good fruit
2. *No me quieras tanto*: Do not love me so much
3. *Eres una hermosa flor en un jardín. A todo el mundo le encanta recoger flores. No dejes que la gente te moleste, deja que te valoren. Sigue dejando buenos frutos por donde vayas*: You are a beautiful flower in a garden. Everyone loves to pick flowers. Don’t let people bother you, let them value you. Keep leaving good fruits wherever you go.