

Life One More Day

One of life's toughest challenges is realizing—at the tender age of six—what is happening in your country and wondering how you will manage to survive another day. Eva Kor faced a similar situation in 1944, when again she had to figure out how to survive. After everything she had already faced she was eventually taken to the hospital, where a doctor remarked, "How sad; she is so young—she has only two weeks left to live." Even then she didn't give up. Eva's first thought was that she had to survive so she could see her sister again. At such a young age, she was forced to grow up quickly and focus with unwavering determination on surviving one more day—something we see clearly when she says, "From that moment on, I concentrated all my efforts, all my talents and all my being on one thing: survival."

Although I will never experience all that she went through—I understand her fight, her feeling of having to do *whatever it takes* to survive one more day. I live with that same sense, that gut instinct—come what may, I cannot give up. I lived in Venezuela from birth until I was thirteen, until 2017, until the university students in Venezuela began to protest. I remember seeing bodies demonstrating: adults, children, and university students—like my father. Even my mother took part in a protest without putting me in danger. I have also seen people die and, at times, have lost hope.

Back then, in 2017, I saw soldiers arrive on the street in front of my house. All the neighbors in the building went down to protest. From the building's stairwell I stood with my sister's friends and my best friend. I watched them set the street on fire and I watched tear gas canisters flying through the air, forcing us to run back home and hide. The tear gas smell was strong and thick and even in memory makes me want to vomit.

I can still remember hearing my neighbor protest and scream at them, *why? Why would they do this to us?* Our own people, who live the same lives, face the same fears and are now trying to hurt us, hurling weapons that are designed to incapacitate people, causing burns, pain. I still remember having to sleep behind my refrigerator because they started shooting at my house after we protested. Everywhere I looked, I saw many deaths. I could hear their crying, their screams of pain, I could smell the smell of the bullet—the smell of the burning skin of the people that they shot. The bullets smelled like ashes. The hot, metallic scent of war is one memory from home that I wish I could forget.

That day made me reflect on the reality of the place where I lived. It opened my eyes; it made me realize how bad things were getting in the country. At that moment, the only thought that crossed my mind was: *I have to survive this*. I had to survive so I could tell my story someday, so I could leave the country and seek a better future, and for the sake of those who couldn't—those who fought for us. In so many ways it was like the case of Eva Kor—who survived and only to dedicate her life to revising her story in hope of a brighter future. To remind us that not everything we go through has to leave a negative mark on us. I admire the way she told her story; although hers and mine are very different, I feel understood and see myself reflected in her.

The idea of having to live one more day—even when you don't know if you'll be able to—is terrifying, especially when you are young and witnessing everything firsthand, as Eva Kor said: "We had no rights, but we had a fierce determination to live one more day—to survive one more experiment." It's about feeling that switch flip in your mind every day, telling yourself that, come what may, you cannot give up. I have to make it through one more day.

On January 27, 1995, Eva Kor decided to write a letter forgiving the Nazis—an act I admire because she left the past behind, despite how difficult that was. Honestly, I do not know if I will ever be able to forgive everything I experienced in Venezuela, given that my country has been under a dictatorship for twenty years; however, I can say that my mind has adapted to the need to survive and to the reality of life there.

If I had the chance to be born again and choose whether to relive everything I went through—having to find a way every day not to give up and to survive—I would choose to live it all over again. It might sound crazy, but Venezuela made me the person I am today; my story, my experiences, and the family and friends I have there—people I have known for so many years—shaped my identity. I do not hate my country; I hate what the government and the dictators did to it. I hope the situation in my country improves someday, because I truly believe. Venezuela deserves the world. After all everyone there is a survivor, and I can say with pride that I am proud to be Venezuelan.