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Frida Kahlo: Her Life and Struggles as an Artist

by Olivia Nguyen

For those of us who enjoy observing or studying various Mexican paintings, the name "Frida Kahlo" might ring a bell. Frida is most often remembered as the wife of a famous painter, Diego Rivera. However, her unique backgrounds and struggles had set her aside from the rest of the artists.

Most of her well-known paintings are self-portraits. After abandoning the study of medicine, Kahlo decided to occupy her time with painting. Kahlo had created at least 140 paintings; of them, fifty five are self-portraits which often incorporated symbolic portrayals of physical and psychological wounds. When asked why, Kahlo replied, "I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best."

Kahlo's life greatly influenced her works. While at school, Kahlo hung out with a group of intellectually like-minded students. She became romantically involved with one of them, Alejandro Gómez Arias. In 1925, Kahlo and Arias were traveling together on a bus when the vehicle collided with a streetcar. As a result, she suffered several serious injuries including fractures in her spine and pelvis.

Miraculously, she was able to transcend her pain and expressed it in her paintings. After staying at the hospital for several weeks, Kahlo returned home to recover further. She began painting during her recuperation and finished her first self-portrait the following year. She painted *Henry Ford Hospital in Mexico City*, which depicts herself bleeding on a bed with a somber feeling. The picture illustrates a naked Kahlo on a hospital bed with several items- a fetus, snail, flower, pelvis, and others- floating around her on red, veinlike strings.

In the same way, her troublesome husband Diego Rivera shaped some aspects of her paintings. Their marriage often was tumultuous. Notoriously, both Kahlo and Rivera had fiery temperaments and both had numerous affairs. For her part, Kahlo became outraged when she learned that Rivera had an affair with her

younger sister, Cristina. Because of this, Kahlo often portrayed the dark side of marriage and love in her paintings, including *Portrait of Cristina, My Sister* with Cristina showing an unattractive face.

Not long after that, Kahlo reconnected with Rivera in 1928. He encouraged her artwork, and the two began a relationship. The couple married the next year. In 1930, they lived in California, where Kahlo showed her painting *Frida and Diego Rivera* at the Sixth Annual Exhibition of the San Francisco Society of Women Artists.

In 1944, Kahlo painted *The Broken Column*, which depicted a nearly nude Frida split down the middle revealing her spine as a shattered decorative column. She also wears a surgical brace and her skin is studded with nails. Again, Kahlo shared her physical chal-

lenges through her art.

Her health issues became nearly all-consuming in 1950. After being diagnosed with gangrene in her right foot, Kahlo spent nine months in the hospital and had several operations during this time. She continued to paint and supported political causes despite having limited mobility.

Deeply depressed, Kahlo was hospitalized again in April 1954 because of poor health, or, as some reports indicated, a suicide attempt. After her 47th birthday, Kahlo died on July 13 at her beloved house. There were some controversies regarding the nature of her death: it was reported to be caused by a pulmonary embolism, but there have also been stories about a possible suicide.

Since her death, Kahlo's fame as an artist has only grown. Her beloved Blue House was opened as a



museum in 1958. The feminist movement of the 1970s led to renewed interest in her life and work, as Kahlo was viewed by many as an icon of female creativity. In 1983, Hayden Herrera's book on the artist, *A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, helped to stir up interest on this great artist. More recently, her life was the subject of a 2002 film

entitled *Frida*, starring Salma Hayek as the artist. The film was nominated for six Academy Awards and won for Best Makeup and Original Score. Thus, the image of Frida Kahlo as a struggling but successful artist never left the hearts of many people and will continue to flourish in the future.

Crawling out of my Shell

by Angelina Li

I have always been a shy person. I was comfortable laying in my shell and watching the world go by. I was never truly comfortable speaking in class, but I was able to change that. The struggle to overcome this fear of public speaking was a painful and frightening experience.

I remember the freshman year of my English class. Our teacher Mr. R was very intimidating. He always shaved his head and wore dress clothes. From an outsider's perspective, he seemed quite cynical. He even described himself as cynical-looking, but assured us that he was not. Being a freshman in a new building and having a seemingly unapproachable English teacher made me curl up in my shell.

On the first day of class, Mr. R stated that he was going to grade us on participation, which would make up a significant percentage of our grade. He said that contributing a few times in class discussions everyday would ensure us a satisfactory participation grade. I disliked how he kept track of how many times I spoke in his class.

We began the school year with a Socratic seminar regarding the

novel *Fahrenheit 451*, which in my opinion, was quite boring (no offense to anyone who enjoyed it). Mr. R divided us into groups, and each group went one by one, with the rest of the class observing the discussion.

I spoke many times throughout the discussion, contributing ideas and opinions. I felt intimidated by the quiet class, which stared, listened, and jotted down notes. We ended the seminar, and I felt confident.

As I observed the next few seminars, I thought that I did well. When I received my grade, I was horrified to see an eighty. My friend, who had spoken far less than I had, received a much higher grade. Even she was surprised to see that I did not receive an A. As the result, my self-esteem fell a few bars.

For the remainder of the year, we had discussions on the novels that we read. There were many people in my class who spoke brilliantly. Their really impressive points and analyses far surpassed my meager points. I was afraid that if I contributed, I would say something stupid and make a fool out of myself. I developed a fear of

stuttering.

When someone spoke, Mr. R wrote down his/her name on his clipboard and kept tally. And never once in the first marking period did he crack a smile. His face was set in a bored expression, and his eyes were judgmental. Thus, my fears overtook me, and I stopped participating altogether.

Halfway through the year, I spoke with another student who was in my shoes. I became happier, knowing that I was not alone. I began participating a few times a week and got my participation grade up.

However, whenever I came into his class, my hands got clammy and my heart raced. I felt my heart pounding in my ears. Oftentimes, I wondered if I was having a panic attack. Before I spoke, I believed my head would explode from the chaotic panic inside. Slowly, the chaos eased, but not completely. During the third marking period, Mr. R stopped grading us on participation, so I stopped contributing regularly and fell back into my old quite shell. Later, when he began grading us again, I started having episodes of panic and anxiety. Finally, the school year

ended.

I was full of regret because I found out over the course of the year that Mr. R had a really dry sense of humor and was hilarious at times. Unfortunately, I did not come out of my shell and open up in his class. But I promised myself that I would never let other people's opinions hold me back.

The following year, I tried out for Model United Nations, and to my surprise, I was accepted onto the team. I went to debates and attended conferences, and slowly crawled out of my shell. I lost my fear of public speaking. To be honest, I really enjoy debating. I'm glad that I have finally overcome my fear.

Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "You have nothing to fear, but fear itself." Just get up, raise your hand, and speak your mind. To be honest, most people are only concerned with themselves, and will neither remember nor care about your drivell. And if they do remember or judge you, it matters not, because "haters gonna hate". You don't want to end up having regrets, so seize every moment you can and don't be afraid to try.

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