

Isis Almazan

*“She was angry. She took it out on a child. Her pride was more important than our relationship.”*

Interviewer: Isis Almazan (IA)

Interviewee: Maria Jose Mohr (MM)

*For my interview, I decided to speak to my sister, Maria Mohr. We have always been close, yet the older we get, the closer we seem to become. My sister and I have been through similar situations with our mother; a hard-headed, strong woman, so, I thought this would be a great topic. From my perspective, this life event shaped a majority of my sister’s remaining adolescence and early adulthood stages. Maria has been through a lot in her life: From facing the facts that she is not an American citizen yet, to being left behind when she was first born and, again, when she was 14. My sister has been through enough to label her entire life a crisis of meaning, but she won’t allow that. She understands how certain aspects of her life have hurt her in ways that are indescribable to others, but she made the choice to not let those things ruin who she wanted to be. This interview shows her strength and determination to be more than what her life experiences have attempted to define her as.*

**IA-** I hope being sisters doesn’t make this weird for you! I want to start off with some formal questions, things I already know, but will make the interview easier to follow for others.

**MM-** Ok!

**IA-** Can you please tell me your full name, birthdate, age, marital status, and relationship to me?

**MM-** Maria Jose Mohr, January 15, 1991, 24, married as of August, and we are sisters.

**IA-** Great. Now, a few “disclaimers”. I want to let you know that I have a list of questions that I have prepared for this interview, some you have seen, and since then, I have edited a few. I will only ask you the broader questions, open for you to discuss whatever it is you like, and if I feel it is necessary to deepen a response to make things more clear, I will lead with a follow up question. Anything that makes you uncomfortable you do not need to answer. If you feel the need to take a break or stop the interview at any time, that is completely fine as well.

**MM-** Sounds great!

**IA-** Let’s get started. Can you describe what a “crisis of meaning” is to you?

**MM-** Hmm. A negative event that causes extreme anguish and suffering [physiologically or physically] that can alter your perspective on life. Like an event or events that 'made you who you are today' sort of thing.

**IA-** It's clear that you understand the concept of a "Crisis of meaning". So, I'm going to give you a description of what I, personally, believe was an event in your life that reflects that description. My understanding of your situation is this:

“At 14 years old, our mother and herself had an extremely large argument about our father (our parents are divorced). The following day, when my sister was dropped off at school, she asked our mom “Are you coming to pick me up?” and she answered that she didn’t know. After school, my sister waited, and waited, and my mother never went to pick her up. Luckily, my sister’s school was around the corner from our dad’s house. After that moment, my sister felt abandoned by our mother.”

Is this an accurate “overview” of what actually happened to you?

**MM-** The argument started several days before. The days leading up to this school day were spent at work with our mother. She refused to take me to school and wanted to show me what it was like to 'work' for a living. During these days I wasn't allowed to refer to her as mom, mommy, mother, etc. She wouldn't respond to any of these names and ignored me mostly. After a few days the school called our father and said that if I was staying home I needed to notify the school. Completely unaware of the situation, our father called our mother and demanded to speak with me. She refused and he called the police, finally forcing our mother to take me to school. From there everything is correct.

**IA-** What about the argument do you think set up your and our mom's relationship to fall the way it did?

**MM-** That the argument started from completely selfish reasons where my feelings or thoughts weren't considered. She was angry. She took it out on a child. Her pride was more important than our relationship.

**IA-** So the day that she didn't come back for you, tell me about how you felt. Initial reactions [when she dropped you off], your thoughts/feelings throughout the day, if any, and when you realized she wasn't going to pick you up

**MM-** Initially I felt glad. I wanted to be somewhere else but near her. My friends were at school, and I wanted to just relax instead of walking on pins and needles around her. I suppose I wasn't expecting that day to becoming my 'moving' day, so there was nothing that was too out of the ordinary. It was just another day with her being the way she was. That and I liked being at dad's so I just shrugged it off. After school I went to dad's and I had to sit down and explain what had happened. Him and Shelly [our step-mother] were furious. Daddy called our mother and when he got off the phone he said it would be better if I just stayed the night. So I did. And stayed again the day after, and the one after that, and after that...

**IA-** What is the most memorable (traumatic, elating, calming, frustrating, etc.) event from those first few days? How does that memory/event affect you today?

**MM-** Definitely when I had to sit in with the guidance counselor the day after I was dropped off at school. Daddy and Shelly had a session with her too to figure out how to handle the situation with me. The guidance counselor completely stereotyped my situation as a rebel teenage situation. She said that "teenage girls will often want to rebel against their mothers in some way". I wanted to scream at her. She had no idea what my situation was. She thought I was overreacting, leaving out details to make her believe I was the victim. She never intended to hear me out and I ended up never talking to her again about my personal life the last few years I attended the school. I remember waiting for the parents to come out of their session after mine and daddy was so red in the face. He looked like he was going to explode. That's when I knew the counselor had told him the same thing.

**IA-** Before, during, and now: what are things that have remained the same about your relationships with our parents, and what are things that have changed? And, where do you see this event playing a role in your own [future] parenting style?

**MM-** My relationship with our mother has honestly stayed the same. I met her when I was 5. I was with her for 8 years before living with our dad. I honestly and truly don't really know who she is, REALLY. Like how you're supposed to know a parent. I mean she didn't even meet my husband until our wedding day and it wasn't from a lack of trying. Even so this situation made me closer to our dad. I used to think he was the main problem with how our mother used to talk about him - and even how now Shelly sometimes speaks about him. But I see now that he loves his children unconditionally and would do anything for us. It's hard for him to show it, but it's so clear in his own way. It makes me wish I had spent more time with him before moving to Wisconsin. I miss him a lot.

Overall I like to think I have 3 parents that have all contributed to my future parenting style. I want to be a mother - not a friend. I want to be able to discipline my children, but not to the point of a mental break. I want to be able to talk to my children openly about how they feel, what they think, their wants, their dreams, free of judgment. I felt trapped growing up. I couldn't express what I really thought or felt. Everything needed to remain bottled up and that is still a big problem for me today. It's hard for me to sometimes be affectionate with people. I just was not raised that way. It's hard to tell someone WHY I am upset, so I rather brood and ruminate on my own. I don't want my children to be that way. I want to know who they are, what they want, what they think, and to let them know that I will never abandon them over something as petty as a party invitation.

Overall a lot of babbling, but I just want to be a good parent. I want to love them and give them the world, but that is nothing new for any parent.

**IA-** What was your turning point? Who was involved, what was your environment, what sparked your change in attitude? What decisions had to be made to understand you were going to move forward?

**MM-** I like to think that I wasn't affected much by what happened, but I really wasn't looking back on it. I was depressed for a while and I buried myself in an online world. Between our mother and my immigration situation, I gave up. I felt like I couldn't do anything. Even if I graduated high school, I couldn't afford college. Even if I finished college I couldn't work. The law has changed since then in my favor, so the ruts are further out than before, but life is still hard (immigration effects a lot of aspects of my life).

My grades suffered, my health suffered, my relationships suffered. But it's funny because had this event in my life not had happened I wouldn't have met Jon. I wouldn't have moved in with daddy. I wouldn't have gotten my own room, my own computer. I wouldn't have been allowed to become addicted to a game that I played 3 days in a row

without sleep. I wouldn't have become a hardcore raider (like a soldier in a dungeon - think dungeon and dragons). I wouldn't have become an officer in my guild, I wouldn't have had the job of recruiting new people. I wouldn't have recruited Jon to the guild. I wouldn't have fallen for a guy who I initially thought was a girl and who he thought I was initially a guy. So the world works in funny ways. Jon was my saving grace. He worried when I wouldn't sleep or eat. He listened to my hopes, my complaints, my cries. For over half a year all we did was talk and talk. I wanted to be a better person for him, I wanted to be a more interesting person who had aspirations and goals. He was my spring board.

He told me constantly that I deserved to be happy, and eventually I believed it. I did deserve to be happy. So that's all I try to do now. I try to keep myself happy. I try to keep moving forward. I try to understand why people have hurt me and try to understand that we're just people and people make mistakes. Humans are emotional beings. Things will fall where they may. I try to not let it bother me too much.

I used to be such an angry person. Everything made me angry. Everything still kind of makes me angry but I try not to let it get the best of me.

**IA-** As your sister, that's so awesome...So, our last question: what would you say to someone/what advice would you give to someone who is going through a similar situation to what you went through?

**MM-** There are people out there that you can trust. They will listen. They will care. They want you to be happy. You deserve to be happy. But if you want to be happy you have to keep your chin up and keep moving forward.

*Conclusion:*

I had always believed that I understood the extent of my sister's situation, however, I was just eight-years-old when it occurred. Through this interview, I realized there was a lot more going on than what I had previously understood. I recently went through a similar experience. I believe that this interview only helped my relationship with my

sister; in a way, it filled the holes I needed to have filled to move on. Although both my sister, and myself, have a lot left to do in regards to healing, our experiences have direct connections to a few schools of philosophy.

Many of my sister's outlooks on life, post-crisis of meaning, are in line with Buddhist teachings and philosophy. My sister was able to accept the fact that her life was going to involve a lot of pain and suffering, of different magnitudes and meanings, but she decided to move forward any way. She understood that there was more to life than just this sorrow she felt. Maria also viewed her situation as one that she could not soak in, for she knew it would lead her to view life in a more negative way. This is something that is touched upon through Buddhist teaching when it is stated,

“Repugnance is explained as ‘ill-will with regard to living beings, with regard to suffering and with regard to things pertaining to suffering. Its function is to produce a bias for unhappy states and bad conduct. Thus it is wrong to be impatient at suffering. Being impatient or angry at suffering does not remove it. On the contrary, it adds a little more to one’s troubles, and aggravates and exacerbates a situation already disagreeable.” (Rahula 28).

She wanted to find ways to make sure this didn't happen to her- which led her to online gaming and finding her, now, husband. She realizes that Buddhism is practical, about the suffering and the search for answers against these sufferings in life, it is why she herself follows Buddhist teachings; to the best of her ability, of course.

Maria also sees the importance of relationships and friendships in her life; a reflection of the Humanists philosophies. She says that her friends provided her some sort of support the day she was dropped off at school. She tells us that she was able to see the fact that our dad truly did love us, something that we were told the opposite of in our childhood. Also, this realization led her to become closer to our dad, forming a stronger relationship that we thought possible. And, lastly, she is able to get through one of the hardest parts of her life through her friend, and, now, life partner, Jon. Without him she wouldn't have been able to do this interview, she wouldn't have been able to get

through the pain and suffering that life had laid out for her. Jon and Maria's love for one another reflects a quote by Petrarch that says, "loving friendship is able to endure everything; it refuses no burden." (Petrarch The Ascent of Mont Ventoux 80). Here, the nature of friendships is more important than the number of friendships you have. Maria can relate to this idea, not because she has little friends, but because she knows who is there for her, who isn't, and who will be able to face the deepest burdens of her life with.

My sister may not realize that her life resonates with many philosophical texts, but she lives her life the way she thinks she should: Happy.