

The Great Pollinator by Lydia Kozlowski

I believe in rants and story-telling. Most of all, I believe in my mother, who spreads the knowledge and wisdom of life to everyone she meets through the act of ranting and telling stories. She is, in her exuberant forms, not only a mother to me, but a financial advisor, therapist, and mother to all.

Mama works the night shifts at the Belvidere Assembly Plant, and rather than going to sleep after her 10-hour shift, she stays up well into the day to spill the tea about her coworkers— Maybe, this is a genuine attempt to spend more time with me. I'd like to believe this is true. What I have learned through her various stories is that her favorite coworkers are similar to herself-- conventional, hardworking, stubborn-- or in other words, immigrants, who blend themselves into the melting pot mold of society. I have learned much more than this, of course.

She turns her gaze to look beyond the porch into the weed-infested vegetable garden, and asks, "Do you know how many cars Chevy assembled today?"

"No, how many?"

"1,136 at the end of the day. Can you believe it? That is what the clock told me."

"Mama, the clock shows the time, not how many cars are made," I interject, acknowledging the immigrant slip.

"I wonder who buys them," she adds avoiding my snarky comment, and with her eyes still fixed on the garden, she remarks, "We need rain soon so we can pull weeds. And I could use a free carwash."

Growing up, I could not sit still during my mother's vent sessions. I'd be halfway out the front door and the volume of her voice would increase so as to make sure I did not miss the story's grand finale. My fondest childhood memories stem from the times my mother yelled reminders from the second story window of our home as I was leaving for school. Only 20 years later have I realized her pattern of motivation-- get up, go do (do it well), talk about it for at least an hour, and finally, repeat. Only 2 decades later have I realized the crazy gene lurks in my flesh only to unconsciously emerge. Inquisitive and slightly relentless, she flutters through the factory like a hummingbird hovering over knowledge and conversation like her floral source of food. One may say she enjoys the gossip, but I know that by listening and conversing, she has found a powerful and influential way of educating herself about the world. Most importantly, she does not cease to pass all of this information on.

Each workstation, bare and uninviting, still receives her complimentary visits. She tends to each station and the coworker occupying it like they are an extension of her garden.

She spoke of her observations:

“You see young men reading textbooks during their thirty-minute lunch break at 2 am to prepare for an exam later that morning...at 7 am.”

“You see single mothers working day and night shifts to make enough for rent this month.”

“You see girls and boys who work other jobs too. They don’t have parents to help them make good decisions. You see too much and too little at the same time.”

Convincing anyone younger than herself, male or female, rich or poor, immigrant or native, to attend college seems to be her favorite hobby. She believed anyone, who handled car parts in an assembly line, fit enough to take classes and succeed.

My mother often laments of her missed opportunity to attend college. If she wins the lottery, even at the age of 80, she swears she would go back to become a nurse or a doctor.

As she speaks, her arms plow through the air with the same motion and speed of a hummingbird’s wings, as if she infinitely scans part numbers, barcode after barcode after barcode until her bin stands bare. You know how Polish people talk and work with emotion in their calloused hands, never in the wrinkles of their face. And that is the phenomena surrounding the world’s greatest people, a category I place my mother in. The knowledge they accumulate, whether in college or not, is not entrapped inside their minds, but rather shared or overshared with everyone in their surrounding environment. They are the greatest pollinators in that sense, and if the world, like the factories, held a looming clock overhead to keep track of such accomplishments, we would be more aware of how many lives they have truly touched.