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O Miami Submission (Mangrove Essay):

Dear Mom,

This is Lilly, your overwhelmingly lovable daughter of course. These days the only activity in your emails are either letters from me or daily weather alerts, warnings, and caution from news channels and radios all over Miami. You know I've been living off the coast in Boca Raton for years now. My kids are doing well, don't worry about them. They go to school regularly, have enough to eat and get their needs. We aren't low on electronics, it's not that we cannot afford them. However, we just choose to be preservative in what we purchase in terms of technology today. It's been a bit rough not being able to have the kids use their favorite set of VRs now but I've come up with ways to make them cope with what they have. They just have to learn to appreciate what they own. And they've succeeded quite impressively. Blake and Teresa inherited those traits from you. You're the inspiration that helps us live a more efficient and safe life here in Florida. Over the years, we couldn't set foot on Miami or anywhere near it. It has been a total disruption for the periphery of Miami and the people are still very wary about how to continue living in such harsh conditions. Many residents have moved out though. Residences have increased in price ever since. According to my grandmother, the cheapest house she could find was around 375k for sale in 2019. In my mind, that is still expensive. However, now I wish that I could have paid 375k for a home. I almost spent all of my savings on a new home to keep me and my family safe. It is only temporary, we plan on moving again with my grandfather's leftover payment since he passed away 5 years ago from the flooding. I do miss him. He was a lovely man. We loved to call him Mr. Joker because he was relatively funny during our summer vacations and he was a great/hidden cheater in poker. Ah, that fella. I admired his personality. But hey, he'll always be in our hearts. And so will Miami...

Your mother always tells me about her memories in Miami. Before the whole climate change havoc and the mass flooding. They were very monumental. I hope to be around for even better memories however Miami was like no other city in Florida. My grandmother remembered going to Orlando for a trip in high school and she mentioned how Miami-free it was. So, it was very quiet which was nice but dull. Miami was a piece of light shining her world. Something small such as Miami Beach made grandma happier than anything else she saw.

Bella Napoli Pizza is her favorite restaurant. It's not present anymore in the streets she was familiar with. I believe it was near South Point and her favorite movie theatre that she went with her mother. Her last favorite movie being "Once Upon A Time in Hollywood", she talks a lot about it. It was very funny in her generation. She absolutely loved the smell of popcorn when she entered the theatre and even though sometimes she didn't have the budget to go see a movie with her mom she loved to look at the plaques and see what was filming and what was upcoming. She loved to review movies on her own. Regal Theatre was her personal heart of Miami. The one thing she remembered when she was in Turkey was the theatre in Miami. It's like the theatre grew with her and she grew with the theatre. Ever since my grandmother was around 11 she loved Aventura Mall. Right in Aventura with holiday decorations hung inside the mall and Christmas gift shops every year during the holiday season. Every step grandma Jennifer took reminded her to appreciate every detail in the mall. Because after 2019, she was back from Turkey. When I was 6 she mentioned about one of her memories to me. About how the mall was still there however her favorite food court and place to eat was gone, replaced by Asian buffets, a tea and dessert café, and vegan food place. She was quite disappointed. I could also see it in her face when she told me about it. As a 15 year old girl, grandma Jennifer loved food. She was a teen so it was understandable. She loved the smell of pastries in Pasha. It was a Turkish cuisine place in the old food court. If anyone were to ask grandma Jennifer where she thought was a place that no one could reach now it would be the food court in Aventura Mall. No other food court could replace the one in Aventura 6 years ago in 2019. But grandma also loved Lincoln Road. The glimmering lights of palm trees during the holidays and fun activities and shows on the road was very entertaining. Grandma loved to have mother-daughter bonding days with her mother on Lincoln Road. Rustica pizza used to be their iconic pizza place. But Bella Napoli was mainly on their top list. No one could beat their Caesar salad and Snapple iced tea.

Jennifer admired bus trips from South Beach to Downtown Miami. She would always rant about how life was at the island she looked at from the window of the bus. Coral Gables. The rich, titled, honored, and luxurious island. Luxury lied there. It isn't much of luxury now. It is completely underwater. And so my grandma thought as well. She looked out into the ocean multiple times and during a trip in the sunset she loved to capture the moment of the quiet, serene ocean with her eyes. She wanted this experience someplace else. She could never really find it though. Her hidden gem was Teavana right at the entrance after leaving the food court in Aventura. Free samples were her thing. My grandmother was frugal but free collections of hers were always original and aesthetic. I admired that trait of hers. Free or not, everything she collected was worthy. Ah, and did she love tea. Very much. I mean first place she'd look in after eating at the food court was Teavana. She thought that Starbucks and McDonalds were overrated and unhealthy at times. Her favorite flavors of tea in Teavana felt real and not synthetic at all. My great grandmother would start buying the tea samples. And oh boy was she not regretful about that decision! Grandma Jennifer wanted more of the tea. There was strawberry, mango, blueberry, pomegranate, and more that I cannot remember. They had a variety. Aventura was her "aventuras" perhaps. The adventure of her childhood but in a mall.

In elementary school and middle school (6<sup>th</sup> grade) grandmother Jennifer would read the Magic Tree House very often. She told me that she loved the series and that because she was lonely

that time in school and was not fitting in with the popular and social crowds, she would read books to kill time. And Magic Tree House reminded her of Miami. The fact that there were 2 kids going on wild adventures from their treehouse to tropical lands like Miami and that she made memories in Miami reading them touched her. It was personal to her, I could tell when she told me herself. The hippie song named "Beach Vibes" would keep her in the groove while walking to the trolley stop to school at 6 AM. Her old school Fienberg Fisher K-8 was next to her street, Euclid Avenue. As much as she felt weird walking past it at the age of 15 and that she was in high school now she still remembered the good memories there. It made her quite poignant though. My grandmother is not very emotional and so anything that made her cry would be a big deal.

It is now the year 2090. I'm here to emphasize on the point that this mass flooding has changed our lives mother. I know you miss me and I miss you too. Very much. It is why I could only fit so much into a letter. I want to talk to you about these funny and crazy stories in person. However, we are not able to transport to anywhere at this time. My kids have had school off for about a week now and we are getting alerts about some flooding here. Our devices and electronics are manually shut off. We are preparing to stock on supplies. I want you to know that I am doing perfectly fine. Grandma is wishing you the best and I have sent you an allowance. I hate to embarrass you like this, I know. But I need to be there for you after being there for my grandmother. She is truly an honest, intelligent, and wholesome person to be around. Let us all pray for our destiny. We are all dependent on each other.

CBS Channel 4 recorded mangroves planted around 71 years ago! It's crazy and very heartbreaking that people risked their lives to save us and their city. Especially their city. Our destiny depended on the community in 2019. From what I have heard, a school in 2019 planted 2,500 mangroves from taking them home and planting it in their backyards. This was conducted by an art project called Plan from EcoArt. The mangroves soaked up a lot of water to stop or limit the flooding. Boca Raton is safe because of this. However, Miami did not make it. We've lived with the curiosity of wanting to live the memories that grandmother Jennifer lived herself. The local ecology program is planting more mangroves to this day to help the coast and the state of Florida. My grandmother would title Miami: "The Island of Nature and Life" and it will never be forgotten. The people that helped us get to where we are today are most appreciated and commemorated for their efforts. We are strong against climate change, we will fight until we solve the issue. Keep planting mom, keep inspiring to make a change and save our state. Climate change in one place is climate change in every other place. That was my quote. Just inspired by Martin Luther King himself from his letter of Birmingham Jail. Remember mom, once you're home with us, call me. When you come home say this: "I am Denise and I am a mangrove" as Xavier Cordata would like to call it. We're waterproof, water goes back to it's place. Not to our childhood town, not to our islands, not to our wedding venues, not to our schools, not to our bookstores, not to anywhere.

Sincerely, your daughter, Lilly.

