

A Story of Resilience
Yvette Salinas

Mayra Turner, age nine, sat with the family dictionary open on her lap. This was one of her favorite things to do when she got bored, passing the time by skimming down the list of words and stopping when she'd reached one she didn't recognize. If her Mom was there, Mayra would get to ask for help understanding the definition. Considering how busy Mayra's mother always seemed to be, it was a good way to connect—even just for a moment. SO Mayra Turner, age nine, glanced at her mother and slowly drew her fingers down on the page of "R"s...

Residential. People live there.

Residue. Gross.

Resign. I quit.

Resilience...?

"Mom, what's that?"

"What's what?" Mayra's mother looked up from her computer, where she'd been furiously typing just a second before.

"Resilience: the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties," Mayra read aloud in her smartest voice, then paused awkwardly. "...what's that mean?" She saw sadness flash across her mother's face. "That's a really tough one to explain."

Maya's mother took a deep breath and tapped her chin. "Well, you know when I told you how my coworker's home caught fire on a Friday...but they were back at work by Monday?"

“Yeah..,” Mayra nodded. “That was so bad. I would have really been sad if all my stuff all got burned up. Who could have even been thinking about working then?”

Mom nodded. “I’m sure they were sad, but they were able to go on with their lives. That’s resilience.though, it was probably because they needed to work to pay for a new place to live...”

Mayra fiddled with a corner of the dictionary’s page. “Well at least they were given a temporary place to stay until they found a home...But I still don’t understand resilience.”

“Okay, how about when Rosalinda showed up at the school play, but couldn’t go in to see it because their wheelchair couldn’t get up the stairs?” Mayra nodded. “I can’t believe the school made that poor old lady wait outside in the cold...”

“Mayra!”

“I’m sorry. I thought you said we should treat our elders with respect...”

“We should. And Rosalinda could have just been angry at the situation and gone home. But they stayed and waited until an accessible side door was found.”

“I remember when we wrote all those letters and the school finally built a ramp at the entrance!” Mayra recalled.

“It should never have been an issue in the first place.” Mayra’s mother scowled. “I imagine they have to deal with that all the time.”

Mayra considered these two stories, about the person at her mother’s work and about Rosalinda. “I guess.... you get resilience when you grow older?”

“Not necessarily, mi’ja. Remember when Jacob was upset about not getting picked to lead that school play?”

“He worked really hard on it...but they said he would be better as a different character.”

“Yes, so I recall. Imagine what Jacob was feeling then...it’s not as big of a deal as a home that burns down, or navigating a world full of barriers...but

even children can show resilience when they don't let setbacks—big or small—bring them down.”

Mayra raised her chin with pride. “Well then, I can be resilient, too.”

““You can't just decide to be Resilient. Nor are Resilient people really born that way, they don't just stumble into it, either...Resilience is forged through facing difficulty, again and again...” Maya's mother's voice drifted off as her eyes filled with tears. “You know what, you have been resilient. Remember when we couldn't live at our old home anymore? And I had to go back to school to try to get a job...and you had to learn to keep yourself busy while I worked and studied?”

Mayra looked down at the dictionary in her lap. “Well....yeah. But I really want to be ready for dealing with...” at a loss for words, Mayra finished sadly, “anything.”

Mayra's mother got up and sat with her. “Sweetie...you don't always have to be so strong on your own. I thought I had to be resilient and take care of us on my own, but that kind of Resilience came at a cost. It was exhausting. Now that we've connected with our neighbors and made so many friends...it's not so hard to be resilient as it once was. Resilience can be honed right here, right now . And Resilience is like a muscle, which you build with use...and a wonderful thing has happened, mi'ja.. Our connections to the community mean we know we'll always have somebody to turn to. And you're learning more about what you're capable of, and that you too can rise above. My hope for you is that you stay connected with a community that will help you along the way.”

Mayra took this all in for a moment, as she usually did when her mother defined a word for her.

Then she nodded to herself, stored this conversation away for later, and proceed to run her finger further down the dictionary page to pass the time.

Resin

Resinate

Resist...

All is well.