

# My Children Are Grown

By: Giselle Sterling

My children are grown and they have stopped speaking to me. My oldest has done this to me before. When she was twelve and I read her journal. She wanted me to read her journal. She was so proud of it and wanted me to see why. Her teachers were proud of it too. It was for a Language Arts assignment and the teacher had used it as an example to show the rest of the class how to make a good journal. It had poetry and collages and drawings where the lines were made out of words written very small. The stories were about things that I didn't know a twelve year old could write. They were stories about dealing with sadness and sickness or hatred and spite. She had been watching her mother and I closely. She was trying her best to protect her kid sister and baby brother from the things Mami and Papi were doing to each other. I know this because she wrote it. I didn't know she felt this way. How she hated being asked which parent she would want to live with. Hated missing her father. She hated her mother for making her cook and clean and tend to children that were not her own. The drawings made me stare at them. They were neat and well designed with dark outlines and clear images that you would see on a tattoo. A braid of flowers circled around a translucent green and blue peacock feather. A skull and cross bones with a gold front tooth, but instead of crossed bones there were crossed number two pencils with a banner below that read "I am the breath that you use to form words". And I stopped to look at her sitting at the edge of the couch. Her small face. Her frail frame. Her eyes staring down at her dangling feet. I looked back down to turn the page and said this is really wonderful. She said, that's what the teachers kept saying. But I grew stern at her modesty and said. No. This is amazing and I hope that you really know that. And she looked up and smiled. The way she smiled when I first held her and called her mi princesita. I asked her if this is how you really feel about your mother and she looked back down at her feet. She was tapping her toes together to the rhythm of the passing seconds. She said I guess so and I told her I really like it and am proud of how honest you are and the smile came back. I said I wanted to take a story to keep with me and show my friends and her legs danced now. I said how maybe I could even read a story to my lawyer friend and he could try and make it so that it wouldn't be like this anymore and her legs stopped. The smile dissolved into a wordless expression that kept her from speaking to me for months after I read her journal just as she was not speaking to me now, twenty-one years later. But when she was twelve I didn't realize what I had done until I saw her face go blank as it did. Her chest still as if she were not breathing. As soon as I saw how still she was I told her that she could think about it because I really didn't need it. When I left she thought about it and the next week that I had the children I asked her about the journal and she said that she had to hand it in for a project and got an A++ and told the teacher to keep it to use as an example for future journal projects. The teacher insisted that my daughter keep her journal to which my daughter replied if I keep it, I will use it for a video project entitled the immolation of a journal.