

Maria's Story

Hola, Mi nombre es Maria Diaz and I live alone in the house where Juan and I raised our four children. Juan and I married and moved here from Puerto Rico when we were teenagers. Juan died almost 20 years ago; he taught school and I stayed home to raise mi familia. Oh, how I miss him but I still feel his spirit is with me. My son and one of my daughters live close by and anytime I have a problem, one of them comes to help as soon as they can. They have jobs, so sometimes they can't come for a day or two so my teenage grandchildren come instead. I give them 50 cents each from my change jar and they get so happy. I love being an abuelita. My other two daughters live far away. One lives an hour away and she comes over every week to help me with laundry and household chores; you see, I have bad arthritis. The aches and pains don't stop me, they just slow me down. I don't dwell on these problems; instead, I try to focus on my blessings and give back.

I go to the VA Hospital and read to the patients and try to cheer them up. I volunteer at my church, tidying things up after services. I've always liked to read - mostly stories about famous people and mysteries - and I stay in touch with my kids and grandkids, mostly by phone. And I watch Jeopardy every evening - I'm pretty good at it.

I have had a good life as well as my share of problems. I have high blood pressure and cholesterol and sometimes my bladder leaks. My blood pressure is Ok now with the pills but I won't take that cholesterol pill; it just makes me feel lousy. The terrible thing is that I have to wear diapers because I dribble. It's so embarrassing. Not all the time, you know, but enough to upset me. I wear them when I go out but I don't like to wear the diapers to bed - they irritate me, so I set my alarm to get up every night at 3 am. I don't want to have an accident in the bed. Sometimes if I nap during the day I have trouble falling asleep and just about the time I fall asleep my 3 am alarm goes off. It's not easy, but I'll do whatever I can to make sure that I don't get another infection.

I don't know why, but I get lots of infections in my urine and when I get an infection, I can't remember things and I get just get so nervous. A few years ago, it was really scary. I called my daughter because I kept falling – three times in just one afternoon. She took me to the hospital and they found that I had another urine infection. I didn't know that an infection could make you fall.

The worst time was when the police called my daughter and told her that I was driving the wrong way down a one-way street. I don't remember any of it but my daughter figured out that I was supposed to go to a physical therapy appointment but never made it and had been driving around all morning. The infection was so bad that time I had to go to the hospital for a few days.

You know, I seem to have trouble with falling. One time all I did was go out to get my recycling bin and when I bent over I fell and broke my nose. Another time, I was changing my clothes in my bedroom and tripped over my comforter and fell and I couldn't get up. I broke my left leg and right arm really bad - they said the bones were all crumbled. I had surgery and they put something called rods and some pins in to hold the bones together. I had to go to la clinica for four months until I was able to walk again. They wouldn't let me put any weight on my leg or arm so I was in a wheelchair for a long time. Once I was able to show them I could walk with a cane and take care of myself, they let me go home. And wouldn't you know it, I got another urine infection. Every time they put a tube in me for my urine that happens and then I get so mixed up. My daughter says I was really confused because I don't even remember being in the hospital.

I have had some problems with that rod in my leg. I had to have the rod replaced because it hurt and my leg was bowing out and if it wasn't replaced. The doctor said I might lose my leg. I seem to get so confused after these surgeries. I went back to la clinica for another 3 months. When I came home, my daughter came to stay with me for a couple of weeks until she was sure I would be okay on my own. I enjoyed having her around except she makes me eat too much. I was glad when she left so that I could go back to what I am used to eating. All I need for dinner is some coffee, and a little chicken with rice.

My biggest problem now is arthritis pain and I manage as long as I take ibuprofen. I'm happy that I can live on my own and take care of myself. I've always been a strong, independent woman and I want to prove to my neighbors and kids that I still am. I know that my kids don't want me to drive my car but I'm not giving up driving. I have to be able to go to the library, the VA Hospital, church and the grocery store when I want something. How else am I supposed to get to the store?

I'm going to make myself a cafesito (little coffee) so I can stay up and watch my afternoon telenovela. This week Alejandro finds out Ana Teresa has come back to the village to marry him. Para mi edad estoy muy bien. For my age I'm doing really well. Better than my neighbor who had to go live with her daughter in law.