

8 Ways to Say  
*"I Love My Life!"*



# 8 Ways to Say "I Love My Life!"



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**Rita Mosqueda Marmolejo**

**FOREWORD BY Vikki Carr**

**EDITED BY Sylvia Mendoza**

**"Powerful stories of  
eight remarkable Latinas"**

— from the foreword by Vikki Carr



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# Foreword

I AM HONORED TO WRITE THE FOREWORD FOR THIS life-changing, inspirational book, *8 Ways to Say "I Love My Life!"*

The powerful stories of eight remarkable Latinas tell how they overcame challenging odds to beat their personal demons. Their renewed spirit led them to a place where each could honestly say, "I love my life."

Every one of the eight stories deeply moved me. These tales filled with hope are not just for Latinas, but for all women (and men) who want their voices to go from weak to strong, and for the quality of their lives to move from a static state to full blossom. These stories can guide a reader's self-love to emerge from beneath insecurities and dark places. This emotional process struck a very familiar chord in me.

Being Vikki Carr is not for the weak or faint of heart. For many years, the time I spent on stage, singing to the loving spirit of my loyal fans was all I had that was truly mine and mine alone. Everything else in my young life was orchestrated by others whose mission was to groom me into an international performer and entertainer, a bright shining star. I was raised to tackle the task at hand, follow directions and not ask questions.

My father was the strong head of our household. Mother always knew and accepted her subservient place at his side. As the eldest of seven children, I was expected to shoulder the responsibility of helping with the cooking, cleaning and caring

for my younger siblings. I was my mother's helping hand. I was brought up to respect and listen to my elders and never question them. As I grew older and went on the road with my music, I knew no other way. At home this was my safety net; away from home, it proved to be my vulnerability.

My journey, like each of these women's journeys, had its share of painful moments. There were times when life disappointed me, when people and events let me down. I began to doubt myself. One day, I took a good look at my life and realized I was stronger than what I gave myself credit for. Like the women in this book, I learned to fight for what I wanted and needed.

As I read their eloquently written words, I came to the realization that I am not alone, that none of us really are. Strength rose up inside of me as I continued to read their stories. Suddenly, the journeys and adventures I thought were so unique to my life experiences were not. What a blow to my ego! But what an amazing realization: We are all sisters, *hermanas*, wanting to have a life filled with love. I was moved by the many messages this book conveys so beautifully, yet reinforces how I do not accept excuses and strongly believe we need to take responsibility for our own lives. We can make our own dreams come true.

"My Father's Daughter," written by Laura De Anda, touched me deeply. It deals with guilt mixed with family and fear, especially fear of her father's illness. Like the author, I've learned that guilt is something we must let go of in order to succeed. Your life is about you, the things you feel and what you know is right for you—but sometimes we just need to let go.

The strength of each of these women shines through in their stories. Josefina López learns that her life and her love can be on her own terms. Nancy De Los Santos Reza finds power in accepting responsibility for her life, then chooses what she feels is best for her. Bel Hernandez Castillo finds her voice through the strength in her identity as Chicana: her Mexican and American

roots. Margo De León realizes that forgiveness is the key to inner peace and a life filled with love and joy. Susan Orosco changes the course of her life from a self-destructive path to seeking the meaning of her life and how God fits in. Rita Mosqueda Marmolejo finds recovery from a legacy of addiction and mental illness. And, Joanna Díaz emulates the strong women in her life to find her place in this world. In each of these examples, a loving source from within pulled them up.

We all have our challenges in life; mine is to see my self-worth. It took me a long time to acknowledge it. In one night I could easily go from singing to the Queen of England or the President of the United States to slipping into a period of self-doubt as I fell asleep. Like many others before me, I went in search of answers from God or “The Universe” to my most perplexing questions. Whatever you call Him, He hears all prayer. It took me a while to learn that. Being Catholic, I have found the place where I truly belong.

If I could help someone heal their life through sharing my life lessons, the greatest lesson would be that you never lose God. Not once did God forsake me, nor take His love and support from me. As I learned to value myself, I realized that God’s gifts are bountiful. In my heart I know He created me and gave me a very special gift that I share with the world. He gave all of us “free will” along with many other blessings. Some of us do not listen to our inner voice at times and we continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. It is only when we finally say, “¡Basta! ¡Ya!” that we finally choose Him over everything else. That’s precisely the moment when we let go. For me that moment came when I took a deep breath and said, “I’m all yours God. Let’s go.”

Often, the big question begs to be asked about all our lives: Would I change anything? My answer is, probably not. These were the life lessons I had to learn over and over again, until I finally “got” them. I did that by having faith, being still and let-

ting my inner voice guide me. And this is what each of the *8 Ways to Say "I Love My Life!"* women have learned. Listen to your own voice.

You will find that the beautiful narratives in this wonderful book say all of this and more. Eight marvelous Latinas overcame the boundaries and limits imposed upon them, fought being wrongly stereotyped and were not afraid to ask for what they wanted in life and fight for it. Each of them listened to her inner voice, which had been there all along, waiting for the chance to shout, "Hey, world! Look at me! I love my life!" And I join them!

*Besos y abrazos,*  
Vikki Carr

## *Preface*

8 WAYS TO SAY “I LOVE MY LIFE!” WAS BORN IN MY BACKYARD. On a beautiful summer evening, my husband and I sat by the pool drinking Santa Margherita’s Pinot Grigio. We were celebrating the new greenhouse he had built for me to house my tropical plants. It was a marvelous addition to our already beautiful backyard. When I finished the last drop of wine from my goblet, he asked if I wanted more. I nodded contentedly. Then my husband stood up from the patio table, held up his arms, looked up to the sky and declared, “I love my life!”

When he walked inside the house, I sat there, contemplating what had just happened. I felt excitement, surprise but most of all, jealousy. I wanted what he had. I wanted to be able to stand up and declare to the heavens that they had done a good job with my life. I wanted to shout to the world, I love my life! Most of all I wanted to mean it, and say it with conviction. I wanted to love my life not in spite of what I had been through but because of it.

So every morning before lunch and in the evening I began to affirm, “I love my life.” At first, it felt odd especially when I held my arms in the air, but it felt magnificent. I didn’t believe my life was perfect; therefore it was hard to love it at first. But I continued to affirm it. After each session, I noticed I felt more energized and excited about life. After a week, I noticed I was remembering good things that had happened to me.

I realized that loving my life was like loving a spouse. It needed attention, recognition and appreciation. My life and I were having a love affair that required respect, communication and acceptance. After the second week, I noticed everything that had ever happened to me in my life started to make sense.

I told my friend Margo De León about my experience. I wanted her to begin the journey of loving her life so she too could reap the benefits. I also told her I wanted to write a book called “How to Say “I Love my Life”. . . and Mean It!” I asked if she wanted to write it with me. She agreed.

Margo improved upon my idea. She told me she always wanted to write a book with other Latinas. I thought that was a great idea. I had thought about writing the book with other women but I had not thought to make it a Latina project.

We decided to invite five additional authors: Laura De Anda, Nancy De Los Santos Reza, Bel Hernandez Castillo, Joanna Ilizaliturri Díaz and Rita Mosqueda Marmolejo. They were chosen for their ability to write, speak publicly and to pursue an authentic life. Through our selection process, we ended up losing one author and gaining two more because Nancy invited the eighth author, Josefina López.

At first, Margo and I agonized about what to do with eight stories when our plans were to have only seven. Laura suggested we keep all eight for several reasons. The number eight symbolizes power, abundance and luck. Also not only does the symbol 8 represent eternity; it even looks like the shape of a woman. We smiled and agreed.

We held one of our first meetings at Josefina’s theater, Casa OIOI, in Boyle Heights. I remember when I approached the theater, seeing the sign on the door informing us the meeting place had been moved down the street. It read “8 Ways to Say I Love My Life meeting will be held at . . .” and she gave the address. Later, when I mentioned to her the correct title (“How to Say ‘I Love my Life’ . . . and Mean It!”) she said she didn’t know how she

had made that mistake. It turned out we all really liked the new title and so it stayed. I envisioned the tagline: “8 Women. 8 Stories. 8 Miracles.”

After the meeting, Josefina suggested we take excerpts from the chapters that we were still working on and create monologues to be presented at her theater for “Women’s Herstory Month.” It was a challenging idea since March was just a few months away, but we agreed. It was exciting to see how we all came together to produce the monologues. Josefina held a monologue writing class and, with her husband Emmanuel Deleage’s help, our autobiographical stories were ready to be presented onstage. Emmanuel would direct six of the monologues and Hector Rodriguez directed the other two. Auditions were held and seven actresses were hired to perform one monologue each while Rita chose to perform her own.

Our first meeting to hear the actresses read was one of the most amazing experiences I had ever had. It was spellbinding to hear the words we had written come alive with the depth of an actor’s soul as each portrayed our lives. I made note of the reactions of each author and could tell from the look of astonishment on their faces that I was not the only one who knew something magical was happening.

The monologues drew packed houses for a two-week run. A couple of months later, after popular demand, we produced the monologues again at the Los Angeles Theater Center with Diane Rodriguez as director. Again we had a packed house plus a favorable review in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Soon after that, we were nominated for the Imagen Award, which is a competitive award from the Imagen Award Foundation. Also known as the Latino Golden Globes, the Imagen Awards gala is held in Beverly Hills and honors the best and most positive portrayals of Latinos in entertainment.

To be honest, being nominated with other stage productions that were heavy hitters with larger budgets was enough of an

honor for me, but not for the monologues. No, as I said before, the monologues had developed a life of their own, and emerged as winners.

On August 2009 we won the Imagen Award for Best Live Theatrical Production. Our beautiful trophy sits at Josefina's theater in Boyle Heights.

After all this delicious commotion the time came for us to buckle down and finish our chapters. We needed to complete the manuscript so we could submit it and find a literary agent.

As we each wrote our chapters, we began to feel like cracked eggs. We felt broken, revealing to each other our innermost demons, pains and strengths. We were talking and writing about love, family and our personal lives. And for some of us that was a touchy subject. At times, our meetings started to become strained. I think most of us were not used to being so vulnerable.

On several occasions, we simply needed time out. But we kept going. I think what inspired us was the success of the monologues, with their critical acclaim and the incredible audience reception. Our stories were helping people; they were healing. Most especially, we were healing.

Just when we thought our chapters couldn't get any better, Laura suggested we hire an editor. She found Sylvia Mendoza. Handing over our 'babies' to her was not easy for us, but we trusted her.

Sylvia took our tear-stained manuscript and dug even deeper. I soon realized she was one of those writers who believed a good manuscript had to have more than tears; it needed blood, too. So be it. She took a red pen and, wow, did we bleed. But the chapters were sharper, clearer and the message was driven home. Sylvia understood what we were trying to say because she was of like mind.

Everything that was happening, the monologues, Sylvia, the chapters were doing a number on the eight of us. We were grow-

ing, learning and healing. It was painful and exhilarating at the same time. It was lot like giving birth.

I used to believe that the power of intention was the strongest spiritual tool. But during this process I learned that the power of decision was even stronger. My understanding of the word intention is wanting something to happen. But to decide was to put it in motion. If we did not love our lives before this project; we certainly would afterward because we decided we would. The writing of our stories led us onto that path.

I wrote the proposal for the manuscript and began the tedious process of submitting it to a list of agents that specialized in the genre of our collected essays. My intention was to submit exclusively to each agent, so that meant waiting for a rejection or a reasonable amount of time with no response, before submitting to the next name on the list. The first agent I submitted to, responded within a week. She passed on the project but she liked the idea and wished us the best of luck. I went on to the second on the list and this time, she asked for the manuscript. Leticia Gomez became our agent.

Margo and I had a pow-wow about our book nearly every day. I kept saying we needed another Latina to write a foreword to the book. I wanted a big name. Not so big that her contract wouldn't allow it (which was the case with Eva Longoria), yet big enough to be known nationwide. I thought of Vikki Carr, *La Bikki*.

Margo assured me it wouldn't hurt to ask. The worst that could happen is she could say no. Two days later, Vikki responded to my email. She wanted to see the manuscript. Margo and I jumped for joy because we knew once she saw the manuscript; she would love it. Margo and I gave thanks to the heavens for yet another miracle.

Several months later, Leticia found our publisher Arte Público Press, and the rest of the story is found in the book you hold in your hands. This book is a dream come true, and a blessing. It