

My Double Identity

by Dariely De La Cruz

The Bronx

What came to mind when I said that?

Usually people think: poverty, crime, ghetto

Rightfully so

I won't deny what you think about the Bronx

But I'm gonna show you my side of it

I wanna show you through my lens,

What it's like to live in the South Bronx

Always loved it

I never thought in a million years that I'd live in Manhattan

But here I am, I'm here, and I'm here to stay

I live about 30 minutes away from home

Home being the Bronx

I go almost every weekend

When I'm not rehearsing for a show

Unfortunately this weekend

I can't be home for the whole time

But I'm going now

I'm going right now and you're coming with me

I want you to see where I live

Let's walk together

Stand right in front of Carlyle Court

25 Union Square West

You'll see a lot of trucks

Markets out, if you're out here early in the day

I'm crossing the street

Directly

Luckily for me, the trains are right across the street

It's easy for me to get home and come back

In about 30-35 minutes

Don't get me wrong

I love the atmosphere of Manhattan

I love seeing so many people

Ambitious, determined, trying to get to where they need to be

But I love the Bronx even more

That's where I became who I am
It's cold
But the warm air from the subway station
Just blew my curls away from my face
It always feel good
I gotta check if I got money in my metrocard
I'm always low
I'm downstairs in the station now
I'm gonna refill my metrocard
I'll be taking the 4 train uptown
And I will get off on 149 street- grand concourse
So will you, you'll be with me
I'm walking to the 4 train with you now
It's a long walk in this subway station
Whenever I'm here, I reflect
On how my week has been
On how my day has been
I listen to the music
Beautiful music
I look at the people
I watch the signs
I'm very observant
Hope you are too
I feel like a whole nother person in Manhattan
Walking straight, still
Went down a little ramp
Walking towards "Uptown and the Bronx"
The 4, 5, 6 line
You can get on the 4 or 5 train
I suggest the 4 train
It's faster and you get to climb up less stairs
But if you take the 5 train,
Get off on 149 street- grand concourse
Same thing, just more stairs
I'll talk to you when I get off the train
Have a safe ride
And reflect because when you get to the Bronx,
It's, at least to me, seems like a whole other state
I just got off the 4 train
You should've too

Turn left and walk straight down til you see the set of stairs
Then go up those stairs and make a left
Walk up a few other stairs
Then exit the turnstiles
Walking
But don't worry
I always feel so comfortable here
Seeing people like me
Just walked out the turnstiles, make a left
And go up this exit
I always feel safer here
Weird huh?
But, the men can get pretty creepy
So watch out for that
I just walked up the stairs
Look around me
Make a left, rather turn your head left
You'll see Popeyes, Burger King, 711, T-Mobile, Dunkin Donuts
The one thing about the Bronx is, all there is is fast food
Which is why so many of us are obese
Keep walking
Just walk straight down
Walking straight down this block
Right next to you, right now, is Hostos Community College
A College my mom said we'd never go to
As you keep walking, you'll see Lincoln Hospital
Just angle your head up
Lincoln Medical Center
My mom never took us to Lincoln Hospital
Even though we live one block away
We go to New York Presbyterian in Manhattan
It's quiet right now
Everyone's walking to work
Going to places
Look to your right
You'll see train tracks
On Park Avenue, you're gonna still keep walking straight
As you walk straight, I want you to think and look,
All you see is Latinos and Blacks
However, I noticed on the train stop

Less and less people are getting off on 125th and more on my stop
The Bronx is being gentrified as I speak to you right now
Which is why I'm apart of Take Back the Bronx
A great organization
Look us up
We do a lot of work
I'm crossing the street now
Be careful
The streets are not paved nicely
Hm, there was a man singing and smiling at me
Homeless man
The man that I always give a little change to,
But today I don't have any
His name is Carlos
Keep walking straight
I'm privileged
I'm privileged to have the opportunity to live in Manhattan
But then, come back to reality where there's poverty
I'd take the Bronx over Manhattan anyday
Some would disagree
I can't explain to you the feeling that I feel
Getting off the train and being back at home
As opposed to getting off the train in Manhattan
Can't explain it
It just feels right
Still walking straight
Lincoln Hospital to my right
To my left right now is AA Dollar Store
A little further back is where my moms
Accounting office used to be
The rent got too high, she had to leave
I also see Taco Bell, don't really like that place
Then there are men who catcall
Probably didn't hear it but
Some mumble, some yell it, some try to touch
Trust me, growing up in the Bronx,
Has given me tough skin, despite how nice I might be
We're approaching the corner, East 149th Street, Morris Avenue
This is my block
Me: Hi!

Scarlet: Oh my God! Mi amor!

Me: How are you?!

Scarlet: Bien. Tu ta muy bella! Ay Dios Mio!

Yo me estoy poniendo vieja, ustedes van subiendo

Y yo bajando

Me: Ay no, no, no, no, no. It's nice seeing you!

Scarlet: Ay, nice seeing you too!

Me: How's John?

Scarlet: He's good. I haven't heard from him for like a month now, pero yeah

Me: He's in Florida right?

Scarlet: He's in Florida mami, todavia. Pero ahi ta el working,

Working. He works in Universal Studios

Me: Okay!

Scarlet: Si, mi amor. Ahi ta el, ya tu sabe. Un hombre

Me: Ya, ya.

Scarlet: Ese un hombre

Me: You did that!

Scarlet: Verdad que si.

Me: You did that!

Scarlet: Exacto. Y como ta la muchacha dime?

Me: Bien, bien. Dayry ta en Washington. Ella va pa,

Dayry goes to Georgetown. Dilenny is in, still in um Long Island.

And I'm in NYU, down in Manhattan. Y la chiquita todavía-

Scarlet: Y la chiquita

Me: La chiquita is in her senior year

Scarlet: Dios mio, mujeres. Pero y ustedes? Ay dios mio,

Yo vi a Mammoy los otros días. (interrupted by another lady)

So entonces, I saw Mammoy the other day, but I saw her from far

And I'm like "Oh my God mira Mammoy alla"

And you know my back problems, yo no podía subir esa escaleras

So the doctor gave me a letter, he was like no you gotta move so they

Put me on the transfer list. It took a few years. Como dos o tres anos.

Me: Oh my God

Scarlet: For them to transfer me, pero Gracias a Dios, I'm there

Me: Y tu espalda ahora?

Scarlet: Yo? Todavia jodia. It's like I'm going to therapy

Me: Never ending

Scarlet: It's never ending mami. And with this weather? Me pongo-

Me: Olle! Y tu no te recuerda que me operaron

Scarlet: Pero ven aca, ya tu ta mejor?

Me: I'm doing better, yeah, todavia estoy en terapia

Scarlet: You see?

Me: Yeah

Scarlet: Como que its never ending. Y tu veras que después,
Cuando se ponga la tiempo así, you're gonna feel discomfort
Y tu va decir "conchale como que dolorcito"

Me: Yes, yes and the weather doesn't help

Scarlet: At all

Me: No, no, no

Scarlet: Te lo digo

Me: Pero mira

Scarlet: Y como, y como ta tu mami? Tu va por donde tu mami ahora?

Me: Yes, I'm going right to mami right there

Scarlet: Ay que chula. Ay no, me la saluda

Me: It was so nice seeing you (as I go in for a hug)

Scarlet: Tan bella mi amor. Dios te me bendiga

Me: Thank you, you too

Scarlet: Saluda me la a las mujeres

Me: I will

Scarlet: Tan bella

Me: I'll tell them you said hi. Bye!

I love her

That's Scarlet

She grew up in my building

Had her son who moved over to Florida

She hasn't heard from him in a while

Oh let me say hi to my friend

I get coffee by him all the time

Me: Hola!

My Friend: Hola!

Me: Como estas?

Friend: Bien!

Me: Mi mama compro cafe hoy?

Friend: Tu mama, no vino hoy

Me: No vino? La voy a comprar una. Una sorpresa.

I'm about to surprise my mom with some coffee

Como estas? Bien Gracias.

I'm at the coffee cart right here at the corner of

149 street where it says Morris Avenue

Sorry, I didn't let you know that I stopped

Just got into conversation
I always see people I know around here
Me: No, no, no, como ella le gusta
Cuanto es?
Friend: Un dollar
Me: One dollar coffee! My favorite part. Hahaha
Muchas gracias amigo!
Friend: Quidate
Me: Por cuánto tiempo vas estar aqui?
Friend: Ya casi me voy
Me: Ya casi?
Friend: Si
Me: Ah pues dame una entonces
Friend: Si, como lo quieres?
Me: Umm light and sweet
Friend: Light and sweet
Pequeno tambien?
Me: Si, pequeno
Gracias amigo
I just got myself a dollar coffee too
You should too
If you're here early in the day
He leaves around 12
Hm?
Friend: Por donde andabas?
Me: Ahora estaba en la escuela, pero ahora voy
A mi mami un pronto
Tengo un show esta noche
Friend: Si?
Me: Si, si
Gracias, muy bien, Gracias
So I just approached the corner
Finally, haha
Waiting to cross the street
You'll see the law office right there
272, that is where my mom works now
She moved about a block over
She's an accountant
But she had to share the office with the lawyer
Rent is too high

The Cat-Caller (CC)

CC: Excuse me, your legs is cold?

Me: No, my legs aren't cold

CC: No

Me: No

Thank you

CC: It's not that cold outside right?

Me: No not that cold

CC: You got a whole husband?

Me: I don't have a whole husband

But I'm not interested

CC: *muffled sounds*

Are you gay?

Me: No, not gay

CC: So you're interested in niggers,

But you not interested in me?

Me: No that's not it, have a good day

CC: You're fire, i love you...

Me: Thank you, thank you

Oh my goodness

Men are crazy

Mami you see that?

That guy

Mom: what happened?

Me: Oh my gosh, I recorded it, you'll hear it

How are you my friend?

Mom's client: Hi. How are you?

I got you coffee mom

Mom: Thank you mami

Mami, you not cold?

Me: No I'm not

Mom: Yes you are

Me: Alright so, I just approached my moms desk

She's the short woman, with the short brown hair

With glasses

The very pretty one, in the office

Ok!

Just had a conversation with my mom

I love her to death

She's the breadwinner of the family

She's always working so hard
I just walked outside the law office
Waiting to cross the street
On this very corner
You should see:
Pay-o-matic Financial Services,
The check cashing place
And the McDonalds over there
Next to my moms office is
Dunkin Donuts and Baskin Robbins
A little further down is Kennedy
My favorite fried chicken spot
Like I said
There's not much healthy food around here
I have to walk three blocks to get a salad
For \$6
Do you hear that music?
That's what it's like being down here
Noise
Latin Music
Hip-hop
I love it
I'll meet you on the other side of the street
Be careful, it's a big street
Once you get to the other side of the street,
Keep walking straight
You'll see a lot of people waiting for the bus here
The bus days?
Oh how I don't miss those
Keep walking straight
Me: Hi!
Person: Hi!
Me: How are you?
Person: I'm good, you?
Me: I'm good
Person: Good?
Me: Yea, I'm good, good.
See ya
Keep walking straight
Walking by a fruit place

Cute fruit market
That's the fresh food that we have around here
Thank God for that
Keep walking straight
You'll see a Tobacco Store and a 99 cent store
Depending on what time of the day,
The 99 cent store might be closed
For religious reasons
The owner there loves me
He's awesome
Cross the street
On the corner of the 99 cent store
You should see "Sabores"
A dominican restaurant
I personally don't like it
Because my mom and my grandmother
Are my restaurant
You'll try it soon
Maybe I can bring you back
So you can have an authentic dominican dish
Keep walking straight
To my right you'll see
K.so nails
That's where I get my nails done sometimes
And next to that, the dental office
I'm walking by the laundromat right now
It's always crazy music going on in there
They're also Dominican owners
Love them
Right next door we have a
Mexican Store
They have great tacos
Stop
You'll see
A&A Grocery and Deli
Closed down
This used to be my family's store
It's actually where my father got shot
By my uncle
Crazy right?

But that's a story for another time
You'll see the Chinese Store right next
They have the best chicken wings
And super super affordable
You'll see an African Market
So many things on one block
So many convenient things
And affordable of course
What I love about the Bronx
Cross the street
When you get to the other side of the street
Stop
Look to your right
That's Alfred E. Smith Highschool
Their football field also
That is my zone high school
My mom said never in a million years would we go there
Me and my three sisters
We actually went to Aquinas Highschool
Further up in the Bronx
A private all girls school
My mom wanted to make sure we got a great education
The sacrifices
That's one word to describe living in the Bronx
With a mother like mine
Tryna get us out of here
To be better
Keep walking straight
You'll see restaurant delices de sabores
A Carribean spot
Never tried it, but will soon
To my left
Look to my left
Maria Lopez Plaza
That is my building
That is where I live
I live on the 5th floor
My grandma lives on the 1st
If we had time, I'd take you to my grandmother's house
But

Maybe we can go later
We are going to the Morris Food
We call it Mami's and Papi's
Grew up going here
Man: Sorry Mamita
Me: No, it's ok
Me: Hola!
"Papi": Hola chula como estas?
Me: Bien!
Here, I get a dollar 25 sandwich
Turkey and cheese with mayo on a hero
Delicious
With my coffee in hand
Get one for yourself
I promise you won't be disappointed
Where can you get a sandwich for \$1.25 in Manhattan?
Me: Um, me puede dar una de turkey, turkey cheese?
Turkey is my personal favorite
Hear that music?
They're also Dominican here
It's a big Dominican population
Makes me feel so at home
I'm about to pay
Return of the Catcaller (CC)
CC: Yo legs!
Me: No
CC: I need you! I need you! I need you! I need you for one second!
Me: Nooo, you don't. I'm fine.
CC: Nah I'm deadass, let me talk to you for one second
Me: No, no
CC: Where's the lucy store?
Me: I don't know
CC: Damn
Me: You should know that
CC: You're mad pretty. You got a whole husband?
Me: No I don't
CC: You said no? Why? You don't want a man?
Me: No
CC: Alright, so then can we talk, can we be friends?
Me: No

CC: Why? I don't wanna do that to you

Me: I don't need a friend. I'm ok now, you can move out the way

CC: I'm good support, I'm good support

Me: Nah, I'm good

UGHHHH!

The guy followed me

These things always happens

It's ok

Please be careful

Men are nuts

Anyway

Walk back to the corner

When you got out of the store

Make a left

This is regular for me

Men like that

sigh

I'm about to cross the street now

I'm going to walk into my building

Bring my grandmother some soda

Canada Dry

It's her favorite

She had eye surgery today

She hasn't been well

So, I'm gonna visit her

Next time

I'll bring you

With me

To see her

But since time is short

I'll talk to you once I leave

The guy called me legs because I have a dress on

With high boots, so you could see my thighs a little bit

Funny huh?

Security guard (SG): Everything working out?

Me: Yes, taking finals right now. So it's been a little stressful

SG: Yea, my son, he's in there now. You remember the year ago?

Me: I remember!

SG: he's 18. His first year.

Me: Wow! His first year? Where does he go again?

SG: He goes to Georgetown

Me: Georgetown! My sister's out in Georgetown. You knew that?

SG: she gettin ready- your sista?

Me: Yea, but she's in graduate school. She's doing nursing

SG: Oh, she's doing, oh she's different. He is in Washington D.C.

Me: Yes, yes. She's also in D.C. but it's just the nursing program

SG: I know. But yea he gettin ready to play basketball for the school

Me: That's amazing!

SG: That's amazing right?

Me: Yess!

SG: Yea but you look good!

Me: Thank you! You too!

Wishing a happy birthday to a neighbor in my building

I was just talking to my security guard from my building

She's amazing

Maybe you should walk in after all

If the door isn't open

Someone will be coming out to open it for you

If anything, to the left

You'll see all of these apartment buildings

Press on 137. That's my grandma's house

I'm 539, but nones home

Walk into the building

Once you have access

Make a left

Walk straight

Make another left

Instead of going on the elevator

Walk out that door

When you walk out the door

Make a left

Walk down straight

You'll pass by the numbers as they get lower

My grandmothers house in 137

Go all the way in the corner

With a little balcony

Go inside

She's very welcoming

If it's a weekday

She'll serve you food

If it's a weekend
She'll still smile at you with her pretty eyes
The little bit of blonde in the front of her hair
Me and her look like twins
You'll know who she is
Speaking to so many people
Seeing so many familiar faces all the time
Makes me feel at home
But it also tells me that
I need to move on
Not move on from the Bronx
But move on out
Become professional
And come back
In the future
As a congresswoman
I take pride in the South Bronx
Not a lot of people do
My mom doesn't still
Meanwhile, she grew up in this very building
In the first floor
And moved out to the fifth floor
When she had all four girls
And my brother
Intergenerational poverty
Do you know what that means?
It's a cycle of poverty
Where one's kids also remains in that same cycle
As the parents
That is what happened with my mother
Granted
My grandmother is an immigrant from the Dominican Republic
And my mom was the only one
Born here out of all her siblings
But I'm gonna break that cycle
While I love the Bronx
I'm not gonna stay here forever
What I will do is advocate
What I will do is in the future, keep this community strong
I wish you were here for the huge parade

With music and food and laughter and kids
That'd be so fun
But again
Maybe I'll take you next time
This doesn't have to be the last time you come to the Bronx
And remember
This is only a small portion of the Bronx
A very small part of it
But it's my part
And I want to keep it safe
I wanna make it better
I will make it better
Let's go say hi to my grandma
You're about to hear a lot of spanish
So don't worry
I'll translate later
Conversation with Mammoy (my grandma) in Spanish
Me: Mammoyyyyyy
Mammoy: Que tu hacia afuera con ese frío?
Me: Yo estaba hablando
 Como te sientes?
Mammoy: Me duele el ojo
 Viene del hospital en la ochenta
 Viene con Nini (aunt)
 Me duele mucho
 Me operaron el otro hace un mes
Me: Pero mira, te ves linda
Mammoy: Si?
Me: Ay si, tu pelo y to
 Yo no se como-
Mammoy: Mi cabeza lo lave fue sábado
 Y mira todavia esta lindo
Me: NO!
Mammoy: Si, Maria me lo hizo y siempre me lo hace bien
 Manana va ser ocho dia
Me: Mammoy no!
Mammoy: Uh huh! Pues si Mammoy
I love my grandmother
I just sat here and enjoyed my sandwich with her
You should probably sit here and eat your sandwich too

I know she only speaks Spanish
But she's super sweet
I told her you'd be coming
She loves visitors
Walk a little bit
Into the house
You'll see here in a little hallway
A bunch of pictures of my family
My nephew
My cousin
My own grandma herself years ago
My mother
My aunt
My sisters and I
She keeps pictures of all of us
Keep walking
You'll see a little mistletoe
If you look up
The living room
So home-y
My favorite place to be
My grandmother's my second mother
If you look to the right
You'll see the Divino Nino
My grandmother's very religious
That's how I was brought up
I pray a lot because of her
I'm Catholic
I go to Church with her on Sunday's
My favorite time to spend with her
I feel so blessed
And so fortunate to be so close to my family
Sit in the living room
Enjoy your sandwich
Or maybe in the kitchen with my grandmother
Whatever you want
Soak in the energy
And the beautiful glassware
I could stay here all day
I wish I could

But I have a show tonight
I'm about to leave
Myra (my cousin): echar pa'lante echar pa'lante
Me: Echar pa'lante
Echar pa'lante
That means to move forward
Everytime I see my grandmother
She gives me a peep talk
She boosts my confidence
Whenever I'm feeling down
She's the person I go to
My mother too
My father is out working
Hes amazing
He tells me about the street life
He tells me to be careful and what to do
My moms all about education
They have two different focuses
My grandmother is about my wellbeing
And for that I really appreciate her
We're so similar
The other woman in the background
Who was speaking is my cousin
Who came from DR recently
I just left my grandmother's house
And I'm walking
Made a slight right
Back by the stairs
Walking straight to make another slight right
And go out the door I came in
Passed the elevators
Make a right and walk out the building
I'm heading straight down
Straight down where I was before
Across the street
From my mother
The law office
You can go back in to say "bye" to her if you want
She might be busy
She's always busy

And walk straight back up to the train
There's so much to see here
I love to be here
Going back to Manhattan from the Bronx
Leaves me with a new determination
More ambition
To help the people of my neighborhood move up
To be the best I/they could be
To help my family
I never forget where I come from
It's a big part of me
And I take pride in it
No matter what stereotypes
No matter what stereotypes
Might come with it
I'm back in Manhattan
Now you see
The double life I live
The pressure
To get my family out of the hood
A pressure to not forget where I come from
And do better for them
By them
Thanks for letting me share this with you
Hope it isn't the last time you visit the South Bronx