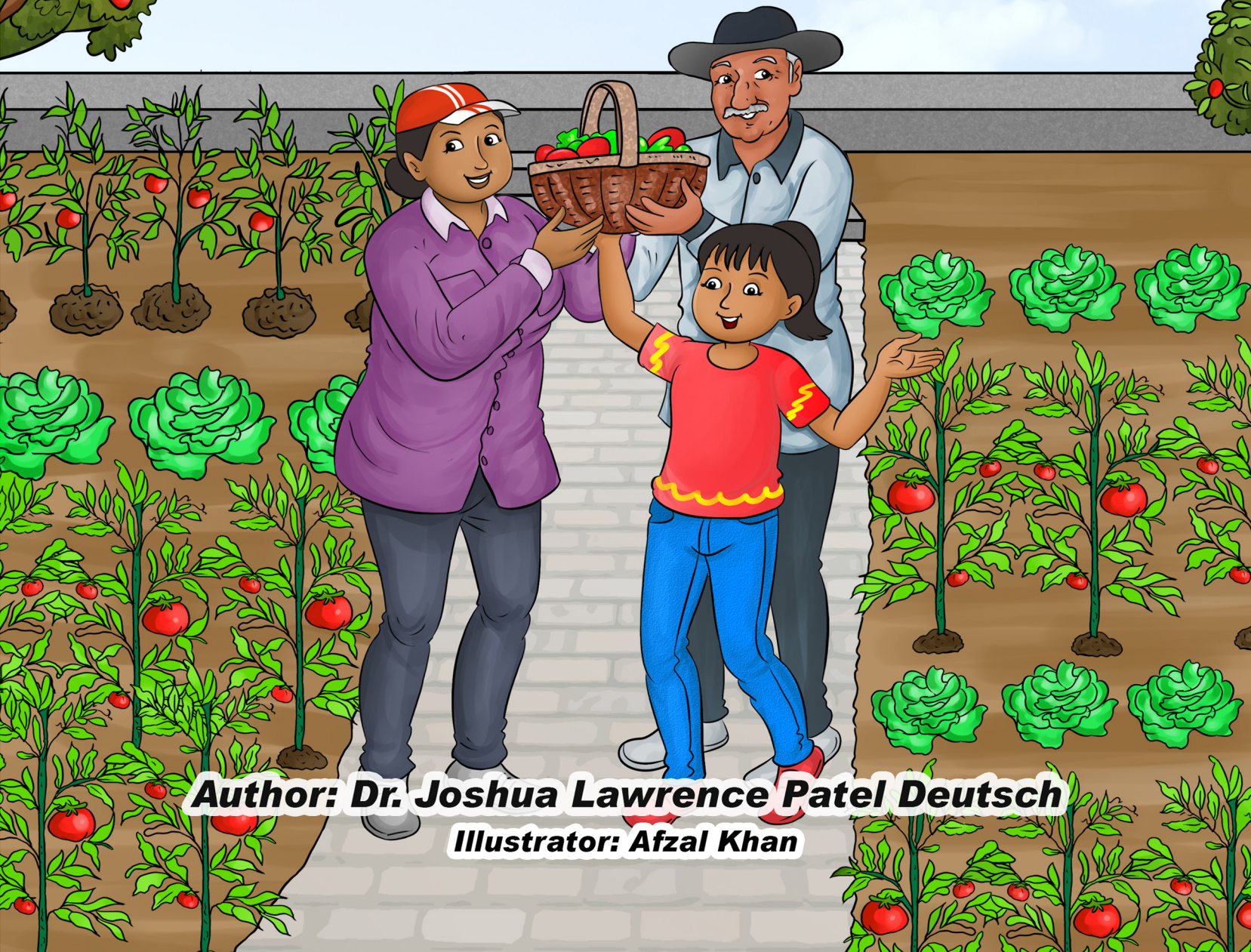


HOW

TÍA GUADALUPE BEAT DIABETES



Author: Dr. Joshua Lawrence Patel Deutsch

Illustrator: Afzal Khan

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When Tía Guadalupe sat down to talk with me, I knew it was important.

“Zenaya, I need a favor,” Tía said. “This afternoon I have a doctor’s appointment, and I need your help with the English.”

“Of course, Tía,” I replied. “I’m happy to help.” I’m the only member of my family who speaks English, so I’m used to helping them.

“Thank you, Zenaya,” Tía said. “This means a lot to me.”



Tía picked me up just as school got out. I could tell she was nervous.

“What’s wrong, Tía?”

“A week ago the doctor tested me for diabetes, and today I get the results.”

Both of Tía’s parents have diabetes. She once told me that she was afraid of getting it too.



The doctor was a young woman from México. She greeted us with a big smile but then changed her expression to deliver the bad news:

“Guadalupe, the laboratory tests show that you have diabetes.”

Tia was trying hard to hold back tears. I held her hand with both of mine.



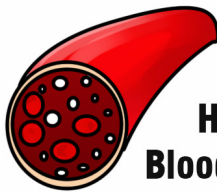
“With diabetes, too much sugar builds up in the blood because the body loses the ability to lower it,” the doctor explained. “It’s just like how water rises in the sink when the drain gets clogged. The high sugar damages the heart, eyes, kidneys, and nerves. Although the damage occurs over many years, we want to bring the blood sugar down as soon as possible. Healthy food and exercise are the best ways to lower your blood sugar, but sometimes, medicines are also needed.”

Diabetes Complications

Normal
Blood sugar



High
Blood sugar



Brain
(risk of stroke)

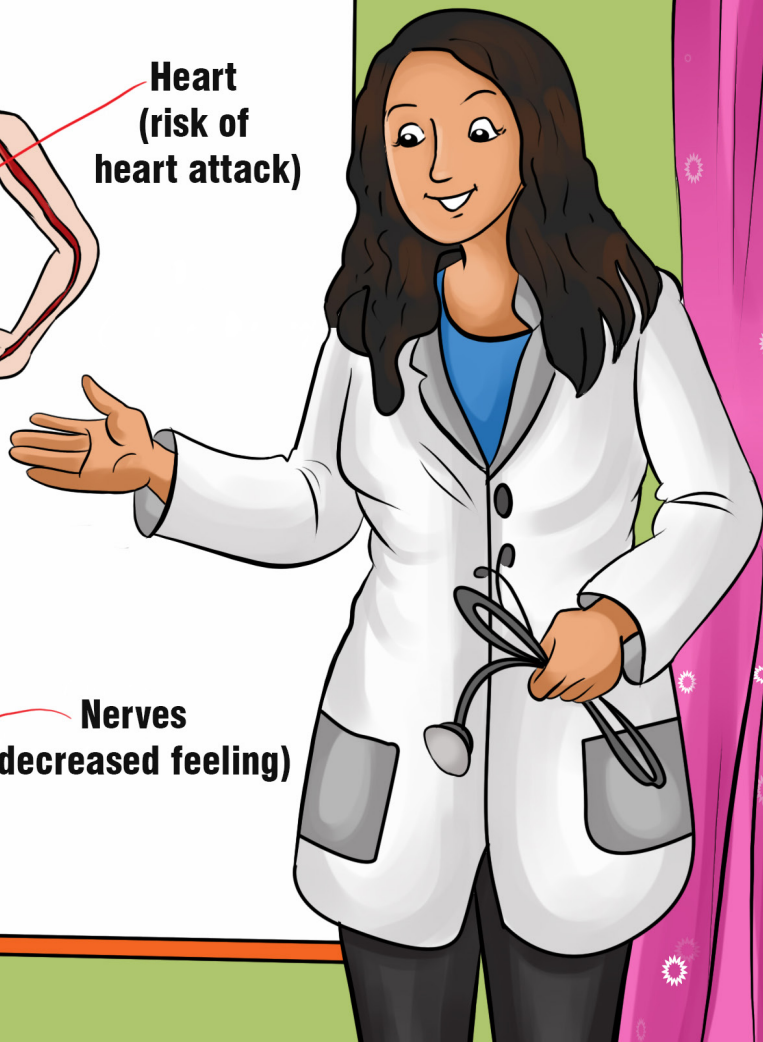
Eye (bad Vision)

Heart
(risk of
heart attack)

Kidney
(kidney damage)

Blood Vessels
(bad blood flow)

Nerves
(decreased feeling)



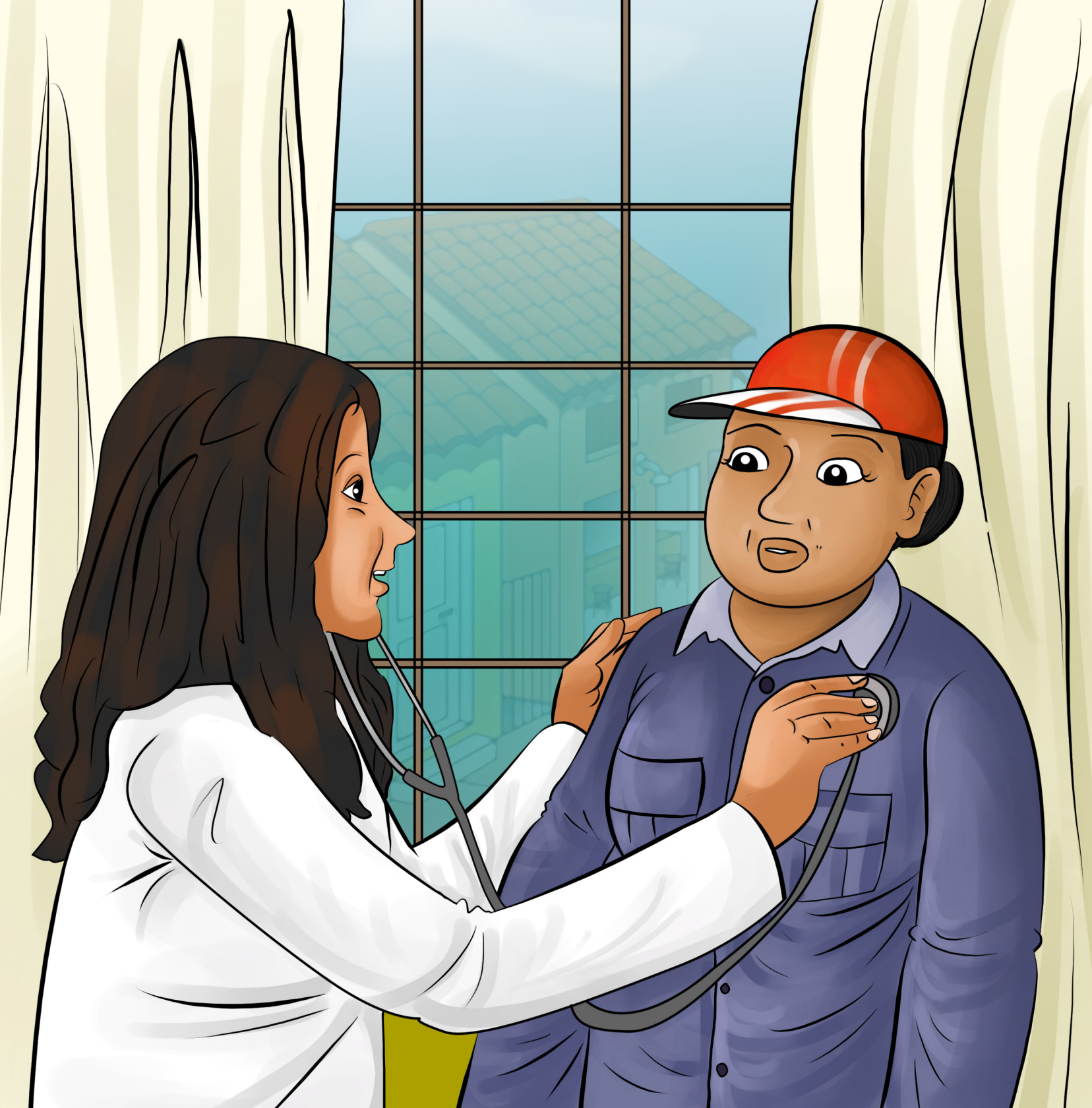
The doctor listened to Tía's heart and lungs with her stethoscope.

"How did I get diabetes?" Tía asked.

"The biggest cause of diabetes is being overweight, but foods and drinks with sugar also increase the risk. Since your parents have diabetes, your chances of getting it were higher from the start."

"How do I fix it?" asked Tía.

"You can't cure diabetes," replied the doctor, "but you can prevent damage to your body by keeping your blood sugar low. Your goal is to eat a healthy diet and exercise every day. Do you think you can do that?"



“I think I can,” Tía said.

“You have three months to work on your healthy goal,” said the doctor. “If you can lose five pounds, you may not need to start medications.”



On the car ride home, Tía looked distressed. “I’ve tried to lose weight so many times but it never works. I don’t know how I’m going to do it.”

“Maybe the whole family can help,” I suggested. “If we all start eating healthier, and get rid of the junk food, it will be easier for you to achieve your healthy goal.”

“I know, Zenaya,” Tía said, “but I don’t want to burden the rest of the family.”

I knew that Tía would never ask for help, but I had made up my mind to change the way my family eats. After all, I felt scared for the whole family. I don't want my parents to get diabetes, and I don't want to get diabetes either.



When we got home, Mamá was in the kitchen cooking carnitas with French fries and a noodle soup. My abuelos were already seated at the table with their diabetes supplies. First, they prick their fingers and put a drop of blood on a piece of plastic that they stick into a machine. The machine tells them how much sugar is in their blood.

“242, very high,” sighed Abuelo. He took a needle and drew up some liquid from a glass vial. Then he injected it into his stomach. Tía looked scared as she watched the painful process.

“How come you can’t just take a pill?” I asked Abuelo. “Before, yes,” he replied, “but now my diabetes is too advanced. The doctor says the pills aren’t strong enough.”

“This medicine is terrible,” added Abuela. “First my sugar is too high and then the medicine drops it too low. Plus, I can’t feel my toes anymore and my kidneys are going bad.”

“Have you tried to eat a healthy diet?” I asked Abuela. “I try, Zenaya, but it’s hard. We all like to eat good food.” Then Abuela paused, looked me in the eye, and changed her answer: “I wish I would’ve started eating healthy a long time ago. Then I wouldn’t have to deal with any of this.”



Mamá brought over a pitcher of water and a big bottle of soda for drinks.

I wanted to tell everyone about our visit to the doctor, but I didn't know how to start. Besides, it was Tía's job to share the news with the family.

But Tía sat quietly and barely touched her food. At night, I had trouble falling asleep. I had to think of a plan to protect my family from diabetes and help Tía meet her healthy goal.

Then, I thought about my next door neighbor Señor González. At 70 years old, he still works in the fields and keeps a vegetable garden in his front yard. He must know how to eat healthy. I decided to talk with him the next day.



The next morning I found Señor González already in his vegetable garden tending to his tomato plants.

“Do you want a tomato?” he asked me.

“Sure,” I responded.

He grabbed a big, red tomato from one of his plants and handed it to me. “Well,” he began, “aren’t you going to eat it?”

I felt confused. I had never just bitten into a big tomato before.

“Trust me,” he assured me. “It’ll be the best tomato you’ve ever had.”

I took a bite. It was juicy, sweet and packed with all sorts of interesting flavors.

“Wow,” I declared. “This tastes nothing like the tomatoes from the grocery store.”

“Of course,” responded Señor González.

“Store tomatoes are picked while green and then ripen in the truck. They travel all the way from México. Most people have no idea how delicious fresh fruits and vegetables are.”



“Señor González, how do you eat healthy?” I asked.

“Zenaya, I’ve lived in this country for twenty years, but I still don’t eat American food. In Oaxaca, we eat beans, nopales, corn tortillas and lots of fresh vegetables. Real food comes from the ground, like that tomato you just ate. It keeps you strong and healthy. Packaged food is full of salt, sugar, fat and a lot of strange chemicals. We have to be careful about what we put in our bodies.”



When I returned to my house, Mamá was making huevos rancheros with ham and fried potatoes. There was a big container of orange juice and a plate of buttered toast.

“I have something to say,” I declared.

I looked at Tía. Her eyes told me that she trusted me to say the right thing.

“Tía has diabetes,” I said, “and the rest of us could get it too. Tía's healthy goal is to lose weight in the next three months or she will need to start medications. If we want to help Tía, we should eat beans with tortillas and vegetables like Señor González.”



“Zenaya is right,” Tío began. “Every day I eat carnitas with chips and a soda. After lunch I feel tired and my knees hurt in the fields. We should go back to eating village food.”

“Zenaya has taught us something important today,” Papá said. “We should be proud of the healthy food from our roots. This is the diet we should teach to our children. The junk food is making us sick. We should stop bringing it into our house.”



After Papá's speech, I knew that my plan to change our diet had worked. We figured out the solution to diabetes that so many people are searching for. It's really hard for one member of a family to change the way she eats. But if everyone in the family changes the diet together, then there will be nothing but healthy food in the house. The change will help Tía with her diabetes and make everyone else healthier too.

Tía Guadalupe thanked everyone for their support. Mamá turned to me and asked, "What should we do next?"

"We should throw away all the bad food," I said. I pointed to the soda bottles lined up in our cabinets. Mamá opened them up and poured them into the sink one after the other. The whole family cheered. We threw away juices, chips, candy, pan dulce, sugared cereal, and everything we wouldn't want our loved ones to eat.

"No more," Mamá declared. "Not in our house and not in our bodies." Then Mamá took out her cooking pot and jar of black beans. "Only the best for my family," she said with a warm smile.

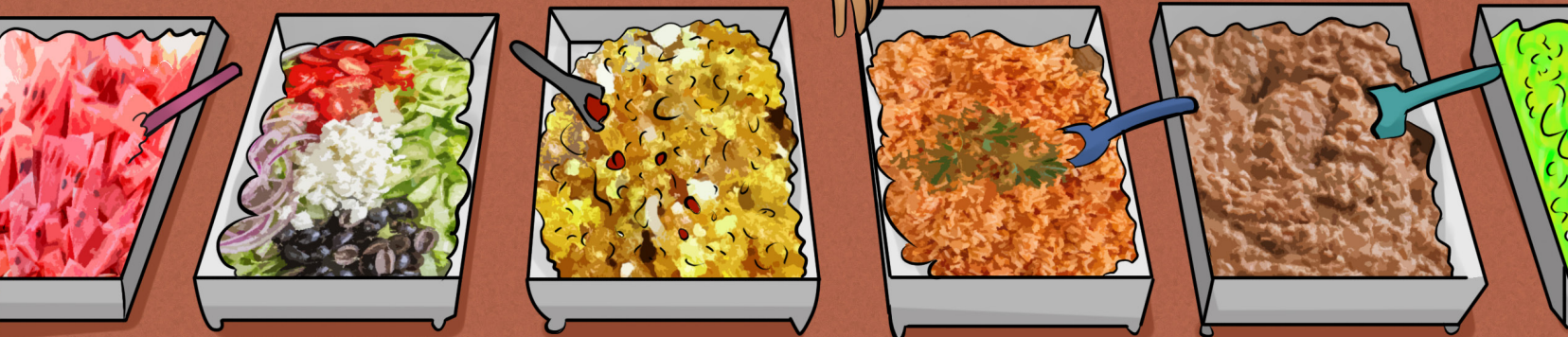


For my family, going back to village food was like falling in love all over again. Tío started bringing fresh produce back from the fields, and Mamá found all the best deals on vegetables from the store. Tía Guadalupe walks around the park for 45 minutes, every morning. Sometimes Tío walks with her. He has less pain in his knees now that he's exercising and eating better. With the help of Señor González, I planted a vegetable garden in our backyard.



Last week we celebrated Tía's 37th birthday. Rather than the usual unhealthy party food, we made vegetarian tacos, salad, rice, beans, guacamole, watermelon, and homemade iced tea for refreshments.

Many guests complemented us on our dietary changes and said that their doctors were telling them to do the same thing. I realized that diabetes is a problem for our whole community, and it's our responsibility to serve healthy food to our guests.



Three months later, Tía Guadalupe and I returned to the doctor. Tía had lost 6 pounds.

“Congratulations,” exclaimed the doctor. “You accomplished your healthy goal. You still have diabetes but your blood sugar is lower and you don’t have to start medications.”

“Thank you, doctor,” replied Tía. “I did this with the help of my family, especially this amazing sobrina.” Tía looked at me and smiled. “We’ve suffered from diabetes for too long, and now we’re going to beat it with a healthy diet.”

I smiled back at her. I knew I didn't have to be scared of diabetes anymore.



This book was created for the benefit of farmworkers in the Salinas Valley who want to read to their children. All profits go towards reading and health promotion for farmworker families. This book and others may be downloaded from our website, copied and freely distributed. Bulk purchasing is available for health clinic reading programs. Find out more by going to our website: justicewithhealth.com



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Other books by this author:

