

BRAIDING

Excerpted from Narration in the Film, "Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of Global Community."

You remember, when sitting there braiding your daughter's hair that she looks a lot like you at her age and like your mother and your grandmother before her.
She is going to school. "Always use your 10 fingers your mother told you when your father took you out of school.

What is the use of school to a girl who cooks and cleans? A kitchen scholar?
But the resistance of your ancestors boiling in you, kept the spirit alive.
You use your 10 fingers, gripping the contours of a pen to write words for women.

You remember thinking, while braiding your daughter's hair that she looks a lot like her mother, who looked a lot like her grandmother and her grandmother before her.
Although you left your mother's gravesite to find work in the city, you and your sister are as close as a needle in your hand or the bus on the crowded city.
Sisters who must compete for limited housing and jobs but sisters who protect one another with all their might from violence of everyday life.

You remember thinking when braiding your daughter's hair that she looks a lot like your mother and her mother, who worked their fingers to the bone to create a better life for you...uprooted from the soil,
You plant on concrete and tin...harvesting the weeds of inequity that grow in the cracks of makeshift homes.
Women like you are never listened to even as they cradle the world in their arms. Women like you, who speak up to the boss...even if it's in a tongue that the privileged few don't value....Creole.

You remember thinking, while braiding your daughter's hair that she looks like the pictures of your grandmother, only a fading memory, since she died when you were just a baby.
"Women are the pillars of society", you are told. They hold up family, community, the country. Women bear life entrusted to them, life that is fragile and unjust when you leave the womb. But, you know that it doesn't have to be this way....that another world is possible.
If you can't reach the promised land, you'll give your shoes to you daughter....so that she can.

You remember thinking, when braiding your daughter's hair, that she looks a lot like your Mother. Your mother looked a lot like your grandmother and her grandmother before her. You name each braid after the 999 women who are boiling in your blood....for their sweat,their pain, their tears.

One braid for your mother and her ancestors.
One braid for your own struggles and victories.
One braid for your daughter and her daughter after her.
Like this, you link your past with your present and your future.
Like this, you see hope and this is your testament to the Haitian women who lived, died and lived again.