

Mother and Daughter Learn to Live Together, When It's Easy and When It's Hard

By ALEXIS REHRMANN

When a smile forms on the left side of Marise Acosta's face, it pulls the stiffer right side along with it, and spreads out to her daughter, Clarice



Pulliza, who is constantly by her side.

The weakness that affects Ms. Acosta's entire right side is caused by cerebral palsy. With the stiffness in her mouth and tongue, it can be hard for Ms. Acosta, 42, to make herself understood.

But she is game to try.

"It happened a long time ago," Ms. Acosta said about her condition, which began with seizures at age 8. She has lived with the challenges of cerebral palsy and mental retardation for most of her life.

These days, the seizures have stopped, but the weakness remains. "They stopped when I had you," Ms. Acosta said to her daughter.

When Ms. Acosta cannot make her meaning clear, Ms. Pulliza, 18, translates.

But Ms. Pulliza has not always been there to help. She chose to move back in with her mother a year and a half ago.

"I was always living in foster care and I never knew what it was like to live with my parents," Ms. Pulliza said of her decision to return.

Ms. Acosta was happy when her daughter was born, but caring for a baby was hard.

"I did it," Ms. Acosta said, "but I had nothing done in the house."

She added: "She was crying too much. She didn't want food. She wanted sweet."

An anonymous tip to Child Protective Services led to Ms. Pulliza's placement in foster care at age 2. Ms. Acosta still feels conflicted about that, though at the time she did not fight it.

"I was still learning," she said, "but I didn't know I was still learning, to be a mother."



Michael Falco for The New York Times

Marise Acosta, right, who has had cerebral palsy since her youth, at home with her daughter, Clarice Pulliza, and grandson, Isaiah Cortes.

A Brooklyn woman with cerebral palsy celebrates renewed family ties.

Ms. Pulliza's foster family lived two blocks from Ms. Acosta, and they saw each other weekly. Today, Ms. Acosta and her daughter share a two-bedroom apartment in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, with Ms. Pulliza's 1-year-old son, Isaiah Cortes. They are learning to live together as a family.

"Sometimes it's easy, sometimes—" Ms. Pulliza trailed off.

"It's hard," her mother finished.

Ms. Pulliza is able to help with housework, especially mopping, which she says is hard for her mother. Like many mothers and teenagers, they have disagreements about how late Ms. Pulliza should stay out.

"I want to move out, but I don't know how long it will take me," Ms. Pulliza said. She is a freshman at the College of Staten Island and plans to major in psychology.

Previously recorded	\$6,071,392.38
Recorded Wednesday	81,310.00
Total	\$6,152,702.38
Last year to date	\$6,140,119.03

"Take your time," her mother advised. "It's not easy."

Ms. Acosta speaks from experience. She has lived on her own since she was 22. She pays her bills with the \$303 she receives each month in disability benefits supplemented by a \$314 monthly pension that began after her father's death. Ms. Acosta pays \$144 toward her rent each month, supplemented by Section 8.

Ms. Acosta also works, stuffing bags with coupons and advertisements, in an employment program at the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service, one of seven agencies supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund. She is paid by the bag, and takes home about \$25 every two weeks. "I'm not very fast," she said with a laugh.

Antoinette McKenzie, 28, a Medicaid service coordinator at the Brooklyn Bureau, was impressed by Ms. Acosta's independence. "She strug-

gles for a lot of the things that she wants," Ms. McKenzie said. "Instead of relying on family, anything she wants she works really hard to get it. It's also her choice. She does everything on her own."

In advance of the holidays, Ms. McKenzie asked Ms. Acosta, "What is it that you would like, if someone was going to give you something for Christmas?"

They settled on a new mattress to replace the one Ms. Acosta had, which was found in the street 11 years ago. Ms. Acosta received \$250 of Neediest Cases money to buy the mattress, which arrived in November.

"It's good," Ms. Acosta said. "I sleep good."

Ms. Acosta is finding comfort in her home, filled again with family. How has life changed? "It changed for the good," she said. "I got a next page. A new life."