



## López Family Values

This family's attitude toward their bodies and menstruation has changed over the years. Aszana, her mother, Vanessa, and her grandmother, Rosa, share their period stories with each other.

**Aszana López-Bell:** Hi, my name is Aszana López-Bell. Um, I'm 20 years old right now, and I'm talking to my mother.

**Vanessa López:** Hi, I'm Vanessa López. I'm 41 years old, and I'm talking to my daughter, Aszana Lila Rosa López-Bell.

**Rosa López:** Mi nombre es Rosa López. Nací agosto 28 del 45...nací aquí en Santiago...

*[Translation: My name is Rosa López. I was born August 28, 1945...I was born here in Santiago...]*

**Narration:** Welcome to Feeling My Flo, a podcast where we see menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies. I'm Kamilah Kashanie. My pronouns are she and her.

For this episode, we'll talk to three generations of menstruators in the López family: a daughter, a mother, and a grandmother, who all use the pronouns she and her. And, we'll travel from the Dominican Republic in the 1950s to New York City in the 1990s to Baltimore, Maryland in 2019.

We'll start with the youngest, Aszana. When she was growing up, Aszana noticed that her mom didn't want her to feel shame about her period. Now, she realizes how important that was. Here she is talking to her mom about it...

**Aszana:** I think you did a good job with teaching me how to use the pad and tampon...like, the first time I had it, giving me the hot water bottle and such. You did a really good job of normalizing it, not making it anything weird.

**Narration:** But, there was *one* thing Aszana didn't see the same way her mom did.

**Aszana:** You wanted to throw me a party to celebrate me being a woman.  
Yeah, I didn't really think it was something to be partied about.

**Narration:** Aszana is talking about a "period party." Here's the basic idea: after someone experiences their first period, sometimes parents or friends throw a party as a way to create a safe space to ask questions about menstruation. It's also a way to celebrate your period as a special occasion.

**Vanessa:** I think for me the period party was just you're being ushered into this beautiful world...

**Narration:** That's Vanessa López, Aszana's mom.

**Vanessa:** ...the joy and sadness and frustration of your cycle. That takes a long time to learn, but there's a million people before you that all did it.

**Narration:** Vanessa was excited when Aszana got her first period—she wanted to mark the occasion. But, Aszana felt differently.

**Aszana:** That just felt really awkward: "Hey, let's have everyone over and just discuss this thing." It felt more private.

**Vanessa:** To be honest, I probably wouldn't have wanted my mom to throw me a period party either. [Laughs] At like 13, that maybe sounds horrific, because I do remember sort of feeling shameful about it...just like the awkwardness of middle school and the awkwardness of your body. It took me a while to really embrace my period. With the intention of the period party, I wanted you to get there before I did.

**Narration:** To understand why Aszana and Vanessa think differently about menstruation, let's look back one generation. Here's Vanessa telling Aszana about what she remembers from *her* childhood.

**Vanessa:** I guess when I think about Abuela, I think Abuela did a really good job of just teaching me to love my body in general. And, I think given the time that Abuela grew up in, she didn't really have the language to talk about it too much, but she was like, "Here's this thing, here's how you handle it."

**Narration:** Vanessa grew up in New York City in the '80s and '90s. And she was thirteen years old when she first got her period.

**Vanessa:** So, I was sitting in the bathroom, and I remember I wiped myself and saw blood and screamed out to my mom, "I got my period!"

**Narration:** Vanessa’s mom sent Vanessa’s brother to the bodega to get pads. On the one hand, Vanessa was relieved to get her period, ’cause she was the last of her friends to get it. On the other hand...

**Vanessa:** It's gonna sound like, I almost hate to say it... I guess a part of me felt kind of dirty, like, “Oh man, now I have this period.”

**Narration:** Vanessa felt like her period was something dirty for a long time.

**Vanessa:** I remember, you know, going to school, and if you had your period, you would hide your pad in your pocket or under your shirt.

**Narration:** It wasn’t until she was in her twenties that she started to think about her period and her body differently. And, her mind really started to change once she started reading feminist books.

**Vanessa:** I think especially I'd read *The Red Tent*, and the idea was women got their periods, and they would be put into this red tent, and sort of they were ostracized from the men, because they were on their cycle.

But, there was also this part where it was like a party, ’cause all the ladies were up in the tent, and they were taking care of each other, and they were like, “Oh you have cramps,” like, “here's some oil to rub on it.”

**Narration:** Reading those books made Vanessa more aware of her body.

**Vanessa:** Having my period put me in connection to the cycles of life. The week before my period, I'm hyper focused, productive. I could do anything...

**Narration:** And that was empowering for her.

**Vanessa:** ...and I think for me it started in books and these women claiming their bodies as powerful sites.

**Narration:** It wasn’t long after that, that Vanessa started to see her own body as one of those “powerful sites.” And, she especially felt that power when she had a daughter of her own. Here she is telling Aszana about it...

**Vanessa:** When you were little, you probably were like 10 months old, and I was really sick, and I remember calling the pediatrician, and I was like, “I have the flu. What am I supposed to do?” He was like, “You breastfeed her, ’cause she's going to get all your antibiotics.” And so, I'm breastfeeding you in the middle of the night, and I'm sweating profusely because I have the flu.

And, I just remember at some point like looking down at you and being like, *Damn, I've sustained this life*. And, for me, that made me feel

really powerful. I think probably the closest I've ever felt to God. But, it also made me be like, *Dang, my body did that.*

**Narration:** That sense of power that Vanessa felt... she never stopped feeling it. And, as Aszana became older, Vanessa knew that she wanted to pass that powerful feeling on. And sometimes, that meant Vanessa did things a little differently than *her* mom.

**Vanessa:** Abuela used to call the vagina the *cucaracha*.

**Aszana:** Yeah, I remember. [Laughs]

**Vanessa:** Which is a cockroach, which is kind of funny and maybe cute, but I hated cockroaches. I thought they were disgusting. Do you remember what I used to call your vagina?

**Aszana:** A flower.

**Vanessa:** Yeah. [Laughs] And, I for real thought about that, because a flower blooms and it grows and it changes and goes through these processes, right? I think part of why I wanted to have a daughter was because I'm a woman, and I wanted to share these experiences. So, I did very much think about how I wanted you to feel about your body.

**Narration:** Now let's hear from Rosa López, mother to Vanessa and grandmother to Aszana. She lives in the Dominican Republic, so she talked to our producer Mia from a studio there.

**Rosa:** Te digo que mi niñez en Santiago fue muy hermosa, porque tuve unos padres muy cariñosos, y unos padres que...

*[Translation: My childhood in Santiago was beautiful, because I had very caring parents that!..]*

**Narration:** Rosa was the youngest of twelve kids growing up in Santiago, a city in the DR.

Rosa told Mia she was thirteen years old when she got her first period. It happened one day when she was swimming in a river near her home.

**Rosa:** El primer día que a mí me bajó mi periodo, yo me estaba bañando en un río. Salí del río corriendo y llegué a mi casa. Y llegué llorando, "¿Dónde mamá?" Y le dije a mi mamá, que yo me había cortado porque estaba sangrando.

*[Translation: The first time I got my period, I was swimming in a river. I ran out of the river and got home, crying "Where's mom?" I told my mom that I cut myself because I was bleeding.]*

**Narration:** Rosa says she saw blood and didn't understand what was happening. She ran back to her

house, crying. And she told her mom she must have cut herself.

**Rosa:** Y ella me dijo, "No, mi hija, ven. Tú y yo tenemos que hablar." Y me llevó a una habitación, me sentó, y me dijo lo que a mí me había pasado. Lo que ya yo era...que yo había desarrollado y yo era una señorita.

*[Translation: She said to me, "No, daughter, come. Let's talk." She took me to a bedroom, sat me down, and explained what happened to me. That I was...that I had developed into a young woman.]*

**Narration:** Rosa's mom said, "Let's talk." She sat Rosa down and explained that she had developed into a young woman.

**Rosa:** También tenía una funda con muchos pañitos cortados. Las madres hacían paños de la tela que iba quedando. Con eso era que uno...se cuidaba.

*[Translation: She also had a bag full of small rags. Back then, mothers would make sanitary pads from leftover fabric....and that's what we used to take care of ourselves.]*

**Narration:** She also gave her a bag full of small rags. Rosa says that back then, the mothers in DR would make sanitary pads from leftover fabric, and that's what menstruators used to take care of themselves.

**Rosa:** Me sentía extraña, porque la verdad yo no quería que eso me pasara.

*[Translation: I felt strange, because the truth is, I didn't want that to happen to me.]*

**Narration:** Rosa says she felt strange, because she didn't really want this to happen to her. And, soon after that, she realized her cycle was irregular; instead of every month, she'd get her period every *other* month, and she remembers her sisters teasing her about it.

**Rosa:** Mis hermanas...me tenían un nombre feo: una mula. Y eso me hizo mucho daño a mí.

*[Translation: My sisters...they had a mean name for me: mule. That really hurt me.]*

**Narration:** They called her *mula*, a mule, because they said she was never going to have kids. By the way, we checked with a doctor about this, who said an irregular period *can* make getting pregnant more difficult but not impossible, and it can be treated.

Still, at a young age, the teasing caused Rosa a lot of pain, but her close relationship with her mom helped her get through it.

**Rosa:** Mi madre fue una madre amorosa. Mi madre creyó siempre en mí.

*[Translation: My mom was a loving mom. My mother always believed in me.]*

**Narration:** Rosa says her mom was very loving, and she always believed in her.

Rosa would remember that love and support when she moved to the United States a year after that first period came. And 18 years later, she would remember it when she had a daughter of her own.

The way the women in the López family talk about periods has evolved a lot in three generations.

Rosa wanted her daughter not to feel shame about periods, so she taught her about her body. Vanessa wanted her daughter to be able to celebrate her womanhood more than she was able to. And, even though Aszana said “no” to the period party, she has some ideas about what she wants to say to her daughter, if she ever has kids.

**Aszana:** I mean right now, I am not at the stage where I'm like, “It's a beautiful thing, your body,” whatever. But, I would just want to tell her, “It's not dirty.” I feel like, a lot of the time, girls are just supposed to act like nothing's happening.

So. I think I would tell them, you know, “It's okay to not feel completely yourself or just feel like you want to take it slow,” that “You could always talk to me about it.”

**Narration:** We loved talking to these three fierce women. And, our hope is that their openness can inspire you to have conversations with your loved ones too.

**Rosa:** Hay niñas que no conocen la menstruación. Ya cuando tú conoces de la menstruación, de cómo cuidarte, es más fácil, y se cometen menos errores.

*[Translation: There are girls that don't know about menstruation. When you already know about menstruation, about how to take care of yourself, it's easier, and fewer mistakes are made.]*

**Vanessa:** I wanted for you to just know that that was a part of your super power as a girl in the world...

**Aszana:** I used to be afraid to be loud with the pad in the bathroom, because you know, it sounds like you're like opening a bag of chips... but, now I don't really feel very shameful about it.

**Narration:** Feeling My Flo is a resource to help you start important conversations at critical Moments, like when you're figuring out how to talk with someone about your period.

We're here to inform, entertain, and empower. Visit us at [feelingmyflo.com](https://feelingmyflo.com), and follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to join the conversation.

Thanks for listening. Feeling My Flo is produced by Mia Warren. This episode was co-produced by Madison Mullen. Our sound engineer is Carolina Rodriguez. Our intern is Emma Forbes. We're a production of Lantigua Williams & Co. I'm your host, Kamilah Kashanie.



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