

My Friend Luis

Episode 3 — “Raphael”

A podcast by Wayne Jacobsen · myfriendluis.com · March 2021

LUIS: When I was on deep pain — either pain physical or emotional — and when I was alone most of the time in the mountains, when I was working, there was this person come in out of nowhere. He was the only person I had ever, and the only person that actually hugged me — it was him.

WAYNE: Hi, I'm Wayne Jacobsen, and this is My Friend Luis — the story of one of the most engaging men I've ever met, and of the friendship that developed between us. It has transformed both of our lives and left us in grateful awe at the adventure of life on this little planet.

In our last episode, we talked about the abuse Luis suffered at the hands of his brothers, and how his parents failed to intercede for him. In this impoverished village, there was no opportunity for him to find help. But one day, help found him — in the form of a mysterious stranger in the nearby mountains.

I began to hear stories about Raphael long after we had become friends. The stories about him trickled out slowly over years, perhaps testing the waters to see what I would think of him. His first story about a lost cow did sound strange, and it made me wonder what this man would have had in mind pursuing a young boy in the mountains. A few months later, he told me another story, and then more followed. I didn't realize that each of these stories was referring to the same man, who would appear out of nowhere, until I asked him one day. Now the stories seemed even stranger, but the same man would keep appearing in Luis's path without any explanation. The day they first met began with a cruel joke his brothers had played on Luis. But the relationship that Luis and Raphael forged together would not only give Luis the last laugh on his brothers, but also a treasure trove of wisdom that would last a lifetime.

LUIS: The first encounter I had with him was because my brothers played a joke on me on one of my birthdays. First of all, you don't celebrate birthdays in Mexico — I mean, when I was a kid, you don't. Now I'm sure they probably do — people with money do — but back then, you don't. It was just another day. There's no gifts, there's no party, there's no cake, there's nothing, because there's no money, there's no food. So they played this joke to me, and they said, "Hey, we have a gift for you because of your birthday." And I said, "Okay, what is it?" I was really excited. They pointed out, "Here, it's inside that big sock." So I looked inside and said, "What's — I don't see it. It's nothing but manure." And they said, "Yeah, that's your gift." Then they started laughing at me. And I felt angry, disappointed at them.

So we used to have one cow that always got away — always. And it was roaming around up in the mountains. So it was my job, being the smallest in the family, to go up there and find it. Being up there, it's really dangerous, because there is a lot of rattlesnakes, mountain lions. There were also people — they used to call them robachicos, which means they abduct children. And I didn't know why they used to abduct them, until later on in my life — the drug cartels used to take children, kill them, open up their thorax, clean up their thorax, fill them with drugs, and pass them to the U.S. as if they were sleeping

children. So I stopped calling on the cow. You can have a relationship — you grew up with the cows and everything. You start calling them and they're kind of like a dog — used to come to me. So I used to call out on the name of the cow. Her name was Bonita, which means pretty. So I stopped calling on the cow's name.

While I was there, I saw this guy appear in front of me. He was wearing Converse — you know, those Converse shoes — blue jeans, kind of like washed-out blue jeans. He had one of those like Hanes white T-shirts — jeans and these light blue shoes. He was there out of nowhere. He was just there, standing. And when I saw him, I was very, very fearful. I was — I mean, very scared. All of a sudden, he reassured me. He started talking to me: "It's okay. It's okay." He says, "I'm your friend. It's okay. Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt you." And he kept reassuring me about it. But first I didn't trust him. But then he said, "You know what?" He said, "La Bonita" — which is my cow's name — "it's over there. If you follow this path, you'll see it. It's going to be by the fence over there." I knew the area very well. And he kept saying, "By the red oak — it's going to be right under it, right now. That's where it is." And I said, "How do you know it's my cow? And how do you know I'm looking for it?" He says, "Oh," he says, "I know you. I'm your friend." To me at the time, I was like, okay, all right. So I said thanks — I thank him. And then I went — I turn around and I went back. Sure enough, there was a cow there, right under the red oak.

That's the first time I saw him. That was my first encounter with somebody that actually cared about me and kind of loved me. And he was displaying this different love.

One day I was up there in the mountains, bringing nopales, which is cactus. In Mexico — you know, we eat them. So the cactus — and you eat them with eggs and stuff. So there he was again: white T-shirt, blue jeans, blue Converse. When I saw him again — this time I saw him and I kind of trust him. I trust him more. I saw him and I was like, "Hey" — I was more kind of shocked to see him, and kind of a little bit relieved. I said, "Hey, how are you?" And then he said, "Good, how are you doing?" And then he pointed out to one of the manure on the ground. And he pointed out and he says, "You know what — if you come in, if you collect those, you can make a lot of money." And I said, "What do you mean? How am I going to make money?" And he said, "Start collecting them." Okay. Nobody collected those at the time — now everybody does. So he says, "Start collecting those." Okay. "Every time you see a horse — you know, not the cows, but from the horses, it's better. You know, the manure from the horses — pick it up and take it home." I said, "Why would I do that? What am I going to do with that?" He says, "Just do that." I said, "Okay."

So I finished picking up all cactus, went home. The next day, after school and after I did all my chores, I went back and I start picking up, right? — the manure from the horses. Some of it was wet, which — it's really heavy. And when you put it on top of you, it gets gross, because all the juices ooze down. Then there he was again. And then he says, "Oh, good — you're doing that, what I told you." I said, "Yeah," but I was kind of like upset. I said, "But this doesn't make any sense to me. Look, look — I'm all covered on, you know, all this water from the manure." And he says, "Let me help you." He grabbed it and then he put it on top of him. I said, "No, no, don't do that." And he put it on top of him, on the shoulder. He was walking in front of me, not saying a word. I didn't tell him where to go. He knew exactly where to go. In my mind, I

was just looking — looking at his shirt. I said, oh, he's going to get so dirty. But I didn't see anything rolling down. He walked and walked, then he got close to my house. And when he was near my house, he says, "Look, if you follow this path, it will take you straight to your house." And I said, "I know — but how do you know that?" Then he looked at me. He says, "I'm your friend, remember?" And he says, "Here — here's the manure." When he took it off, it was clean. I didn't see anything. And I said, "How did you do that? You're not even dirty." He just smiled at me and put it down on the floor. And he just said, "I'll see you later." Okay — I said, "Okay." So when I put it back, I was carrying it on my back now, because I didn't want any juices to ooze on me. So it was kind of like dropping them on the back. So I kept collecting the manure.

WAYNE: What are your brothers thinking? You're collecting manure?

LUIS: A chiquillo loco, a niño loco — the crazy kid. Because nobody does that.

So one time I was collecting manure — it was like the fourth or the fifth day of collecting — and then I went to this area. There was a lot, because nobody was collecting. I wanted to — to this place where there were some horses and also some cows. And there was this big bull that everybody was afraid of.

Everybody was afraid of that bull, because the bull was extremely, extremely dangerous. If you have a bull that dangerous, you know, here in the U.S. — oh, they'll remove it right away, and they put it somewhere, right? Over there, they don't — they use it more like other terms, right? There's no sign. Everybody just — word of mouth: "Oh, don't go in that area, because that bull, it's really — you know, will attack you." I don't know why. It'll see people and attack them right away.

So when I went over there, I saw the bull. It was a huge bull. It was wide, and it had black spots on — one big black spot on the right side. Beautiful, humongous bull. And I was watching for the bull. And when the bull turned his back and went back — three football fields away — but I keep kind of venturing deeper and deeper and deeper, waiting for the bull to turn his back. And then I pick up the manure, and all of a sudden I got very distracted. I saw so much manure, and I was so happy that I got distracted. I started picking up manure. When I realized, the bull saw me, and it started making his way towards me, and he was making noises and moving his head up and down — I guess they were threats. And when I saw that — I saw the bull — I pick up the sack of manure, I had put it on my back, and start running back. When I looked back, I saw the bull charging right behind me. I dropped the sack of manure, and then I run for the nearest tree — my plan was to go up on the tree. When I was running, all of a sudden I saw the bull stop. Just stop — stop cold. He didn't stop just on his four legs. No, no — he actually slid with his back legs. That's how he stopped. And I didn't know why. And it was making the gesture — you know, like gestures with the head — and it was waving up and down at that area where I left the sack of manure. And then it just turned around and run the opposite direction.

Then I went back and pick up the sack. I had a slingshot with me. When I pick up the sack of manure and I start running out — because I was very scared — I noticed that I lost it. But then I was so afraid of the bull that I didn't go back. And I was very upset, because it took me like three months of saving to buy that slingshot. And I protected and I cared for that slingshot so much. I even personalized it — you know, in

Mexico, there's this little flowers called colas de ratón, which means rat's tail. If you smear it against your pants or something, it stayed there — it stains it and stays there for a long time. And I remember painting it and everything with different flowers. And it was beautiful to me.

On the way back, I was crying. All of a sudden — I don't know where — I see my friend right there in the middle of the road, waiting for me. And then he waved. He waved at me. And when I saw him, I started walking faster towards him. And then he said, "Here, let me help you." He was always there when I was distressed — even angry, too — when I was really sad or physical pain, and usually in the mountains. And he helped me. He only engaged when necessary. He grabbed the manure and he started walking. He always led the way — he always knew where to go. Anyways, I just went along with him. As usual, he just said, "Okay, if you go this — follow this path." And then I was upset, so I said, "Yeah, if I follow this path, I will get home. I know, I know — don't you think I know that?" He looked at me. He says, "Why are you upset?" And I said, "Never mind. Just give me the manure." I was kind of mad at him, too, because he sent me on this quest to collect manure for no reason that he never actually told me yet — why do I need this manure for? When I grabbed the — held the manure from him, I started walking, turned my back on him. And then he called my name. And he says — three times, he says — "Luis." The reason he called my name three times is because I didn't want to turn around and look at him. I was upset. I was mad at him. And then he says, "Luis." I turn around and I said, "What?" "This — are you mad because of this?" So he reached on his backpack, and — the slingshot. I looked at him and I said, "My slingshot! Where was it? Where was it?" And then he said, "Oh, you left it over there. When you dropped the manure, I picked that up from there." So I don't know if the bull saw him. I don't know.

On the seventh day of collecting all this manure, I was up in the mountains again. I was looking again for the same cow that used to get away. And I'm the one they sent, because I was really good at it. When I told them that it wasn't me finding it — it was my friend — they thought I was crazy. So that's why I stopped talking about him. And my brothers used to tease me at school. And now at school, everybody knew about this imaginary friend, and everybody thought I was crazy. So I stopped talking about him.

WAYNE: Did you ever get a name for this guy?

LUIS: I used to call him Raphael.

WAYNE: He'd tell you that was his name, or how did you call him that?

LUIS: He mentioned that once. I keep asking him — he kept saying it wasn't relevant. Till one time I said — I said, "What is your name?" But he never really — we never really sit down and have a heart to heart. No.

When I was looking for this cow again — I don't know where — he appears. But this time is different. He signals — he's telling me with his hands, like this, to stop. So I stopped. Then I said, "What's wrong?" He says, "Wait." And all of a sudden he started walking forward, pointing it out with his head. And then I looked, and it was a rattlesnake on the road. Then I said, "Oh, a rattlesnake. Let's take it." And, you know, people eat him — you know, we can sell the meat and the skin. He goes out, and all of a sudden he comes

out with this perfectly shaped stick — I don't know where. And then he grabs it and just steps on the head, like nothing. I thought it was nuts. And grabs it, and he says, "No, let's leave it for the hawks or the animals to eat it." And he grabs it and he disposes it. And I said, "Can I have the rattle?" He says, "No." And then he just comes to me, and then he says, "Oh, by the way," he says, "La Bonita" — my family's cow — "it's over there, by this path." He says, "Okay, let's go get it." I love that.

He was the only person I had ever, and the only person that actually hugged me — it was him. He will kind of answer questions when I asked them. In my mind, I never thought of him as an angel or anything. No — just a friend. When I was really sad and a lot of physical pain or emotional pain, he will hug me. And when he hugged me, he didn't have to say anything else. I felt comforted. I felt in peace. I felt love. When I went home, nobody ever hugged me — not even my mom, nobody, or my dad. Never.

That's why he told me about the manure. He says, "Okay, the reason I ask you about the manure is because you're going to go to the people who make bricks. And you're going to tell them that instead of them getting the straw and chop it themselves — it's a lot of work for them, and more expensive, because they're paying these people to go get the straw and chop it and throw it in there." He says, "You're going to tell them that it's better for them to buy the manure. They just stomp on it, make it — you know, pulverize it, make it like powder — and mix it with the clay. And that's better — better consistency — because when they burn it, it burns inside and turns them red also." So I said, "What? How do you know that? I never seen that." He says, "Think about it. Okay — they have a lot of straw inside, right? And so when he chopped up on little pieces, right?" He says, "You pick it up, you sell it to them, they pulverize it, they mix it with the clay, and they have bricks." And I said, "Can you come with me and explain that? Because I'm going to look like a fool here." And he says, "I can't. You have to do that."

So I took a sample, and then I gave it to this guy and I said, "Look" — the first guy thought I was nuts. So he kicked me out of there. He actually kicked me — literally kicked me — out of there, shooed me out of his — he says, "Get out of here." So I went to the second one, and the second one didn't do anything. He thought I was crazy. The third one, though — the third one, he says, "I don't know, kid." So I said, "Look, look, look — what is it that you do? You go get straw, right? Right? So you have to chop it up, right? Right? — to make a little pieces, right? So they can fit on the clay, right?" I said, "This one already has little pieces inside. It's the same theory, but, you know, better." I told him that, right? I said, "Just do this — watch." And I started smashing it with my hands. And then I mix it with the clay. And I said, "Put it on the thing to mold it, right — like a brick." So he did that. And then he says, "Okay, I'm going to let it dry, and then I'm going to bake it. You come back in four days, okay? If it works, I'll buy it from you, okay?" I said, "Okay."

So on the fourth day I came back, and I noticed that the bricks — ladrillos, you know, the ladrillos that he made — they're more porous, you know, more poor. They have like little bubbles inside, if you will — little cavities. The one he made with the manure — the color was darker; the red, it was more redder. And it wasn't light red — it was like dark red. And it was really sturdy — really, really, like, no pores. No pores inside. It was like stronger. And then he says, "Okay, kid — how much do you have?" I said, "Well, so far, 30 sacks." I collect a lot. And in my house, my dad was really mad. Everybody was mad at me. And my

brothers used to just pick it up and throw it on the ground. But they stopped doing that, because they got in trouble with my mom — because now there's manure on the ground. I said, "Okay," I said, "but you have to go get it." I said, "I cannot bring all of that." So he comes in with the truck. And now they're starting the negotiation, right? So I didn't know how much to ask for it, because I didn't — there was no — I don't know. So I said, okay — I look at him and said, "How much do you pay for people to go get the straw?" He says — well, of course he gave me this ridiculous figure. And I said, "Nah, you don't pay him that. Come on." And then he looked at me and he says, "Who are you?" — "How about you? You're selling me that." I said, "No, no, no, a friend advised me about this. Look, look, look — this is what you're going to do, okay? For each one of these, you're going to give me two pesos." And then he — but two pesos for me, back then, it was a lot. So he says, "I don't know, kid. I'll give you one dollar."

And all of a sudden, my dad comes out, and he sees this stranger guy talking to me, and he says, "What are you doing?" I have to stop my dad, because my dad says, "Don't talk to my kid. What are you talking about?" I said, "No, no, no — that, that — I'm doing business here." And he says, "What? You? What? You?" I was, like — gosh — seven, eight. And then I said, "I'm doing business." He says, "With what? What are you selling?" He was about to beat me. I said, "No, no, no, no, no, no — let me explain. The manure right there — I'm selling the manure." He says, "You're what?" He looked at the guy and he says, "Are you going to be idiot enough to buy manure?" He says, "You can go get it." And then I said, "Dad, don't mess this up for me. Just go."

And then I said, okay. So we agree, actually, in a dollar — a dollar, one and 75. I'm going to call them dollars, right? A dollar and 75 cents. So here we agree on that. Okay — we agree on the price, and it was per each sack. Some were bigger than others. So I thought — that's why I said, well, you know, that evens it up. Some are bigger, some are a little bit smaller, but, you know, that evens it up, right? He said, "Okay." So he got all dirty. He put them on the truck, paid me for it. And when I showed up, I got so much money. Then — look at my brothers. That thing exploded from there. As of today, everybody picks up manure and sells it. And everybody thought I was crazy because I was picking up manure.

WAYNE: What'd you do with the money you made?

LUIS: What I did — I bought my mom sandals, because they were really, really, really bad. I bought my dad huaraches — like poor men's shoes. I bought myself another pair. What I wanted was a soccer ball — that's what I wanted. But I didn't — in my mind, it wasn't fair when we needed shoes. And then I bought lard at home, too, because that's how you used to fry eggs and beans and all that stuff. And then I bought eggs and beans. And then I gave my mom like five pesos, and I gave my dad another five. I kept the rest.

So yeah, that was my experience with Raphael. I had — we had more encounters after that. He was my mentor in many ways — taught me how to read and write. Especially since I was a kid, when I see him up in the mountains, he used to go on the rocks and use them as a board, if you will. He used to scratch numbers or scratch letters, and then start teaching me how to sound out letters, to start reading. And for example, my name — he starts, says, okay, we went through the alphabet, right? And he says, "Which one is the letter L?" I'll say, "I don't know." He says, "Okay, this is the letter L. Your name starts with this letter

L." And then — another one: "Which is this?" I said, "Lu, lu." And he says, "Okay, where's the letter U?" — right? In Spanish. And he says, "It's this one here." Oh, okay. So he started teaching me the alphabet — finding the letters on the alphabet. And we had this big rock — he had the alphabet in there. He started teaching me how to do math also. He used to ask me questions like, "How much is two plus two?" I'll say, "Four." "Okay, now how much is four plus four?" Eight. And then so forth — eight plus eight, 16; 16 plus 16, 32; and so forth. And I keep writing things down. Because of that, I skip two grades in elementary — because that's all I did in Mexico, elementary. That's all you can get. So I skip two grades, and I ended up graduating with my older brothers. They didn't like that, because they were being made fun of and bullied.

He always came when I was very, very upset — either angry, or a lot of injustice. He knew that, and he understood me. This guy really gets me. Often my brothers, they would do things and blame it on me and get away with it.

One of my brothers stole cucumbers from a local field. He was hungry, and he stole them. The owner saw him — but I guess he saw him from afar and didn't recognize him. But he knew it was one of us. My father summoned all four of us. The guy came in, and my dad was really strict on that: you do not steal. You do not take something that is not yours. It was a huge deal. Even if you're starving, you do not. You ask, or you work for it, but you do not steal. So the guy came in — "I cannot recognize him, but I know it was one of them." He got a white shirt when he did that — and I noticed my older brother came and changed. I was wearing a white little shirt. Immediately, they thought it was me. And then my brothers, of course, when they saw that — so they saw the opportunity, and they said, "Yeah, yeah, it was him. It was him. It was him. Beat him, beat him." And my dad actually — I mean, without asking me any questions — he struck me. He struck me right on the face. And he struck me so hard that all I hear was like this firecracker inside of my head. And all of a sudden, I was on the floor, and I was like, why? I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't do nothing. So I was very upset. I was very angry. And then I went up on the mountain, and that's when I saw again my friend. He showed up, and then he advised me on that. He knew everything, apparently — I didn't explain anything to him. He says, "Look, next time it happens, you're going to do this." Then he told me what to do.

Now, the next time — my brothers knew that this time it worked, so they make it a habit of blaming me for things I didn't do, especially like stealing things — food. So one time, this guy had tomatoes. He had like two or three plants or something. And one of my brothers stole them, and he stole them for the house. The guy found out who did it — and then they came home, and ate two of them on their way home. And the guy says that whoever saw him — he saw him eating it. And then my brothers, right away, they played me again. My dad was about to beat me up, but now I got advice. So I pointed to my dad, I said, "Before you beat me, let's do this." And he says, "What do you want to do?" Then I asked my mom — because everybody gets together, the entire family, and I have to get the beating in front of everybody. And everybody beat you — sad, you know — everybody beats me, or beats the person who committed the crime or whatever. So I asked my mother for a glass of water, and she says, "What?" "Give me a glass of water." "What?" So I started drinking a lot of water — a lot. I drink a lot of water, and I drink, and I drink more and more and more. And then, after I drank, I put my two fingers inside of my mouth until I puke, and all the water came out. So I told my dad, and I said, "Okay, ask my brothers to do the same, and you'll

find your tomatoes." My brothers wouldn't do it. They wouldn't do it. My dad looked at me, and then he looked at my brother, and he said, "No, he's nuts. He's crazy. He's crazy. No, he's crazy. Beat him, beat him." And then my dad says, "No, no, no, no, no. You guys said that he just ate it. Now you guys do the same." They didn't do it. And because they didn't do it, one of my older brothers knew that he was going to beat all of them — he turned my other brother in. He didn't get a beating because he wrongfully accused me. He got a beating because he did it.

When I looked at my dad — I keep telling him, I say, "You see that? You see that? See? I was innocent all this time. You see that?" I was always fighting to earn my dad's love. I was always trying to please him, doing things. "You see that? I finished my chores, Dad. You see that? And on top of that, I did this, Dad. You see that? You see?" And even when I collected the money, I said — for the manure — I said, "You see that? What I did — you see that?" He just looked at me and shrugged his shoulders, and he says, "Eh, it was just a matter of time. Anybody could have done it." And I said, "Yeah, I know anybody could have — but nobody thought about it. I thought about it." And he says, "Yeah." And I said, "Well," I said, "I didn't really —" I said, "that's not my credit." I said, "Credit goes to my friend." He didn't want to tell me that. And then my brothers were like, "Yeah, but we help you. You know, at first we gave you all this manure, and that gave you the idea" — you know, oh, they wanted part of the money too. Because of that, they said, "You have to give us part of the money, because, you know, we gave you the idea." I said, "Nah, you're trying to play a joke on me. You're trying to make fun of me. Because I know — you get nothing."

WAYNE: And as far as you know, no one around you — your brothers, your parents — nobody ever saw or acknowledged this guy. You told them about him, but they never saw him, right? They never engaged him. And even if he was around when other people were around, the other people didn't seem to acknowledge him.

LUIS: No. In fact, I stopped talking about it, because everybody thought I was nuts. Everybody thought I was crazy. Because to me, it's as real as me talking to you right now. He used to hold my hand when I was a kid. He gave me physical food to eat, and I ate it. And that satisfied my hunger. Sometimes at home, you have to choose whether to have breakfast, lunch, or dinner — so you have to pick one, right? And I used to pick always breakfast, because I know that I was hungry when I'm in the mountains — because we used to go to the mountains all the time, to pick wood or to check on the plants or stuff like that. He'll always appear if I was physically hungry. He'll always appear and feed me — always. I never went hungry, because of him. So when my brothers and sisters — they used to fight for or take my food away from me. At first I used to cry a lot, but then I used to tell my brothers — I said, "Ah, it doesn't matter." I said, "Raphael, he'll feed me. I don't care. Take it. Take it. You can take it. The food he's going to give me, it's even better."

Now, the only thing he never really fed me, it was things like chocolates or lollipops or candy. He never fed me that. Things like apples, bananas, or, you know, tacos — things I knew — but nothing like that, because that thing was like a delicacy. But when I asked him once, that if you have candy, he says, "No." He said — why? Because he said that — "Because you don't need them. Because I only have what you need." He always gave me things I knew. He never came up with crazy things like, you know, a piece of

cake. He always bring me food that I knew — something I was related to. Like, for example, if I was up on the mountains, I was really thirsty — he'll come and say, "Hey, how are you?" Sometimes he had a little bag, or sometimes he had a backpack, but sometimes he had nothing. And when he had nothing, he'll go around a big rock, or he'll go around a tree or around a bush, and come and produces this water. He never came and say, "Here," and appear before me. No. He'll know when I was hungry. And he says, "Oh, I made this for you." And then he'll come in with tacos, for example. And then I said, "Where did you find — where you got this from?" He'll say, "Oh, I had them back there." And I said, "Aren't you hungry?" He says, "I already ate."

I used to tell him, like, "Man — for a busy man, I never seen you do anything." And being lazy, on that culture, it was a really bad thing. And I remember I keep telling him — I says, "Don't you have parents? Don't you have brothers or sisters?" And he says, "Oh, I have a really big family." He says, "And you're part of it. That's why I'm here." And then I'll say, "But don't you work?" He says, "I've worked very, very hard." And I used to kind of tease him by saying, "I never seen you do anything, really." And he says, "Oh, yeah — by being here with you, I'm doing a lot." But I didn't get what he was talking about. I thought he was nuts. I just thought he was crazy.

WAYNE: See, I do think it was really strange — but you weren't uncomfortable around him.

LUIS: Oh, not at all. I enjoyed his company. I actually — sometimes when I was going to the mountains, I will call on to him. Sometimes he'll appear, like if I had a question — but sometimes he won't even pop up. When he pops up by himself, it's when I was on physical pain or emotional pain, or I was mistreated, or there was some injustice against me. And he told me this — that that's when he comes the fastest. Because he said this to me, and it stuck with me. He said that the pain of the children attracts the attention of the father. He told me — he says, "Look, when a father or a mother has a children, when they hear them on the crib crying —" I didn't know what a crib was; he had to show me on a book what a crib was, because we didn't have none of that stuff. He said, "When a baby cries, the father or the mother run to the children, because they cry, and it attracts the parents. Then they check it, they feed it, make sure it's okay, not on pain. And then they put it back on the crib, or carry it." He says, "But remember this: the pain of the children attracts the attention of the father. That's why I'm here."

So I started growing. I noticed that he really, really loved me. He really, really had the best interest at heart for me. I know that every time I was in pain, purposely I used to walk into the forest so I can meet him — because I know he was going to be there, because I know I needed him. And he never failed me. Never. He was always there.

WAYNE: Here's an older man, an adult, showing up in a kid's life at various times. And it didn't seem strange to you at the time?

LUIS: At first, it was kind of weird, because my parents used to tell me that — not to talk to strangers, you know, typical things, not to go where strangers are. But with this guy was different. I felt drawn to him. I don't have to keep my hands up. I don't have to have a guard up with this guy. He had my best interest, and he was there to protect me. And I learned very quickly, instead of running away from him, just to embrace

him and run towards him. Every time I was, like, up in the mountains crying or hungry or something, he'll just appear.

WAYNE: How often did you see this guy?

LUIS: From the time I was like five or six, I used to see him — like, it was, I don't know, maybe once, twice a week. At different random occasions. Within three years — God — after I started boxing, he started fading away, because my coach started playing a different role in my life. He was more like a fatherly figure. So I stopped seeing him then.

WAYNE: Was it because you went to the mountains less, too, or not?

LUIS: Oh, yes. That too, yes.

WAYNE: At this point, I'm not sure what to make of Raphael and his interest in Luis. But he fades into the background now, as Luis doesn't see him again for a number of years. During that time, another man takes center stage — an army captain, whom Luis admires from afar until one day he jerks Luis out of a brawl in the middle of the road. That brief connection opens a door that Luis has to squeeze through, but it does change the course of his life. Next time, on *My Friend Luis*...

LUIS: I noticed that one of the fighters started crying. "I don't want to fight. I don't want to fight." He cowered, right? And when I saw that, in my mind I was like, that's my chance. I want to take it. So I run to the coach and says, "Captain Herrera, Captain Herrera — I noticed that you're one man down, sir. Sir, please allow me to take his place and fight for you."

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