



## How Emeraude Toubia Uses Love as a Life Force

The star of Amazon's *With Love*, and Lifetime's *Holiday in Santa Fe*, opens up about how she sets a supportive tone on set, the experience of building her career alongside her equally talented husband (Prince Royce!) and what a loss taught her about the importance of cherishing life's smallest moments.

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Alicia Menendez:

If you feel like you are seeing Emeraude Toubia everywhere, it's because you are. Right now she is starring in Amazon's *With Love*, and Lifetime's *Holiday In Santa Fe*, bringing smart and independent Latina characters to life. And as her star rises, Emeraude is incredibly intentional about how she shows up in the world, on set, in her own life, and committed to taking in the here and now, even as she strives for more.

Emeraude, thank you so much for doing this.

Emeraude Toubia:

Yes!

Menendez: You are absolutely everywhere right now. Amazon's *With Love*, which was written by Gloria Calderon Kellett, who was one of our first interviews on this podcast. Lifetime's *Holiday In Santa Fe*, which our girl Cristela Alonzo wrote. It came right as we were all like, where are the Latinas in movies other than in the background. It was not always like this. I imagine that there were moments in your life where you prayed for the moment that you are having right now.

Toubia: Oh, yes. You can get me a little emotional, of course. It's been a long journey. I come from a really small town in Brownsville, Texas. Thank you, Alicia. Now you're going to make my makeup look really messed up.

I come from a really small town in Brownsville and my dreams are sometimes just so hard to reach, and I remember my girlfriends and I remember their dreams and sometimes it just wasn't possible for them because they had other priorities. So I just feel so blessed to be living my dream. It's also really hard. Sometimes I think, what did I get myself into? It's full of no's. It's a career that you have to be so strong, that you really have to believe in yourself, that you really have to know what you're worth. I feel that my mom has a lot to do with that.

I think my mom, since I was young, she instilled in me how valuable I was and where I come from, I should never be shamed of my family and my background, and I should always bring that with me and carry it with me and always be authentic. Never try to imitate someone else. Never try to be like someone else. Be you, even if it's a little weird and quirky. Whatever it is, just be you. The people are going to love you for you, and I feel that if there's any advice I can give to so someone it's just, prepare yourself. Prepare for what you want to do. So when that opportunity comes, you're ready.

Menendez: I know you're not a pageant girl now, but you came up as a pageant girl. When I look at the totality of your career, you have done a lot to prepare for this moment. When you were doing those pageants in Brownsville, what was it? What was the goal at that point?

Toubia: I remember I was at the mall and I saw this big poster and I was like, "Mom, I want to do that." What girl does sometimes not want to be a queen, does not want to have this crown over your head, right? I was, I don't know, 14, 13. I was like, "Mom, I want to do that." Mom said, "Okay, you want to do that? You have to work for it."

I remember I was wearing a Macy's dress. It was probably like a \$50 Macy's dress, and all these girls were wearing designer dresses. I was like, "I'm not going to win." That was my first pageant, and I won my first pageant. I remember in an interview, they told me, "What do you think about body piercings," or something like that. And I said, "Oh, I actually have one. As long as your parents give you permission, I think it's good." I think that answer, and being authentic, that's what really caught the judges and they were like, "Oh, we like this girl. Let's see what else she has to say." Sometimes it's good to prepare, but it's good to, once you're there to let go and just be you.

Pageants taught me a lot of discipline. They taught me that you really have to prepare yourself. I had a general good experience with pageants for self and respecting everyone.

Menendez: Because that then becomes a building block for Nuestra Belleza Latina, which is a show. It's interesting, because I think of you and then I think of Melissa Barrera, who one of the ways in which she came up was through La Academia, which was this reality show in Mexico. Just talked to me a lot about the fact that it really broke her. It shook her confidence being on a reality show that was also a competition. It took her a long time to rebuild from having people question whether she was good enough, she was talented enough. It seems to me, at least the way you talk about it, that for you Nuestra Belleza was really a launching point. It actually built you up more than it made you question yourself.

Toubia: Yeah. I think you have to listen. You have to listen to the criticism, constructive criticism. I think I was right at that point where being bullied wasn't really a bad thing. Right now it's a bad thing, and I'm glad that people are being more vocal about it because it's very important. But yeah, I was at that point where they were little bullies and they were saying mean things, but I don't know what it is about me. The more bad things you say about me, it's like the stronger I get. Oh, you think that of me? Oh, I'm going to prove you wrong because it's not me.

So I just feel life is how you take things. You have to take them in ways that are good for you and that benefit you. Obviously there are days where you feel bad, and you want to cry. It's okay to have those days. There's days where I just sit down and for three days straight, I'm eating freaking ice cream and watching Netflix. But then you need to know that you have to rise above that. You have to let it go and move on.

Menendez: As I understand it, after Nuestra Belleza, you got lots of offers for telenovelas, which is what one would expect of the runner up of this show. That would've been the easier path to take.

Toubia: It seems but it wasn't, no. After Nuestra Belleza Latina, obviously all the attention goes to... I was first runner up, but it goes to the winner. She got her own show. Everything happened for her. I actually had to go to the competition network in order to get an opportunity, because she's the winner so we're giving her everything. But as I started hosting a video countdown show, that was called 18 and Over, TRL. It was really fun. I got to interview all these great people and got to listen to music. For that interview, I remember I went in and spoke to the head of whatever. I was like, "Oh, \$50 a show. I'm praying if they can just pay me anything," because sometimes we're taught that, oh, you have to do things for free for so long.

I was like \$50 a show. I'm hoping. Then I remember I sat in his office and they paid me \$900 a show. I thought I was the richest person in the world. I was like, "Oh my God. I'm making nine." It was once a week so I was making \$900 a week. I was like, "Oh my God, I'm making you \$4,000 a month. I'm so rich. Can't believe it." That was just a big moment for me in my career.

I started getting raises and other opportunities and then somebody messed up in the contract. I never end up signing a contract. Then they called me from Menivision, which is the telenovela world on Univision and I got an offer. I said, "I want to move on to doing acting now." Then I did that for a bit.

Then a casting director from LA heard about me and they flew me to LA. I tested for Fox for an upcoming show. I was like, "Oh my God, I speak English. I can try this crossover thing." I ended up moving to LA with nothing, just my dreams and my hope of getting something. Three months in, I booked one of the lead characters on Shadow Hunters. I feel that, to me, was my biggest break.

Menendez: I have a question that I'm asking. I hope you'll take it as I'm asking it, which is from a place of love and great admiration, which is, when you come up with people focused on your beauty, how do you help people understand that you are more than just a face?

Toubia: You have to prepare yourself. You have to know what you want. Right now that I'm also producing and I'm starting to develop my own stuff. I just can't walk into the door and be

like, "Hey, so I have an idea." No, what's my idea? What's the reason behind my idea? You just have to really be prepared. I feel that is a stigma for a lot of Latinas.

I remember being on a show and a cast member said something like, "Oh, you Latinas," and I'm like, "What do you mean, us Latinas?" It's sad also because I sometimes feel like my vocabulary is not as expanded as other people might have. I grew up in a really small town. Most people just spoke Spanish. In school, we didn't have the best teachers. They were great teachers, but they weren't the best teachers. At home, just the fact that my parents are immigrants. I'm an immigrant myself. As long as you're going to school, basically that's enough. You're good. You're going to have it good, but it's not. You need so much more. You really need to read. You really need to know about what's happening in the world. You just really have to be so knowledgeable about so many things.

To me, that's where I've had to really push and show people what's more than what they see. There is more to me and heart. Heart, because that's what pushes me, where I come from, where my fat family is, what I want to tell about my stories and what I want to show people that I am as a woman. How do I want people to remember me? How do I want people to perceive me once I leave a meeting or once I meet our crew, our casting crew. Every person from background to catering, I would go up to them and introduce myself and make sure that they felt comfortable. Because to me, I'm setting an example to my co-stars. I'm setting an example to everyone that this is the energy that we're going to have on set.

Menendez: You say your mom taught you that when one door closes another opens. When has that been true for you?

Toubia: A lot of times. In this world, all the time. I've done probably this year probably over 200 auditions. 99 of them were nos. Yes, I cry. I still cry. People think that it's so easy now that I just get offers. No, I don't. I do get some offers, but it's not like that. I still have to audition. They hurt. You work so hard. You don't get paid to audition. You have to set up your lights. You have to set up your background. You have to do your own little coaching. You have to read the scene. You have to practice it over and over, put yourself on tape. Sometimes you even have to go buy an outfit that works just for the character. You don't get paid for that. You're spending that out of your pocket. Sometimes I remember, I could barely pay my light bill. When I was in Miami and I had to do all these things and it is what it is. Sometimes you buy stuff and you have to return them. It is what it is. You just wear them for your little photo shoot, and then you got to return it. We all went through that. Sometimes, still go through that. You just have to keep going.

Menendez: I wonder for you growing up in a house where your mom's Mexican, your dad's Lebanese, how both of those cultures showed up in your upbringing?

Toubia: A lot. My dad was a chef in the house. He would cook all the time. Then I lived in a border town, so I was so close to Mexico. We never had insurance growing up. I would just cross to Mexico and go to the doctor there, because it was just so much cheaper. I feel so much

Latina to Latina: How Emeraude Toubia Uses Love as a Life Force

more practical. I think in the US, you have to go through so many steps, which is fine. I get it. But in Mexico you just go, they give you a shot, you're ready to go. In the US, you're just like, "Okay, now you have to meet with this other doctor, and then this other doctor," to then finally give you that shot that you need. It just, I don't know. It taught me a lot about how wonderful each culture is. It taught me about how, in a way, we're all the same. It's just, our traditions sometimes are different. At the end of the day, we all have feelings. We all get our heart broken. We all cry. We all enjoy. We all want that. We just do it differently.

Menendez: I imagine your Lebanese dad being in Brownsville being like, "Of course I got to cook because where am I going to get Lebanese food around here?"

Toubia: There were some Lebanese spots. We had some other Lebanese friends, but he cooked. My dad's mom also showed my mom a lot. So she would cook here and there. We love to eat.

Menendez: Speaking about your dad, you lost him six months before your wedding.

Toubia: My wedding, I know. It was so hard.

Menendez: I think of things like that, a wedding, which is such a huge celebration, and then I think of the holidays, where they're going to be a lot of people this year, who are for the first time gathering for the holidays without someone they love. I wonder what you have learned about living with grief.

Toubia: Here you go again.

You just learn to live with it. It's hard, but I'm just so grateful that I really enjoyed my time with my dad. There's not a moment that I regret. He was an incredible father. He was an incredible husband. That's what I take with me. You just learn to live with it. For those that still have their parents, I would just say to enjoy them. My mom is lucky to have her mom. My grandpa passed away too recently, but just enjoy your family. Sometimes they get on our nerves. We don't want to hear from them. We hate them. Just really enjoy them. Spend time with them. Carve out a day, a special day, when you're just not on your freaking phone. I feel we forget how present we have to be in life. We have to be present and phones distract us so many times. Mom and my grandma are here with me in LA and I took my grandma to see the sunset and we held hands. Those are the moments that you cherish forever.

Menendez: Ilana Peña. I think of Ilana Peña who lost her dad when she was little and how you get something like a show. She goes, and she calls her mom, but there's always the presence of this absence. I think of you exploding in this moment and I imagine he would've been over the moon for you.

Toubia: I think so. I think he was proud of me. I'm sure he still is. I remember he just wanted me to be a, he wanted like, "Just be a manager at a bank." That, to him, was a good enough job

Latina to Latina: How Emeraude Toubia Uses Love as a Life Force

to be a manager. Then when I'm here telling him I'm going to be an actress and I'm going to model, I'm going to do pageants. He's like, "What's happening? What are you doing?" But no, he definitely always supported me. I remember when I told him I was moving to Miami, he said, "No, I'll open a little beauty salon here for you," because I wanted to do that for a little bit, do hair and makeup. I've always just been natural at doing all that stuff. I would line my lips in red and they would just be perfect. He was very understanding, but I'm glad we really got to enjoy so much together.

When I was shooting in Toronto, he came to visit. We went out. I took him to Niagara Falls. We went to Orlando because he wanted to see the NASA station. We went there. In LA, he got to enjoy, like I've rented these beautiful homes with my husband and just have some time off because we're at work all day. He got to enjoy that and be there and just relax. He enjoyed food. He really did have this great life. So there's really nothing that really hurts me or stings me because he left. So that's why I think that everyone has to just really appreciate the moments of when you're alive.

Menendez: I love that he wanted you to be a bank manager. I'm sorry to push on this, but the thing that I think is interesting is I've seen you in so many interviews, talk about how important it is to you to stay down to earth, to stay connected to your roots, to not become a starlet, to not lose touch with the things and the place that makes you.

Toubia: Yeah.

Menendez: That to me is a very telling anecdote.

Toubia: Yeah.

Menendez: That was his big laudable dream. But that was the context that he was in.

Toubia: Yes, yes.

Menendez: I've talked to so many public people on this podcast. I myself am somewhat of a public person. I don't know that I've ever spoken with someone who is one half of a public couple the way that you are. For anyone who doesn't know, Emeraude is married to Prince Royce. There are now listeners screaming in their cars. We live in a time when just by economic necessity, both partners have to work and life is barely built for two people to work, especially as you build a family. I would argue it is certainly not built for two people to have careers. It's like the demands of your career alone, the demands of his career alone, is enough to build an entire team around. How do you two do it?

Toubia: I don't know how we do it. It's like destiny sometimes brings us together. I know that I could easily stop working and I know that I could just be his wife. He's never asked me to do that. He's always supported me. I think that's really important. You need to support your couple and what they love. You have to be there. Of course we don't have a perfect marriage. We fight. We scream at each other. I mean it's normal.

Latina to Latina: How Emeraude Toubia Uses Love as a Life Force

Menendez: Also, although you have not been married a long time, you've been together a long time.

Toubia: We've been together for 10 years. Yeah, three years December 1st. We got married December 1st. We just had our little three year anniversary. But yes, it's not easy, but I think that sometimes we forget to tell people how we feel and we need to respect how that other person feels. Just because we don't feel that way doesn't mean they don't feel that way. So we need to understand if he says, "Hey, I feel like you're doing this." Okay, so let's talk about it. Let's get to the bottom of where is it coming from and what is it that I'm doing that's making you feel that way so that we can work on it together.

I think we all also need to know that, I don't think you should stop being boyfriend and girlfriend. I think it's important to always maintain that. I think little details here and there, flowers just because, handwritten letters, I love you text, good morning texts. Then sometimes being apart for a bit and then reuniting is also special, right? It sparks up certain things that maybe we were together for a long time.

I also get to work at different cities, different countries. He does as well. So it's nice sometimes just to meet there and enjoy the city. I remember when we first started dating, he was very adamant of not going out much and staying private. He really respects his fans and I do too. But then it came to a point where we like, "You know what, no. We have to enjoy life. We have to enjoy these beautiful things. We're so lucky to travel so much. So let's meet the people. Let's eat the food. Let's eat at the restaurant on the street. Let's go eat at the taco truck. Let's go eat at all these different places." So we just started building what works best for us.

Menendez: That is advice I could have used earlier on in my marriage. Thank you for that. Emeraude, what did I miss?

Toubia: We talked a lot, girl. You got it like on lock. Great interview.

Menendez: You're so delightful. Thank you so much for this. This was wonderful.

Toubia: Absolutely, thank you.

Menendez: Hey, thank you so much for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantugua and me, Alicia Menendez. Sarah McClure is our senior producer. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer. Stephen Colón mixed this episode. Jimmy Gutierrez is our managing editor. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor and ad ops lead. We love hearing from your email us at hola at Latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at Latina to Latina. Remember to subscribe or follow us on radio public, Apple podcast, Google podcast, good pods, wherever you're listening right now. And remember, every time you share the podcast or you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

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