



## Why Actress Lisa Vidal Believes “I’m here because this was supposed to happen.”

We've all been there. "Oh my God, can I do this?" And in those moments of intense doubt and fear, Lisa Vidal, the star of ABC's *The Baker and the Beauty*, says "That's when you have to really embrace your talent, and recognize who you are and say, 'Yes, I can do this. Yes, this belongs to me.'" We believe her. She has a four-decade Hollywood career, survived breast cancer, supported her son through addiction and recovery, and came through it all with the grace to "live one day at a time in gratitude." Get ready to be inspired.

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Alicia Menendez:

I have to tell you, in the first few minutes of my conversation with actress Lisa Vidal, I understood why people love working with her. She was impeccably prepared, fully present, and so, so genuine. Right now, she's starring in ABC's *The Baker and the Beauty*. We talk about that, and we talk about life off screen, battling breast cancer at the same time as her sister, supporting her son through addiction, and not letting work define who she is.

One more thing. You're going to notice that I was able to have this incredible conversation with Lisa in her natural environment, her home, in the middle of a pandemic, so you're gonna hear some home sounds in the background. Keep listening. I promise it is worth it.

So, Lisa, when you were first starting out, and you'd book a pilot, how would you approach it?

**Lisa Vidal:** The way I was trained was you read the whole script, and then you start to work, usually from the inside out. Sometimes there's a character where you can kind of create outside in, right? But usually you start to imagine the life of this character, who she was, how she grew up, how she thinks. You read about what the other characters say about her, so that it gives you an idea of how people think of her. Why do people say that about her? You know?

**Menendez:** So, when you read the script for *Baker and the Beauty*, what was your first thought?

**Vidal:** Well, when I first read the script for *Baker and the Beauty*, I was like, "Thank you, God!" Because I had been praying for it. I kid you not. I had been praying for a family show. I wanted to play a mom on a show. I wanted to be able to be funny and dramatic. I did not want her to be stereotypical or caricaturish. I wanted it to be sort of like a *This is Us*, a combination of a *Modern Family*, like I just... I literally put that out there, and I was getting a lot of different pilots, and really nothing was feeding me. Nothing was exciting me. And then this came around and it was like, "Oh my gosh." It was like amazing.

**Menendez:** I'm Cuban. I grew up in Jersey, but I lived in Miami for six years, so I know Mari, right? This is a person you know.

Vidal: Yeah.

Menendez: Which is fun and exciting, to see that person on television.

Vidal: Yeah. When I read the role of Mari in the script, I was like, “Oh my God. I have to play this woman. I know her. I know who she is. I know every little innuendo, every little secret. Every little thing about her, I know it.” Because I’m a mom of three. My kids are a little younger than my kids on the show, but I have three grown children, and I’ve been through the gamut.

Menendez: I have to say, though, before I watched the show, when I was just reading a description of the show, and I read that you were playing the matriarch, I sort of did a spit take, because it was like, “Is she old enough to play?” Like only in television land would someone like you be dubbed “the matriarch” of a family.

Vidal: You know, I love... Thank you so much.

Menendez: You’re very welcome.

Vidal: I do appreciate that. That’s so sweet.

Menendez: It’s true.

Vidal: That’s so sweet. But you know, it’s like I am, like I, in my real family, I’m like the matriarch of the family, and I’m the oldest of four. I run my home. Mama the boss lady up in here, you know? And just in general, even with my parents, I’ve always been like that very adult child. My sisters, I’m like so much more, and my brother, like so much more of a mom to them in a lot of ways. I’ve always taken care of them. I know what that feels like, so it’s me. It really is me. So, and that was another thing about reading Mari, as I read the role, and I got more and more excited, because I was like, “Oh, this is so... I can bring so much of me into this woman, and I want to see a woman like that on television.” Instead of the regular stereotype that we always see.

Menendez: Seen a lot of that. You grew up in the Bronx, moved to Whitestone, Queens, when you were about 11. How does growing up in New York City follow you as you make your way in Hollywood?

Vidal: Oh, wow. That’s such a good question. Actually, nobody’s ever asked me that. That’s a good one. I was actually... Yeah, I was born in Spanish Harlem, lived there for a little while. My parents moved around a lot. Then we moved to the Bronx. I was in the Bronx for a while. And then moved to a very Italian Jewish neighborhood in Whitestone, Queens, so I went from this super ethnic neighborhood, you know, and urban and all of that, and then suddenly I was like, “Ooh, Jews and Italians. White boys.”

Menendez: Not a lot of Puerto Ricans in Whitestone when you were growing up there.

Vidal: Oh my God. But I was like, “They’re kind of cute, though. Okay, wait a minute.” It was hilarious. But I did go through a lot there, because there weren’t a lot of brown people there, so there was a lot of like uncomfortable moments for me, and a lot of stuff that I came up against that was difficult. But-

Menendez: Like what? Do you remember that? Do you remember those hard moments?

Vidal: Oh, I remember all of them. I remember all of them.

Menendez: Can you tell me one of them?

Vidal: Some people in our building would see us coming and they wouldn't hold the door for us, or they'd try to get into the elevator, so that they wouldn't have to ride up with us, and there were a lot of uncomfortable moments, and I used to go down to the bus stop to wait for the bus, and there'd be a group of girls who wouldn't speak to me, and I would just... And I got called spic. I got called a lot of names. And I got called the N word. It was hard. It was really hard. I dealt with a lot of stuff there, but I also met a lot of good people, so that was also wonderful. I had a very strong mom, and my mother was like, "You're gonna go downstairs and you're gonna get on that bus, and you're gonna go to that school, because you have a right to live in this neighborhood." My mother was no joke, so I was more afraid of her than I was of anybody else. I was like, "Okay, ma. All right."

But all the women in my family, like that's what I come from, you know? So, I carry that in Hollywood, back to your question about like, you know, it's a tough business. And there's a lot of turning down, and a lot of rejection, and I've learned to have a tough skin.

Ad: *Miss Juleyka, nice to have you on! Must be a special reason.*

Lantigua-Williams:

*Yeah, yeah. You know it's a special reason, since I like to be behind the scenes. All right, so when Cantu Beauty decided to come on board, I rushed.*

Menendez: *You rushed to volunteer to try the products.*

Lantigua-Williams:

*Yes, I know I did, and it's the first time. I know. But I've already been using their coconut curling cream for years, so I figured I wasn't gonna miss a chance to try out sister products.*

Menendez: *I like the photo you sent me the other day. Your hair looked really good.*

Lantigua-Williams:

*And that was just after one shampoo and conditioner. My curls were shiny and smooth, man, and my comb was not full of my own hair after I detangled it in the shower.*

Menendez: *Even in pictures it's coming through, like your hair looks shiny, and hydrated, and just so healthy.*

Lantigua-Williams:

*Thanks. I really appreciate that you let me send you those, because I'm really excited about the change.*

Menendez: *So, how many products are you using all told?*

Lantigua-Williams:

*Right now, I've got like four, so I'm using the shampoo, the conditioner, the leave-in cream, and then can I just tell you what my favorite is?*

Menendez: *Mm-hmm (affirmative).*

Lantigua-Williams:

*The Wave Whip. First of all, that name is everything, but I love how my waves and my curls just are fuller, they're more touchable, they're less frizzy. I mean, I know. I sound like an ad, but let me tell you.*

Menendez: *Well, you can enjoy the benefits of the Cantu Beauty haircare line, picking up your favorites at Target, or ordering from target.com.*

Menendez: You grew up acting. When did you know that this was for you?

Vidal: I knew from a very early age that I loved to perform. I was always singing, because I'm a singer. I always had music on the radio. That was my first love, actually. I also used to watch a lot of television, because you know, we lived in the Bronx, and Spanish Harlem, so my mother was not like letting us go out sometimes, because at certain times the neighborhood would get tricky, so she was like, "No. En la casa. Ustedes no van a salir," or whatever. And so, I watched a lot of television. That was my friend. I watched movies, girl. So, I used to... I was so pulled in by movies, and then I had my aunt, my titi, who is such a hero in my life. She was always taking us to movies. So, I'll never forget, she used to drop us off at the movie theater, my and my cousins, and she would be like, "I'll be back at 5:00 PM to pick you guys up." Because she felt bad for us that we were stuck in the house, because we weren't allowed to hang out outside.

So, we would be at the movie theater all day. In those days, you would go from one theater to another, one movie to another. You know? Then I saw Funny Girl. My titi took me to go see Funny Girl, and I just fell in love with Barbara Streisand and how she was singing and acting, and that was it. That was it. I knew what I wanted to do.

Menendez: What do you mark as your big break?

Vidal: You know what? My big break was a film that I did called I Like It Like That. That was my big break, because I Like It Like That, and I think it was a big break for all of us in that film. It was a small film that became like a cult film, that became huge, and so I pretty much soon after that, I got signed to a deal to ABC, which led to my Steven Spielberg show that was my first big lead role on a network primetime television show that Steven Spielberg produced.

Menendez: You had Steven Spielberg writing you fan mail.

Vidal: He did. He wrote me-

Menendez: That's surreal.

Vidal: I went, "Please." I was like, I thought they sent it to the wrong address. I was like, "Uh, this must be for somebody else." I couldn't believe it. I mean, I still have it up on my wall as one of my proudest moments, and I've always loved Steven. Who doesn't love Steven Spielberg, right?

Menendez: But I thought it was interesting, too, that when you got that spinoff and you were really gonna be carrying the pilot, that there was a little piece of you that worried, can I carry this pilot? Right? That is a different level of pressure, to be like, "This show will succeed or fail," and you're not like the fourth or fifth person down in the credits. It is you.

Vidal: Well, yeah. I mean, they brought Blair Underwood and I in, and our characters just exploded on the show, like it was... We became a hot partnership on the show. We played

cops. Yeah, you know, I think when you go from a guest star, doing these kinds of roles, or even a recurring character, right, who comes in and out, maybe you do three episodes, maybe you do five episodes, whatever. When you come into the place of a lead, and there absolutely is a whole new level of responsibility, and absolutely, without a doubt, there is that little bit of like, “Oh my God, can I do this?”

But that’s when you have to really embrace your talent and recognize who you are, and say, “Yes, I can do this. Yes. This belongs to me. I’m here because this was supposed to happen.” And it’s a battle, right? Because we have that little devil on one side, the little angel on the other, who they talk into each ear, and so we... That’s why training is so important. That’s why understanding the process of creating a character, being prepared, preparation, profession, discipline, professionalism, all of that comes into play, so that you’re standing on solid ground and you have foundation when you come into that position, and you know what you’re doing.

Menendez: I was looking through your IMDB. Have you ever played a non-Latina character?

Vidal: I have. There’ve been a few of those roles that were actually written white. Being Mary Jane, that was written white. Gabrielle and I had the same representation, and they sent me the script, and I got a meeting with Mara Brock Akil, and she was like, “I know Lisa’s work.” And we sat down for three hours and talked about Kara, and that was it. She was like, “I want you to be my Kara.”

Menendez: It also shows you the value of having a person of color be the other person on the other side of that table.

Vidal: Oh, [crosstalk]-

Menendez: Right? That like the Akils would get that.

Vidal: Absolutely. Absolutely. They are so pro black and brown. Absolutely.

*Ad: Hi, everybody. I’m Juleyka Lantigua-Williams. I make podcasts, usually with and for other people, so the last thing I expected to be doing, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, was hosting a podcast. But here I am, inviting you to listen to How to Talk to [Mamá and Papá] About Anything. I know, that’s a mouthful. Stay with me. COVID-19’s impact on families around me was the catalyst for How to Talk to [Mamá and Papá] About Anything. It is a show about family, about how to communicate with loved ones when you feel like you just can’t.*

*Every week, I’ll talk to an adult child of immigrant parents who’s having a hard time broaching a taboo subject, feeling not heard or understood, and ready to try something new. No subject is off limits. Money, toxic relatives, religion, we’re gonna get into it, and I’m calling in backup. Every episode, I’ll speak to a pro, someone who is trained and experienced in helping people get through these murky relationship waters. The goal is for you and I to walk away with loving, informed, and sustainable ways to start some of these heavy conversations. So, go to your favorite podcast app right now and subscribe or follow How to Talk to [Mamá and Papá] About Anything, and connect with us on Twitter and Instagram, @talktomamipapi. Thanks, and wish me luck!*

Menendez: To switch gears a little, 2016, you were diagnosed with breast cancer. Invasive ductal carcinoma. But it didn’t show up on your mammogram. What brought you to the doctor?

Vidal: Well, what brought me to the doctor were two things. First of all, it runs in my family. At that point, my mother and her sister had had it, and they had both gone through mastectomies. But my sister had just been diagnosed. My middle sister, Tanya. So, we have always been religious about going for mammograms, and checking ourselves out, and ultrasounds, and everything else, because first of all, my doctor recommended it. And because it ran in my family. So, when I went to go be with my sister for her diagnosis, because it was just so shocking, and scary, and everything, I went out to San Francisco where she lived to be with her. I wasn't feeling well. I felt like I had a UTI or something was going on. Something didn't feel right.

And I was like, "You know what? I'm gonna see. I'm gonna go into my OB/GYN and see what's going on. Anyway, every time I'd go to see him, he always did an ultrasound. That was part of his exam no matter what. So, I called him up and I was like, "Hey, doc. I want to come in. I'm feeling this." He was like, "Yeah, come on in. Let's get everything done before you have to leave to go shoot." So, when I went into him, I told him about my sister. This man is always meticulous to begin with, but this time around, he was super meticulous. He was like, "Well, there's nothing going on there. Everything's fine." He said, "Let's do your ultrasound." You know, because that's the routine. And he was super meticulous as usual, and he... All of a sudden, he goes, "What is that?" And I was like, "What?" And he was like, "I don't like the way this looks." And I was like, "What? What are you talking about?" I was like, "Come on. I just came from my sister. There's no way that I'm gonna have something."

Well, I did. And he found it. And he found it early on through ultrasound. He sent me to my breast doctor, my clinic, and I did a mammogram. Mammogram showed nothing. Then she did the ultrasound and she saw it, and she did two biopsies, and three days later I got the phone call saying that it was cancer. So, as surreal as that was, it happened. My sister and I went through it together.

Menendez: It's wild.

Vidal: Both double mastectomies.

Menendez: What would you say to someone who's going through it right now?

Vidal: I have several people who are going through it right now, and who have gone through it that I've been in touch with, that I speak to, and I just... First of all, I pray with them, because I like to pray. I'm a prayer person, prayer warrior. I tell them to take it one day at a time, to find something to be grateful for, to look to God's strength, because sometimes our own human strength doesn't get us through it. So, we need to believe in something much more powerful than ourselves, and then believe that He's gonna bring us through it, and then obviously do everything that you're supposed to do to care for yourself.

I've spoken to women who didn't want to lose their breasts, and it was like they had the BRCA gene. I've spoken to women who have a higher stage, and it's like, "You know what?" It's like, "If this means life or death, your physical self is not the priority. Your health is the priority. Your life. Your longevity. Your ability to be in control to a certain extent about your choices, and advocate for yourself."

Menendez: I was watching you talk about it on The Real, and this already feels like so... It feels like so much time has passed since you were processing it then. We're living in a moment where everyone is dealing with uncertainty, and I wonder what living through that diagnosis and that treatment has taught you about living when you don't know what the future is going to bring.

Vidal: Right, so that's the thing. What it taught me the most is that I am not in control of anything, and that I have to literally live one day at a time in gratitude, and I can't stress that enough. I am grateful for the fact that I got the kind of cancer that I did, because... and that God gave me the courage to go through the double mastectomy, because I didn't have to go through radiation. I didn't have to go that route, because I chose to just take them off, and it had not spread to my lymph nodes because I caught it early. Why? Because I did ultrasounds, faithfully, every single year. And mammograms.

Menendez: Were you a person of faith before all of this?

Vidal: I always was. I always was, but not like I am now. I wasn't... I mean, God brought me much deeper. Much more understanding. Much more clarity. And I feel like I live my life that way, like I feel I can be transparent, because... and I'm not trying to sound cocky or anything. I'm just truly trying to express the way I feel in my heart and in my being, that nobody can hurt me. You can't hurt me. I can be transparent and I'm gonna be okay. Because I know I lead with love, and I lead with faith, and I lead because I know who's in charge. Not me. You know?

Menendez: I love that. And I think that's particularly useful in this moment. I was interviewing Isabella Gomez from *One Day at a Time*-

Vidal: Yes, I love her.

Menendez: And when I asked her, she's so great, and when I asked her what she wants in her career, she had what I thought was a pretty level-headed answer, which was basically I want to keep working. And you have really managed to do that. What is the secret?

Vidal: Well, I get asked this question a lot, and I don't know the perfect chemistry, but I can share what worked for me, what I think worked for me, was obviously knowing my craft and being prepared, but even more so than that, I always had in perspective that what I do for a living is my job. It doesn't define every part of me. So, my number one goal was to be a mom, and to be married, and I wanted that life. I wanted that. I wanted to be a wife, and I wanted to raise my kids, and have my baby. I wanted that. That, to me, was my number one desire, and my greater purpose, and then my work was just a part of me. It was an important part of me, and it's what I did for a living, but it didn't define all of me. I feel like sometimes when it's all you have, and I'm not saying you have to get married and have kids, I'm just saying that it's important for actors to live their lives. And I think it makes you a better actor when you live your life, because then you have life experience, and you have stuff to pull from, right?

So, just live your life, and not sit by a phone worrying, not... Like, you have to be creative. You have to have other things in your life that are your go-tos, that feed your spirit. It can't just be that you're an actor. Being an actor is amazing. I feel very blessed. I feel like I'm doing what I love and that is a blessing. Not many people get to do that.

Menendez: Well, and you also have managed to be what for me is the perfect level of famous. Like you have some notoriety, but when I Google you, your work comes up, not your business.

Vidal: I always thought of my kids first. I always thought of my family first. I never wanted to put myself in a position or predicament that was going to bring shame or bring kind of just bad light on them. Now, my kids are older, so they're much more comfortable if they're getting a little limelight. My oldest son, who struggled with a drug problem, he has been so brave, and he wanted me to speak about that platform, because his purpose is to help people. My purpose is to help people, right? And he's writing, he's doing music. My other son's in

college. He's into film, music, and all that. My daughter, as well. She's an actress and loves writing, and music, and she sings.

I don't want to discourage that in them. They're artists. And so, I always say like there's no shame in being a human being. There's no shame in having issues and problems. We all do. So, the thing is to lead with a lot of love and compassion, understanding, and no judgment. Because everybody's going through something. So, I think that's super important.

Menendez: We've done almost 100 interviews for this. I don't know that I've ever spoken with a mom who's talked publicly about having a child who's worked through addiction. That's gotta be really hard as a mom.

Vidal: It's hard. It is hard. When I was shooting *Being Mary Jane*, I was going through the most difficult. But I got through it. I went through my breast cancer and my son, and I got through it, and I stayed very strong, and faithful, and I relied on my village. And that's why I feel, again, the way I'd like to share is by being transparent, and by helping someone else in their journey, and my son feels the same way, and our family went through a lot, and it's nothing to feel ashamed about.

Menendez: Here's my last question for you, which is what are you gonna do next?

Vidal: What am I gonna do next? I don't know, but I love acting. It's my number one. I get to sing on the show. I hope that leads to something. I hope that leads to something. But I've always, always wanted to produce, and direct, and create, like I have several projects that I'm working on that I hope and pray that I can get them off the ground.

Menendez: As vehicles for you or as vehicles for whomever?

Vidal: Some are for me, some are for my amazing, talented, Latino brother and sisters, and friends that are in the business, that I just want to create for.

Menendez: You are a gem. Thank you so, so, so, so much. I can't believe how good you look without a stitch of makeup on. It's very upsetting.

Vidal: You're very kind.

Menendez: Thank you as always for joining us. *Latina to Latina* is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Cedric Wilson is our sound designer. Manuela Bedoya is our intern. We love hearing from you. Email us at [hola@latinatolatina.com](mailto:hola@latinatolatina.com), and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you're listening, and please, please leave a review. It is one of the quickest and easiest ways to help us grow as a community.

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