



Mayan Lopez Knows That Art Imitates Life

Comedy and entertainment is the family business (her dad is comedian George Lopez), but it was a TikTok video that caught the eye of a Hollywood writer and inspired Mayan's new NBC sitcom: Lopez vs. Lopez. Mayan gets candid about her complicated relationship with her father, and the combination of craft-honing and deep therapy that has prepared her for this moment.

Alicia Menendez: What is it like to grow up the child of one of the most famous comedians in the world? Live through his infidelity and a public divorce, and then come together after a decade of tension to co-star in a sitcom about, well, all of it. That's what Mayan Lopez has lived through, and it's what she's doing with her new NBC sitcom, Lopez Vs. Lopez. She's here to talk about the power of therapy, the necessity of hard conversations, and the TikTok that started it all.

Mayan, thank you so much for being here.

Mayan Lopez: Thank you so much for having me, Alicia. I'm so excited to be here.

Menendez: What an exciting time for you.

Lopez: It has been an absolute whirlwind. I am here to proudly promote my new show on NBC, Lopez Vs. Lopez, in which I star with my real-life father, George Lopez. It's a fictionalized version of our real-life relationship. It's all really about the pain and reconnecting with a family member or a parent that you've had some animosity. So there were, like, generational trauma or just internal parent-child relationship things. Now I get to create beautiful art and hopefully impact a lot of people, and be a representation of Latinas in media. And I'm so incredibly grateful.

Menendez: It's so wild to hear you speak about it so freely because, in general, families don't like to acknowledge tension or rifts. In Latino families specifically, we are conditioned from a very young age that what happens at home stays at home, and we do not talk about it with people outside of the house. So I want to go back first, and I want you to start by telling me when you were a kid, what was that home like?

Lopez: It was a very chaotic home life sometimes. I'm an only child, and I'm kind of the miracle baby. My parents tried very hard to have other children, but it was really just me. And so my mom had a lot of juggling. My parents were really a partnership in their marriage as well, and so I got to see on screen, go to see the George Lopez show, which started when I was five and went until I was about 9, 10. And so it was really interesting to see. I was very shielded from a lot of things in my home. My mom made everything seemed really great, but I also internalized a lot of the anxiety. I didn't really know what my dad did. I knew that he made people laugh, but people would come up to me and be like, "Oh, can I get your dad's autograph or something," or, "Can I get this," or, "Can I get that?" And I was a little kid just wanting to make friends, and so I was like, "Absolutely." I said yes, and so created more people-pleasing behaviors, and I was always very trusting.

In my life, I've had people come up to me, and they're just like, "Oh, yeah. We're only friends because of who your dad is." Or "Where you come from." And so that was very weird for my own personal identity of always wanting to try to separate myself, or sometimes I used him as an umbrella to try to make friends in my own life.

Menendez: I noticed on your Instagram, a tribute to a therapist you had at a really critical time in your life. And I'm going to paraphrase here, but you said, "I was 16, and I was a kid, and I was afraid, and I didn't want to live." Can you take me back to what was happening, sort of who you were in that before time?

Lopez: I want to just say my mom and my dad; I have my own things with my dad. We are still growing our relationship, but to even think of the 15-year-old, if I were to tell her where I am now and the woman that I am, I would be so proud of myself. I really would be. A public divorce is something that, it takes away the privacy of something so personal, and so even when I went to school, before I really got into therapy, people were coming up to me asking me if it was true. Teachers were asking me about my parent's infidelity. It was on the cover of National Enquirer. I had a really hard time expressing my feelings that I couldn't even go into a room with my dad without bursting into tears because the amount of anxiety, and it was just shaking in me.

It's been 10 years of really taking care of myself, along with also pursuing my passions of comedy and always wanting to make people laugh. Even when I was going through things in my life and my family, sometimes the only way that I can get a quip or something was I made a really good joke. I like to say that it was always Lopez versus Lopez because sometimes we didn't have the communication style or being comfortable with each other to say something, and so that was my way, I would make a little dig, and maybe I would impress him, and maybe that impressive it was going to be able to get into his psyche. And me going into almost, my dad says, the family business, I see it no different as someone who is the head of a law firm helping their child, teaching them the ropes.

And I've had an incredible teacher, and I feel like almost everything in my life has prepared me for this moment because, I even have talked to my therapist, and I was like, "So let me get this straight," my therapist, "So you're acting as a fictionalized version of yourself, but your scene partner is your father who has been the catalyst of a lot of trauma for you, but you're having to play a different version." And almost everything in my life, I've realized, has prepared me for that. All the therapy that I've had, all the realization. I feel like in my life somewhere during this pain, I truly feel like I called this experience to me because I always knew in those moments where I was feeling down, I always knew that I was meant for something more. And I always hoped that my pain was going to mean something, and that is something that I'm so excited about.

The first couple of weeks it was very emotional. It took me a really hard time to separate my father, the character George, from we're coworkers now, but also we are still trying to get comfortable with each other because I even think, God, in the last 10 years, I'm spending more time with him on set than I've spent with him in a really long time. So even being with each other every day, my dad's getting to know me. And that's something that's... I'm so grateful.

You know, I think it's so funny that how this show came about is as much as I've prepared it and studied from me being a comedian, I made a TikTok with someone who was talking about my parent's divorce and other dramas that have happened in my family. And really, I just wanted to air out some dirty laundry. Because at that time, I was having some

animosity with my dad, and I was twerking upside down on a wall as a duet. Because I was like, "What's going to get people's attention? Why not?"

And my mom actually told me not to post that video. She thought it was going to be too much. And I did. And our showrunner, Debby Wolfe, saw that video, and she's actually the second-ever Latina showrunner to ever run a show on network television. And so from there, I feel like it's just two years ago I couldn't have these conversations with my dad, and now we're doing it on a big huge scale, and it's something I'm so grateful for.

Menendez: I mean, the thing is, Mayan, I want to be clear, you've done the work. What did it take to get ready? Not just psychologically, but skill-wise for this moment?

Lopez: I've always wanted to be a performer ever since I was five years old. My parents actually, I begged them to have me start acting, but my parents were like, "Absolutely not. We want you to have a childhood." And looking back, I'm very grateful for that. But I still did things even as a young kid. I feel like I inherited... My dad always likes to say to me that, "Oh, comedy's genetic." Because I almost have that quick wit. I used to get in trouble all the time in school because I would say the first thing that came to my head, and it would be funny, and would I make people laugh. So I started going to the Second City in Hollywood summer camp when I was a little girl learning to do improvisational comedy. I always wanted to train. I didn't like standup just because my dad and I always felt so much pressure. Still, I feel like now I'm opening up to the idea of doing it because I do love comedy. I've always been wanting to be a student of comedy.

For college, I went to Columbia College Chicago, studying comedy writing and performance. I went there for about two years until I dropped out and went to the conservatory program at the Second City in Chicago. And it was the best training. I performed every night for four years, always going around really honing in and getting my performing in. Because even with the show Lopez Vs. Lopez, we perform in front of a live audience every week. And the audience gives me so much life because I can hear the laughter and know where I need to go. And so that skill has helped me so much. My dad has always said, "No one is meant for this job. Just try to be the best comedian that you can be and just focus on being the best and doing what you need to do, and someone will notice." And it happened.

Menendez: Can you talk me through how you go from twerking on a wall in a TikTok video to having a sitcom on a major broadcast channel? And by that, I mean pull back the curtain for someone who's not familiar with the process, with how something goes from being a concept that you're out pitching to putting the team together to getting it picked up and being in those rehearsals.

Lopez: So it started in October of 2020 because COVID put, like everything in the world, things way behind and behind and behind. So I made this TikTok, and Debby, Debby Wolfe, who's our showrunner, co-creator, and writer, she was procrastinating, not wanting to write one night at three o'clock in the morning. Was looking through her TikTok and my TikTok came up. And she started looking at my other videos that I had made. And we have very similar histories. She's half Salvadorian, half Jewish. So she just watched this, and she was like, "This is a show." And she saw me, and then she saw me first and then saw who my dad was. And she was a co-executive producer on The Conners show on ABC. And her showrunner was Bruce Helford, who happened to be the co-creator of my dad's original show, George Lopez. And so she really instigated everything. My dad and I would've never thought to work with each other in a million years.

She set up a meeting. We were all like, "Did we have a show idea here? Do we have something? This is really special." We're like, "Yes, let's do it." We got a treatment really quickly. We pitched it to many different networks, ABC and NBC bought... Bought, which is meaning they just wanted to support the idea in the room, which is very rare to happen. They fought for it over a couple of months, and then NBC bought the pilot to green-light it, and we started casting. In March of this year, we shot the pilot, and May, June, we found out that we were going to go to air, and now we're about to shoot. We're on a break, but now we're going to be shooting our eighth episode out of 13 so far.

Menendez: You've said, Mayan, of your mom, "Your presence is my safety." Can you tell me about a time when that was true?

Lopez: I think there's been sometimes where my mom has been the reason I've been able to breathe another day. She has been always there for me and always putting my needs before hers, sometimes to her detriment. But I think that's also the love of a mother is that you would do anything for your child. And I'm just very grateful that I've had someone being very stable in my life. I don't think my dad would disagree that he's always been very present. He never had a father, and so he didn't really always know how to be a good father to me during those periods. Now we've reestablished that relationship. But with my mom, I've had to do some growing as well.

You know, everyone has complex relationships with their family in general. But my mother has been a steady, constant rock for me as she's allowed me to be able to have a safety. Although as I've gotten older, my mom has said like, "Okay, you can step out of the nest now," we call, you can go out of the nest, out of the nest. I'm 26, so sometimes I still need my mom. And so I ask, "Okay, can I step back in the nest for a second?" So it's like I need to ask permission. But as I'm going through life, she's always been there and always supporting me. So I'm always incredibly grateful to her.

Menendez: Yeah, it's a funny thing about becoming among myself, which is I used to think that the most important things were showing up for the recitals and the basketball games, and those things are important, but really it's like you remember who was with you when you had a stomach bug in the middle of the night. You remember who got you off the school bus the day that you were crying because you had some beef with your best friend. Like those, that constant, steady presence is really what it's about. More than those big high hat moments.

Lopez: Yeah. Just letting me... Even if I just need someone to sit with me if I'm going through things. Even if I don't want her to touch me, just your presence enough can be... Just knowing that someone's there, being able to feel that connection to them that is sometimes as much safety as you need.

Menendez: I realize we've sort of walked around this, talked around this, but what did the coming back together actually require? Teach those of us who have been avoiding having that coming together, having that conversation, what it actually looks like.

Lopez: I think what it came down to, if I could sub it down to one thing I think with my dad is that he may not have agreed with how I interpreted or how I saw the things that he did to me, but he at least had enough to at least acknowledge my experience. I once was telling my dad in family therapy once that when I was a little kid, it was really confusing that I would try to go up to him and give him a hug, but he didn't really have affection in the home, and so he would push me away. He'd push me away. So I never really liked to go near him because I didn't know if I was going to be pushed away because I wanted to hug. Which

was like, "Am I bad? What's wrong with me? La la la." And until I told my dad that even as a little kid, it really hurt how I interacted with him.

And even something just as simple as, "Oh my gosh, Mayan, I'm so sorry. If I had known that that would've affected you in that way, I would've never have done it." Or "I'm so sorry for how that was seen." Or even just the simplest acknowledgment of my pain or even trying to try and empathize or to understand. And I don't expect ever for that pain...

Because you have to take responsibility sometimes for your own suffering. I know I've kept myself in places because I've wanted to feel that pain or had pain power me through, but I've had to take responsibility for that. It may have been my parent's mistake, but it's my responsibility. And so I've really taken my own life in my own hands. It's not going to fix everything, but it gives me enough to go off of that. I can go accept that and heal myself.

Menendez: I want to ask you a hard question, which is when do you know that you are more than George Lopez's kid? Is that an achievement? Is that a hoop you jump through, or is it a sense of peace you come to with yourself?

Lopez: I think almost as of recently; I have felt that because when I was very insecure with myself, I used to remember getting into college parties, showing up a picture of me and my dad as a kid. Being like, "Look, I'm important. Let me in." When I felt nothing in myself, and this experience and this show has proven to me how strong and how funny and how incredible I am that I've never done this before, and I am shining, and I am thriving, and I'm not like, my mom's being like, "You're tuning your own horn." But I was like, "Hey, I have a horn to toot now." So it's that. And I feel like, yes, I am very grateful, and I would never take my DNA away from me is that I And just like any other celebrity child, I think of Dan Levy in Schitt's Creek working with his dad. You're still able to see, yes, that they're working together, but that he has many wonderful products. He's a great actor. He's a great writer. You're able to separate that. And I feel like, with this, I'm just going to keep doing me. I'm going to keep showing Mayan, and I know that it's going to take time, but the more that I'm just trying to be authentically me, that I know that people will see me. And it'll take time, but I'm going to keep going down that road

Menendez: Mayan, thank you for taking the time to do this.

Lopez: Thank you so much for having me.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. *Latina to Latina* is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Florence Barrau-Adams mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us @latinatolatina. Check out our merchandise at latinatolatina.com/shop. And remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Goodpods, or wherever you're listening right now.

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