



Mayda del Valle,
Los Angeles, 2009.

27 | THE POWER OF TELLING YOUR STORY MAYDA DEL VALLE

Spoken-word artist

Mayda del Valle doesn't waste words. Or time. In 2001, at the age of 22, the Chicago native became the youngest poet and first Latino to win the Individual National Poetry Slam. Since then, her bracing style—informed by Latin jazz and hip-hop—has set off sparks on Russell Simmons's Def Poetry HBO series and Broadway show; in May she performed at the White House at the invitation of the president and First Lady. When *O* asked del Valle to talk about what she does, she composed this poem:

when I would wander into the kitchen
for the third time
in 37 minutes
shoulders curved into a question mark
waiting for the perfect opportunity to ask her
for something
my mother
in all her motherly wisdom
would say

As if I didn't carry you for 9 months
and push you from this body. what is it you
want girl?
el que no habla Dios no lo escucha

if you don't speak God can't hear you

It might have been the fear
of being
so quiet
that my creator would become deaf to my very
existence

the hurry up and spit it out already
that mothers have of forcing their offspring
to speak

Might have been the height the color
of language the how did you learn English
the name that stumped teachers who smelled
like stale coffee and cigarettes
the shhhhhhh not
right now

The 7 A.M. reception desk temp job
at the fancy designer label
I wore the same shoes to every day
where no one noticed my pen and paper
hiding the diary in religion class
mom finding it
under the bed

might have been the you're that girl
who beat me at the slam last week
the but
what will people think
if you talk
about that
in public?

might have been stories of grandmas
with a child on one hip
and a silent song swinging from the other

could have been anything
that encouraged the hand the mouth
the loud the shout
the story the telling

must have been something
made me think I was special enough
to speak to scream
to stand up straight
special enough to ask
God to listen
to me

28 | THE AWESOME POWER OF EVERYWOMAN LILLY LEDBETTER

Retiree, hero

For 19 years, while Lilly Ledbetter was a manager at a Goodyear tire plant in Alabama, her male peers' salaries far outpaced her own; by the late 1990s, the highest-paid male manager was making some \$18,000 more for comparable work. Though Ledbetter didn't prevail when her discrimination suit reached the Supreme Court, her case led to the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which President Obama signed into law in January. On behalf of women everywhere, we salute her....

Work hard and play by the rules: That cornerstone of the American dream crumbled a bit in 2007 when the Supreme Court ruled against Lilly Ledbetter. The five-four decision boiled down to timing: Five male justices invoked the statute of limitations for pay-discrimination claims, and decided the inequity Ledbetter suffered had expired.

But Ledbetter kept right on fighting. And the new law that bears her name effectively nullified the Supreme Court decision. Today the 71-year-old retiree is championing what she calls "the next logical step": the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would strengthen penalties for equal-pay violations.

Lilly Ledbetter never received the hundreds of thousands of dollars due her in back pay and benefits. But her name is now shorthand for a new, im-

