

L.A. Vida
Complete Synopsis

Lupe Padilla is dreaming of her recent family trip to Oaxaca. In her fitful dream she remembers the memorial service and burial of her recently deceased mother. In remembrance of Mrs. Padilla, Rafael, Lupe's boyfriend, has invited the family to the colorful Oaxaca Ballet Folklorico, a favorite of Lupe's mother. Rafael asks Lupe to stay in Oaxaca and marry him. Lupe is torn between her love for Rafael, her allegiance to her family, and the desire to be the first in her family to go to college. Lupe abruptly awakens to a much different reality. She lives in present day East Los Angeles with her father and younger brother. Lupe and her family get ready for work. As José Maria, Lupe's brother, walks her to work, they are stopped by Pinto, a local gang member. Pinto is interested in Lupe and tries to recruit José Maria into the gang. Lupe fiercely defends her little brother.

Lupe arrives at her aunt Gabi's panadería where she works as a waitress. Gabi and the panadería cooks, Nacho and Conchise, are excited to see Lupe now that she is back from her trip. Suddenly José Maria bursts in unannounced. He angrily informs everyone of his being robbed by gang members at the high school. Lupe and Gabi calm José Maria down and remind him to be thankful for "familia y fe", family and faith. Nacho attempts to cheer him up by extolling the virtues of not being a vegetarian. José Maria does not return to school but goes to work at the meat plant where his father is manager.

Mr. Padilla is surprised to see José Maria arrive so early at the plant. José Maria informs his father that Pinto has been harassing him and Lupe. Mr. Padilla immediately fires Pinto. Pinto protests and threatens him with retribution. After escorting Pinto from the building, Mr. Padilla is called to the plant office. He is informed that Francisco Ruiz, the plant owner, has suddenly died. Mr. Padilla informs the worried employees that their jobs are now in jeopardy.

That evening Lupe again dreams of her Oaxaca trip and Rafael. Again, he asks Lupe to stay in Mexico with him. Lupe reluctantly informs Rafael that she can't abandon her family. He tells Lupe he will be in Los Angeles in November with the ballet company. Lupe invites him to the Padilla Día de Los Muertos party. Again, she wakes up in East Los Angeles. As Lupe and José Maria walk to work, they are again confronted by Pinto. He is more insistent with his invitation for José Maria to join his gang. He warns Lupe not to interfere. Lupe flies at Pinto in a rage and she is knocked to the ground.

When Lupe arrives at work, she explains what happened with Pinto. Gabi vows to protect the family at any cost. Conchise and Nacho console her with Gabi's cool tepache.

In the seven years since Jake, Francisco's son, left his father and the meat plant, he has been working in the Peace Corps in Uganda. Jake has been informed of his father's death and has returned to East Los Angeles. As Ruiz' only heir, the plant is now his. He is unsure what to do. Upon entering the plant he is greeted by Mr. Padilla. José Maria informs Jake that the plant is in disarray and unsafe. When the lunch bell sounds, Lupe appears with food for the workers. Jake and Lupe had a relationship seven years ago

before he left. Jake and Lupe awkwardly say hello. They obviously still have an interest in each other. As they reacquaint themselves, Lupe suggests that Jake keep the plant instead of selling it. She tells Jake of her dream of attending college. When Lupe returns to Gabi's panadería, everyone wants to know how Lupe feels about Jake.

The next day Jake meets with his father's lawyers concerning the fate of the plant. The lawyers inform Jake that the plant was in escrow when his father died. He must now decide whether to sell or keep the plant. Mr. Padilla offers some advice. Suddenly José Maria comes running into the plant. The INS agents are on the property and will conduct a search for undocumented workers. Two workers, Rosa and Antonio Medina, are undocumented. Jake quickly hides the Medinas under the floorboards in the office. After the raid, Rosa and Antonio are exceedingly grateful to Jake. In appreciation, Mr. Padilla invites Jake to their Dia de Los Muertos Party.

The next day Jake visits Lupe at Gabi's panadería. Lupe is excited to see him and congratulates him on helping the Medinas. Gabi notices that Lupe's interest in Jake is growing. Lupe and Jake make plans to meet at the plant that evening. After Jake leaves, all the employees want to know if Lupe is now more interested in Jake than Rafael. She reassures everyone that their relationship years ago is ancient history. Only Gabi can see that Lupe is not entirely honest.

That evening Jake and Lupe meet at the plant. They reminisce about the time they spent there years ago. Lupe takes Jake behind the plant and shows him the employee garden. The Medinas are tending the garden and shower Jake with fruit and vegetables in appreciation for saving them from the INS. Jake and Lupe are clearly falling in love.

A few days later the Padilla Dia de Los Muertos party takes place. All are in attendance except for Jake, Rafael, and Pinto. When both Jake and Rafael arrive, Lupe is forced to explain. But before any explanation can be made, three shots ring out and glass flies through the air. Everyone drops for cover. Pinto has sprayed the house with gunfire. In fury, a gun toting Gabi charges out the front door and returns fire. Pinto flees, but inside Jake has been injured by the flying glass. Jake is taken to County General for stitches.

Later in the evening Lupe stops by St. Mary's Church. She lights a candle for her mother and tells her of her plans to follow her dream of attending college and not marry Rafael or Jake. When they return home, everyone is cleaning up the house. Despite the damaged house, they honor those who have passed away and give thanks for the family they have.