



Written by [Michelle Malkin](#) on March 3, 2021

Missing Marizela: Ten Years

March 5, 2011. I remember the moment like it was yesterday when my family contacted me in a panic to let me know that my 18-year-old cousin and goddaughter, Marizela “EmEm” Perez, had gone missing.

“Help.”

It’s the text you get in the middle of the night that doesn’t seem real. Ten years ago this week, EmEm vanished from the University of Washington campus in the middle of a sunny afternoon. She was last seen walking away from a Safeway grocery store in the U District and into the dread void of uncertainty. Once again, as I have done faithfully and heartachingly for the last decade, I must report that there is still no news on her whereabouts. Nothing. In 2019, I finally received some Seattle Police Department documents in response to a public records request about her case. But nothing in the trove shed light on any potential investigative leads.

In my home office, I keep a bulging file called “Find Marizela.” There are handwritten notes of conversations with police, carefully constructed timelines, social media archives and holiday photos gathered around the piano singing Christmas hymns and carols. There’s also a stack of missing person flyers emblazoned with the headline, “HAVE YOU SEEN ME?” illustrated with screenshots from the Safeway surveillance video. Pale and fleeting, EmEm looks like a ghost — drained of the beautiful, bubbly energy she embodied as a child who loved baking cookies and playing board games with me.

The description on the flyer reads:

“Asian female, 5’5” tall, 110 lbs, skinny build, asymmetrical bob with short bangs and brown/red highlights hairstyle, tattoo on left inner arm with the words ‘lahat ay magiging maayos’ (all will be well), last seen wearing a dark jacket with hood over a light color sweater with hood, denim jeans, light brown suede laced boots, possibly wearing green eye contacts, carrying a denim drawstring backpack with rainbow butterfly screenprint, with a Macbook Pro laptop.”

Ten years.

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The first weeks after she disappeared are now mostly a blur, but a few memories are indelible. I remember breaking down while a teenage girl sang “If I Die Young” by The Band Perry at my then-7-year-old son’s talent show on the night before I flew out to Seattle to be with Marizela’s parents:



Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia Commons
Michelle Malkin



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*If I die young, bury me in satin
Lay me down on a bed of roses
Sink me in the river at dawn
Send me away with the words of a love song
Lord make me a rainbow, I'll shine down on my mother
She'll know I'm safe with you when she stands under my colors...
...Gather up your tears, keep 'em in your pocket
Save them for a time when you're really gonna need them, oh*

I won't forget the kindness of strangers and old friends who volunteered to help us search local parks and public streets. I remember feeling lost and desperate in Discovery Park, staring out toward Puget Sound, praying to God, asking: "Where? How? Why?"

For all the negativity that surrounds the reputation of the national media, I have nothing but praise and thanks for the local reporters — Christine Clarridge at the Seattle Times and Shomari Stone at KOMO, in particular — who covered Marizela's story with compassion and context. Clarridge highlighted Marizela's case, as well as the plight of other families with missing young adults, in a searing front-page feature on what parents go through in cases where the police have not found evidence of foul play. Suicide was a primary assumption on the part of the police. EmEm did have a history of depression. But the case of young Joyce Chiang — whose death in 1999 was reclassified as a homicide in 2011 by Washington police who mistakenly insisted the case was a suicide — shows the dangers of locking into assumptions without thoroughly exploring all leads.

Ten years on, the investigation into Marizela's disappearance has all but come to a halt. But if you live in the Washington area and have any relevant information about her whereabouts, please contact the Seattle Police Department at (206) 625-5011. And for those who have to go through this same hell, a hell I wish on no one, I leave you with five hard-learned lessons from a decade's worth of unknowing:

- 1) Document everything.
- 2) Take an immediate and full inventory of your loved one's internet footprint — every email account, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and social networking account.
- 3) Don't assume the police are pinging cell phones, obtaining internet or phone records or obtaining surveillance camera video. Don't assume anything.
- 4) Make sure your loved one's info gets into the NAMUS (National Missing and Unidentified Persons System) database immediately.
- 5) Don't be afraid to be a squeaky wheel.

If you don't speak up for your missing loved one, no one will.

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