

# THE LOST YEARS

JUDY SERRANO

[www.JudySerrano.com](http://www.JudySerrano.com)



Black Rose Writing

[www.blackrosewriting.com](http://www.blackrosewriting.com)

© 2013 by Judy Serrano

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publishers, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a newspaper, magazine or journal.

The final approval for this literary material is granted by the author.

First printing

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

ISBN: 978-1-61296-271-9

PUBLISHED BY BLACK ROSE WRITING

[www.blackrosewriting.com](http://www.blackrosewriting.com)

Printed in the United States of America

*The Lost Years* is printed in Adobe Caslon Pro

Cover Art by Dark Water Arts @ [www.candacelbowser.com](http://www.candacelbowser.com)

## Author Notes

I would like to thank my husband, Miguel, for always showing me support and kindness while I am writing my stories. I also need to thank my boys, Miguel Jr., Theo, Tad and Enrique for always allowing me time to write, and helping me remember to get up from my desk and play every now and then. Thank you to my mother for editing “The Lost Years,” out of the goodness of her heart.

Thank you to my readers, who without you, there would be no stories to share. Thank you to the many bloggers who take the time to write about my characters and post reviews.

I would also like to thank Reagan Rothe and Black Rose Writing for making my dreams come true. Reagan believed in me from the start, and I will always be grateful for that.

## Reviews for The Lost Years

“I have read every book that Judy Serrano throws at me and I love it! I cannot wait to read about the Montiago family. I feel like they are a part of my fictional extended family because I know so much about their adventures.” – **Stephanie Fatta** of *Beauty Brite Book Reviews*

“I have loved every book in the Easter’s Lilly series and The Lost Years is no exception... Very well written as always and again I was completely hooked.” – **Rachel Simons** of *Stressed Rach Reviews*

“Judy Serrano has so much going on in the stories, she tells parts that terrify you, parts that bring a smile to your face and parts that brings tears to your eyes... I would love to see this series turn into a movie or a TV mini-series one day.” – **Patty Foltz** of *Way2Kool Designs*

“Judy Serrano has done it yet again! I was totally engrossed in this book. I read it in a day.” – **Gina Butler** of *Gina’s Library*

# THE LOST YEARS



## Chapter 1

### The Picket Fence

I'll never forget the day I put a bullet in my uncle Hector's brain. I was 16 years old.

*15 years earlier.*

"Grab me that hammer!" Max shouted. "Come on now, Junior, it's time to get that white picket fence put up for your mother." That's all she ever wanted; a house with a white picket fence in the front for all to see. She wanted to be *normal*, whatever that was. We put up the fence together and my mom was watching us from the window, holding her glass of iced tea in her hand. Her curly blond hair cascaded like waves down her shoulders, as her grey blue eyes looked almost through us while we labored.

"She loves you, you know," I told him.

"I know," he answered, putting the finishing touches on the fence. "Ready to throw some poles into the lake out back?"

"I've been ready since we got here," I answered.

"We've only been here for a few days," he reminded me. "You

know you're going to start your new school on Monday.”

“Home schooling is looking better and better,” I told him.

“I’ll be working as a math teacher at your school. It’ll be fun, the two of us, hanging out together.”

“Yeah, lots of fun,” I told him sarcastically. He hammered away at that fence until the front yard was completely enclosed. He smiled with pride at his workmanship. Honestly, I never thought he had it in him. We have always been so rich, and so well taken care of, that I had never seen my uncle Max lift a finger unless it was to pull the trigger of his gun. The cartel took good care of us for too long. We moved out of my uncle Diego’s house in Las Vegas and set up camp in a small town in Texas called Quinlan. It was a little too small for my taste but mom was happy. And if mom was happy, all was right with the world.

My uncle Diego, Max’s half brother, is the leader of the organization. My mom was married to him a long time ago, when she discovered she was pregnant with me, and my birth father had abandoned her. Diego married her as part of a business arrangement. He didn’t love her and pretty much ignored her; that’s when she met and fell in love with Maxwell. It was a long and complicated road, the one that lead us here. My uncle Max was an FBI operative, living with my uncle Diego only to infiltrate his organization, along with his full brother Hector. Back then, Diego and Max were not close. Diego was partially responsible for the death of Max and Hector’s mother. Hector and my mom were lovers once. That’s why she’s pregnant now. I told you... a long and complicated road.



Hector got in trouble with the law and went on the run. That was when he left my mother and she and my uncle Max got back together. My uncle Diego has the flash drives that prove my uncle Hector is guilty as sin, but has them hidden in some undisclosed location. I think there is a part of my mother that misses Hector in a way. Sometimes there is a sort of sadness behind her eyes that no one seems to be able to touch. Not even Max.

My uncle Diego was saved by the grace of God and turned his life around. He became a preacher man while not *entirely* letting go of the cartel. It will be mine someday, I'm sure of that. He fell hopelessly in love with my mother and has been carrying a torch for her ever since: A very obvious torch. He has managed to marry someone else. His wife's name is Julia, and they have a family of their own, but Julia made Max and my mom move out of their house due to the recognizable longing my uncle had for my mother. It had become painful to watch. Although Max had never really forgiven Hector for sleeping with my mother, Diego and he have a sort of truce about it all. They are best friends now and have been for years.

My mom is in her seventh month of pregnancy now. Max's infidelity was the culprit. She sort of *turned to* Hector when Max was unfaithful. Her affair with Uncle Hector went on and off for years after that. But Max loved me and raised me as his own, and promised my mother he would do the same for this baby when he or she was born. Warts and all, Max was a stand-up guy when it came to my mother's children. I was glad they finally decided to move out from

under the watchful eye of my uncle Diego and live a life as a family on their own.

Uncle Diego bought our house for us. He didn't want my mother to want for anything and well... let's face facts... schoolteachers don't make much money. Our home had five-bedrooms and was strategically located on the lake with a boat ramp. It was a brick home with lots of shade trees. I had never seen anything quite so amazing and my mom loved it. That's what was important now, that mom was happy. She was incredibly beautiful and drove the Montego men wild. Even now, she could make a man beg for breath with the crook of her little finger.

"Call Chris and I'll go get the poles!" he shouted, walking towards the garage. Chris is my half brother. He is Max's son. Sammy is also Max's boy. Chris is 11 and Sam is about 7. Amelia is Hector's daughter with my mom. This was during the first affair. That's why I say she never really got over him. She kept going back to him, time and time again. Amelia, sometimes known as Amy, is 9 and very bitter. Her father left after she was born and didn't come back for three years. When he finally came to live with us, he only stayed for a little while before he was gone again. She blames mom for chasing him away and of course she hates Max for the same reason. I suppose she'll be trouble some day.

I started for the house when Chris came running out the door with what looked like a cup full of bait in his hand. "Come on, come on, come on!" he shouted anxiously, as he started running from the

back of the house. I followed. We got to the boat ramp and Papi, that's what I called my uncle Max, was putting bait on hooks to throw the poles in the water.

"Beautiful day," Max observed. "It's like paradise out here. The only thing missing is your mother." We both looked at the house, almost expecting her to be walking towards us. Suddenly we heard a crash and the window to the room at the back of the house shattered. Without any reaction time, Max was gone. Chris and I weren't far behind. When we got to the house, Max put his hand up and said, "Wait here. Please boys, don't follow me inside." I could hear my mother arguing with someone. There was definitely a man in the room with her. Max pulled his gun, cocked it, and slowly walked inside. We could hear bits and pieces of the conversation but nothing more than that. I pulled my gun and got closer. Yes, I carry a gun. It was my uncle Hector inside with my mother. I was sure of it. I got a little closer and peeked my head inside, unnoticed. He had a gun on my mother and was threatening to kill her if Papi didn't hand over the flash drives. "Don't make me kill you," I heard Max say. Max and my mother never told Uncle Hector that the baby was his. They lied about it, like they lied about everything else. They didn't want him to come back and stake claim on the baby someday.

"She's miscarrying, Hector, let her go!" I heard Max shout. She must have been bleeding, I thought.

Hector shouted something back that I couldn't make out and then Max let the hammer drop, so to speak. I knew he had to be

desperate. He never tipped his hand in all the years I have known him unless there were no other options available. "It's your baby, Hector. She's carrying your baby." I held my breath.

"W-what?" Hector stammered. "*My* baby?" Too much time had passed. I knew something was wrong and I couldn't trust that he wouldn't shoot her. I spend most of my childhood protecting my mother, and I certainly wasn't going to let him kill her now.

I slowly crept around Max and he turned in surprise when he saw me. My mother had already collapsed onto the floor looking much like a ragdoll. Hector was standing, dumb founded, next to her, sweat dripping down his face with his gun pointed towards the floor. I pointed the gun at Hector's head and let out a bullet. It was like I was watching the whole thing in slow motion. I saw the bullet leave the gun and enter my uncle in the side of the head. He dropped the gun and hit the floor. There was blood: lots of blood. Max rushed to my mother, lifted her into his arms and carried her out to the couch. "Call 911!" he shouted. "Please, Junior, I can't lose her!" As I called for help, Max was already on the phone with the FBI. It felt like only minutes had gone by before they were here, cleaning up the mess, and leaving with my uncle Hector on a gurney.

"Is he dead?" I asked. "Is he dead?"

My question fell on deaf ears as they whisked him away and the paramedics took my mom to the hospital. Max put me in charge of the children while he went to the hospital with the wounded. It all happened so fast that I wasn't even sure what had happened. Chris

helped me to the couch and sat with me while I regrouped and tried to catch my breath. “Is he dead?” I asked again. “Mom is she...”

“I don’t know,” was all he said before he hurried out the door. We sat there in the painful silence, waiting for Sam and Amy to come down the stairs looking for the answers that we did not have.

## Chapter 2

### The hardest part is the waiting

When morning came, we found Max in the kitchen cooking breakfast. We all came into the kitchen like cats afraid of the bath water. “How’s mom?” I asked.

“I’m sorry, Junior,” he started. “She lost the baby.”

“But mom, how’s mom doing?”

“She’s very sad but she’s okay. Uncle Diego is with her now. He flew in last night.”

“Julia?” I asked.

“No, his wife didn’t come.” We weren’t surprised. “She’s very depressed about the baby. Even though it was Hector’s, she’s very sad.”

“And Hector?” I asked.

“It was self-defense, Junior, you’re okay.”

“Is he...?”

“Yes,” he answered. “She’s very depressed about that too.”

“I’m sorry, Papi. I know you loved him.” Although I knew I was supposed to feel remorse, I wasn’t feeling anything even close. It was him or my mother and the choice was clear.

“I’m glad you stepped in,” he continued. “I wouldn’t have been

able to do it.”

“I know,” I answered. “Can we see her today?”

“Yes,” he told us. “Right after you’ve eaten.”

We ate as quickly as we could and he took us to our mom. Uncle Diego was sitting up in her bed with her, leaning against the headboard and she was securely wrapped around him with her head leaning against his chest. “Mom,” I said, running to her. “Mom, I’m so sorry.”

“Junior,” she hugged me tightly. “Thank you for...” she started to cry, “for saving my life.”

I pushed her back a little so that I could see her face. “But you’re sad,” I continued.

“He’s gone,” she said. “Hector and his baby... both gone.”

She leaned back against Diego again and he squeezed her tightly as she wept. “You still have Amy,” I reminded her. Amy was sitting on the floor by the door. She had her knees tucked under her chin. We all looked at that unloving child and my mother found no comfort there.

“When did you get here?” I asked uncle Diego.

“Early this morning. I just wanted to see her,” he continued. “To hold her for a minute. Then I’ll go.”

“Diego...” Max warned. Then Diego started to get out of the bed but my mom wouldn’t let him go.

“Lilly, let me comfort you,” Max pleaded. “Last time you were hurt like this you turned to...” He almost said it but stopped himself. “Let me in, baby girl.”

“He’s right, Lilly,” Diego agreed. “Let him in. I have to go.”

She let go of my uncle and Max slipped in the bed in his place. “I can’t grieve for Hector with you,” she told him.

He picked up her chin with his fingers. “You loved him, Lilly. If you didn’t love him you wouldn’t have let him father a child with you. Grieve, cry... he is certainly no threat to me now.” She put her head on his chest and began to weep. Chris, Amy, and Sam got into the bed with them and Max’s eyes began to fill with tears.

I was different. I did not mourn or feel sadness. That was not part of my constitution. I knew there was something broken inside of me, the first time I killed someone. It was easy and it solved a problem for me. It was then that I realized how easy this world was. If there was a problem, simply eliminate it. No more problem.

“Come on,” Diego said, grabbing my arm. “Let them grieve.” We headed into the hallway and sat down in a private area in the waiting room. “Junior,” he started. “Diego,” he corrected. That’s why they called me Junior. I was named after my uncle when he and my mother were married, all those years ago. Diego Jr. was my name. Eventually over time, I became Junior. “Why no tears? You and Hector were close before he started popping pills. No pain? No sadness?”

“I feel no remorse,” I answered. “I think there’s something wrong with me, Uncle. I never feel sorry. I have no conscience.”

“Sometimes you sound a little too much like me,” he continued. “But that’s not what I’m asking.”

“I have gone between his side and Max’s side for years. He’s gone



for good this time. Maybe Mom and Max will finally build a life together without his interference. Maybe there will finally be some peace.”

“Maybe so,” he said, trying to conceal a smile. “And you? When do you get to have your own life?”

“I’ve spent so much time protecting my mom, that I haven’t made any time for that stuff.”

“I understand you played football back in Las Vegas. Quarterback I was told.” I smiled. “You can certainly do that here.”

“I guess,” I answered.

“How about girls, Diego? Don’t you want to spend some time in the company of some pretty girls?”

“I don’t have time for girls,” I answered. He laughed. “What?”

“No girls, back in Las Vegas?”

“A few here and there. But nothing serious.”

“Let’s talk about that,” he started. I knew right then where this was leading. “Why do you think Hector got your mom pregnant twice?”

“Because he was stupid,” I answered.

Diego smiled. “No argument there,” he went on. “What made him stupid?”

“I already know all that stuff,” I insisted. “He didn’t use any... protection.” I blurted uneasily. “Right?”

“Right,” he answered. “Do you know about protection?”

“Yes, Uncle Diego. I lived with my parents always cheating on

each other. I know all about that stuff. I'd have to be unconscious not to pick up a thing or two along the way. Max told me Hector was sloppy."

"When you start dating, I want you to keep a few things in mind."

"Okay," I said uncomfortably.

"Once you get intimate with a young lady, it is a joining of the souls. If you are intimate with someone who you are not married to, you will eventually break up. Then you will experience a tearing of the souls. That kind of pain is something you may never get over."

"Like you and mom?" I asked.

"Exactly like that," he answered. "I was married to your mom at the time, but I never got over her. There will never be another woman like your mom for me."

"What about Hector and mom? They were never married."

"And..." he continued. "Look at her now. Part of her soul is dead. It's missing. She will miss him for a long time. She gave a part of herself to him that she will never get back: the very best and most personal part. If he was still alive, it would live inside of them both forever. They should never have let it get that far. But the truth is, once they were intimate, they connected on a very personal level. They couldn't stay away from each other and this went on for what felt like a lifetime."

"Married people break up all the time," I told him.

"Married people are supposed to stay married. Try to wait,

Junior.”

“Mom says that if I start dating, it will just lead to all that other stuff. I don’t want a bunch of little Diego’s running around.”

He laughed a little. “Heavy kissing and touching will lead to the other stuff,” he agreed. “So try not to be alone in the dark too much.”

“You mean with a girl,” I jested.

“Yes, with a girl.” He hit me in the back of the head lightly.

“I have a question,” I started.

“Go ahead,” he continued.

“Why should I be with girls at all? Maybe I shouldn’t date until I’m 18 or so.”

“I am afraid, Son, that it will be out of your control. You will soon find a beautiful senorita who will steal your heart. I just want to be sure that you understand how important a step like that can be and if you can’t wait for some reason, how to protect yourself.” I nodded. “Intimacy is very emotional for a girl. Men can have multiple partners and not think twice.” He paused. “Much like you feeling no remorse for shooting people. You go on like it was nothing. But women will become more needy. They will need continuous reassurance. And eventually you will break her heart. Just try to wait, okay?”

“Yes sir,” I answered.

“Okay then.” He put his hand on the top of my head and messed up my hair. “I have to go.”

“Are you going to say goodbye to mom?” I asked.

“I think I’ll leave her in the capable hands of your uncle Max,” he

answered. He started to walk away but I grabbed his arm.

“When you retire, Uncle Diego, will you leave the business to me?”

“What do you want, Junior, the church or the organization?” He had a mischievous smile on his face, like he totally knew what the answer to that question was going to be.

“The organization, Tio. Will you leave it to me or one of your real kids?”

The tightness of his expression relaxed a little as a smile spread like a ripple in a still pond. “You couldn’t be more mine if you came from my own flesh and blood, Junior. Yes, it will someday be yours. So don’t do anything stupid until that day comes.” He tossed me a wink and disappeared down the hallway. I went back into the hospital room and they were getting mom ready to go. The mood was very dark and all the kids were drying their eyes. I was glad I missed it.

“We’re going?” I asked.

“Yes,” Max answered. “Did Diego leave?”

“Yes, he’s gone,” I confirmed.

“Let’s go!”

We headed back to our house in hopes that my mom would try to get some rest. I started getting my things ready for school tomorrow. I knew that everything was about to change.