

### *In the Time of the Butterflies* Thematic Essay

In the historical fiction novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, by Julia Alvarez, readers follow the four Mirabal sisters: Patria, Dede, Minerva, and Maria Teresa. The setting of this book takes place during the 1930s to 1960s in the Dominican Republic. “Las Mariposas”, as the sisters were known, organized meetings to oppose Trujillo, the evil dictator of D.R who was anti communism. They collected guns and ammunition to use towards the revolution. Dede was the only sibling who wasn't formally involved with the resistance because of her abusive husband, but she was the one who lived to tell her sister's story. On the other hand, Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa were the ones who were deeply involved and would do anything to prove what they were fighting for. Readers learn the story that these three young women were traveling in an attempt to free their husbands from jail, and apparently drove off the side of the hill to their deaths. However, it was later revealed that Trujillo was behind the terrible accident. An important theme in *In the Time of the Butterflies* is when families make sacrifices for each other they become stronger. This is shown through Dede coming out of her comfort zone to protect her family, Patria risking her relationships, and Minerva having to make choices in order to be the bigger person for her family.

Dede comes out of her comfort zone to protect her family. Being the second oldest, Dede Mirabal is protective over her sisters. Dede hasn't always had the closest relationship with her sisters since she was in an abusive relationship with her husband, Jaimito. Dede was constantly concerned about her sister's safety, knowing that Minerva, Maria and Patria were intensely involved with the resistance. Dede would worry more over Minerva knowing she was not only involved with the resistance but that she was in trouble with the law and was on house arrest. When Dede goes on a trip with Minerva to clean out her house they get stopped by an officer.

When the officer asks for identification Dede says she is Minerva. Minerva distinctively remembers it like so. Minerva says, on page 277. “How, when we were asked to identify ourselves, what she said was—I will never forget this—said my name is Minerva Mirabal.” This shows how Dede takes Minerva's cover to protect her. Readers view Dede as someone who isn't courageous or someone to take risks. In this moment, Dede steps out of her comfort zone to protect her sister. Not only did she step up as an older sister but it brought them closer making them stronger together. The death of the sisters was hard on Dede; she became an open book to everyone who wanted an inside scoop of what really happened. The novel opens to a time where Dede is explaining how interviewers come around every November looking for more information on the sisters' deaths. Dede is still trying to deal with this wound that wasn't ever healed and when she has to keep being the one to retell this story she feels, on page 301. “Each visitor would break my heart all over again— “It was the least I could do being the one who survived.” Through Dede we see how she sacrificed her state of comfort to tell the girls stories. Even though it pains Dede it benefited her and the family by getting the Mirabal name out there. Dede did this to protect her family's legacy and to keep it alive, to make sure people knew what they fought for. Overall, Dede exemplifies making sacrifices for family by constantly stepping out of her comfort zone.

Patria makes sacrifices that risk her relationships with her husband and son. Patria being the oldest of all the sisters she is someone who is family oriented and loves to give and share her belongings. Patria started getting more involved with the resistance after she offered her home as a place where members of the resistance could have their private meetings. Patria's husband, Predrito, was protective over this land since he was opposed to them meeting near their property. Predrito had only agreed that these meetings were allowed to be on their land, never

close or especially in the house. Patria invites them in when she says, on page 165 “Come on inside now...I have something to talk to you about. He thought I meant him, but I was looking around at the whole group. Come on in now, I mean it this time.” This illustrates how by Patria being the heart felt person she is, she is willing to open her house up to the resistance even though it's going to create problems between her and her husband. But she made this sacrifice because she knew it was important to the resistance but more importantly her family. Patria does not only risk her relationship with Pedrito but also Nelson, her son. Patria was extremely protective over Nelson since he was her first born. As Nelson is getting older Patria realizes his interest in the resistance. When Patria makes this realization she starts to panic and secretly sends a letter to his school requesting he stays on the school grounds. When Nelson finds out about this letter his mom sent he felt “it was unfair, [Patria] wasn't letting him become a man.” In this moment his safety was more important than their relationship. Patria sacrifices peace within their relationship in order to protect his innocence and this was clear when Patria says “But I stood firm. I'd rather have him stay alive, a boy forever, then be a man dead on the ground.” (pg.158) This demonstrates how Patria stuck with her decisions and was just doing her duty of being a mom. We see Patria sacrificing her relationship with Nelson and though he doesn't know it now short term sacrifices make a long term impact on how he lived. To conclude, these actions make the family stronger through the sacrifices Patria made.

Minerva had to make choices to be the bigger person for her family. Minerva is the third oldest child in the family and was very determined. She is caring but is someone who sticks with her decisions and knows what's right from wrong. Since Minerva and her husband, Manolo, were a big part of the revolution they would constantly be traveling around in regard to the resistance. Minerva had to sacrifice her baby, Manolito, to her sister Patria. Minerva did this

in order to make it less suspicious that she kept traveling back and forth between towns. On page 155, from Patrias chapter, Patria says. "But Minerva, your own child— I began and then I saw it did hurt her to make this sacrifice she was convinced she needed to make." This conveys how Minerva knew that she had to make this choice even though she didn't want to. Minerva knew she made a commitment to this resistance and that meant there might be times where you had to make a sacrifice. By making this sacrifice she gave her baby a better life including herself. This made their family stronger because now Patria has more kids to love and Minerva has a closer bond with Patria now that she is taking care of her child. Minerva became the bigger person by making this choice she knew needed to be made. Additionally we see Minerva being the sister who is the most brave and courageous. She took chances and made bold choices. She respected loyalty and didn't like being lied to. When Minerva finds out her dad had been cheating on her mom and had another family, with four young daughters as well, she was furious. Minerva ends up taking her car to his mistress' house and crashes into her dad's car. By doing so, Minerva made a statement but also showed this is unacceptable and actions have consequences. When Minerva is alone with her dad in the car, running errands she talks about the whole situation and it gets pretty heated. Minerva then says, on page 91. "I waited for things to settle down inside me. Then I said I want to meet them, they're my sisters after all." This illustrates how Minerva sacrifices the feelings of anger and betrayal and puts them behind her in order to be the bigger person in this moment. Minerva knew that it wasn't the girl's fault, it was her fathers and they were related at the end of the day. This was a hard decision for Minerva to make since she first thought of her dad as a trusting father and now knowing his secret she felt lied too. This action makes the family stronger by creating a more understanding environment between Minerva and her dad. In short the audience sees how Minerva has to make choices to

be the bigger person for her family.

In summary, a memorable theme throughout the book *In the Time of the Butterflies* is when families make sacrifices for each other they become stronger. This is represented by Dede coming out of her comfort zone, Patria nearly risking relationships, and Minerva making choices to be the bigger person for her family. This is significant because through this theme readers see how the Mirabal's make sacrifices for each other which makes them stronger as a family. We notice the Mirabals' take risks to better the family even though it might be difficult. As a reader of this novel the sisters have opened my eyes to see how a family could become stronger through the sacrifices they make for one another.

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