

The Secret of the Old Mango Tree

By: Erlise



Outside Mateo's school in San Isidro sat a tall mango tree. During the summer months, its branches droop low from green leaves and sweet fruit. Its trunk was thick and slightly bent with rough bark that stayed cool in the sun. Children played near the tree, but few ever noticed it. Except Mateo. He was twelve years old.



Mateo sat beneath the mango tree during recess. Other kids played games like tag and basketball, but Mateo liked to read in the trunk. Being near the tree soothed him. He always felt safe.

This afternoon was different. Mateo slumped down into his usual spot, frustrated. He'd failed his math quiz, and some kids in class had whispered

and giggled. Embarrassment flushed Mateo's face.

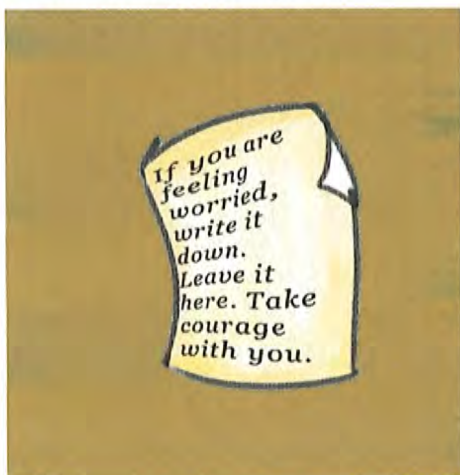
Instead of going to lunch, he walked over to the mango tree.

That's when he saw it.

Inside the hollow of the tree sat a small tin box. Mateo knew he had never seen it there before. Puzzled, he opened the lid. Inside was a folded note.

If you are feeling worried, write it down. Leave it here.

Take courage with you.



Mateo scanned his surroundings. No one was watching. Heart racing, he pulled a scrap of paper from his notebook and wrote:

I'm scared I'll fail math class.

He folded it up and tucked it inside the box.

Mateo returned to the tree the next morning. The tin box was there, his note had disappeared. In its place was a new message:

Everyone learns at their own speed. Don't give up.

Mateo stared at the encouraging words. Who had put them there? His heart felt warm.

That week, Mateo began writing notes and leaving them in the tin box. Every day, a new message would appear.

Your mistakes help your brain learn.

Asking questions is how you grow stronger.

You are smarter than you believe.

Mateo stayed after school to receive tutoring. He spent every afternoon practicing math problems beneath the mango tree. On his next quiz, he aced it.

One morning, Mateo arrived for recess early. There by the tree was Mrs. Ramirez, his teacher. She had a pen in her hand and grinned when Mateo approached.

"You found the box," she said softly.

"You wrote the notes?" Mateo inquired.



Mrs. Ramirez nodded. "When I was little, someone left me notes that helped me believe in myself. I wanted my students to have someone like that too."

Mateo grinned wide. "It worked."

Mrs. Ramirez reached into her pocket and pulled out several blank notes. “Now go help someone else.”

The next week, Mateo spotted a small girl sitting beneath the mango tree. She looked sad and defeated. Quietly, he returned the box to its nook in the trunk. He tied a yellow ribbon to the tree’s lowest branch.

Because like mango trees, acts of kindness can blossom sweet fruit for others. Encouragement helps people grow strong and confident, just like a tree grows with care and patience.

