

# Mijita Fridita

Frida Kahlo was born in Mexico City in 1907. But Frida liked to tell people that she was born in 1910, the year of the Mexican Revolution. Frida wanted others to know how proud she was of being Mexican. Frida got sick with polio at age 7 and she had to stay inside her house for nine months. She couldn't leave her own bed, but she brought to life an imaginary friend--someone to share secrets and dance with.



Young Frida's health got better, but one of her legs became shorter and thinner than the other. Other kids made fun of her and called her hurtful names. So Frida began to hide the difference in her leg with extra socks and a raised right shoe. Following the advice of her father, she continued to play sports like swimming, soccer, and wrestling. Frida liked to be active and to explore around her town on a bike.

Her father, Guillermo Kahlo, was a photographer. He suffered from epilepsy, which at times made it hard for him to work. Yet, Guillermo Kahlo worked for the Mexican government, taking photos of national monuments and important buildings. He was born in Germany and moved to Mexico when he was 19 years old. Guillermo married Frida's mother, Matilde Calderón, a Mexican woman whose family had both native and Spanish roots. She did not go to school, but she was raised by nuns and grew up a devout Catholic. Matilde taught her daughters sewing, cooking and cleaning because she thought all women had to learn these skills. But Frida Kahlo was not very interested in these activities. She preferred to collect stones, plants and even insects. Frida would bring home all the things she collected to look at them with a microscope. These interests made her very close to her dad, who also taught her about photography and painting.

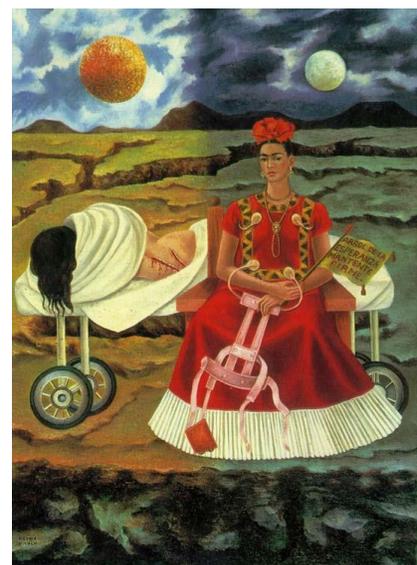
When Frida was fifteen, she applied to the National Preparatory School, the greatest school in Mexico, which had just begun to accept girls. All candidates had to take a difficult entrance test, which Frida Kahlo scored very well. Only 35 girls went to that school, out of two thousand students. Her talents were quickly recognized there, and Frida got along with many of the other students. She was part of student groups that met to talk about poetry and politics. One of these groups, named the "Cachuchas", included seven boys and two girls, who were some of the school's most ambitious students.

Her father had been hired as a photographer by the government of Porfirio Díaz. However, after the revolution and change of president, he had less work. To help support her family, Frida started working while going to school. She worked as a cashier at a drugstore, but she was not very good at doing math. Then, her father helped her find a job at a print shop. One of her first tasks there was to copy the prints of the artist Anders Zorn.

On September 17, 1925, Frida's life changed forever. The bus she was riding in crashed into a trolley car. This caused a metal rod to stab Frida's abdomen. Her spinal column, pelvis, collarbone, right leg and foot, left shoulder and two ribs were also harmed. The doctors put her in a full body plaster cast. She stayed at the hospital for a whole month with her older sister Matilde, who would tell her jokes to help her stay positive. The young Frida Kahlo had to stay in bed for many weeks. Again, Frida used her imagination and creativity to make things better. This time, she painted. Her mother got her a special lap easel so that Frida could paint while lying in bed. To learn more, Frida read many painting books and imitated the styles of many famous artists. She also asked her sisters and friends to pose so she could paint them. Frida would go on to become a famous and unique painter.

Frida's family did not have enough money to pay all her medical bills. So Frida tried to earn money with her art. But she did not know if her paintings were good enough for her to make a living as an artist. Frida searched for someone who could tell her. She asked Diego Rivera, a famous Mexican painter she met at her school before the accident. Diego found Frida's paintings to be very interesting and he became enamored of her. Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo would later get married and have great careers as artists.

In 1954, Frida was offered her first solo art show in Mexico. It took place at the elegant *Galería de Arte Contemporáneo* in the Zona Rosa of Mexico City. At first, it seemed that Frida would be too ill to attend. But Frida had her own bed moved into the gallery, for her to lie down during the show. She arrived by ambulance, was carried into the room on a stretcher and laid onto her bed. Surrounded by crowds of fans of her art, Frida appeared to be resting upon a throne.



## **Resources & Recommended Reading:**

Helm, MacKinley (1989) *Modern Mexican Painters*, Dover Publications

Herrera, Hayden (1983) *FRIDA, A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, Harper & Row Publishers

Grimberg, Salomon (1997) *Frida Kahlo*, Barnes & Noble Inc.

Kettenmann, Andrea (2000) *Kahlo*, Taschen

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Venezia, Mike (1999) *Frida Kahlo*, Grolier Publishing.

Sabbeth, Carol (2005) *Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera –their Lives and Ideas: 24 Activities*, Chicago Review Press