

Personal Questions:

Question: What's your full name, and is there a story behind it?

Maria: My name is Maria Arabo. My godmother actually gave me my name because she thought it was pretty, but when my grandpa found out, he was upset because that was the name of his step mother, who was very cruel to him as a child. However, I ended up becoming my grandpa's favorite, which I feel like redeemed the name for him.

Question: Where were you born and raised?

Maria: I was born in Baghdad, Iraq. I moved to San Diego when I was six, and have lived in the same small suburban area till now.

Question: Can you tell me about your family?

Maria: My immediate family consists of my parents and my older sister. My sister is a pharmacist, is married, and has one girl. My mom is a stay home mom, and my dad works in HVAC.

Question: Do you have any siblings, and are you close to them?

Maria: I have one older sister, who is 9 years older than me. She is a pharmacist, is married and has one girl who is 4. We are not close since she is so much older than me, so when she established her life, I barely started mine.

Question: What's your favorite childhood memory?

Maria: When I was about 8 or 9, I was on a baseball team with all my cousins. I have always been the only girl in the family, besides my sister, so I did everything with my male cousins. I was the only girl on the team, which always made me laugh looking back on it because I stuck out like a sore thumb with my pink bat and mitten.

Question: What's your relationship status, and what do you look for in a partner?

Maria: I am currently single. I look for someone who is kind, smart, and religious. But I think the most important thing is that he truly has to be in love with me for everything that I am.

Question: What do you do for a living, and do you enjoy your job?

Maria: I am currently an Outreach Coordinator at Triple V, and I absolutely love my job and my team.

Question: Have you traveled much, and what's your favorite destination?

Maria: I have been very fortunate to be able to travel to many different cities and countries. I have been to New York, Boston, Washington D.C., San Francisco, Chicago, Michigan. I have also been to Rome, Venice, Paris, Madrid, Barcelona which were all absolutely amazing.

Question: What are some of your life goals and aspirations?

Maria: I want to manage nonprofit organizations, and hopefully one day I can work for an organization like Make A Wish, and work as a director.

Question: Do you have any significant personal achievements you're proud of?

Maria: Graduating UCSD and getting a job not too far out from graduating is something I am very proud of, because when I was in my undergrad, I was struggling with figuring out what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go after college, so being able to have graduated and gotten a job that I am happy with is amazing.

Hobbies and Interests

Question: What are your favorite hobbies or pastimes?

Maria: I love reading. I read when I get home from work and I just spend the entire night with my head stuck in a book. It is my favorite form of therapy because I get to transport myself in another world and forget all the bad that is happening in real life.

Question: Are there any sports or physical activities you enjoy?

Maria: I like to play tennis, even though I am not the best at it. I try to hike as often as I can because I love nature and it is enjoyable to get away from the screens and look at the world.

Question: What types of books, movies, or TV shows do you like?

Maria: My favorite types of books are fantasy novels or romance. The same goes for movies and TV shows, because I am a hopeless romantic.

Question: Do you have a favorite musical genre or artist?

Maria: My favorite music genre is country, at the moment. My taste in music changes depending on my mood.

Question: Are you into any arts or crafts, like painting or writing?

Maria: I try to journal, as a way to get my thoughts out, but I don't do it as often as I like.

Question: Are you passionate about any social or environmental causes?

Maria: I think that I care a great deal about the issues that are going around in the world, but to me, it is just difficult to make a difference, because no matter how much I talk about a certain issue, or try to promote it on my social media, when the hype ends, everyone forgets about the problem.

Question: What's something you've always wanted to learn or try?

Maria: I have always wanted to learn to play the piano. I love classical music and going to the symphony, so to be able to play such a beautiful instrument like the piano would be a dream.

Question: Do you have any unusual or hidden talents?

Maria: I am very good at organization. I know that is not a conventional talent, but I am so good at color coding, and cleaning up my space. I am also very fast at doing those types of things.

Personality and Values:

Question: How would you describe your personality in a few words?

Maria: Kind, caring, funny

Question: What are your core values in life?

Maria: My core value is that it is important to show kindness to everyone, especially those who do not show it to you, because there is no reason to have hatred in your heart.

Question: Are you an introvert or an extrovert, and how does that affect you?

Maria: I have a little bit of both, depending on where I am. I sometimes need time to develop relationships with people where I am able to come out of my shell and be an extrovert.

Question: What qualities do you value most in a friend?

Maria: Trust is my number one. If I can't trust my friends, then I feel like there is no point in having them, because to me my friends are my support system, and if I can't trust them to keep what I tell them to themselves then that is a betrayal.

Question: What's your approach to handling conflict or difficult situations?

Maria: I am very level-headed, so when a conflict occurs I talk about the problem at hand, and get it straightened out.

Question: How do you define success and happiness?

Maria: Success to me is being able to make an impact on someone's life that is not yours. I want to be able to do things with my life that make someone else happy, and in turn that will make me happy.

Question: Are there any significant life experiences that have shaped you?

Maria: When I was 20 I went through a really horrible breakup. I fell into serious depression where I would cry myself to sleep for 2 months straight. I lost a lot of weight, which was very bad for me since I am already so small. After a lot of prayer and self healing, I was able to grow and turn into a completely different person, a person that I can actually look in the mirror and smile back at. Although this happened a lot later in life, that event shaped me so much and I am grateful for the person that I have become because of it.

Favorites and Preferences:

Question: What's your all-time favorite food?

Maria: I love pasta

Question: Do you have a go-to comfort meal or snack?

Maria: Chips are my favorite comfort meal, nothing in specific, just chips in general.

Question: What's your favorite season, and why?

Maria: Winter is my favorite season because I love the outfits, and getting creative with what I can wear.

Question: Can you name a book or movie that profoundly impacted you?

Maria: My favorite book is A Court of Mist and Fury. That book really changed my perspective on love. Even though it was a fantasy novel, the characters and their love story felt so real and deep, and really impacted me for the better.

Question: What's your favorite way to relax or unwind?

Maria: Reading is my favorite way to relax because it lets me turn off my thoughts and transport myself into another world.

Question: Are there any specific daily rituals or habits you have?

Maria: I try to pray everyday because it makes me feel better, and brings me some peace whenever I feel like I need guidance.

Question: What's your favorite type of weather?

Maria: Cold weather is my favorite because I love to wear cozy sweaters or wrap myself up in a blanket in my room.

Travel and Adventure:

Question: Have you ever had a life-changing travel experience?

Maria: When I went to Chicago in summer of 2022, I realized that I would want to move there one day and live a year there by myself, so I think that was something that really allowed me to change my mindset about things like work and where I live.

Question: Is there a place you dream of visiting someday?

Maria: I have always wanted to visit Turkey or Singapore, because I hear they are such beautiful places.

Question: Do you prefer city life or the countryside?

Maria: I think in a perfect world I would like to try both, but I think my preference would be the countryside that is not too far away from the city.

Question: Have you ever taken a spontaneous trip? What happened?

Maria: For my 22nd birthday my friends and I went on a last minute trip to Newport Beach. We went for the night and got dinner and explored the area, which was very fun and I got to share a good memory with my closest friend.

Question: Do you enjoy outdoor activities or adventure sports?

Maria: I think outdoor activities are my preference just because I do not like to do anything too dangerous.

Question: What's the most beautiful natural scenery you've witnessed?

Maria: I went to Idyllwild with my best friends in January of 2023. We went when there was still snow but most of it had melted because it was sunny throughout the day. It was one of the most beautiful and peaceful scenes I had ever seen because the snow, mixed with the mountains and the sun created such a beautiful picture.

Relationships and Friendship:

Question: How do you approach making and maintaining friendships?

Maria: I am very friendly to everyone that I meet, so making new friends comes naturally. However maintaining a friendship is hard, especially if both sides are not putting enough effort, so it is just a process of figuring out how that specific friendship is going to work.

Question: Can you describe your closest friend and what you admire about them?

Maria: My best friend is so funny and so kind, and she is the vault to all my secrets. I admire her because she is so hardworking and rarely complains about her tasks, which is something I really look up to.

Question: What qualities do you value most in a romantic partner?

Maria: Honesty and trust are what I value most in a romantic partner because they are the fundamental foundations of all relationships. If there is no honesty and trust then that is not a relationship that is going to last.

Question: How do you handle disagreements or conflicts in relationships?

Maria: I like to keep my tone even because I don't like to yell or lash out, so I try my best to communicate effectively with people I am having conflicts with.

Question: Do you believe in soulmates or lifelong friendships?

Maria: I believe in soulmates. I think a big part of that belief comes from me being Catholic, so I believe that the person that you are meant to be with is the person that God has chosen for you. In a way, this gives me a lot of hope and makes me feel better, especially when I start to feel discouraged about not finding someone. I just tell myself that God doesn't want to show him to me just yet.

Question: What's the best piece of relationship advice you've received?

Maria: The best relationship advice I have gotten is, "it is okay if they are not the right person". I get attached fairly easily and if that person doesn't work out, I often blame myself or think that I had let the person who I am supposed to be with, go. This advice has gotten me through a lot of hard times because it really is okay if they are not your person, because everything that you learn from previous relationships helps you become a better version of yourself.

Philosophical and Thought-Provoking:

Question: What's your philosophy on life or your guiding principles?

Maria: My philosophy is that everything happens for a lesson. Everything that happens in your life, whether it is a challenge or a misstep, I take it as a lesson that I have to learn from and grow from, and if that "lesson" keeps showing back up, then I have not fully learned everything I needed to learn.

Question: Are there any unanswered questions or mysteries that fascinate you?

Maria: Since I am Catholic, I believe in heaven, but something that really makes me think is what heaven may look like. Is it the same for everyone? Is it your happiest memory? Are you alone? These questions tend to keep me up at night, but they also make me grow closer to my faith despite it.

Question: If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

Maria: The one thing I could change if I had the chance is to stop children from dying. Whether it is from illness or war or mental health. I would like to live in a world where children are allowed to be free and at peace and are able to grow up and become the better generation that we so desperately need.

Question: Do you believe in fate, free will, or something else?

Maria: I believe in all of the above. I think that when something happens, you have free will and are able to do what you want, but fate always has a way of bringing what is supposed to be in front of you.

Question: What's your take on the meaning of life?

Maria: Life is a gift, and everyday that we get is a blessing. When I complain, I immediately stop myself because I know there is always someone out there who has it worse than me so I always make sure to be grateful for what I have.

Question: How do you view the balance between science and spirituality?

Maria: I studied science in college, and I am very Catholic, however I balance them out fairly well. I try to be realistic with myself and view the things that have concrete evidence as fact, and those that do not as faith.

Personal Growth and Self-Reflection:

Question: Have you ever had a major turning point in your life?

Maria: When I was 21, my life changed very dramatically. I had just broken up with my boyfriend of 3 years, I had a major falling out with my older sister, and I felt so lost when it came to my future career path. Due to all of this, I broke down completely and fell into a really deep dark depression that I did not come out of for a year. However traumatic this was for me, I did come out a better version of myself than I was prior to my depression, and for that I am very grateful. I prayed and meditated a lot which really helped me find my way out, because if I was not going to be able to love myself through this process, then I was never going to be able to truly love my life.

Question: How do you handle failure or setbacks?

Maria: When I was younger I used to let failure define who I was. If I failed a test, or disappointed my parents or my friends, I took that to heart and let it drag me down. Now, after a lot of growth with time and also working at becoming a better version of myself, I view my failures as a way to learn from my mistakes and ultimately use it as a driving force for bettering my future.

Question: What's something you've learned about yourself recently?

Maria: I have learned that I often try to control the things that are going on around me that I have zero control over. I guess this all sprouts from not feeling like I was enough for the better part of my life. I think now that I am older, and I would like to think a little wiser, I am able to differentiate between the things that I can and can not control. Doing so, I am able to enjoy my life with ease and hope that everything that is out of my control gets resolved or does not become something that ultimately hurts me.

Question: Do you have any personal mantras or quotes that inspire you?

Maria: My favorite quote is "difficult roads often lead to beautiful destinations". When life is hard I just try to tell myself that this will become a full circle moment, and that I am going to look back at all my hardships and smile, knowing that I have made it to the beautiful destination.

Question: Are there any fears or challenges you're actively working to overcome?

Maria: I have a fear that I am not going to achieve my dreams, or that I will fall into a career or life that I am not happy with, so to overcome these fears I just do my best everyday to strive for my goals and make everyday count.

Question: What's the most valuable life lesson you've learned so far?

Maria: Everything hardship or challenge in life is a lesson that you must overcome. When something hard happens, I take it as a lesson I must learn from and that is the only way that I will truly grow as an individual and become my best possible self.

Dreams and Future Plans:

Question: Where do you see yourself in 5, 10, or 20 years?

Maria: Honestly, I have no idea where my life will take me, because everytime I try to plan out my life, something always gets in the way or my life makes a large detour in a direction that I was not expecting. All I hope for in the next 5, 10, and 20 years is that I am happy. Truly happy and achieving my dreams, making a difference, and that I have wonderful people at my side, because at the end of the day that is the only thing anyone can really ask for in a world where there is never certainty.

Question: Are there any specific goals or dreams you're currently pursuing?

Maria: My current goal is working my way towards pursuing a career in nonprofit management. Right now, I work at a non-profit organization that helps high school students and college students get scholarships, and once I save up enough money, I want to go get my masters degree in nonprofit management. From then I hope to gain a director position working for a company like Make A Wish, St.Judes, or Rady's Children, because I want to have a career that makes a difference in the lives of children.

Question: If you had unlimited resources, what would you do with your life?

Maria: I would go to every poor country and provide them with all the basic necessities for living and then I would do that ten times over until they have everything they need to sustain a good life. After that I would do everything in my power to end the homelessness problem in my city because everyone, regardless of their missteps, deserves a second chance at life. Honesty, if I had unlimited resources, I would not stop until everything in the world was good and just.

Question: Do you have a "bucket list" of things you want to accomplish?

Maria: Not necessarily, but I do have things I want to do and places I want to see. I want to explore as much of Europe as I can, live in a new city for a year, and try to fix problems that are happening around my city so that I can leave this world a better place than I found it.

Question: What legacy would you like to leave behind?

Maria: I think the only true legacy I want to leave is to be able to have left the world a better place than I found it. I hope to impact the lives of many people, and not so I can feel a sense of satisfaction or that I can flaunt myself as a good person, but instead to be able to bring life and joy back to people who deserve it.

Quirky and Fun Questions:

Question: If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

Maria: I think I would want to be insanely smart and have an exceeding intelligence because I have always really valued that in other people when I come across someone who is really smart, and I always wished I had a larger capacity for that.

Question: What's your spirit animal, and why?

Maria: I think my spirit animal is an elephant because they seem very wise and I try to embody wisdom throughout my life, or even look towards those who are wise, so an elephant is my perfect spirit animal.

Question: If you could time travel to any era, where and when would you go?

Maria: I think I would love to travel back to the regency era or the 20s, for the sole reason that I love the outfits.

Question: What's the most unusual or adventurous thing you've ever eaten?

Maria: In my freshman year of high school I took a Spanish class where my teacher had a bag of dried crickets and he offered it to us to try. I tried it thinking it would be gross, but I just tasted really salty, so it wasn't half bad.

Question: If you could meet any historical figure, who would it be?

Maria: Since I am catholic, this makes sense to me, so I think I would want to meet Jesus. I know that to many, he is not a historical figure, but he embodies a large fraction of my education growing up, and even still, so to be able to meet him would be amazing. I think I would just want to thank him for giving me a faith that I hold so dear and that makes me who I am.

Question: What's your favorite type of dance move?

Maria: I have two left feet, so when I try to dance it is always just me standing there, slightly bending my knees, and moving my hands to the beat, so that I can try to replicate what a decent dancer might look like.

Random and Lighthearted:

Question: Do you have a favorite joke or funny story you'd like to share?

Maria: I went to San Francisco with a big group of friends in 2012 and on our second day one of our friends wasn't feeling well. When we got back to the hotel she started throwing up and we were all freaking out because we didn't know what was wrong with her. When she got out of the bathroom, she called her aunt who is a doctor and told her the symptoms she was having. When she hung up the fun, she looked at all of us and said "my appendix is bursting, I need to go to the hospital". We all freaked out so myself and two other friends called an uber and took her to the hospital. We all knew how fatal it could be if we were too late, so we kept asking her

how her pain levels were, and she would respond with extremely low numbers for a person whose appendix was apparently bursting. So we get to the hospital, and hours go by while we're waiting for the doctors to tell us what's wrong. The doctor came out and his answer had us all floored. Her appendix was in fact not busting. However, our dear old friend had caught the coronavirus. So we all start freaking out because we are on vacation and we've all been sharing a room with her. So for the duration of our trip we all had to quarantine until we got our tests back and they were all thankfully negative. At the time that story was not funny to any of us in the slightest, but now we all look back and laugh till we cry every time we retell it.

Question: What's your favorite type of dessert?

Maria: I love cheesecake, specifically banana cheesecake which everyone thinks I'm really weird for, but it is so delicious.

Question: If you could only eat one cuisine for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Maria: If I could eat pasta for the rest of my life and not gain a single pound, sign me up.

Question: Do you believe in aliens or extraterrestrial life?

Maria: I feel like there are way too many planets for there not to be people/things living on them. Sometimes I think that if there are aliens, they probably think of earth and the inhabitants of it as being aliens, because we are probably so strange to them, just like the thought of them is strange to us.

Question: What's your ideal weekend getaway?

Maria: An ideal weekend getaway involves both relaxing and having fun, so a day spent enjoying nature or laying by the pool, with dinner or a night out on the town to follow up with.

Question: Are you a morning person or a night owl?

Maria: I am definitely a morning person. I can't really stay up very late anymore which makes me sad because I love going out at night, but morning activities are also very fun too.

Question: What's your favorite board game or card game?

Maria: When I was little, candyland was my ultimate favorite game, but if I were to play it now I'd probably think it was boring. I think the fun came from playing it with all my cousins and imagining all the characters were real. Now I love playing uno with my friends because we make it really competitive, but it is all in good fun.

Reflective and Emotional:

Question: What's a moment in your life that made you feel truly alive?

Maria: I don't think I have a singular moment. Everytime I am with my friends I feel truly alive, because they are all my safe space and every moment with them makes me the happiest.

Question: Is there a specific song or piece of music that holds special meaning to you?

Maria: Yellow, by coldplay. I listen to that song often and hope that one day I can find my yellow.

Question: Have you ever experienced a profound act of kindness?

Maria: When I was leaving my internship at a retirement community, my supervisor surprised me with the kindest gift and overwhelming goodbye. She had bought me a tote bag filled with so many goodies, and she gave it to me and said, "so you can look professional in your new job". Once she gave it to me she started crying and told me how she was going to miss me and how she was so grateful for the time we had spent together. I had never felt so much happiness and sadness in a singular moment. She was the most genuine human being I had ever come across and I will always remember all of her help and grace that she bestowed on me.

Question: What's the most significant personal transformation you've undergone?

Maria: In 2021 I went through a very difficult time where I fell into a really deep depression that I could not get out of for a whole year. I remember crying myself to sleep for two straight months, and my friends had no idea because I did not want to burden them with my problems. I prayed a lot and reset my entire mentality on life until I was able to crawl out of that hole I was in, and ultimately become the person I am today. Although it was the hardest time of my life, I wouldn't go back and change it because I am much happier with the version of the person I have become.

Question: Can you recall a time when you faced your biggest fear?

Maria: When it was my third year of college, I was struggling with my major and wanted to switch into something easier because I was scared I was going to fail my courses. I had gotten a C on one of my midterms and was terrified because I was not a C student. Failing was, and still is a really big fear of mine, and not just with my academics but in life. I had always struggled with feeling like I am enough, so this specific situation made me feel like I was not smart enough to continue with my major. However I was able to overcome this and study a little harder, but I think the most valuable lesson I learned from this is that even if I were to fail, that does not mean my life ends, or that I myself am a failure. We all have to fall in order to truly understand what the real definition of success is.

Theoretical and Hypothetical:

Question: If you could change one decision from your past, what would it be?

Maria: I wish I had tried a little harder in highschool because I was always disappointed in myself that I had to go to a community college and then later transfer to a 4 year university. It

wasnt that I was ashamed of community college, it was more me being disappointed in the fact that I had a goal and I did not achieve it. But I truly believe that everything happens for a reason, so in the grand scheme of things it truly doesn't matter and life always has a way of falling into place.

Question: What would you do if you won the lottery tomorrow?

Maria: I would buy my parents a house of their dreams, and then put enough in my bank account to sustain a decent life, and then I would give the rest to a charity I truly value, because money can only buy one person so much, and materialistic things fade and we grow tired of them with time, so why not give to to an organization where many can find help through.

Question: If you could live in any fictional universe, which one would it be?

Maria: In my favorite book series, called A Court of Thorns and Roses, I would live in their world. It is called Prythian but I would specifically live in Velaris, which is the city of starlight in this book series. I just love fantasy so this would be a dream come true.

Question: If you had the chance to meet your future self, what would you ask them?

Maria: Are we happy? That would be the only thing I would ask because to me that is the most important thing you can get out of life.

Question: If you could have dinner with any three people, living or dead, who would they be?

Maria: I would have dinner with my two passed grandparents and my mom, so that she can see her parents again and so that I can tell them how grateful I am to have known them.

Current Events and Opinions:

Question: What's your take on the current state of the world?

Maria: The world right now is in shambles because people are money and power hungry and do not care about how their actions affect the lives of millions, including children who have no say in anything that is going on around them.

Question: Are there any social or political issues you're passionate about?

Maria: Currently the war going on between Israel and Palestine is something I have been thinking about. I don't get into political issues, so mainly the reason I have been thinking about it so much is because there are so many people dying on both sides who do not have a say in what is going on around them, and it's really heartbreaking to see how many innocent people are dying.

Question: How do you stay informed about current events?

Maria: Honestly I really don't see anything if it isn't on my news app or on social media, so I don't stay connected to current events as much as I should.

Question: If you could change one aspect of society, what would it be?

Maria: That people were kinder. There are too many people in the world who don't believe that kindness matters or is necessary to live a quality life, and I can't judge people who I do not know, so I would just hope that one day they figure out that it doesn't require much effort to be kind.

Question: What's your opinion on the role of technology in our lives?

Maria: It can be good and bad. It's useful when learning new things or staying connected with others. It is bad when technology becomes similar to human beings, and starts tracking your every movement. Those things can get very out of hand and if society is not careful, it will quickly take us all over.

Food and Culinary Preferences:

Question: Are there any foods you dislike or refuse to eat?

Maria: No, I honestly am very open to trying new things and exploring foods from other cultures.

Question: What's your favorite cooking or baking recipe?

Maria: I would not know what to do with a pan if someone gave it to me. Me and the kitchen are not friends.

Question: Do you enjoy trying new cuisines or restaurants?

Maria: I love trying new restaurants and cuisines, even if I don't end up liking them, it is still fun to try new things.

Question: Are you a fan of spicy foods?

Maria: I like a medium amount of spice because if I have too much it will upset my stomach and make my nose run like crazy.

Question: Do you have any dietary restrictions or food allergies?

Maria: No, lucky I don't have any dietary restrictions or food allergies.

Books, Movies, and Pop Culture:

Question: What's the last book you read, and what did you think of it?

Maria: The last book I read was Heir of Fire by Sarah J Mass, which is the fourth book of the Throne of Glass series. I really enjoyed it, but it did take me a while to get through just because of how dense it was, and because it was a lot of world building.

Question: Can you name a movie or TV show you could watch repeatedly?

Maria: Friends is my forever comfort show, and I have watched the whole series over like 5 or 6 times.

Question: Who's your favorite fictional character, and why?

Maria: I don't think I have a favorite fictional character just because I like to read books based off the genre, so I read a lot of romance or fantasy novels so the characters always end up blending together in the end.

Question: Are there any upcoming movies or events you're excited about?

Maria: My birthday is in 2 weeks and I am going out with my closest friends to this new restaurant that opened in San Diego not too long ago, so I am very excited.

Question: What's your guilty pleasure when it comes to entertainment?

Maria: I honestly only read these days in order to transport myself into a world that is not my own. I really love the feeling a good book gives me.

Question: If you could be a character in any book or movie, who would you choose?

Maria: In my favorite book series, the main character's name is Freye, and she has the most adventurous life, where so many things have happened to her, both good and bad, so to be able to live her life like it was portrayed in the book would be super cool.

Question: How can I improve my study habits?

Maria: Something I always tell myself is "make what you are studying fun even if it is conventionally not". Finding joy out of studying often helps me because it makes me adjust my mindset from, "I am to study this" to "I want to study this".

Question: How do I manage my time effectively?

Maria: Make a planner, or a checklist, or whatever way you want to map out your time. Mapping out your plan for the day keeps everything organized and makes you remember what you have to do, and it also allows you to set personal goals. Oftentimes that is what really motivates us to do the things we need to get done when we have a goal placed.

Question: What should I do if I'm struggling with a particular subject?

Maria: Always ask for help no matter what. Ask your teachers, your TA's, your friends who are good at that certain subject, because there will always be at least one person who is willing to help you. And if that doesn't work, then find youtube videos and try to teach yourself as best as you can. When you are struggling with something it is always necessary to go that extra mile in order to get things done.

Question: How do I deal with bullying or peer pressure?

Maria: Tell someone you trust, and make sure that it gets put an end to because things like this lead to very dark paths if they aren't rectified right away.

Question: How can I improve my test-taking skills?

Maria: Making flashcards always helped me when I was studying for a test because the repetition really helped engrave everything in my mind. Also it is important to take breaks because your mind can only absorb so much information at a time, so give yourself the grace to take a ten minute break every now and then.

Question: What's the best way to prepare for college applications?

Maria: Make sure you have a specific document or folder specific to each school you are applying to, so that you can put in all the necessary dates and requirements in order to not get mixed up. Writing your personal statements tends to be very challenging but colleges really like to see unique stories, so dig deep and write about something that no one else would, but always make sure to proofread and edit it more than once. Even have your friends read and edit, because it's always nice to have second opinions.

Question: How can I choose the right extracurricular activities?

Maria: Choose the activities that you are interested in and extracurriculars that will benefit you in your future career path. That was something I always struggled with because I just wanted to do the activities that my friends were in or the ones that seemed the most fun from the outside, but trust me looks are very deceiving and if you are not truly interested in an extracurricular then it is going to be a waste of your time.

Question: How do I balance school, work, and social life?

Maria: Set out blocks for yourself. For example if you go to school from 8-2 everyday and work from 3-6 at your part time job 4 days a week, then on the day where you aren't working set a block out for studying, and set another block for your social life. However, it is important to take your academics seriously because it is really easy to fall behind. Your mental health is also very

important so setting out those blocks in your weeks for relaxing or hanging out with your friends is very important. Just make sure that each block has an apricot portion.

Question: How can I cope with exam anxiety?

Maria: What I tell myself is "I studied all that I could, and whatever happens, I know I tried my very best". You can't beat yourself up everytime you feel nervous or anxious for a test because that is just going to fully drain you. All you can do is trust in your abilities and intelligence and go into the exam with confidence. You just need to truly believe in yourself.

Question: What should I do if I'm falling behind in class?

Maria: Ask for help. Most of the time there is always someone who wants to help, especially if you are willing to put in the effort. Ask for extensions or retake opportunities so that you can bring your grade back up.

Question: How do I make friends and fit in at a new school?

Maria: It is so cliché but honestly, just be yourself. You do not want to pretend to be someone else and then fall into a friend group that does not fit with who you are or your ideals and morals. The right friends will always fall into your lap when you least expect it.

Question: What are some effective note-taking strategies?

Maria: I color code a lot because it helps me organize things in my head. I also try to take in smaller sentences, where I can retrace my memory instead of just reading off the page, because I find that it isn't the most effective time of studying when I take intensive notes. But everyone is different and it is almost like a trial and error type of thing where you have to find what is best for you, and it is okay if what works for one person, does not work for another.

Question: How can I stay motivated to complete assignments?

Maria: Give yourself a reward at the end. Whether it is time to read, go on your bike, take a shower. Whatever it may be, give yourself a reward at the end where you can tell yourself "once I finish this assignment I can do TBD". It's a good way to motivate yourself to finish and it used to help me a bunch because I felt relaxed when I was finally able to relax knowing that my assignments were done.

Question: How do I handle conflicts with teachers or classmates?

Maria: Always be level-headed and don't let your temper or ego get in the way of resolving a conflict. You never want to have a problem with your teachers and classmates because it will get in the way of everything and give you more trouble than it's worth.

Question: What's the best way to choose a college major?

Maria: Pick something that you like, but also something that leads you to your future goal. Don't pick the route everyone else is taking just because you feel like that might be the best way. You need to pick a major that is going to be enjoyed and not dreaded, because that mistake is made too many times by college students and they always end up regretting it. It is ok to pick a major and end up switching it, but just make sure to do it early on so that you don't fall behind.

Question: How can I improve my writing skills?

Maria: Reading really helps, because when you learn new words, or see how a book's form is being written in, you can learn from that and improve your own skills.

Question: What are some tips for staying organized?

Maria: Make a planner, make a to-do list, make anything that you can always look towards and plan out your day because that is the best way to stay on track.

Question: How do I deal with a breakup or relationship problems?

Maria: Do not let it consume you. Talk through relationship problems and if they are something that can not be fixed then you have to ask yourself if the relationship is worth all that hurt. Oftentimes if problems keep coming up, especially if they are the same repeating problems, they will not be fixed and it is better to start thinking about breaking up and doing what is best for you. Breakups are really difficult to get through, but as cliché as it sounds, time heals everything, but you have to help time heal. What I mean by that is you can't sit and wallow for a year because that won't fix your mind and heart. You have to take action towards bettering yourself and healing yourself so that time can do the rest.

Question: How can I improve my public speaking skills?

Maria: Start by talking to yourself in the mirror and then gradually progress to talking in front of friends or family to get more comfortable with speaking in front of others. It takes a lot of practice but when you believe in yourself and have confidence in your abilities then it quickly becomes something that you excel at.

Question: What should I do if I'm feeling overwhelmed by schoolwork?

Maria: Give yourself the grace to take breaks and ask for help because if you are overwhelmed then the work you provide won't be of quality, so give yourself that opportunity to ask for help and take time for yourself.

Question: How do I choose the right classes for next semester?

Maria: Usually counselors will help with deciding what is the best way to plan out your semesters, but if that isn't an option, then make sure to not overload on hard classes all in one go because you will burn out very quickly.

Question: How can I set and achieve academic goals?

Maria: Tell yourself you want whatever it is you are trying to achieve and then figure out a plan to get there. For example, if you want an A in a class then you have to make sure you are properly studying for the exams, going to office hours, asking for help, and then you will achieve your goal through that plan. Always have a plan in motion.

Question: What's the best way to prepare for standardized tests like the SAT or ACT?

Maria: Practice, practice, practice. Use quizlets, booklets, other forms of study tools to prepare yourself for similar questions that will be asked, but you have to practice more than once because a test of that caliber requires a lot of effort, especially if you only want to take it once and get a good score that will make you eligible for the colleges that you want.

Question: How do I develop good study habits for math?

Maria: Math requires a lot of practice, so if you learn a new lesson, when you get home you should give yourself a question set that focuses on what you learned in the lesson, and answer those questions so that you can know if you are good at that specific topic or need extra guidance. And if you do need extra guidance, then always feel comfortable enough to talk to your teacher or friends who can help, or look to things like youtube and google.

Question: How can I get better at time management during online learning?

Maria: Online learning can be easy to fall behind in because oftentimes there is not a deadline, so the best way to go about that is to give yourself your own deadline and maintain that schedule throughout your online learning process.

Question: What should I do if I'm being cyberbullied?

Maria: Alert your parents, teachers, or any adult figure in your life because that is a serious problem that would need to be stopped immediately. It is no joke and if someone starts to take what the cyberbully is saying to heart then it can lead to a lot of damage.

Question: How do I build self-confidence?

Maria: Ignore the people who try to put you down and focus on making your opinion of yourself the only one that matters. Self-confidence is difficult to sustain, especially if you are surrounded

by people who only bring you down. Making sure you have a healthy relationship with yourself is the first step at building and maintaining your self-confidence

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Question: How can I avoid procrastination?

Maria: Instill a reward system in your study or work routine so that you can tell yourself “okay, if I finish this task now then I can go watch a movie after”, or whatever you want the reward to be.

Question: What's the best way to handle a difficult teacher?

Maria: Always be level-headed and never start a fight, or raise your voice, or be disrespectful. Try to reason with them, and if that does not work then go to the principal or another high authority and express what is happening.

Question: How do I choose the right college?

Maria: Choose a college that has everything you are looking for. If you want academics and a social life, then pick a college that has both. Ultimately you will be spending four years of your life at that institution, so do your research.

Question: How can I improve my reading comprehension skills?

Maria: Something that helps me is that I will read over something three times, and that usually helps me absorb the information. Taking notes and re-reading those notes is also a helpful tool.

Question: What should I do if I'm feeling peer pressure to engage in risky behavior?

Maria: Simple. Do not do it. If you are aware that it is risky behavior then that means you are smart enough to detect when you should walk away. Those types of friends who are asking you to participate in something dangerous are not friends who care about you or your well-being.

Question: How do I create a strong college application essay?

Maria: Make sure that you are being as unique as possible. Proofread your essays and make sure that there are no typos or grammatical errors. Ask others to proofread and see if they can bestow any advice to you for your application journey.

Question: How can I find scholarships and financial aid for college?

Maria: FAFSA is the easiest way, if you are a student who comes from a low income household. There are also many scholarship opportunities if you are willing to look for it. Ask your counselors, do your own research, and find what organizations in your area are giving out scholarships that you can apply to.

Question: What are some strategies for staying focused during virtual classes?

Maria: Make a schedule for yourself that you can always look towards, because it is easy to fall behind in classes that are virtual because the deadlines can be more lenient, so setting your own deadlines really helps get yourself organized and it also makes sure you do not fall behind.

Question: How do I prepare for a job interview?

Maria: There is an interview method called STAR, which stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Results. Basically, when an interviewer asks you a question you instill the STAR method. So for example, if they asked you about a difficult challenge that you have had to overcome, then you would respond with quickly setting the scene for the situation, then describe what your task was at this given site the scenario is based, then explain what steps you took to address the issue (Action), and lastly share the results, so what did the outcome achieve.

Question: How can I overcome writer's block?

Maria: I think the best way to overcome writer's block is to reset yourself, meaning have a day or two, or however long you need to come back to a place where you can draw inspiration from.

Question: What should I do if I'm struggling with my mental health?

Maria: Ask for help from someone you trust, or someone professional. In this day and age, anyone suffering from mental health has someone or somewhere to look towards since it is such a growing problem, especially in the United States.

Question: How do I build a healthy social life?

Maria: Make sure to give yourself the grace to be able to go and do things that you enjoy, but make sure that whatever that may be, that it is not going to bring you any harm. I think that having a healthy social life consists of being around people you love and have fun with, but it also means that you know when limits need to be placed.

Question: How can I manage stress during exams?

Maria: Meditation is a good way to manage stress during exams. Sit yourself down and breathe, and tell yourself that you have done everything you can to prepare for this exam and that whatever will be will be.

Question: What should I do if I'm having trouble with my parents?

Maria: If you are having trouble with your parents and you are finding it difficult to reason with them, then bring in another party, whether it is your aunts or uncles, or even another trusted adult that you know will be able to get whatever the situation is, under control.

Question: How do I choose the right extracurricular activities for my college application?

Maria: Choose what you enjoy doing because you do not want to pick something for the sole reason that you believe it will look good on college applications, because then you are going to be stuck doing something that you ultimately do not like.

Question: How can I improve my time management skills for homework?

Maria: Make a planner, set goals for yourself, turn your phone off. Any of these types of solutions will help with time management, but it is all about consistency. You need to do something multiple times for you to see if it is working for you or if you need to find a new solution, because everyone is different and requires their own way of managing their time.

Question: What should I do if I'm feeling isolated or lonely?

Maria: There are a couple ways to go about this. If you are being purposely isolated, then you need to branch out and find new friends to connect with because no one deserves to be left out. If you are personally isolating yourself and are feeling lonely because of whatever inner battle you might be fighting, then you need to start healing from within. Start by figuring out what the root of the loneliness and isolation may be and then go from there. Look to a trusted individual if you feel like you are struggling with finding the answer and trust that it will all work out in the end.

Question: How do I handle peer pressure to use drugs or alcohol?

Maria: It is a lot harder to say no to something than it is to say yes, which is why so many teens and young adults fall into the hole that is peer pressure, but it requires inner strength and a strong head, that everyone can possess if they are willing. Say no, because the consequences are never worth it.

Question: How can I improve my vocabulary?

Maria: Reading, using different apps that give you a word of the day, amongst other things like that, which help grow your vocabulary and improve your communication and writing skills over time.

Question: What should I do if I witness bullying at school?

Maria: Immediately report it and let an adult handle it.

Question: How do I prepare for a science fair or research project?

Maria: Plan out what you want to present and make sure that you have all the materials required for a proper presentation. First thing is to come up with an idea, and then once you have that, go to your library database, google scholar, or other search engines like these, and start

gathering all the information. Once that is complete you are going to have to organize it in a manner that makes sense to what you are trying to portray. Make sure that the way in which you present is clean and precise, but also unique to you, that will leave people remembering your presentation.

Question: How can I become a better public speaker?

Maria: Taking communications courses is often the best way to go about improving your public speaking skills, because in those courses, they teach you necessary skills that will help you. Another good way is using friends or classmates to have mock presentations in front of you so that you can get critiques from them and see what you need to improve on from someone else's perspective.

Question: What should I do if I'm struggling with body image issues?

Maria: A technique that I know helps a lot of people starts with looking in the mirror and starts complimenting the parts of yourself that you like. Oftentimes people judge themselves so harshly but when they take a closer look at themselves, in this case, from the outside, they realize that there are a lot more parts of themselves that they like, more than the ones they don't. However if you are wanting to change the way you look whether that is losing weight, or dying your hair, or whatever it may be, you are allowed to do so, but just make sure that you are changing for yourself and not for anyone else.

Question: How do I develop strong critical thinking skills?

Maria: Make sure that all the information you take in during your everyday life is being seen from more than one point of view, because you have to make sure that this information is coming from a trustworthy source. Always be listening, and make sure to ask questions in a way that will not provide a biased response.

Question: How can I maintain a healthy diet during busy school days?

Maria: Meal planning is always a really helpful way to maintain a healthy diet, because it allows you to make all your meals for the week in one go, so that you do not have to worry about what you are going to eat during the week.

Question: What should I do if I'm struggling with a learning disability?

Maria: The first thing to do in this case is try to understand what it is exactly that you are struggling with. This can either be done on your own or through professional help. Once you understand what you are dealing with, then make sure to seek help with figuring out how to manage it because it is necessary to either get help from a professional or someone who has a similar disability to yours, so that you can figure out how you are going to go about it.

Question: How do I set boundaries with friends and family?

Maria: Tell them that you need your own personal space, and that although you love their company, that it is important you take time for yourself and that everything that goes on in your life does not need to be shared with them.

Question: How can I improve my time management skills for long-term projects?

Maria: Setting up a goal planner and having it extend to a long period of time is helpful because this way you are able to see where you want to go and where you want to be all in one place, which provides motivation.

Question: What should I do if I'm experiencing discrimination or racism at school?

Maria: Tell the principle of a teacher and have them solve the problem because that is not your job to make someone act like a decent human being. Just make sure to not take these types of things to heart because people are always going to have mean things to say, but just know that you are doing everything you can to be a good person.

Question: How do I handle conflicts within a group project?

Maria: Sit everyone down and have each person express what they are feeling and what the problem is. Communication is the only way any conflict will be resolved, and oftentimes it does take some time to get to that conclusion.

Question: How can I build a strong resume for college applications?

Maria: The key is to make sure that you have experience there that shows you know how to be consistent. If you put a bunch of experiences and jobs that you have only lasted in for less than six months then that won't show up well. Also, make sure that you are presenting yourself in a professional manner, so that means no bright colors or funky text, and always proofread.

Question: What should I do if I'm struggling with my sexuality or gender identity?

Maria: It is always good to talk to other people who are or were in the same position as you are because it allows you to gain different perspectives and advice from those who have overcome or are currently facing this struggle. Just know that it is not wrong to struggle with your sexuality or gender identity, and if anyone ever judges you for it then they are not individuals you need in your life, so don't take their mean remarks to heart.

Question: How do I navigate social media responsibly?

Maria: Everything in moderation. Don't post every little thing about yourself or your life because when you start sharing all of these little details, it can sometimes get messy and people will start

to feel as if they are owed information about your life. Enjoy social media because it is a fun outlet, but just be careful of what you post and who you let see it.

Question: How can I develop strong problem-solving skills?

Maria: Brainstorming is always a great start to developing strong problem-solving skills, because when you are able to think outside the box it allows you to visualize a bigger and better picture.

Question: What should I do if I'm feeling overwhelmed by extracurricular commitments?

Maria: Extracurricular and academics are always a struggle to manage, and oftentimes if you have too many extracurriculars, it is going to make you fall behind if you do not have good time management skills. It is okay to not be overly involved in extracurricular activities, especially if you are falling behind in your academics. Make sure you are doing what you need and not what you think is required of you, because your mental health always comes first.

Question: How do I build strong study groups?

Maria: Find classmates that you know are going to put in the work and not just throw all their responsibilities on everyone else. Communicate with those who you end up choosing to be in your study group and make sure that everyone is on the same page in terms of goals for that particular course, so that you can have an effective and efficient study group.

Question: How can I improve my artistic or creative skills?

Maria: Practice your skills and have confidence in yourself, because when you are able to really believe in yourself and your skills, then you can accomplish anything, as cheesy as it sounds.

Question: What should I do if I'm experiencing peer pressure to cheat?

Maria: Just don't. The consequences are never worth it, and 9/10 you will get caught.

Question: How do I develop effective research skills?

Maria: It is important to know what articles are viable and what articles are not. Meaning you have to practice finding information that is within a reasonable date range, has facts and not theories, and is properly accredited. Use search engines like Google Scholar or a library database and not People Magazine for your information.

Question: How can I improve my relationship with my siblings?

Maria: Have sibling outings, talk to them about things that can form a stronger bond, and treat them as you would treat your best friend, and that way you can improve your relationship with them.

Question: What should I do if I'm struggling with self-esteem issues?

Maria: Know you are enough, and always let that be known, because self-esteem issues only take root in someone if that person lets them. Change your mentality from feeling like you are not enough and start telling yourself that you're proud of who you are. Compliment yourself instead of discouraging who you are.

Question: How do I manage my online reputation?

Maria: It is very simple. Do not post anything on social media that you will regret in five years, or that you would not want someone like your grandmother seeing. Always be mindful of what you put out there, because your digital footprint lasts your whole life.

Question: How can I prepare for the transition to college life?

Maria: It is completely normal to feel nervous, and have thoughts like “am I going to make friends?” or “will my major be the right fit for me”, because college is the time of your life where you really transition from a teenager to an adult. All of your fears are valid, and trust me, everyone else is feeling and thinking the same thing. The key to preparing for this transition is to turn your fear into excitement, and know that if you do end up wanting to change your major then that's completely fine, because almost everyone does the same thing. Be confident and talk to those who you sit next to. It is a lot easier to make friends than some might think. Just enjoy your four years because I promise you will regret it if you didn't fully deep dive into your college experience.

Question: What should I do if I'm dealing with a difficult breakup?

Maria: It is okay to mourn that previous relationship. Give yourself the time to process it. Just don't wallow in it for too long, because time will heal this wound, but you have to help time. Meaning, you need to better yourself everyday and work towards being at peace with the breakup, because if you sit and wallow, yes time will pass, but there will be no healing because you have stayed in the same exact position that whole time.

Question: How do I handle conflicts with roommates or friends in college?

Maria: Oftentimes when we are young it's a lot easier to lash out rather than properly communicate with one another to get to the root of the problem and solve the issue. It takes a lot of practice and mental strength, but healthy communication is the only way to handle conflicts with roommates or friends, and honestly everyone that you will have a conflict with throughout your life.

Question: How can I develop effective problem-solving skills in math and science?

Maria: The best thing that you can do is practice everyday, whether it is for 10 minutes or half an hour. Practice everyday so that you can improve your skills in math and science.

Question: What should I do if I'm struggling with time management in extracurricular activities?

Maria: If you are struggling with keeping up with your extracurricular activities, and your academics are falling behind, then it is time to start to consider a number of options. If you are in multiple extracurriculars, consider dropping one in order to make room for your academics. If you do not want to drop your extracurriculars, then look at your class schedule and start making a plan. Schedule a portion of your time during the week for your coursework and stick to that plan. It is okay to want it all, you just have to work a little harder to get it.

Question: How do I build healthy romantic relationships?

Maria: Make sure that your romantic relationships start off with a standard. Make sure that you are with someone who is trustworthy, honest, loyal, and has characteristics that you look for. Always strive to have good communication skills with each other because relationships are hard and require a lot of time and effort to maintain.

Question: How can I improve my financial literacy?

Maria: You can start reading books on finances, listen to podcasts, watch videos, and talk to people who are knowledgeable about this topic so that you can learn from them.

Question: What should I do if I'm experiencing discrimination or bullying based on my race or ethnicity?

Maria: Alert someone you trust or an authority figure about what is happening so that they can put a stop to it. No one deserves to feel uncomfortable about this because that is what makes you uniquely you and everyone should be proud of that.

Question: How do I navigate the college application process as a first-generation student?

Maria: Look to your counselors for guidance because they are your greatest bet, since they know all the ins and outs of college applications. They will make sure that you have everything you need and are applying within the deadlines.

Question: How can I improve my computer programming skills?

Maria: Read books and watch videos on how to improve your skills because you just need to know how to start, and then you just practice from there.

Question: What should I do if I'm feeling overwhelmed by the college application process?

Maria: If you are feeling overwhelmed, try having someone who has gone through the process already, guide you through it. It is always nice to have a reassuring person next to you when doing something as important as your college applications because it provides a level of confidence that you did not know you needed.

Question: How do I handle conflicts with roommates in college dorms?

Maria: Talk it out. Don't lash out or say something that you will regret and will likely escalate the conflict. Communicate, be level headed, and get through the conflict in mature fashion.

Question: How can I develop strong leadership skills?

Maria: The key to being a great leader is to listen to those you are leading. Be mindful of what those around you need and want and try your best to understand them. A good leader practices humility and kindness and makes sure that everyone is at a place they want to make and are comfortable.

Question: What should I do if I'm dealing with a difficult teacher in college?

Maria: If you are dealing with a difficult teacher and it is making the class extra difficult for you, consider taking the course a different semester with a different teacher, or switching the teacher that same semester if you are able. However, if you feel that you can study a little harder and get through the course, then take that chance and try your best, but know that if you were to get a grade you did not like, then there are always chances to retake classes.

Question: How do I balance academics and a part-time job in college?

Maria: make sure that when you are not working, you are taking the time to do all of your class work and not falling behind. Time management is the key to balance.

Question: How can I improve my research and citation skills?

Maria: Learn how to use quality search engines for your resources so that you are able to cite credible information. Make sure the information is verified, so practice finding articles and seeing if they are adequate or not. Like everything in life, this takes practice.

Question: What should I do if I'm feeling homesick in college?

Maria: Find something or someplace that reminds you of home and look towards it whenever you are feeling homesick. For example, if a specific cafe in your neighborhood reminds you of one like back home then go to it and get a coffee from there every morning, so that you can feel like there is always a little piece of home with you everyday.

Question: How do I navigate the challenges of a long-distance relationship in college?

Maria: Try to talk to each other every night, and have conversations about your days and the people you've met, so that one another can feel like they are right there with you. It is difficult to have a long distance relationship, but if you are willing to put in the effort, it is worth it.

Question: How can I improve my time management skills for a full course load in college?

Maria: Have a schedule that you follow through and leave room for yourself on that schedule to fall behind, so that you can always give yourself the opportunity to struggle and not have it ruin the bigger picture.

Question: What should I do if I'm struggling with addiction or substance abuse?

Maria: Go to AA meetings, get a therapist, talk to people you trust, and be stronger than your addiction.

Question: How do I cope with academic pressure in college?

Maria: If you are feeling like your specific major is too difficult and that you are falling behind no matter how hard you study, then it is okay to consider switching majors, or maybe getting out of that one really difficult class that is overwhelming you. In college, you are often left alone to negative these difficult situations, so you need to listen to yourself and trust your gut.

Question: How can I develop a strong professional network?

Maria: Set up a good LinkedIn and connect with people who are in similar careers that you want to go. Go to conferences and different networking events. Really just put yourself out there because employers love to see eager individuals.

Question: What should I do if I'm experiencing mental health challenges in college?

Maria: Ask for help and make sure that you are taking personal time. Mental health at any age is a challenge, but in college it can get especially difficult if it is not managed because you feel like you are dealing with so many things at a time and it can get extremely overwhelming. So give yourself the grace of asking for help.

Question: How do I handle conflicts with professors or classmates in graduate school?

Maria: Make sure to always be level-headed and respectful, even if someone is not treating you in the same regard. Communicate clearly and make sure the problem does not get too far or heated. If this does not work then you should speak to another individual who has more of a sway with these individuals, because there is only so much you can do.

Question: How can I prepare for the GRE or other graduate school entrance exams?

Maria: Just as you would for any other test, study, study, study. Make sure that you are fully prepared going into it, and that doesn't just mean you know all the information. Make sure that you are in a healthy place mentally, so that you can go into these exams with nothing but confidence.

Question: What should I do if I'm experiencing impostor syndrome in my career?

Maria: Know that you are not alone in this feeling, but it is important to remind yourself of your achievements and success, because you deserve to be proud of yourself. It is important to have humility, but just embrace the feeling and know you have accomplished so much, and that its just the start.

Question: How do I navigate workplace conflicts and office politics?

Maria: Always stay neutral unless it is a serious issue in which it is necessary to speak up. Otherwise, don't get involved because things like that get too messy and no one wins. If you want to put an end to it, have your co workers sit down and air out their grievances, and if that does not work out, if the conflict is disturbing the workplace, then let a supervisor know of the situation.

Question: How can I achieve a work-life balance in my career?

Maria: When you get home from work, make sure that there is something waiting for you that is going to let you unwind, like a book, movie, workout routine, anything that makes you feel good and relaxed. On your days off make sure that you have plans set, whether is with friends, family, or even just yourself, make sure that you have something to look forward to when the work week ends.

Question: What should I do if I'm experiencing burnout at work?

Maria: Your employer will understand if you need to take some time off to recharge, because an employer wants someone who is going to give out quality work, and when you are burnt out, your work will show that.

Question: How do I plan for retirement and financial security?

Maria: Make sure that you are putting in a portion of your paycheck into your savings account, and that you are not flying through your paycheck the moment you get it. Educate yourself on the different routes you can go with and make sure you know all your benefits and options.

Question: How can I make a positive impact on my community and the world?

Maria: Wake up everyday and try. That is all any of us can do to make an impact. If we all wake up everyday and try to be genuinely good, then there is no other result that could come out of that other than a positive impact.

Questions: What role does spirituality or religion play in your life, if any?

Maria: I am Catholic and I would say it defines my whole life. How I view the world, how I go about my everyday life, how I treat others. Being Catholic is so incredibly important to me because my church is my safe haven. Whenever I am feeling down or struggling with something in particular, I just sit and pray, because that really is the only way I find any peace in such a crazy world.

Questions: Do you believe in karma or the concept of cosmic justice?

Maria: I believe in everything that goes around, comes around, because bad people do not just get to do bad things and get away with it. I think in life teaching those people a lesson, so I guess you can call it karma or cosmic justice, but I do believe in having your wrong doings thrown back in your face.

Questions: How do you handle situations that challenge your beliefs or values?

Maria: I try to avoid these types of situations as much as possible, but at the same time, if someone was having a problem that went against my beliefs or values, I would not judge them or try to steer them away from, especially if it was about a topic they were very passionate about, because at the end of the day we all live our own individual lives and no one gets to pass judgment on a life that is not theirs.

Questions: Are you more inclined towards optimism or pessimism?

Maria: I have lived a very pessimistic life when I was younger, because I was not mentally healthy, but as I started to grow up and learn more about the world and how life is way too short, I switched to a very optimistic attitude, because it is a lot easier to be optimistic and go with the flow of life, rather than be pessimistic and view everything as a negative.

Questions: What do you believe is the purpose of human existence?

Maria: I believe all of us have a vocation that we are put onto this world to do, and oftentimes we stray away from that path, but I cant believe that we are all born to just die. I think that we all have a purpose that we are meant to fulfill, that will better the world and create an impact, whether it is on a small or large scale. I also think that having this belief makes life a lot more fun and keeps things interesting.

Questions: Do you believe in the concept of destiny or fate?

Maria: I 100% believe in destiny and fate. I think a lot of this however does stem from my faith. I believe that God has already planned out our lives and knows exactly what is coming, and I think that he always wants good things for us, but sometimes we stray away from the path and we lose our way. My thing is that I live everyday with God, and let him steer my life, because I have tried for a really long time to control my future, when I know I have no power over that. So it is just a lot easier to believe in fate and have hope that it all works out in the end.

Questions: What are your views on forgiveness and second chances?

Maria: There is a Saint that is very popular in the catholic faith. Her name is Maria Goretti. She was a young girl whose neighbor tried rapping, but she fought back and when she did, her attacker stabbed her 15 times. Maria, on her deathbed, said that she forgave her attacker and hoped that she would see him again in heaven. She was later canonized for this, and her attacker, after going to jail, became a monk and changed his life because of Maria's actions. I tell this story because this is how I view forgiveness and second chances. If Maria could forgive the man who killed her, then I can forgive a friend or someone in my life who has wronged me. It is much easier to forgive someone than to hold a grudge against them.

Questions: What ethical dilemma have you faced in your life, and how did you resolve it?

Maria: When I was in highschool, one of my friends was getting cheated on by her boyfriend. I was not very close to her, but we still ran in the same circles. All of her friends knew about what was going on and did not tell her because this was highschool and they did not want to cause a problem with the guy who was cheating on her, since he was popular. I was struggling with either telling her or keeping it to myself, because if her best friends weren't doing anything about it, then I did not feel like I had a place to say anything. They ended up breaking up anyway because she somehow found out, but I still never forgave myself for not telling her, and letting her be clueless, while everyone around her was hiding it. I learned something vital during that time however. Always go with your gut and do the right thing, because to this day it still eats away at me everytime I think about it.

Questions: How do you approach situations where there's no clear right or wrong answer?

Maria: Being catholic, I pray every time I am faced with a difficult situation. If you are not religious, try mediation, or talking to a person you trust about what you should do. Oftentimes it is hard to come to a conclusion about whether something is right or wrong and having a different opinion or a spiritual guide helping you, always seems to do the trick.

Question: What motivated you to choose your current profession or career path?

Maria: I have always struggled with where I wanted to go in life, and who I wanted to be, but I always knew I wanted to make an impact on the world, in whatever way I could. I was always pressured by my family to go down the medical route because they always believed that it was

the most ideal career to have. I thought long and hard about it and realized that the medical field was not where I wanted to go down, for a long list of reasons that included not wanting to spend my whole young adult life in school and because I did not feel passionate enough about pursuing that type of career. I did a lot of research on what type of career I can pursue that will be impactful for others, and I found a lot of different types of careers, but stumbled on non-profits, which called on me the most. I chose this route because I felt like I could leave an impact on other people's lives in a multitude of ways because the non-profit circuit is so diverse and has so many different opportunities to lend a hand. Although figuring out a path that was right for me was very difficult and stressful, it allowed me to see things in a more positive light. I was able to switch my "why is this happening to me" mentality into "it probably was not the right fit for me anyways".

Question: How do you define a fulfilling and meaningful job?

Maria: I define a fulfilling and meaningful job as being something that always leaves me wanting to do more. When you are passionate about a job, then you are always going to want to strive for more and do everything you can to be better at your position. When that stops happening, then that is when you need to start rethinking this specific career path, because you do not want to spend the rest of your life in a job that you are ultimately unhappy in.

Question: Are you more driven by passion or financial stability in your career choices?

Maria: I think I lean more towards passion, because I want a career where I can do good and help others. However, we do live in a world where money is crucial, so looking for a job that provides financial stability but also allows me to be passionate about my work is the most ideal.

Question: What kind of work environment do you thrive in the most?

Maria: I love a work environment where I am able to collaborate with others, and have a relationship with my coworkers. I am fully capable of working on my own, but having a job where I am able to brainstorm with my team and talk to others is my ideal environment and where I thrive the most because I would definitely call myself an extrovert.

Question: How do you handle work-related stress and pressure?

Maria: I used to be very bad when it came to stress and pressure, but I think as I have gotten older, I have learned to cope with it a lot better. What I do is rely heavily on time management. I make sure that all my tasks are arranged in a way that not only makes sense, but is also not going to burn me out. For example if my boss wants me to complete a task by the next day, then I put everything I am currently working on to a halt and complete whatever that specific task may be so that I can get it to my boss in a timely manner, and then I will later proceed with the things that are not time sensitive.

Question: What's your opinion on work-life balance, and how do you achieve it?

Maria: I try my best to always have plans for the weekend, whether it is going out with my friends or just having a relaxing “me day”, because I find that makes the work weeks go a lot smoother when you have something to look forward to. So every week I just make sure there is something to do at the end of it and that seems to really help me achieve a work-life balance.

Question: How do you set and achieve career goals?

Maria: I make a yearly goal plan, meaning I plan out when I would like to achieve specific goals and make it as realistic as possible. For example, I want to go and get a masters degree, but I want to have worked for at least six months to a year before I go, so if I graduated in June of 2023 from undergrad, and got a job in october of 2023, then that means I would aim to start/apply to my masters program in summer of 2024. Things like these allow you to see the bigger picture and help you stay on track.

Question: Do you believe in the idea of a dream job, and have you found yours?

Maria: I do believe in the idea of a dream job, but I think you have to have a few jobs before you get to that point because you learn what you want and what you don't want, and so a dream job becomes a job that fits all of the “wants” you're looking for. I have not found my dream job yet but I know I am on the right track.

Question: How important is creativity and innovation in your work?

Maria: Extremely important. In the nonprofit world you always have to be one step ahead, because there are so many non-profit organizations, and you can get a lot of repeats, so creativity and innovation is super important because that is what makes you stand out from the rest and what ultimately helps grow your organization.

Question: What qualities do you admire in a good leader or manager?

Maria: Someone who is kind and understanding, because there are way too many people in the world who have positions such as manager or leader who forgot what it felt like to be just an average employee. Having a boss who understands the struggles and knows that we all have lives of our own outside of work is definitely a necessity.

Question: How do you handle disagreements on cultural or social issues?

Maria: I try my best to make sure to not get into arguments about topics related to cultural or social issues, because I am a firm believer that everyone is entitled to their own opinion and I don't like to judge or comment on those opinions because I don't feel like I have a place to do that. Having a conversation is one thing, but I always try to avoid arguments about these types of topics as much as I can.

Question: What's your stance on social media and its impact on society?

Maria: Social media, in my opinion, has always been a tug between good and bad. Social media is great when it comes to staying up to date on things that are happening in the world, and staying in touch with old friends or distant family members. However, social media can turn ugly fairly quickly when people begin to share their opinions on certain topics, and then get judged for it or “canceled”, which is today's term for basically being blacklisted. Also, social media, can portray a lot of fake news, and people who only use social media for their knowledge and current events are going to fall victim to this fake news. Overall, social media should be consumed in moderation and not taken too seriously.

Question: How do you perceive the influence of technology on modern relationships?

Maria: Personally, it is so hard to meet people in real life, especially if you are a full time employee and the only people you see everyday are your coworkers. I think that different dating apps are really helpful, but it should definitely be taken with the utmost caution because there are a lot of strange individuals who use those types of apps and might not be using it to get a date and rather for something harmful. So go into relationships developed on these types of apps with caution and if you end up wanting to meet this person in real life, then make sure a trusted individual has all of the information for that date so they can know where you are at all times.

Question: Do you think society is becoming more or less tolerant of differences?

Maria: In my opinion, less tolerant. I would like to think that every year that goes by and every new generation that rises, peoples differences become less of a spectacle and more a normalcy, but from what I have personally bared witness to, that is not the case. If a person has a certain opinion on something that another person share the opposition, there will more than likely be an argument that turns volatile, because, based on what I see, people do not tolerate a difference in opinion, which is why I tend to keep things to myself and stay out of other people's arguments because it is easier to mind your own business and let other people think what they want to think.

Question: What role do you think art and creativity play in society?

Maria: Art and creativity are extremely important because I feel like they make life a little more exciting and bring life back into a society that oftentimes loses its overall spirit. I think those individuals who are lucky enough to have a talent in the arts are so crucial to our society and should definitely be showcased more.

Question: How do you think society should address mental health issues?

Maria: I think society now has been doing a great job at addressing mental health issues. It is not a taboo topic anymore. Schools have different outlets students can go to to receive health. Therapy is becoming easier to obtain than it was in prior years. Overall, the topic of mental health is being addressed and brought to light in ways it never had been just five years back.

Question: What are your thoughts on the importance of education in society?

Maria: Education is very important and is necessary if you want to pursue a career in medicine of any STEM related field, however, if you are a naturally gifted individual, or a very hardworking person and you want to pursue a career in a field that doesn't necessarily require education to be good at, then by all means, go straight into the workforce, get internships, network, and start building up your resume that way.

Question: How do you think travel broadens one's perspective on life?

Maria: Travel allows someone to view the world through a different lens, because we all get very comfortable with the everyday world we see, and when we start to travel and see other cultures and traditions, it really allows us to broaden our perspective on life, because you start to realize just how vast the world really is. Everytime I travel, I gain a newfound appreciation for different cultures because, one thing about me is that I love to learn and see what else the world has to offer, so travel is definitely a necessity if you are lucky enough to do so.

Question: How do you approach immersing yourself in different cultures while traveling?

Maria: Be respectful of everything the different cultures have to offer. Be gracious of the hospitality, because you are in their country, so always be kind and respectful. Enjoy what you are seeing and take every opportunity to learn from the different cultures and people that you come across.

Question: What's the most adventurous thing you've done while traveling?

Maria: I went to Catalina Island with my family when I was young, and we went parasailing, which for me was a large feat because I am terrified of heights. As we were going into the ocean to set flight I was on the verge of tears because I was so scared that something would go wrong, like my harness would break and I would fall into the ocean from 200 feet. As we were taking off I was so nervous, but once we got into the air and we were just flying through the sky I was so proud of myself for facing such a large fear and finding joy in it.

Question: What's your favorite travel destination and why?

Maria: My favorite travel destination is idyllwild, California. I go at the start of every year with my friends and use it as a way to unwind and disappear from all the stress of our everyday lives. It is just a little town in the mountains that has only a few restaurants and coffee shops, but we just get a cabin and cook, dance, and enjoy our time together, away from the real world.

Question: How do you think travel changes the way people perceive their own culture?

Maria: Personally, it makes me realize how many cultures and traditions there are out there, and it makes me very interested in learning more about those cultures and traditions. I love teaching people about my own culture, so I love learning from others, because there is so much to know and see that you can't just limit yourself to your own culture.

Question: What's your opinion on solo travel versus traveling with others?

Maria: I have never solo traveled, but I have always wanted to because there is a different kind of freedom that comes with that. You are able to do whatever you want without making sure other people want to do the same, and it gives you a lot of opportunities to find joy with yourself. However I love traveling with my friends, especially friends who I am very close to and who like the same things I do. When you travel with those types of people that are easy going and share the same interests as you then you are able to really enjoy that trip because there will never be anything you need to argue about.

Question: How do you think travel can promote peace and understanding among nations?

Maria: There are people who are judgemental towards other nations, especially when they have no idea what goes on there or how their country works, so travel, in my opinion, can really help people have more of an open mind and understanding perspective.

Question: What destination is next on your travel bucket list?

Maria: My next destination on my travel bucket list is still in the States, because I have always found this place to be such a good time. Nashville is where I want to go next, first of all because I love country music, and second because their nightlife seems so fun. Hopefully I can go there in 2024 for a summer or fall trip with my best friends.

Question: What are your views on climate change and its impact on the planet?

Maria: Climate change is definitely a real thing for those who do not believe it is happening. It is so obvious that our world is deteriorating and there is not much a single person can do, but if a whole society got together and decided that enough was enough, then so much could change for the better.

Question: How do you approach sustainable living in your daily life?

Maria: I don't use plastic water bottles anymore. I have a thermos that I bring everywhere and just refill, which has significantly cut down on my plastic use, but has also made me way healthier because I find myself drinking way more water than before.

Question: What environmental issues concern you the most, and why?

Maria: Definitely climate change, because it makes me sad that certain animals are dying off because every year that passes winter becomes pushed back and becomes shorter in length.

Question: How do you think individuals can contribute to conservation efforts?

Maria: Be mindful of recycling, stop contributing to fast fashion, and just be respectful of the world you live in. Don't litter when there is a trash can 5 steps to your left, and don't judge other people for trying to spread the word and aid the cause.

Question: What's your opinion on animal rights and ethical treatment of animals?

Maria: I am a big supporter of animal rights and ethical treatment of animals, because just like humans, animals have brains and hearts and feel things just like we do. If you are not vegetarian then it does not mean that you have to be rude to someone who is.

Question: How do you approach ethical consumerism in your purchases?

Maria: I try not to buy from fast fashion brands, and I also limit how much I shop, because there are so many clothes that get thrown away everyday which add to our waste problem. I just try to be mindful of everything I buy, and buy in moderation.

Question: What role do you think corporations should play in environmental conservation?

Maria: There are multi- billion dollar corporations that could spare a couple million dollars to aid the environmental conservation cause, yet the majority don't. If you have the facilities to do so, then do so.

Question: How do you feel about the use of renewable energy sources?

Maria: I personally do not know much about this topic to give an appropriate opinion.

Question: How do you think society can raise awareness about environmental issues?

Maria: I think just staying educated on the different topics and problems that are happening is the best start, and then once you are educated you can then educate others and it becomes this domino effect of knowledge and awareness.

Question: What emerging technology are you most excited about, and why?

Maria: Honestly the only emerging technology that I know anything about is AI, which I guess I am excited but also scared of because although it is so useful and can provide a world of knowledge at your fingertips, it is also going to replace a lot of jobs which is going to be detrimental, since it is already so difficult to get a job in this day and age.

Question: How do you feel about the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence?

Maria: I am very nervous because I feel like the rapid advancements, comes the lack of need for humans doing certain jobs, and that is going to cause a huge problem in the job climate, since it is already so hard to find a job nowadays. Replacing humans with AI is very nerve racking.

Question: What's your take on the future of space exploration and colonization?

Maria: I personally think that is really cool. I don't think that it will happen in my lifetime, or even my grandchildren's lifetime, but it is definitely something that might happen in the far future. I think it is interesting and could be beneficial because it is getting difficult to maintain so many humans on earth, that maybe colonization on other planets might not be so bad.

Question: What ethical concerns do you have about emerging technologies?

Maria: I just think that is going to take away a lot of jobs, because the government might think "why would I pay a person to do this task when an AI can do it for me", which is where I get nervous about when it comes to emerging technology.

Question: How do you feel about the prospect of humans living on Mars?

Maria: I think that if humans can live on earth, why can't we believe that people live on other planets. Honestly, this is just a fun theory I like to have because it keeps things interesting and provides a bigger perspective on things.

Question: How do you think technology will impact the future of education?

Maria: I definitely think it will help a lot of people learn more because it is at their disposal, but I also think it will leave a large room for cheating because why would you read a book when you can just ask chat GPT to give you all the answers, and so that is where it will cause a large problem and change learning into something that is not tangible.

Question: What role does creativity play in your life, and how do you nurture it?

Maria: I think that when a person is creative they are able to look at life through different lenses which makes life a lot more interesting. Creativity allows people to grow themselves and the projects they are working on which is key because you never want to be stuck in one place for too long.

Question: How do you overcome creative blocks and writer's or artist's block?

Maria: Take a rest day because oftentimes these types of things occur because you may feel burnout or discouragement, so just take a day or even a couple to refresh yourself so that you can go back with a cleaner headspace than before.

Question: What's your opinion on the connection between mental health and creativity?

Maria: They are one in the same in my opinion. When you are not in a healthy place mentally, you are not going to be creative or as creative as you would want. Mental health is the key to everything, so if you are not mentally well then that is going to take away from more aspects of your life, not just your creativity.

Question: How do you feel about censorship in art and creative expression?

Maria: I think that there are certain ages for things and young children should not be exposed to everything. However if an individual's art is being censored for being different or is maybe causing disagreement amongst people then I think that is wrong because that is the point of art. Art is meant to spark up conversations and different perspectives.

Question:What's your approach to finding inspiration for your creative endeavors?

Maria: I like to talk to other people and see what they are currently doing and thinking because I personally grow when I learn from others and the world around me.

Question:How do you perceive the relationship between art and politics?

Maria: Art and politics have very strong personalities, so to speak, on their own, so they are bound to come together as one or even clash against one another, but that really is everything in life. It is just a matter of, are you going to pay attention to it or not.

Question:What's your opinion on the commercialization of art and creative works?

Maria: I think that it is wrong to profit off someone else's art, but if an artist wants to sell their art, then they can do that because it is there to do whatever they want with it, and if you don't want to buy it then you don't have to.

Question:How do you think creativity contributes to problem-solving in various fields?

Maria: I think creativity is the key to problem solving because you always have to think outside the box when it comes to figuring out a problem or solving an issue that you feel has not been solved through regular means.

Question:What's your perspective on the impact of art and music on mental well-being?

Maria: Art and music are so beneficial for mental well-being because it becomes an outlet for people. Personally, I struggled with depression for a year when I was 21, and besides prayer, the only other thing that really helped me get through it was music. It was a way to channel my feelings and also connect with other artists whose music made me believe they went through the same thing and they could overcome it so why can't I.

Question:How do you encourage creativity in others, especially in children?

Maria: I have a young niece, so something that I liked to do with her was draw. We would draw different shapes and I would ask her "what do you think this looks like", and if I drew a triangle with wings then she would say a bird, and so and so, which really helped her grow her creativity because she wasn't limiting herself to what she knew was fact.

Question: How do you stay informed about current events and news?

Maria: I have alerts on for my news app that is on my phone, so I try to always read through the articles that pop up so that I stay up to date.

Question: What's your perspective on activism and its impact on social change?

Maria: I think it is important to stand up for what you believe in, but honestly I draw the line when people start rioting. You can protest for what you believe in without being disrespectful and creating more injustice.

Question: How do you think society should address income inequality?

Maria: I honestly don't know how society would go about that, just because I am not educated on that myself. I know there is a system for everything and you can't just increase the minimum wage, because the money has to come from somewhere, so I really don't know how society should address income inequality.

Question: How do you perceive the role of NGOs and nonprofits in social change?

Maria: I think that they are important because they can provide not only an awareness surrounding whatever topic they are striving to change, but also they can gather funds to also aid their cause.

Question: What causes or social issues are you most passionate about?

Maria: I think currently, the war between Israel and Palestine. I don't have a side on the matter, because I am not fully educated on the details of why they are fighting and for how long, but the reason I would say I am passionate about it is because there are innocent people who are dying, including children, and that needs to be put an end to.

Question: How do you contribute to charitable or philanthropic causes?

Maria: I try to donate money to charities that I feel a strong connection to at least once a year, or if there are certain causes that arise, then I try to donate money to those causes, even if it isn't a large sum, because anything helps.

Question: What's your opinion on volunteering and community service?

Maria: I absolutely love volunteering. I was very involved in my community when I was in highschool, but as you get older and have a lot more responsibilities and work to do you tend to lose those passions, but I still try to go to charity events and volunteer at certain events in my community whenever I can so that I can still be an active member and contribute to the cause.

Question: How do you perceive the lessons we can learn from history?

Maria: Don't let history repeat itself. If we can take one thing away from history, it is that we should not repeat the past, the mistakes that were made, the judgment that was passed onto individuals. History is meant to be learned from, respected, and used to make a better future.

Question: What's your opinion on the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions?

Maria: I think it is extremely important to preserve cultural heritage and traditions because that is what makes everyone very unique. If we all had one singular tradition and cultural heritage that we followed then life would be so boring. Beauty comes from cultural heritage and traditions, and I think they should always be preserved and taught to future generations.

Question: How do you approach learning about different cultures and their histories?

Maria: I ask people who share those different cultures and try to learn about their history through conversations, and trying new foods, and traditions. If I am really curious then I will do actual research, whether it is a google search or reading a book, but overall I really like to learn about the different cultures and their histories.

Question: How do you think historical events shape contemporary societies?

Maria: I think understanding how things used to work in the past, gives us a better understanding of what to do in the future, and grow a new model so that we can better our society.

Question: How do you define a healthy family dynamic?

Maria: A healthy family dynamic is one that is respectful of each other, has boundaries, and knows how to properly communicate with one another.

Question: How do you balance familial obligations with personal aspirations?

Maria: Coming from a family who really valued what other people think, I did not give too much thought into familial obligations, because if my parents wanted me to be a doctor, they only wanted that because it would look nice to their friends. So I focused on my personal aspirations and focused on what I wanted to leave behind as my legacy, and not pay any attention to what my parents wanted me to portray to our community.

Question: How do you perceive the impact of parental influences on personality development?

Maria: I think when a child is very young, parental influence does impact personal development because when you are so young you tend to learn from what is around you and oftentimes that is a parent. I think as a parent it is important to not expose your children to things like prejudice or judgment of others because children are like sponges and absorb information fairly quickly.

Question: What role do you think siblings play in shaping each other's lives?

Maria: Personally, I have one sister and we are very estranged from each other, and it has always felt like there is a part of me missing because a sibling, ideally, should be your closest friend, and when that is not the case it is very difficult to not see your friends or people who you know interact with their own siblings without feeling a bit of envy.

Question: How do you approach parenting, and what values would you instill in your children?

Maria: When I become a parent I want to teach my children the basic values of life. Don't judge people because you never know what is going on in their life, always be kind even if people are not kind to you, show grace and patience, among other things. I want to raise children who are inherently good, who can spread positivity amongst their generation.

Question: What's your opinion on the concept of a chosen family and its significance?

Maria: My best friends are truly my chosen family. To me, my chosen family means more to me than my biological family, because my blood relatives have let me down too many times to count. A chosen family is so beautiful because it gives you a second chance at having people in your life who undoubtedly support you throughout everything.

Question: How do you handle generational differences within the family?

Maria: I try not to blame the different individuals in my family who are younger or older than me, because they ultimately have been living a different life than me, and have seen and experienced things that I have not, so it is not my place to get angry or judgmental when it comes to generational differences.

Question: What's your perspective on the evolving definition of family in modern society?

Maria: For me, the more "family" the better. I know the term family has grown a lot in past generations, which I personally like because I hold people who are close to me and who have done so much for me to heart and that deserves to be given a title, so what better title than family.