

**Topic:** I almost lost my Mexican culture.

**Abstract:** Growing up without a father almost made me lose my background culture. Trying to find out who I was and where I fit in was hard. My dad was always so proud of his background culture but when he passed away I lost who I was. Hanging out with different people made me change who I was and losing my Mexican heritage.

**Key Words:** Single parent, Mexican, death, acculturation. Mexican-American

### How Death Almost Killed My Identity

What would you do if you saw Death? I remember that night, it was dark and raining but my dad just had to set up the soccer nets for the next day. BOOM BOOM BOOM! My dad was a victim of a drive by and died instantly. I heard my house phone ring but didn't bother to pick it up. I tried to go back to sleep but I heard my mom getting the phone. She ran to the bath room and cried for a long time, I tried not to pay attention and go back to sleep. When I woke up several hours later, I heard many people crying and praying my grandpa's old room. "Oh god, please don't let it be anything bad" was all I kept thinking. I peaked in and saw a pictured of my dad. At that minute I had a bad feeling that something had happen to my dad, because it was only his picture they were praying for and no sign of my uncle's (he had also gone to go help set up and got shot). I went to school not knowing what really happen that day, until I got called into the principle's office. My mom had red eyes, tear drops rolling down her cheek and hugged me, and told me my dad had passed away. We all paused. All I said was I "knew it!" Hugged her and asked if I could go back to class. The principle told my mom I was in shocked. That news affected me, I started being more timid. My father's death had killed part of my Identity.

My father was a positive, strong, hard-working; Mexican he loved his background culture! I remember all the dancing and the music he would love to play Sunday's after Church. Our family was fun and very traditional. At school I had a lot of friends and loved getting along

with everyone. Through the end of my fourth grade year I didn't play much on "fun Fridays" counting the minutes until it was time to go home. Waiting for the day I could once hear my dad's truck door closing and the front door opening, "DAD!" (Then hugging him until something else would catch my eyes). My fifth grade year was bad. I started getting low grades. I didn't like to participate in class anymore. On show and tell day I didn't bring anything. I thought nothing in my life was interesting. When I said that, a girl responds was "tell us about your dad I saw him in the news. How did he die?" The teacher as well as all the other students just kept staring I stared back. My father was the only one who would push me in school and showed me how to have a good time. Soon the teacher called the next student. I just wanted my life to end so I can be with my father dancing to his Spanish music and always being optimistic. I didn't care who I was and what I was going to be.

My sixth grade was really bad I was dropped out. That year my whole family and I went to Mexico. My dad was buried in Oaxaca, Mexico so we went to go decorate his tomb (tradition we had to do) for *Dia De Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). When we arrived in Mexico my whole family seemed to love the place and every moment they had. My Father loved his home town. My mom took us to his favorite places and gave us the lecture of *Dia de los Muertos*. My Brother and sister loved it! My baby brother was only a couple months old and had no clue what was going on and I didn't seem to care for it. That placed showed me who my dad was and who my family is (Proud Mexicans).

My mother was a single parent and unfortunately she couldn't be with my siblings and me at the time. She worked all the time trying to maintain a stable income for us to survive. I no longer saw anything what so ever about our traditions not even our mandatory Mass on Sundays were give-in. My sister and Brother had more time with my father so they kept going and loved

the music and dancing. Our Mexican family threw parties every other weekends. They played Spanish bands. We call it *banda* and *corridos*. My older brother and sister love that! Me on the other hand don't I rather listen to country music. I never really understood why they liked it so much and trust me it's just a bunch of noise anyways.

My older siblings and I are different because we grew up differently. They always had my mom and dad to make them feel happy. I was a little girl still barley trying to find out who I was in this world. The only reason I didn't care about school was because my dad was the only one who would push me to try my best. Always giving lectures how he wished he had an education and the opportunity I have. When I had came back I got a teacher name Mrs. Popa who I think is the most caring teacher ever (I soon called her my second mom so I only told classmates). She was almost like my dad always nagging me to do my best in school.

Ms. Popa was the ASB teacher. I had join ASB as a senator my seventh grade year. Ms. Popa had helped me out a lot; she was the coolest teacher in school! I loved doing ASB it helped me to forget a little bit about the past and focus in the future. I would stay after school a lot and she helped me out with English problems I had. Along with other classmates we would shop with Ms. Popa for supplies we need. My favorite time I loved was going out to eat with her and ASB members. She introduced me to many restaurants I didn't even know existed. She saved my education; she helped me be more involved, and in a way helped me be more outgoing.

Another teacher who helped me in my education was Mr. Ayala. I was still stuck in a lower English class but he thought us not to think we were less smart then the regular English students. Mr. Ayala pushed us to do our best in the class, thought us what the regular English students were doing, and on top of that he would make the class very interesting. I learn a lot from him and thanks to him I got into regular English my eight grade year.

During my middle school year I was always in school getting more involved in every after school activities I could! I had join ASB, yearbook, and Tiger Pride all which Mrs. Popa ran. Before I had met Mrs. Popa I was a shy girl and “was just there”. She was proud of being Irish and loved the color green. She loved her back ground culture and what she was doing with her life just like how my dad used to be. I would be with other kids and Mrs. Popa organizing for the next event or working on the next page for the yearbook. I was always filled around with other classmates. I felt like I fit in again. I started listening to the music they like and everything else they did.

During eighth grade I had been suspended from ASB because of my grade. The reality was that I wanted an easy way out. Mrs. Popa was mad at me for making that decision because she knew I could do better. Hearing the word disappointed makes me feel awful and that’s what she mention “I am so disappointed in you” (ouch). I never thought I would hear that from any one. In my suspension I started to talk to the “misbehaving students” in my English class. I was having fun, but I was getting into trouble. Mrs. Popa help me back into ASB and I started to improve my grades again.

Mrs. Popa had signed my year book and it was touching. She said” Gladis you have changed and I can’t believe my Gladis was sent to the office, you’re better then that I know you are. Don’t let anything get in your way in making your dreams come true. You’re a very smart girl and don’t be lazy about anything because it won’t get you know where in life and we both know your can make something of yourself.” And then I was off to High school with dreams, goals, and encouragement. I know what I want to do with my life becoming an SSA FBI profiler, saving people’s life’s, and hope for one day to solve my dad’s case. And then I was now going to High school.

In high school of my sophomore year I had a *Quinceañera*, I didn't skip the father daughter dance. I don't know why but I had to have it. It wasn't even my *Quinceañera*. I had it for my aunt and mother. I was living there fantasy of the *Quinceañera* they never had. I wanted a Sweet-Sixteen with a car as my present! I distanced myself from my family and there tradition. I was becoming more Americanized each year in high school.

I started to meet new people in high school and seeing new ideas. In high school brands and looks were in. I started wearing UGGS, American Eagle, Hollister, Ray Ban's, Dior, and much more. A long with music and dancing. This time it wasn't Mexican music with Mexican dancing like Salsa. It was Hip-Hop music with Hip-hop music and many others as Country (my favorite), Pop, House/ Electro.

It wasn't until last year I started understanding the Oreo saying "black on the outside, white in the inside". I've been trying more and more to practice my family traditions. My family and my best friend say they "wish I was a little more I am Mexican" I tell them I am Mexican but they shut me down with "yeah but your white wash and you can't even speak Spanish" That encourages me more to try my best with my Mexican traditions. I have my Brother and sister teach me the entire dance moves my Dad and mom would teach them when they were little. The lost of my dad gave me a lot of who I was. My Spanish is still little rusty but I can somewhat communicate with my mom and that's all that matters. I know I am Mexican American; I love all the Mexican food as well as all American food. I love Christmas with my family since we have a diversity of ethnicity in our family. We have white and Filipino. That day we have tamales, ham, and fried rice and much more! We all have to get use to this new society and learn to acculturate! I am Mexican American and proud of it and I'm glad I found out all traditions I was missing out on.

