

Topic: Against All Odds

Abstract: This is the story of my grandfather, a noble and respected man, who sought little but concentrated on the welfare of his family. My grandfather was a WWII veteran who served two tours as a GI and a Military Police Officer (MP). He gained respect, even among his enemies. Though of Mexican descent, he identified himself as an American patriot, leaving behind a legacy for his grandchildren to follow.

Against All Odds

My grandfather has had an effect on the way I make my choices in life. He has been an inspiration on my views but his shoes are still hard to fill.

My grandfather was born on October 27, 1921 in Pinole, California. He was bilingual and identified himself as an American. He identified himself as an American because of the fact that he was born and raised in this country. However, he was not ashamed of being considered a Mexican American. He was raised in Seligman, Arizona and lived in a boarding house with both parents and twelve other brothers and sisters. His father was the owner of a gas station off of Route 66 and owner of the boarding house my grandfather was raised in.

As a child, my grandfather was quickly forced into employment. Due to the economic struggles, all children within the family were expected to help out financially. In order to help the family, his father would stay at the gas station in Arizona and send his mother with all twelve children to farm work in California. With only a third grade education, my grandfather quickly earned the respect of the foreman. He was the only one to volunteer to get a truck out that was stuck in the mud. Since my grandfather was only fifteen years old at the time, as a joke, the foreman challenged him to try and promised the truck as a gift if he succeeded. My grandfather ended up with a new truck as a young teenager.

My grandfather did not have a choice when he was informed that he had been drafted for WWII at the age of eighteen. After being drafted, he fought on two sides of the world as a WWII G.I. with Company I394 Infantry Division. His first encounter with danger was in 1942, when he hacked his way through the jungles of the Soloman Islands. During an ambush, a Japanese sniper hiding in a tree shot my grandfather through his wrist watch and out his elbow. Out of a squad of five, my grandfather was the only survivor.

After recovering, my grandfather still made the decision to re-enlist as a Paratrooper. As an American, he still felt the desire to fight for his country. As a paratrooper, he parachuted into Normandy. He participated in the Battle of the Bulge in which he was forced to spend his holidays in a foxhole. During an attack, my grandfather was once again wounded. He survived after being shot in the face. He recovered from this wound in France and was then placed as a Military Police Officer (MP) in Germany.

As an MP, my grandfather's duties were to patrol the Prisoner of War (POW) Camp. One foggy day, during a routine patrol, he noticed a group of Germans soldiers walking towards him. Surprisingly, these soldiers were yelling, "Yank, Yank," which meant that they were surrendering. My grandfather took them in as prisoners with many to follow. My grandfather noticed that these prisoners were starving just as much as the American soldiers. As a noble man, he decided to befriend them in which they provided information on how to find food off camp.

The German soldiers informed my grandfather of secret places throughout the village in which they hid food in case of an emergency. In order to survive, both American and German soldiers worked together to feed each other. For this decision, my grandfather was reprimanded

for putting himself and others in danger. My grandfather was not affected by this consequence because he felt that being a noble man was more important than military rank. He was still fully honored as a war hero and given two purple hearts for his wounds.

After being honorably discharged from the military, my grandfather came back to San Jose, California. From 1948 to 1984, he was a member of the Labor Union, worked on construction projects as a heavy equipment operator, rose to a general foreman, and retired as a construction superintendent. He did not categorize his success on his ethnicity, but rather thought of it as humble beginnings, hard work, and respect.

While working, he was able to purchase a home for his mother. This was the beginning of his obsession with owning properties. He was the owner of eleven properties in San Jose which consisted of apartment complexes, gas stations, and a nightclub. My grandfather would mainly rent apartments to families because of the memories he had as a child. It would be difficult for his family to find shelter in California while working in the fields because of the large number of children his mother had to care for.

My grandfather met my grandmother in San Jose, because she was a tenant of one of the complexes. As a single mother, my grandmother respected my grandfather for stepping up to provide for her and her five children. He even went to the extent to cover the funeral costs of one of my grandmother's children. Coming from a large family, my grandfather knew the financial struggles my grandmother was facing. He decided to sell all of his properties to purchase a thirty acre ranch in Hollister to raise the children. He treated my grandmother's first five children with the same care and love as his own four children.

My grandparents ended up separating later due to marital issues. Before my grandfather passed away, he met with my grandmother and asked for her to make sure that all his grandchildren would have shelter and food. He did not want to die worrying about his grandchildren or knowing that they were not being well taken care of.

Growing up feeling like an American but being classified as a Mexican, my grandfather's participation in the war changed his views of his identity. After serving two tours and fighting for his country, my grandfather changed his name to become more American. He may have made this decision to gain more respect as an individual who risked his life for the freedom of others. My grandfather also made the decision to support himself by chasing the American dream.

Overall, my grandfather accepted the social, economic, and political environment he grew up in. Socially, he decided to change his name to be more American because he felt that he had earned his place in the category of American instead of Mexican American. He never looked down upon being a Mexican but considered himself American because he had respect for his country and felt that his experiences molded his identity. Being born into the Great Depression also affected how my grandfather made his decisions. He was raised learning the meaning of hard work. Even though he made most of his success after the Great Depression, he still never took anything for granted and made sure that he would own many properties to be able to shelter his future family.

My grandfather has affected my sense of identity by creating a desire to not simply be a regular person. This means that I have set my goals to build a better legacy to my name. I feel that his blood runs through me and I can accomplish anything I set myself out to do. The fact

that his only desire before he passed away was for his grandchildren to be taken care of, makes me feel even more pressured of not letting him down. I also feel pressured to achieve higher goals, especially because his own children lacked accomplishments due to the depression that they fell into because of his death. They were used to him being the main provider for their family, and it was difficult for them to take their own roles as adults. Others would think that his children should have tried harder to set goals and empower our family. So far, I cannot see anyone remembering our last name and thinking positive of the changes we have made in the world. It may seem that the day my grandfather died, was the day my last name also died.

I would love to be half the man my grandfather was but, my confused identity of being a Mexican American sometimes brings me down. I feel that I am not accepted as a Mexican to others Mexicans because of a language barrier. I also feel that I am not fully accepted as an American because of the color of my skin. It is very difficult for me to identity with either ethnicity but I believe a carry values for both sides. My grandfather has taught me the value of hard work and respect, which I can earn not only by being American, Mexican American, or Mexican. I believe I am going to accomplish my goals whether people accept me for what ethnicity they may think I am.