

Topic: My Grandfather's experience of being the leader of a family.

Abstract: Being the eldest son of a Mexican family, my grandfather had to assume the responsibility of a household, at the age of nine. He dropped out of school in the fifth grade to be able to support his family. He started working any job that would pay, in able to keep his mother and seven siblings from starving. At the age of 15 he decided to move to the United States to send money back to Mexico to support his family. He worked various jobs when he got to the United States and made more money than he would have in Mexico. He also faced much adversity in the workplace from American supervision and co-workers. By working my grandfather met my grandmother at his workplace. He also brought over many of his siblings from Mexico in order to give his family a better life.

Keywords: Mexican people and education, supporting the family, migrant worker, working conditions, hostility in the workplace, workplace connections, bettering family.

Mi Abuelo

No sooner than had they buried his father, my grandfather assumed the role of being the man of the house at the young age of nine. That morning in Mexico City he left home as a young fifth grader, assuming it was going to be like every other day. The news he received that afternoon, would change his life forever. His family and his siblings gathered around his mother who was crying hysterically. He then learned that his father was tragically killed at the age of 35. My grandfather's role was changed immediately from that of a fifth grader, to having to become the main provider for his family.

My grandfather dropped out of school in the fifth grade. He had to do this because he needed to work in order to support his family. My great-grandfather always stressed the importance of education to my grandfather. My grandfather has always known how important education is, in order to secure a better life for him and his family. A lot of Mexican people have to drop out of school so they could be able to support their family. Many Mexican people are forced to pull their children from school because of

their poor economic status. Because of this many Mexican children were unable to secure brighter futures for themselves. My grandfather struggled in areas of life without having education, but he always tried to further his knowledge by teaching himself numerous things. He learned how to teach himself things that a father or school teacher would usually have taught him. Such as reading and writing better, doing housework, and taught himself how to weld, which would soon be his future job. My grandfather passed down how important school is to my father, and my father has passed down how important school is to me.

When my grandfather first dropped out of school he would look for any job that would pay him. In Mexico, jobs are very hard to find because of the millions of people also looking for any job that would pay. It did not matter how much or what he did as long as they paid him. Because of his young age he was limited with the type of jobs he was allowed to perform. My grandfather usually hung around construction sites performing any task they allowed him to do. One of his first jobs he worked was moving bricks for about twenty five cents a day, if he was lucky. Sometimes he worked for free because they did not think they had to pay him because he was a kid or cheated him out of his pay. He would have to work all day usually in extremely hot weather conditions. The only tools he used were his hands and did not even have gloves to wear. This job was very hard on grown man, yet my grandfather was a nine year old competing with these grown men. My grandfather performed this type of labor until the age of fifteen. At that age he felt he was not supporting his family enough because his family was growing up. So, he decided in order to support his family better, he informed his mother

that the best thing for his family was for him to leave Mexico and move to the United States to seek a better paying job.

At the age of fifteen my grandfather headed for the boarder not knowing what lied ahead. He took only the clothes on his back and one pair of clothes to change into. He traveled to the boarder by hopping trains, walking, and taking any ride he could get. He snuck across the boarder with six other men and arrived in Arizona. He was excited and nervous when he first arrived in the United States thinking of all the opportunities that lie ahead for him and also not knowing about his future. My grandfather was expecting to send money back to the United States so he could return their someday and his family life would be better.

First arriving in the United States my Grandfather took mostly jobs in the agricultural field. He felt that this was the best opportunity because people always needed food and that meant there would always be work. He made his money depending on how much he picked for the day. He was usually the first one to start and the last person to leave at the end of the day. The pay was not a lot, but it was better than what he was making in Mexico. Working conditions were not great. They were not supplied with restrooms, did not always have proper tools, long hours, intense heat, and with little to no breaks. My grandfather also faced a lot of racial discrimination during this time. The Mexican people were not treated well and looked down upon. He faced people telling him to go back to Mexico and people calling out racial slurs toward him. But, he never let them get to him because he knew that he had to be there to support his family. He felt that by being in the United States it gave him a lot more opportunities than being in Mexico. His family missed my grandfather but knew the only way they would survive

is if he was in the United States. My grandfather wished to one day return to Mexico and be with his family once again. He soon figured out that there was more steady work in California and decided to leave Arizona.

My grandfather arrived in California when he was sixteen. He kept working jobs in the agricultural field but he felt that this was not enough. He wanted to give his family as much as could because he was the main provider. He decided he needed to get another job and he found one working at the cannery in Hollister. He first started working at the Cannery when he was sixteen and worked there until he past away at the age of seventy-one. When he first started working at the cannery he mainly did maintenance sanitation for the first couple of years. He then moved to become a greaser in the cannery which used a grease gun to lubricate all machinery with moving parts. After that he showed interest in the mechanical department. But, those jobs were usually favored by the American men and Mexican usually struggled to learn all the aspects of this job. Supervisor knew and would usually not make Mexican men mechanics. My grandfather was always up for a challenge. He taught himself how to become a mechanic without any schooling. The cannery usually sent their mechanics to school to learn how to do their job. They felt it would be a waist of money if they sent my grandfather because he would not be able to learn how to become a mechanic. He soon became one of the best mechanics the cannery had. This racial discrimination did not give an opportunity to my grandfather. He also faced a very hostile environment in the workplace at the cannery. Many people called him racist names such as “Wet Backs,” and most of his American co-workers felt like they were his superior. He also faced discrimination with pay. He did the same work as some American men, yet they were paid more even though they had the

same exact job. My grandfather never did anything about this because he did not want to lose his job. He knew the only thing that he was there for was to work to be able to support his family. So, he kept his mouth shut and worked very hard to at his job and knew it was for his family.

My grandfather also made many workplace connections. He met my grandmother working at the cannery. She was from Hollister and spoke Spanish and English. They were two different people coming from very different backgrounds. My grandmother graduated high, where my grandfather did not even get past the fifth grade. My grandmother was an American citizen, and my grandfather was an illegal immigrant. Yet, they still fell in love and got married. My grandfather being a migrant worker still wanted to go back to Mexico to be with his family. But, after he met my grandmother all his plans changed. He stayed in California to be with his wife and had seven children in Hollister. He still sent money back to his family even though he now had a family of his own. He now was the leader of two households that he had to support. It's amazing how he was able to support his family back home and also support his family here in the United States.

My grandfather wanted to better his family back home in Mexico. So, he eventually brought over his youngest brother to live in the United States. He wanted to give his brother a better life and he knew the United States offered better opportunities for work than Mexico did. He got his brother a job at the cannery and his brother was soon able to raise enough money to bring his wife and children to the United States. Even though they both lived in the United States they still supported their family back in

Mexico. My grandfather never stopped sending back money to his family. He felt that he was still the man of the house in Mexico and was still the leader of his family.

My grandfather was forced to become the leader of his household at a very young age. But, even at a young age he was able to have success of being the leader of his family. My grandfather was a strong leader. He survived many journeys throughout his life and they made him a strong and proud person. His leadership skills made it possible for me to be alive today. I am grateful that my grandfather was such a strong person and am very proud to be his grandchild.