

Topic: My struggle with old family traditions and how I broke free.

Abstract: As a child I was subjected to old family traditions. I learned at a very young age the roles that both a male and female played in a typical Mexican family. My grandmother who had immigrated to the United States at a very young age was very old fashion and strict with the way that she viewed a female's role in a Mexican family. After my mother and father split we were forced to live with my grandmother and the female role became even more clear to me. I was then forced to take on a role based on an old fashion tradition that I not only didn't agree with but that I didn't understand. Throughout most of my childhood I struggled to make my place as an individual because of the fear and respect that I had for my grandmother. I hid my studying most of my childhood and it wasn't until I entered high school that I finally got the courage to ask my mother to allow me more studying time so that I could have a better chance to get into a good college. My mother disagreed and it wasn't until my aunt came to my defense that my mother's view changed towards me forever. Through struggle and constant studying I finally got the approval of my grandmother and we're closer than we've ever been.

Keywords: Old fashion traditions broken by new traditions, roles of women and men in a Mexican family, independence of Mexican women and how it was seen as an intimidation when finding a good husband.

Broken Traditions

I was born on May 19, 1981, to a mother that was of Mexican descent, but who was born in the United States, and to a father who was an immigrant from Guadalajara Mexico, who came to the United States to pursue the "American Dream." Since birth, the only language that I heard and spoke was the Spanish language and by the time I started kindergarten, I had already learned two important things; First, I learned that not all things are promised. I know you're probably thinking what do I mean by this? What could a child at such a young age know about such a thing? Well, unfortunately by the time I entered kindergarten, my parent's marriage had deteriorated and we were forced to

move into my grandmother's home. None of us know what really happen between our parents; the only thing that we know is that one day my father left for work as usual and was never heard from or seen again. The second thing that I learned was the roles that both a female and male played in typical Mexican family and it's something that was emphasized day in and day out in my grandmother's home.

Living at my grandmother's house proved to be a lot more than just a typical walk in the park, I know that most people in this day and age would love nothing more than to be with their grandmother's day in and day out, but unfortunately that wasn't the case for me. It's not that I didn't love my grandmother it's just that she was a very old fashion Mexican woman who took Mexican traditions very seriously. Our second week there she already had helped my mother get a job working in the fields picking onions and I was already being taught my role as the only other female in a family that consisted of my mother, myself, and my three younger brothers. Every day after school my grandmother would go out to greet me at the door when I got home from school and almost immediately she would always pull my aside and give me a new lesson for the day that explained my role as woman of the house.

I remember telling her that I wanted to play with my brothers and she would tell me that I could play later because there were more important things that I had to learn that would help me land a good husband later on. See my grandmother immigrated to the United States when she was about 14 years old and she was taught that a woman is responsible for maintaining a household. She didn't even continue school when she got here because she had to go out in work so that she could help my great grandparents support the family. The problem was that I didn't even care about landing a husband,

who would at such a young age. All I cared about was playing with my brothers or watching cartoons, but instead I was treated almost like a slave. Bound to a tradition that didn't understand and that I didn't agree with. I remember telling my mother that my grandmother was unfair and that I didn't want to live with her anymore because she was always making me do all the household chores and that my brothers didn't have to do anything, but watch cartoons and go outside and play. My mother always promised that she would talk to my grandmother about it, but she never did and I never knew why? I felt all alone and eventually I just gave up and I learned how to bottle it up inside over the years and to just do as I was told.

By the age of ten I was already making tortillas and doing almost every chore known to every homemaker on the face of the planet. By the age of thirteen I was expected to prepare meals for my three younger brothers and help them with their homework every day after school. The only time that I had any type of rest or time to do my own homework was when my brothers were sleeping or when I was in school. Through all this I somehow managed to maintain my grades. Secretly my education was my only joy and it helped me escape from the homemaking role that was forced upon me.

Late one night while my brothers were sleeping, I started to do my homework when I was startled by one of my brothers. I ended up having to bribe him not to tell my grandmother that he had seen me doing my homework. See, in my grandmother's eyes it's not that education wasn't important it's that it wasn't important enough for a woman to have because it would be wasted. Instead she believed that a good education should be better pursued by a man because he would be the one to not only support a family, but he would also be the one to run the household. In my grandmother's eyes and a woman was

only suppose to do whatever her husband asked of her, take care of the children, keep the house clean, and cook meals for her family. Oh, and let's not forget, she was also expected to get a job when times got tough to help out the family financially. If you ask me it seems that women in Mexican families don't get enough credit for maintain a household on their own and maintaining a job as well.

A few months later even with me bribing my little brother not to tell my grandmother about me doing my homework late at night he still told her. Why? I really don't know, but I think it might have had something to do with the fact that I didn't let him watch cartoons one day after school because he had homework to do. So I guess that was his little way of getting me back. It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. She just gave me the same old lecture about how I didn't need an education because I would find myself a good husband to take care of me and how a woman that was too independent was too intimidating for a good man. I didn't even respond, I wasn't suppose to because a well brought up proper young woman wasn't supposed to, I just bit my tongue and thought to myself that if any man felt too intimidated by a good independent woman who knew what she wanted and how to get it? Then he must not be that good of a man and he didn't deserve her anyways.

The following month my mother announced that she had met someone at work and that she had fallen in love. They'd been working together for the past seven years and she'd also been secretly seeing him for the past two and a half years. We weren't too upset by the news we were actually glad to see that my mother was able to overcome the hurt caused by our father and we just prayed for the best. The good news is that things were going extremely well for my mother and my new step father and we were finally

moving out of my grandmother's strict house. I felt really excited because I was just about to enter high school and I thought that just maybe I might have a good chance at my mother allowing me to put my head in my books a little more so that I could have a better chance at possibly getting into a good college even though I knew that a continued education was completely going against my family traditions. It was now the end of June and school had almost been out for a month now and I still hadn't gotten the courage to talk to my mom about allowing me to devote more time to studying. I was scared because she was exactly like my grandmother, she too had been denied an education at a very young age and she felt exactly the way my grandmother did about women and education. The only difference was that my mother was a little more passive and soft spoken, so she was a little more approachable.

I finally got the courage to ask her one day when my aunt was visiting. You see my aunt was the youngest of three and my mother was her older sister, but they were completely different in the way that they viewed the world. My aunt was the first to go against my grandmother's strict traditions. She had left home at the age of fifteen and she had gotten pregnant at the age of seventeen. She moved in with her son's father and she was able to maintain a fulltime job and continue her high school education. She eventually graduated from high school and she became the first person in our family to get her high school diploma in the United States. So as you can see I took advantage of the fact that my aunt's views were more like mine and I asked my mother while my aunt was visiting because I knew that my aunt would come to my defense. So I asked and at first my mother just ignored me so I decided to ask again and this time my mother gave me a look that told me that I better not ask again or else. My aunt repeated my question

and my mother said no. I was then asked to leave the room and I couldn't really hear what was being said, but after about twenty minutes I was called back into the room by my aunt. I don't exactly know what my aunt said to my mother that day all I know is that whatever it was it changed my mother's mind forever. After that my mother was a lot more supportive and I was finally able to freely study and I was also still able to help my mother out around the house. All of a sudden doing chores and helping take care of my younger brothers didn't seem like such a burden anymore and I was happy to oblige.

One day after school I stayed to study with a group of friends at the school library and as I was getting home I noticed my grandmother's car parked in the driveway. All of a sudden my world crumbled from underneath my feet and I felt weak. I was nervous because I knew that my grandmother still didn't know about my new study arrangements and I knew that she was going to grill me as soon as I stepped in the door. I finally got enough courage to open the door and as I was walking towards the kitchen I could hear my grandmother talking to my brothers, grilling them about where I was? And why I wasn't home preparing dinner or helping them with their homework? But they didn't say one word. They knew exactly where I was and yet they kept quite. When I finally came into the kitchen my grandmother started yelling at me and asking me where I'd been and with whom I'd been with? She asked me every question imaginable and I couldn't answer because I was scared. After about five minutes I finally got up enough courage to answer and when she heard my response she called me a liar and she slapped me harder than I'd ever been slapped in my entire life. She told me that I was probably out running around with some random boy and that I was a disgrace and how I would bring shame to my family. She was about to slap me again when in comes my mother and my aunt.

At this point I was crying uncontrollably. I was shocked. My grandmother had always been tough on me, but she had never laid a hand on me before. How could it be that even when I was telling the truth it was a lie in her eyes? I had done nothing my whole life, but do everything that she had ever asked of me, and yet she still didn't believe me. It seemed like forever, but my mother and my aunt finally were able to stop her from yelling at me and they explained to her the new studying arrangements that we had agreed on. My grandmother became really upset with both my mother and my aunt. She said that they were wrong and that we had traditions that need to live on. My aunt told her that times have changed and that our family needs to change with them. My grandmother still disagreed and she told my aunt that this whole situation was her fault and that she was corrupting both my mother and me with her independence nonsense.

My grandmother stormed out of our house after that and every time she came to visit us she always put me down and told me mean things. I remember her telling me one time that I should've been born a man because I act like one and that I would never find a husband because men don't like women that are too independent and they don't like women that think that they know it all. I learned to just ignore whatever she said and I ended getting my first job at McDonald's a few months later. I managed to maintain a part time job, help my mother at home with the house work, and keep my grades up. In June of 1999 I graduated from high school. Unfortunately I was unable to continue my education after that until now and a lot has changed since then, my grandmother finally changed her views and has become a lot more open minded about our traditions. We are now closer than we've ever been and she even watches my two girls while I'm in school four days a week. I don't resent my grandmother for being so hard on me when I

was younger, I'm actually really grateful that I was able to learn my family traditions even though I didn't always agree with them. I think that I'm a stronger person because of them. My family traditions may have been broken, but in my heart they'll never be forgotten. I'll still teach my daughters our traditions, but I won't force those traditions upon them. I'll simply tell them, this is what our family was built on, what we've evolved into and the choice is yours, but no matter what path my girls choose to take I'll always be behind them one hundred percent.