

Dacia Hernandez

Professor Kelli Wood

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Writing My Life

I will never forget my grandmother's appearance. She had deep and expressive brown eyes, the kind of eyes I could lose myself in; just with a look, I could tell how she was feeling or what she wanted to say. Sometimes I think that the saying, "A look can say a thousand words," comes from someone who knew her very well. Although she was small, she had a certain air of authority. Maybe it was the way she would stand upright as if there was no one who could take her down. That made her look like she was in charge. She was very quiet, but when she talked, she had the ability to grab everybody's attention. Age could not take away her beauty; she was peculiarly striking. Her gray hair made her more interesting, just throughout the years we get knowledge, and sure she had a lot, not only about life lessons, but about traditions, culture, and history too.

There is a Mexican saying, "*pareces de rancho*," which means that you act very conservative or shy as if you were raised on a farm. Why do I bring that up? Well, my grandmother was very conservative. It was not just the fact that she was raised on a farm, but it was the fact that she was born in the 1920s. At that time, it was a man's world. It was unusual for women to go to school; they were only to be at home helping with "woman stuff." Because of that and the fact that her mom died when she was very young, she never learned to read or write. She had to take over her mother's place at such a young age. Growing without her mom made her the loving and caring person she was. She knew how much a person can need that warm love that sometimes just a mother can give. Even though her life was not an easy one, my grandmother was built of happiness. She would always see

the bright side of the things. She thought that everything happened for a reason; we might not know what it is, but someday everything will all make perfect sense. She would always say that without our struggles we would not be who we are now. Her positivity is what defined her the most.

She had two siblings, one older brother and one younger sister. She was the maternal figure she never had for her sister. She would feed her, she would dress her, and she would teach her everything she knew. Years after the death of her mother, her father died too, due to a heart attack. You would think that her brother would become the head of the family, but that was not the case. He was an alcoholic, and he would only work to satiate his thirst; he did not care about anything else. So she started working at a *tiendita* (a small store) that her uncle owned. Even though she was illiterate, she was very smart. There she learned to add and subtract. She did such a great job managing the store that when her uncle died, he left the store to her along with a pen and a note that said, "I know you will take good care of it." Did he mean the store or the pen? She never knew.

We were very close. Every weekend she would come and stay at our place. She took care of us, my sister and me, while my parents were working. We did everything together; she taught us manners, traditions, and everything she knew. She would tell us tales; she knew I loved them very much. I was always wanting to hear a new one. After years one day she told me she did not know any more tales. I thought she was lying, so I got upset and I remember I told her, "I will not talk to you until you tell me a new one!"

The next day, she came to me slowly and cautiously, like a predator surrounding its prey. I remember the look in her eyes, deep and thoughtful, as she was thinking of a way to teach me a lesson. I noticed she was holding a pen very tight, and I asked her with curiosity, "What is that?" She told me, "It is a pen. I think is time you write your own tales," and she winked at me. I looked at the old pen wondering if it would work. It looked very old; there

were some letters printed on it, but I could not make a word out of it, so I asked my grandma what word was printed on the pen, and she said, “I never knew. It was like that when my uncle gave to me. I hope it helps you with your tales,” she told me with a smile on her face.

I still remember the feel of the pen in my hands. Even though it was so old and cracked, it felt smooth and warm. I could see that the blue color that once was vibrant and vivid now was opaque and dirty. I thought to myself, “How can something that is so old still work or be worth it?” Then my grandmother came to my mind. At that time, she was turning eighty, and I thought how old and weak she had grown. That did not mean she did not have anything to give; what mattered was the inside, just like the pen. It could look broken, weak, or old, but as long as the inside was strong and working, the outside was not important.

The smell of the ink touching the paper, as I write with that “old pen” brings back memories. I remember the way I reacted that time, and I feel ashamed. Now I understand that with that behavior I was not going to get anything or anywhere. I understand that in life, things are not going to be given to me easily or they will not be given to me at all. In order to get what I want, I have to work for it. I understand that we are the ones who write our own tales and stories. Thanks to my grandma, I have a pen to do so.