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Papi

Graciela Chipres
Humboldt State University

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Papi

Graciela Chipres

I live with my mami and my two older sisters.

Papi is locked away in Vacaville, “cow town” with scary evil men
who won’t let him out.

I don’t know him very well but my Papi is my everything.

He makes me feel safe and unconditionally loved.

Every time I see my Papi, my heart sings with immense joy.
He is a superhero and knight in shining armor rolled into one.

I feel the warmth of el sol and the comfort of sleep
after a long summer’s day of play.

My Papi is a large man.

From his tattoos and his demeanor,

most people are afraid but all I see from my Papi
are his bright white toothed smiles,

Laughter, a fierce protective nature for his loved ones,
and tight hugs full of love tinged with the smell of cigarettes.

I lived and grew up without him in my life,
a gentle memory of safety and security if anything were to happen.

I could depend on him.

Until a life of hardship and survival through drug dealing
lead to his murder by los federales when I was in high school.

His body had been found, death by 8 bullets to the chest,
drowned in his own blood.

My world caved in on itself.

I couldn’t breathe, a knot of tears pooling in my throat,
denying the release of my despair.

I felt cheated out of spending time with my Papi and angry at my
sisters and mom for

keeping it from me for the sake of my studies.
I've always felt like I wasn't made for this world,
too soft, a chillona for life but this was something different.
I was tired of hearing all the suffering that my family and my people
endure
but this was an injustice I couldn't bear, knowing my father could've
led a happier life.
My abuelo died of alcohol poisoning when he was very young,
and as one of the eldest men in the family he was thrust into
responsibilities he couldn't fathom.
He worked hard in the fields
but the destitution was suffocating and laborious,
barely keeping his family and then my family from starvation.
Without opportunities and resources at his disposal like we have in
the US, he took to drug dealing, and was incarcerated for all my
childhood.
I have letters and drawings he would send me while he was in prison
his tender, loving words telling us to work hard,
so that we didn't have to suffer like he did.
His constant praise of my sisters and I
is the greatest thing he ever gave to this world.
Prison is no way to live; my sister told me that my Papi would often
say he would die before ever going back to prison.
I vividly recall my Papi on one of the worst days,
slumped over on a cane like an old man at only thirty,
bearing the weight of his painful life.
I can't imagine the horrible experiences my father had to suffer
for my family, but I know he did it out of love for us.
That love was displayed permanently on his body,
his hija's names on his chest close to his heart
and my mama's name etched across his belly.

I knew this world was cruel and unfair;
I just didn't know why it had to be my Papi.
My rage and despair turned to grey hopelessness and indifference.
I escaped the loss in my books which were my constant refuge,
ran harder and faster in cross country and slept my days away.
My Papi has been the source of the greatest love I've experienced
and the greatest pain I've endured in my life.
He is still the sweetest, kindest, most selfless man I've ever met.
Graduation looms in the horizon and I have done it all
by clinging to his memory, knowing that he is protecting me
from wherever he may be.
I would give anything to see him and talk to him for just one day.
I know he'll be with me on my graduation day in spirit
and he will beam with pride knowing that
his sacrifices were not made en vano.
En memoria de Rafael Chipres Guizar.