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Capella: Two Golden Stars

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Capella: Two Golden Stars

Gabriela Rivera Almansa

My favorite stories are ones about my grandfather. Born in 1916 in Cuba, Candido Almansa was one of the youngest of four siblings from a humble household. He was an orphan by the age of 8 and was taken in by his older brother who worked at the town's barbershop. My grandfather started working at a young age, helping out his brother in the shop and selling fruits around town. By the age of 16, he moved to the capital of Cuba and started working for a wealthy family as their gardener. The lady of the house became interested in teaching my grandfather manners and important life lessons like how to save money. It was this background that shaped him into the hard-working and committed man so many people knew and loved.

The family he worked for owned many factories in the city, and he started working as a tool and die maker. By the time Fidel Castro came around, my grandfather was a hard-working man who had no intention of letting anyone dictate what he could do with his business. My grandfather knew he had to get his family out from under that oppressive regime, so when the opportunity arose, he uprooted his life and moved to Long Island. There he worked 80 hours a week without a vacation, making parts for guns used during the Vietnam War. After 6 years of hard work and determination, he saved up enough money to move to Puerto Rico where the climate and sense of community were similar to Cuba's.

My grandfather sacrificed a lot for his family. With only a 6th grade education, he started a successful business. He instilled values of hard work and perseverance, and was a wonderful role model to my mother. Throughout their journey to the States, my mother was a young girl who did not speak English. She got bullied in school and felt embarrassed when speaking in front of others. This only fueled her resolve to become fully bilingual, and now she is an English professor who helps others learn the same

language she had such a hard time learning. When I see my mother, I see my grandfather's strong work ethic and determination.

As a professor, my mother always includes a broader narrative in her classroom. She often teaches stories written by minorities who have been overlooked in most schools' curriculums. It was with her that I encountered my love for Alice Walker and Maya Angelou. My mother also nourishes wonderful relationships with her students. Oftentimes, when we are all out at the mall or the grocery store she bumps into one of her students. The joy in their faces at seeing my mother, even years after taking her class in some cases, is one I know comes from a true appreciation of her.

Both my grandfather and my mother are two clear examples of how your circumstances do not have to dictate your entire life. Their dedication and love for their crafts are what inspire me to go to school every day and work my hardest. I can only hope to one day make them both as proud of me as I am to come from a lineage of tremendously hardworking people.

REFLECTION

When asked to write about someone whose life of work and sacrifice for me has inspired me to work hard and achieve my goals, I immediately thought of my mother and of my grandfather. Of all the people in my life, these two people have been the ones to constantly support my plans and decisions. Even though my grandfather passed away when I was in 8th grade, I still remember so many of his teachings. He was the most hard-working man I'd ever met and he made sure to consistently provide for his family. I wanted to write something that included my mother as well, because she inherited all of my grandfather's hard-working characteristics.

My grandfather fought to make sure he had saved enough money and be able to leave it for his children. My mother currently works more than she ever has in order to make sure I am able finish my college education in the States. She sacrifices so much so that I can have a better life, which is exactly what her father did for her. I titled my freewrite "Capella: Two Golden Stars" after looking up constellations made up of only two stars. I found the title fitting because that was the theme of the prompt, my constellation. I think my constellation of support is much brighter than just two, but these two stars were/are the most important ones, the ones that shine the brightest.