

Para la Familia

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Reflections from the author

Para la Familia is a poem about my dad and how he worked for his family throughout his entire life. While this is a poem about my dad, I know other people who emigrated from other countries share similar experiences. I chose to write this poem because I have heard variations of this story from many people in my culture, and I think it is important to bring up the stories of immigrants who come to this country to make a better life for their families. They are doing what many people's ancestors did back when this country started. Given today's political climate, I think it is more important to tell these stories because of the picture painted of immigrants from Mexico.

In class, we learned about intersectionality and how it plays a part in our life experiences. As humans we have a lot of identities that describe us, and sometimes these identities overlap with each other, affecting our own individual experiences. Intersectionality is where these identities connect with each other. In this poem I included some of my dad's intersecting characteristics such as being an immigrant, being Mexican, not having English as a first language, being a worker, and being a father. Because of these characteristics, my dad had double jeopardy. Double jeopardy is when a person already has certain disadvantages because of one of their characteristics, but has more disadvantages added to that because of another intersecting identity. In my dad's case, he was a Mexican immigrant and was called a "wetback" by people when he first came to this country. It was also harder for him to find work because he did not know English.

In the stanza where I talk about my dad's drinking, I thought a lot about the lecture on substance abuse. Throughout my life, it has been difficult for me to understand my dad's drinking habits. It was not until after I thought about the instability my dad lived through that I started being able to connect the pieces. For my dad, things changed drastically when he first came here. He was in a new country where it was hard to find a stable job if you were not from there. And even when he would find a job, nothing was certain for the next day because there was no guarantee immigration would not find him. When someone is faced with these problems every day, I can understand why someone would turn to drinking as an escape.

It is not an easy life and to still make sacrifices and go through difficulties to create a better life for your family, emigrating should be viewed as an honorable action. Even after coming to this country the situation is still not easy. But for some people, just by seeing their families achieve milestones they did not think were possible, they know their sacrifices were worth it. I hope my father knows his certainly were.

Tarimoro, Guanajuato 1960s

*He works the fields,
Feeding the pigs, milking the cows,
Doing yard work,
He is eight years old,
He watches as his siblings walk together to school,
He is one of the ones not allowed to go,
He needs to work for his family.*

*Mom picks him up a Bible,
He learns to read from it,
Cover to cover he rereads,
He learns the rosary,
Religion is the only thing he knows like the back of his hand,
He keeps it in his heart.*

*The sun comes up and it's time for work,
Sweat, grime, muddy hands,
He buys the beat-up car,
"It won't last much longer," said the seller,
"I don't mind," he says
It got the job done,
He taught his sister how to drive,
You put in work for the little things.*

*He makes his way to the U.S. in the 70s,
He hears people murmuring things,
The English language is not his,
"Wetback" he hears, but does not understand.*

*He works from sunrise to sunset,
"Para la familia," he thinks.*

*Work is stressful,
Moving from place to place to find it,
Drinks and cigarettes come easy,
Bars become homes,
They are his escape from the exhausting reality.*

*1993 he meets her,
The one who he knows will be his forever family,
Marries her in 1994,
His first child, a boy in 1995,
His second child, a girl in 1999*

*He looks at them and knows they are worth it,
"Lo hare por ellos."*

*Years pass,
He has a steady job at an electric company,
Works from midafternoon to late night,
I compare my hands to his one day,
His nails are chipped and dirty,
Calluses from years of work making his hands rough,
My hands are small and soft,
He doesn't have to say anything for me to understand.*