

ENG 100: Third Place

My Pops My OG

by Jovanni Montalvo

“If it was easy, everyone would be doing it.” Those are the words the older version of me says. They say I’m his spitting image. That’s my dad, my best friend, my mentor when I feel low, and my boy that I know will always be there for me.

My dad originated from Zacatecas, Mexico. He’s forty-six years of age now but still works like he’s twenty-five. His desire to always be there for his family and his three kids is endless. If I told you this man only made it to the third grade, you’d never believe me. Well, that’s true. My dad grew up in a very poor family where he was forced to work long days and sometimes nights since he was ten. Life wasn’t easy for him growing up; eventually he had the chance to leave that behind and make a decision that, until this day, is the reason why I even have the chance to attend college and pursue my dreams in a career of my choice. At the age of fourteen, my dad left his family and migrated to the United States to try and seek this so-called “American Dream.” He first lived in California, and with very little English you can only imagine how difficult it was for him. Working as a dishwasher and porter at a restaurant for twelve-hour shifts was a necessity. “I had bills to pay, and if I ever wanted to have a family in the U.S. I better get used to days like these,” was what my dad told me.

Eventually, nine years later, he was able to get enough money to provide my grandparents with green cards, and they were able to come to the U.S. and eventually become citizens. At the time, my dad was still an immigrant. They were together once again, but that still meant they had to continue to work if they wanted to survive. My dad always told me how

he learned how to complete simple tasks on cars from my grandpa and his older brothers, then eventually met the right people to help polish up his skills in that field. With all the skills he took in, at the age of thirty he was able to leave all those little jobs and finally pursue his own dream. He opened up his own body and mechanic shop that is still in full operation back at home.

Following along, his journey to become a citizen was not easy. He made it to the U.S. in '86 at the age of fourteen, but he didn't become a "legal U.S. citizen" until the age of twenty-nine in '01; that's about fifteen years after he even got here. With the world being how it is right now, I fear for students who have parents who are not legal citizens and run the risk every day of being deported to their original country. My dad always tells me, "People are always so fast to say, come to the U.S. legally, but yet they don't seem to realize that you don't become a citizen from day to night, and it's a process that many people, like me, don't have fifteen years of their life for."

I tie his story back to me on a very small scale. I also like his favorite saying, "if it was easy, everyone would be doing it," because I always tell myself just because my parents can offer me the world, I'm always going to work for what I want. I started working when I was fifteen, and soon once I turned sixteen, those forty hours a week plus school were always on my agenda. I went from working at a Culver's for a year and then Panda Express for about fourteen months. Eventually I turned eighteen and realized fast food sucks! I then got a job at a dealership and became an assistant of a salesman making \$17/hr and getting paid weekly. I almost was considering staying home and trying this college stuff later down the road. Talks with my dad helped me stay motivated, and he told me, "Once you start your career, that money would be

chump change to you.” To this day, I’m the first to go away for school and even attend a four-year university in my intermediate or extended family straight out of high school.

In the end, I like to say my dad is my hero because, thanks to everything he went through, my brother, my sister, and myself are able to call ourselves United States born citizens and attend college to make a career for ourselves. There are many parents who make sacrifices as my dad did, and for that I’m proud to share his story because none of it was easy, but with grit and motivation he was able to make it possible for him and his family to have the world.