Nelly Castro

My grandpa is more than just a grandpa; to me he’s a dad and a best friend. He has always been there for me when I need him. No matter how bad the situation can be, he’s always very supportive and caring. His name is Roberto Bernal, he was born on May 13, 1946 and as he always says, “years are not only give age but rather they give you experience.” My grandpa works in a cemetery and he has a lot of interesting stories to tell me. Some are really sad and others are just hilarious. When I visit him, I always follow him and listen to everything he tells me because I know that by paying attention and listening to him, I’ll learn a lot. I often like to ask about his childhood, that’s when I see that mine wasn’t too bad compared to his, but it also makes me admire him more and feel very lucky to have a super grandpa like him. He is a super grandpa because he never shows to be afraid or scared of anything. He’s always very protective with all his family and since we were all little he taught us to not be afraid or intimidated by anything. To me my grandpa is a hero; I admire him and I know he could be a role model to any young member of the family. Sometimes, however, I wonder what secrets he is hiding under his cape. I wonder how his childhood shaped him for the rest of his life.

When I first asked my grandpa about his family he got a little teary eyed and I was feeling really bad, but even though, he decided to tell me about his childhood. He used to live in Santa Tierra, Mexico with his seven siblings, both of his parents and his grandma. When he was only four years old his mom past away due to breast cancer. He stayed with his dad and soon he had a step-mother. As he told me “she was like an angel” because Francisca, his step mom, took care of them and became a real mom to him and his siblings. “But my happiness didn’t last long” and as he was telling me I just couldn’t believe everything that was coming out of his mouth, at the age of eight his dad past away because of cancer as well. Soon enough he had to start working and start taking care and responsibility of his family. Life had made him strong and responsible by then. He dropped out of school when he was in third grade, “I didn’t even know how to read nor count then” he said. But when he found a job at the field he started learning with all the other workers. As I was listening, his life story, it sounded like a movie story rather than a real life story. “When I turned 15, I started working in the police department” and right at that moment I was able to picture my grandpa with his uniform. But he didn’t last long there because his family was in need of more money. So he started a “new journey without destination” and that’s how he got to Pachuca, Mexico, where he settled and formed his own family.

When my grandpa had just moved to Pachuca he was living at the police station because he didn’t have enough money to rent a room. One night after work he and other friends decided to go out for dinner and also to see what was out there besides work. When they went to a restaurant called La Beta, “I saw your grandmother, and I just couldn’t take her out of my mind”, my grandpa shared with a smile. They got to know each other and soon enough they got married, in 1966. Since my grandpa was a full time cop he didn’t have much time for family so in 1970 he decided to switch jobs and that way, he would now have time for his marriage. His new job was in a cemetery and that’s where he really started to enjoy life and have his family close enough to him, by then my grandma was pregnant for the first time. My grandparents bought a house right behind the cemetery where his children would grow and make lifetime memories.

My next question of his job at the cemetery was, “were you scared to work there?” I know it was an impulsive question but to my surprise his answer was yes. “I never liked to deal with dead bodies when I was a cop, and now my new job required me to be even closer to them, but I had to work and make money to support both of my families.” With time and patience he then started loving his new job; he saw how the dead people were not going to hurt him because they’re dead. He became very dedicated to his job ever since 1973. “I always like to have everything clean and I love to see how families are satisfied with my services” he also told me that he doesn’t think any of his sons would have the place good maintained as he has it right now because “they’re a new generation and they like to do everything the easy way.” I really couldn’t control my questions and thoughts on the interview, and even though I was a scared to hear the answer I wanted to know if he had any hidden scary stories to tell me. And that’s when the fun of this conversation began.

I knew that I would be really scared to find out if any crazy stories have happened at the cemetery because is so close to home, but at the same time I was curious, so I pretended to be ready for the story. He begun, “I was actually never scared by the idea of me working with ghosts, until I saw a real one.” Couple of years ago three young friends were driving to a party; a tragic accident killed two of them instantly. Veronica and Christian were engaged, both of them died, Julio was Christians brother and he is the survivor. One day while working, my grandpa saw a young man, “He looked very young, a young man full of life. Wearing dark blue jeans, a collar black shirt, brown hair and his skin looked very tan and healthy. He saw me and hid his face, but he asked me where Veronica was buried.” When my grandma told him where she was at, he started walking very fast but, “I felt like a cold breeze and I couldn’t move for few seconds, it was a weird feeling because I actually felt scared.” My grandpa kept working, but when it was time to close the cemetery, he realized that the young man was still in there so he went to go look for him. After searching for him he noticed he wasn’t there, so he decided to call for help. “I told your uncle what he looked like but as soonest he heard me say he was looking for Veronica his mouth was wide open, he took me to the place where we keep record of the dead people and he showed me that the guy who asked for Veronica was dead too.” My grandpa felt the chills on his skin and almost fainted, he finally admitted that he did believe in ghosts and of course he was scared of anything related to that kind of nature.

The next day when he was cleaning, he heard someone crying and when he got closer he saw how the shadow of a girl was disappearing but no girl was there. He started to realize how things with ghost were getting really bad and he decided to call for help. “When I called a ghost hunter, he laughed” but when he actually got to the cemetery with all the equipment he realized how many souls were living and hunting the cemetery. The ghost hunter told my grandpa after the religious mass to go to the doctor because he had heard a ghost said “Roberto is ill, he needs help as soon as possible.” Few days after they had a mass and the priest had prayed for all those souls, my grandpa went to the doctor and he was detected with cancer. “I didn’t know what I was feeling, I felt glad I found out about my cancer on time but I felt scared to know it was detected with cancer by a ghost.” After years of treatment and medicine my grandpa won the cancer battle, “I still get scared every time I’m alone working; I always ask myself what crazy thing I am going to see today. But that’s something nobody knows Nelly, only you know the fear I have when I work there alone.”

After that conversation I felt very glad to have found out a secret from my hero, but was he is still my hero now? I mean, I know my grandpa is an amazing dad and jolly man but the image of him being always strong and never scared was now kind of foggy. After couple of days, I realized that we are all humans; we all feel fear and get scared sometimes, even my grandpa. This story just made me admire him even more now because although he had a bad and scary experience at the cemetery he’s still working there and he still loves his job. I sometimes fear to go visit my grandpa because of the ghost, I feel like they will be following me, but as my grandpa said, “It’s all in your mind.” Now I even feel like I love my grandpa more than before and that we are closer.

Although at some point I felt like my grandpa wasn’t my hero anymore because he was scared of ghost, I still look up to him and admire him. His stories made me realize that he is a true hero, he’s a super human. I feel like there’s no one in this world who would do what my grandpa did for himself and his family. After seen all those dead peoples ghost and founding about his cancer he stayed strong and kept working at the cemetery. His life didn’t change much, to the rest of my family his life never changed, but to me, I know the story, I know my grandpa can feel scared too, I love him even more and for sure now I want to follow his steps. I learned that confidence makes everything possible and even if I’m scared of something I need to face it and get the best from it because you never know how it will turn this to be.