

OPINIONS

My jefito and me — American Mexicanos

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When my jefito (papa), Angel, was born in Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico, it was close to one year to the date after Pancho Villa won the battle of Torreon.

My jefito had the regular childhood that any impoverished child could have — lack of material possessions, but filled with dreams and hopes. But all that was shattered in one night. My abuelito (grandpa) was returning to the small house where he, my abuelita (grandma), tio (uncle) and jefito were living. Just as he was opening the gate to enter the yard, he was gunned down. My abuelita, tio and jefito were witness to this act.

Upon crossing la frontera (border), this family of three settled in Globe, Ariz. My abuelita forbade my tio or jefito to ever return to Torreon.

Many years later, when my jefito was a young man, after passing his naturalization exam and receiving his papers, he joined the U.S. Army. After boot camp, he was shipped to Europe and fought in World War II. He took part in the battle of the Rhineland, one of the bloodiest battles.

Sadly, he was wounded when



Courtesy Alexander Monarrez Maldonado

The author's parents kept a photo of their son hanging in their living room until he returned from his Air Force duty.

the soldier in front of him stepped on a land mine and shrapnel flew in every direction. My jefito ended up in an Army hospital near Salisbury, England. It took months before my mama received word of his being wounded.

My jefito eventually returned home to Globe, but not without the memories of war buried deep in his mind. Once, when a car backfired, he took cover and hugged the earth as close to his body as he could. Time was all he had to heal himself.

In the process, my mama

blessed him with children. The last child was his only son, Alexander — me.

I would now have what my jefito never had — bikes, trains and most of all, a role model. I would also have a regular childhood. But my jefito would push me to educate myself and “become something.”

One day, during my junior year in high school, I was sitting at the table in our small kitchen, and my jefito started speaking to me, but in a tone I had never heard from him before.

He said, “I want you to go to college, but I can’t help you.” For the first time in my young life, I saw this wonderful man humbled, and though I knew it was not my fault, I felt at fault. I had tried to live without getting in trouble and never wanted to see my jefito hurt or sad. So I started applying for grants and scholarships, y con el favor de Dios (and by the grace of God), I was able to attend college for two years. To this day, my most prized possession is the “Who’s Who Among Students in American Junior Colleges” award, for which I will always be indebted to my jefito and mama for pushing me to at least try.

After college, I just couldn’t find a job anywhere. So I joined the Air Force, not out of patriotism but for a bi-weekly paycheck. I served my four years and came out with an honorable discharge, just like my jefito.

Now, I finally considered myself an American. I had graduated from high school and junior college and served in the military. What else did I have to do, to prove to be an American? But then, after returning and working odd jobs, I was slapped in the face with just being “another Mexican.” I was deeply hurt. I only wanted to be treated like my fellow Americans, with respect.

My jefito passed away in a Veterans Administration hospice. Many relatives and friends were with us at this sad time. Through the broken smiles of encouragement and sympathy, I was able to cope with the loss of the man who had molded-me. I was so proud to see the American flag draped over his coffin, as everyone could now see that he was an American veteran who had served his country.

Time does heal and make us stronger. Within the last couple of years, I have become active with our immigration issue. I now produce a weekly show on Access Tucson TV that is pro-G.I., pro-immigrant, pro-labor, pro-union and anti-Republican, anti-conservative and anti-special-interest-government — if anything, for my jefito and mama, for whom all I ever wanted to do was make them proud of me.

I’m 50 years old now, and though I’m “American,” in my heart, *I am mexicano*. So next time someone begins talking negatively about “immigrants” and “anchor babies,” tell them the story of Angel and Alexander Maldonado, the American *Mexicanos*.

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