

El Hombre de la Casa

“Yo so el hombre de la casa,” was a phrase my father would say when I was young. He was to be served by my mother and she was to obey his every command. He had immense pride in his culture and followed the steps of his father; he believed that was the only way he could be considered a true Guatemalan. My mother was put down by him because her only job was to take care of my brothers and me. And like my mother, his mother was expected to take care of all the children, cook, clean, and serve. Although he loved his mother, he resisted seeing this oppression because he was afraid; afraid of changing, afraid of the results.

Like a lot of other immigrants, my father left his country because he wanted a better life for his children. My father suffered so much in his country, Guatemala, that he had to leave. At the young age of six, he had to work in the fields and go to school and to earn his daily bread in order to help his family. Soon he was forced to drop out of school because his parents could not afford to get him an education. He had nine brothers and sisters whom he had to take care of. Sometimes he even went without eating and, as he grew, he knew he did not want to live this way anymore. Deep inside of him there was hope; especially because, as a small child, he heard great stories of Los Estados Unidos and how it was the land of opportunity. He was anxious to come here because he sought the American Dream: the dream of one day having a good job, a car, and a house motivated him to reach that goal of coming to America. After his long battle to get here, he was able to settle down and start a family.

He wasn't sure how to approach this family, so he followed in the steps of his father. This was all he had seen and, although he wanted the best for us, it was hard for him to show any emotions toward us because he had that “machismo” built inside of him. As Rangel pointed out, “Being an hombre with cajones was what I had to be, I had no other option, and this, the way I was brought up made up my gender identity. My role as a man also separated me from women in my life and the way I was associated with them” (Rangel 1). This was the way my father had grown up, and he also felt he “had no other option” but to accept and believe it. He was following the regulations in our culture that Rangel also followed “of ‘hombres no lloran.’ Trying to fit in the image of a strong typical Latin man in a time of grief was not who I wanted to be, but who I had to be” (Rangel 3). My father was forced into this role by tradition, a role that was a constant cause of grief in his life because he had to isolate himself from who he loved most, his family.

It was hard for my father knowing that, to the women he most loved in his life, he could not show any emotions or say a simple “I love you.” Just like Rangel, he “could create no deep emotional attachment with women” (Rangel 3). In elementary school, his lack of affection towards me pushed our relationship to the point where he didn't matter to me. We had no connection and no real conversation because he saw me as a woman and could not create an emotional attachment with me, a behavior typical of his Guatemalan culture.

When my father came to realize how distant he and I were, it created a softness inside him; he began to see what kind of man he had really become. It's as if he looked deep into himself and saw all the damage he had created in our family. He didn't realize he had been reinforcing exactly what his father

had done to him and his mother. It was at that moment he recognized he had to change. My father was able to break free from our culture's patriarchy and was able to view a woman as more than just a housekeeper.

At first it was hard to accept that my father was trying to change. As he tried to approach me, I rejected him many times, feeling uneasy and unsure of what to really do. When I finally gave in, he became a part of my life. He was no longer "el hombre de la casa," but a father and a friend. It was a fresh start and together we were finally able to build the connection we had been missing. We became really close and had our "father and daughter time" as he would call it. And, for the first time, I finally heard those words I always wanted to hear from a dad: "I love you hija." He came to realize that a woman is "una piedra preciosa," as he tells me today. It was also a moment in my life when I realized it is possible to break free from patriarchal values in a family. But oppression, as experienced by my father, can also occur outside of the home.

My father had participated in and benefited from this oppression because it was easier to accept it rather than challenge it. When people are taught and corrected to conform to what society expects of them, many don't dare to fight it and, instead, just accept it. When, in reality, we should all be treated equally regardless of race, color, background, or gender. We should challenge the values that our cultures hold today that put women down. Just like Blanco states, "By challenging the patriarchal values shaped by our families, these values would change and be reshaped to be equal towards women and men" (Blanco 5). Setting an example, like my father, shows that it is possible to change and end this damaging cycle. Together we can change the way women are viewed and fight sexism. At home, we can help our mothers clean and cook so it won't be just viewed as a "woman's job." We can set an example for other families and show that a woman's job can also be a man's job. Blanco states, "I think by my family's values changing, it would also have an effect on my relatives, which in turn, would extend to a lot of people to hopefully changing their values to promote equality between women and men"(5). By applying Blanco's idea, we can move closer to making the home a more equal place.

In order for change to happen it has to start in our homes. Men need to start viewing women as more than a tool, maid and caretaker. Clearly this doesn't just affect the relationships with women but the relationships with children and the example that is being set among young boys. Women also need to fight this oppression and stop assuming it is okay to accept the role given to them by men. There is nothing right about being put down and believing you are weak and powerless in the eyes of men. A woman can be more than just a cook, cleaner, and caretaker; she can be whomever she wants and desires to be in life. I am glad my father was able to figure this out for himself and to make a change before it was too late.

To this day, I am thankful for having a wonderful father. I notice his hard work and the sweat he breaks from his long days at work. And, although we got off on the wrong foot, I can now say he is my hero for taking on the struggle of getting to America and for giving me the love of a true father. Just like Morales' father, "He carried so much intelligence, dreamt of great things, and he sacrificed everything for my brothers and me, so that we could become what he never could" (5). My father's dream is that his sacrifice will give me a better chance at a happy and successful life and, because of him, I am able to

strive for my dreams in a way he never could. His sacrifice is my motivation; his love is my inspiration; and hopefully, his dream will be my reality.

Works Cited

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