

An Unsung Hero: My Grandfather, Hugo Padilla

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Throughout our lives, we look up to people who are exemplary role models to others. Role models whose actions serve to act as a template upon which we can base our own lives. Their actions have a deep influence on us. They guide us. They inspire us. They motivate us to better not only our own lives, but also those of the people on whom we have the ability to make a positive impact. In my personal life, this role-model figure has always been, and always will be, my grandfather.

Although he stands only a little over 5' 2", he has an unmatched spirit and resilience in his personality. From as far back as I can remember, my grandfather has been the pillar of the small family on my mother's side. Despite the problems and issues that afflict our small family, my grandfather has always made a point of maintaining the idealism that persistent hard work and dedication to goals in one's life will bear success, regardless of the hardships that accompany it. He plays a central role in the lives of my cousins and myself by emphasizing the importance of education, family, and in having faith in others that they will help see you through the trials and tribulations you face. He has never given up on anyone in our family. He has picked me up and helped set me back on course at the lowest points in my life.

My grandfather, the modest man that he is, came to this country by the sheer will of God. He was adopted by missionaries from an orphanage in Ecuador, South America, at the age of 11. In California, his adoptive family constantly struggled financially, being that there were a multitude of adopted children by the adoptive parents. Despite such, my grandfather felt extremely grateful for the blessings he received, and the opportunity for a better life in the states.

Despite living in poverty, he felt a strong sense of gratitude for everything in his life, a gratitude he set out to repay to his nation, when he enlisted in the U.S. army in the late 1950s, while still a teenager. He had decided that if his country needed troops, he was going to enlist, not be drafted. During the Vietnam War, he would serve in the army for a total of six years as a field medic. Memories of death and destruction would still haunt him and remain as a deeply embedded burden as they were over 40 years ago.

He would marry a native Vietnamese woman, and have three children in Vietnam, before moving back to the U.S. in 1973, after the war ended.

He would return with his family in utter destitution. His family and he had to resort to living in a cabin once used for storing hay on his adoptive father's land. He had no formal education and was forced to resort to taking any low-wage job he could find. He received no support from the V.A., Veteran's Association, for the severe stomach problems and boils he suffered from. His life was a prolonged suffering in which he desperately tried to support himself and his family. Despite the countless hardships, he refused to simply submit to the poverty that engulfed him, for his family's sake. He would go on to go to nursing school for four long years during which he had to maintain several jobs and be a father and husband to his family on top of his school work. But he persisted, got a nursing job, and not only bettered the life of his family, but inspired his children and grandchildren to do the same.

My grandfather has always told me that if you want to do something, you do it. He has never taken anything in his life for granted, but has always demanded the best of himself in order to support all the members of his family. He firmly believes that if there is something you wish to achieve in your life, it can only be achieved by the dedication and commitment you devote to it, a belief that I also hold. My grandfather is the role model and hero in my life because he embodies the moral fiber of courage in the face of adversity, and despite the injustice and hardship he has had to deal with in his life, he is still the compassionate father figure in my life.