

Learning to Listen

I remember when I was six years old I was visiting my great-grandparents for the summer. They lived in Matamoros, Mexico. My great grandparents were survivors of the Mexican Civil War, they were poor, and lived in a two-room dirt floor shack. When I was young, I did not understand the concept of poverty and wealth. It is until known that I look back and realize how poor my great grandparents used to be. My memories are not of poverty but of the love and kindness my great-grandparents gave me. A child knows when he or she is loved.

Summer days in Matamoros are more than hot. One day I was with my great grandfather working in his tomato garden. He was teaching me how to work. I was more an obstruction and did not provide any real help, but he had me working with him, anyway. He was in his mid-nineties; his face was dark from many years of sun exposure. His face was covered with wrinkles and the shadow from his old hat made the wrinkles look deep and dark. His face showed years of hardship and his eyes looked tired. Sweat was running down his face, and the wrinkles looked like small rivers of water overflowing. He was pulling weeds and was showing me how to care for tomato plants. I remembered that he looked up, wiped the sweat from his forehead, focused his eyes at a distance, and then he turned to me and said in Spanish.

“Son, look at that, have you ever seen such a beautiful woman?”

I looked up, looked around, and was a little puzzled. I did not see a beautiful woman; I saw my great-grandmother walking toward us with a pitcher of water. Young children sometimes are blunt and are honest with what they say. I was six-years-old, and I had an excuse. I laughed and told my great grandfather that it was grandma and that his eyes were old and not good.

“Grandma is old like you grandpa,” I said.

He turned, looked at me, and smiled.

“Son, it has taken me years to learn to how to see and now I want to learn how to listen.”

Amilcar (Aumi) Hernandez

mystories@aumih.info