



## **“Abuelo”**

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THE TITLE OF THIS PICTURE IS “Abuelo” which means grandfather in Spanish. At first glance, it seems just a waste of a snapshot. Perhaps just another struggling photographer trying to pay the rent or who simply had one more shot left in a roll of film and took a random picture. It is an 8" by 11" color photograph of a man's neck, more specifically the back of his neck. It is quite wrinkled and brown and white hair has invaded the scalp. At first I questioned why the photographer did not simply take a picture of his grandfather's face. A face would allow viewers to see what the grandfather looks like and tell some kind of story, certainly more than what the back of his neck could possibly tell.

What I came to realize is that this is no random shot. What this picture wants is for me to imagine and to create a story. It does not necessarily wish to be framed but the picture does not want to be overlooked or neglected. It wants to be given a chance to prove itself as equally worthy as any other photograph. I do not need the face of the Abuelo to imagine the story of his life or personality. The back of his neck is just as important as his face.

After spending some time with this Abuelo I learned that the back of his neck is not just brown, it is tanned. Not just a natural tan, that some people are born with, but a particular shade of tan that can only be attained after continuous exposure to the sun. Perhaps this man does a lot of work outside. The distinguished wrinkles are more than just lines. In between them there seems to be some kind of dust. I recognize this dust because it is the kind of dust my father gets when he is working with joint compound.

After examining a little more closely I noticed the multiple scars on his scalp which prevent his hair from growing. The tiny hole in his earlobe reminds me that he was young once and had, like many young teenage boys, pierced his ear. Around his neck I can see a glimpse of a brown necklace. This necklace is very familiar to me because I own one. It is a very thin string with a small rectangular cloth at both ends. Many Catholics believe that it is something sacred.

In this case this picture is not measured by the thousands of words it is worth, but it is measured by what I took from it. It should not be



criticized by what it does not have but should be valued for what it does have. I have found something in common with this photograph. All along what this picture wanted from me was to find something familiar. That familiarity sets this particular picture apart from all other photographs I have encountered and what has kept it vividly visible after having come across it years ago. This is exactly what this photograph longed for: to be found familiar and remembered.

### ANALYSIS

Angelica takes an unconventional essay prompt, “Describe a picture and explore what it wants,” and writes a short and creative essay that not only answers the prompt in an unexpected way but also demonstrates Angelica’s dedication to learning more about her history. The essay opens with the surprising sentence, “At first glance, it seems just a waste of a snapshot.” The reader immediately wonders, *why write about this photo then?* Angelica goes on to show an aptitude for vivid description, which she uses to illustrate the picture for those of us who aren’t able to see it. We are also drawn into the mystery in wondering what meaning a photo of the back of someone’s neck, wrinkled with brown and white hair, could possibly have.

Angelica states her answer to the essay prompt directly: “What this picture wants is for me to imagine and to create a story.” She goes on to explain why this process of imagining and creating a story is important: the photo will have a chance “to prove itself as equally worthy as any other photograph.” Angelica goes on to breathe life into this mysterious photo through a combination of sleuthing and guesswork. The amount of information she is about to extract from small details like the color of Abuelo’s skin demonstrates Angelica’s impressive imaginative capacity and thoughtful analysis. Even as fine a detail as dust in the wrinkles of the skin does not escape Angelica. She relates this dust to familiar (and familial) knowledge: “. . . it is the kind of dust my father gets when he is working with joint compound.” Angelica might have clarified “joint compound” for those who are unfamiliar with the term. Still, her descriptions are intriguing. Angelica’s eye for detail leads her to notice a hole in the earlobe from a former ear piercing, and part of a necklace. By linking these details to her father’s life as a compound worker and also to her Catholic faith, we learn about Angelica’s beliefs and her family life, as well as about her heritage.

Angelica summarizes the point of her essay nicely in her concluding paragraph, when she returns to the original question and answers it in a slightly different way: “All along what this picture wanted from me was to find something familiar . . . to be found familiar