

Be Grateful for What You Have
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As a kid, I always thought my dad was strict for no reason. Whenever I wouldn't finish my food, he chastised me if I didn't eat every crumb. I recently learned that growing up, he didn't have much food, and for me to just sit there and waste was infuriating for him. He taught me to appreciate everything— every opportunity, every crumb. When there was a toy I wanted and he said no, I got mad at him even though I had plenty of toys at home. He taught me to appreciate what I have because I am lucky to have it. I finally realized why he was so strict when I heard the story of his journey to becoming a United States citizen.

My dad was the oldest of seven. He grew up in an impoverished part of the Dominican Republic, doing everything and anything possible to make some money. He cleaned shoes and got a job at an auto body shop sweeping floors. He helped his family by pitching in what little money he made. His family always came first. Sometimes they would go days without eating; it was rough trying to feed 9 people. He would scavenge for half-eaten food out of the garbage that people didn't finish.

While working at the auto body shop, he worked his way up and fell in love with cars. He spent every day in the garage, working tirelessly to perfect his craft. With the sun beaming on him, he swept the dirty floors and fixed old cars with oil-caked hands. He sometimes got to drive the cars. He would rush to class covered in grease after finishing his shift. He was lucky enough to get a car from the shop which meant he no longer had to walk four miles to class and back.

At 22 years old, my dad made the difficult call to move to the United States. While adjusting to life in the USA, he stayed with his aunt and worked on cars by the shore, eventually receiving a job offer in XXXXXXXXXX. He had saved up enough money to buy a small house in XXXX. He still works on cars, and is able to provide for his family the comforts that he never

had growing up. I always wondered why he would get so angry whenever I didn't finish my food. Now at XX, I realize everything he said that I considered mean was to help me become a better person.

The law of life he taught me is to be grateful for what you have. Knowing the true value of every opportunity— even one as small as sweeping the floor in an auto body shop— showed me to appreciate what I have instead of wanting and wasting. Every dollar, every opportunity, could change my future. Not a day goes by where I don't think about my dad's story. I learned that true happiness doesn't come from money or material items; it comes from gratitude.