

The house was practically in ruins, but underneath layers of dust, fond memories of childhood still existed. The last time I stood in front of our house in Ecuador, I was nine. During our first few days on this trip down memory lane, my parents spent the majority of their time cleaning. Dust from the dirt road next to our house had entered through the gaps between the windows and walls. It filled and covered the rooms.

While serving breakfast my mom acknowledged the dreadful gaps. “Jose, we need to find a way to seal those gaps, it’s letting all the dust in.”

“I already bought a couple of tubes of the special glue we need to seal it,” explained my dad as he chugged down some hot coffee with his *humita*.

“Caulk,” I stated simply while sweeping my bangs out of my eyes. My spatially oriented brain offered to help him. I could just see how to fix the spaces, it was obvious, but he chuckled at the thought of me helping. I gave him an offended look, and asked him why not. Apparently I didn’t know *how*. Whenever I demonstrated any of my dexterous abilities, he always found a way to criticize the way I did it. There was always a more “practical” way of doing things, even though majority of what he suggested didn’t appeal to my artistic visuality.

Being raised in Ecuador, my father always had different expectations for us. He had thought that with three daughters, dinner would always be served on the table and the house would always be sparkling. He hadn’t expected us to excel in our studies, however was extremely proud of that. Nonetheless, he occasionally underestimates our abilities.

After his initial frown, my father lightened up and stated that he would teach me once and then I could help him do the rest of the windows. He demonstrated how to hold the caulk gun and seal the opening. “Pay attention, you have to align the edge of the caulk gun to the gap, notice that it’s cut at a

slant. Slowly stream the glue down, and then with a damp cloth you carefully perfect the edges,” he demonstrated. I decided to not tell him that I was the one who almost finished the caulk while working on an art project back home. I got annoyed with him, but I try not to show it in case there was something crucial he needed to teach me.

I clutched onto the gun and carefully sealed away the opening, using a damp cloth to perfect the lining. I give him a gloating smile and pointed out that the side of the window that I did looked better than the side of the window he did. He refused to admit it, but I now had his approval to continue on and seal the rest of the windows in the house.

My father always gets annoyed whenever I used any of his tools. But I can't help myself, I know they each have a significant purpose and want to learn what they all are. Growing up, I would make the accessories for my toys that my parents would refuse to buy. I made everything for my dolls, including dresses out of my mom's scrap fabric and paper mache babies and baskets. Sometimes I would want to expand and use my dad's tools that were tucked away in the basement. I, as a curious seven year old, would tiptoe and scavenge through his toolbox despite my mother's warning that he'd get mad if he found anything missing. There were some days he cared, but other days I got a chance. He would let me inspect the bucket of screws and bolts while he fixed said object, although he'd never let me keep any of it.

The older I grew, the more curious I became with the tools in the basement. By nine I was already using his pliers to snap the beads out of bracelets I didn't like. I was ecstatic when he first let me use the power drill at the age of thirteen. The door handles of our kitchen cabinets are still slightly crooked, but it's barely noticeable. Last year I proudly soldered together the wires that came loose on my cousin's earphones, remembering how early on my father melted the whole earpiece on a previous attempt on fixing broken earphones.

When I reflect about my experiences learning with and from my father, I realize that I have been

pushing up against expectations since I was young. I was expected to be a more traditional female, yet tools feel as comfortable as the measuring cup. At first, I was frustrated when my father or others were surprised by my interests, but I learned how to navigate those expectations and to get as much as I could from them. I know I'm interested in engineering, and with the knowledge and experience I will acquire in college, I want to defy any negative stereotypes against me. Yes, I am a girl, and yes I can use a power drill. Yes, I am hispanic and I've made it this far and further. I know I'm going to have to face more hardships, but what more can I say, as I say when my father faces me with a friendly challenge? Bring it on.