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Overcoming Conflicts - Essay

I have lived with my grandparents since I was very young, about five years old. They have become significant role models to me in many aspects and I appreciate them dearly for always being supportive of my education.

Naturally, having been raised by them, many of their ideas and beliefs had slowly, unconsciously become part of my own way of thinking. It was as if all those teachings were intrinsically true for the sole reason that my grandparents were the ones teaching them to me. So, I kept these thoughts always in the back of my mind.

That was until I was introduced to other perspectives. As I grew up, I was exposed to the way other people see the world, both by interacting with my classmates and being exposed to different opinions on the internet. I became more aware than ever before that not everything I was taught was the norm, and that, in fact, much of it was based on prejudice. Having had this seemingly obvious realization left me in a state of mental discomfort, it meant disregarding many of the things I was raised up believing. While it was a difficult process, I learned to be critical of my beliefs and overcome those negative preconceptions.

Having made this leap was only the first step, though, as the biggest challenge now would be to express these new ideas to my family, and my grandparents specifically. I was afraid of disappointing them, and worse, losing their affection. Therefore, I decided to keep them to myself despite the mental burden it meant.

However, one day I was finally done with keeping up appearances. It was during Pride Month in Ecuador, as my family and I watched the news covering the marches in support of the cause happening in Quito. I remember the way my grandfather started criticizing those who attended the march, and subsequently, the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. Many unsavory things came out of his mouth, and as I sat next to him listening to what he said, I felt betrayed, as if the person I was looking at was no longer my grandfather. I spoke up, saying I not only disagreed with what he said, but that he was completely in the wrong for having those opinions. Suddenly, all looks were upon me. They berated me for having these opinions, so different from their own, and then my grandfather stood up angrily and left.

The rest of the day I was left wondering whether what I did was right. After all, if I was doing the "right" thing, why was it so difficult? After a couple of days of tension, I decided it was best to reach out to him and talk. He was not very open to the idea, but as I persisted, I convinced him and my grandmother to sit down and talk. I began by acknowledging the generational differences between us, that our upbringing influences our perspectives. Nonetheless, I wanted to emphasize that said upbringing is not a definite cornerstone, but that instead our values change with time, and we should be open to accepting this change. More importantly, however, finding common ground with them was essential. By agreeing on the basic notion that every person is deserving of respect, I could make them realize on their own that rather than concentrating on our differences, on maintaining an idea of "us" and "them", they could instead focus on similarities.

While of course a change in mentality was not immediate, the ideas they held so close to them without questioning suddenly started to fade. Despite still disagreeing on many things, I am

proud of my grandparents for being brave enough to leave behind those beliefs that made them feel secure and now be more accepting of others.

Not everyone can or should think the same, that would be going against our very nature as complex beings. Still, I do believe there is value in educating (not indoctrinating) others. There is so much we can achieve, not by shaming others for carrying on ideas they were surrounded with, but instead being empathetic and giving them the tools they need to think critically.