What a Guy

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Every young man has been influenced by older people in their lives. Besides my own father, the one guy who taught me how to be cool was my Uncle Eddie. Whenever I think about him, I think of how naturally cool he was. Not only was he cool, but he was funny, charming, and wise. He always knew what to say and when to say it.

My Uncle Lencho had just passed away. It was during visiting hours at the funeral parlor, and family was coming in and out to pay their respects. I remember seeing everyone in nice clothes. The adults were in suits and ties, black dresses and makeup. Then Uncle Eddie came in the room. I saw him and had an immediate smile on my face, as did my dad. He came into the room in blue jeans, cowboy boots, a white t-shirt, and a leather vest. All the adults seemed very offended by his wardrobe. Lencho’s wife, Clara, went right up to him and said, “Eddie, what are you thinking? You should show some respect!”

Eddie didn’t skip a beat when he said right back, “Lencho may have wanted you to cry, but he wouldn’t want me to cry. He’d want me to drink.”

My mom used to love hanging out with Aunt Irene, which meant I got to hang out with Uncle Eddie. I would go out to his garage and watch him work on his Corvette. He’d spent years on that car, trying to make it run again. “When I get it right, I’m driving down to Texas and retiring.”

We were at a family barbeque. My family loves to drink, so there was more alcohol at this party then there was food. Uncle Eddie and Aunt Irene came to the barbeque in the middle of an intense argument. She was doing most of the yelling and he stood there and took it. When she left to go inside, all that remained were the male adults and some scattered cousins. As soon as she reached the kitchen and shut the door behind her, Uncle Eddie said, “Every time she opens her mouth, I need a drink.”

My confirmation ceremony was the most proper thing I’ve ever attended. Everything was orderly and precise, with no room for error. I stood in front of the church waiting for the entire thing to be over. Then from the back of the church, I heard, “Attaboy, Darryl!” which was followed
by a celebratory catcall. Uncle Eddie was asked to leave the church.

I was sixteen years old when my mom told me that Uncle Eddie was sick and she didn’t know how much longer he was going to live. She said we were going to Illinois to visit him one last time. I took off from school and work and made it to Illinois that same day. When we got there, Eddie was immobile in bed, pale and lifeless.

When I came to his bedside, he opened his eyes and said, “Son, take the keys, and go start her up. I almost got it.”

He handed me the keys to his Corvette and I went to the garage and turned the engine. It roared like thunder.

When I returned to his bed, he said, “I almost got her.”

The Corvette did run again, and it led the hearse during his funeral.

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**Darryl DeLeon** is a 4th-year student in journalism and mass communication from Davenport, IA. He is currently on sabbatical this semester, though he fully intends on returning in the fall to finish school. Darryl is mighty proud.