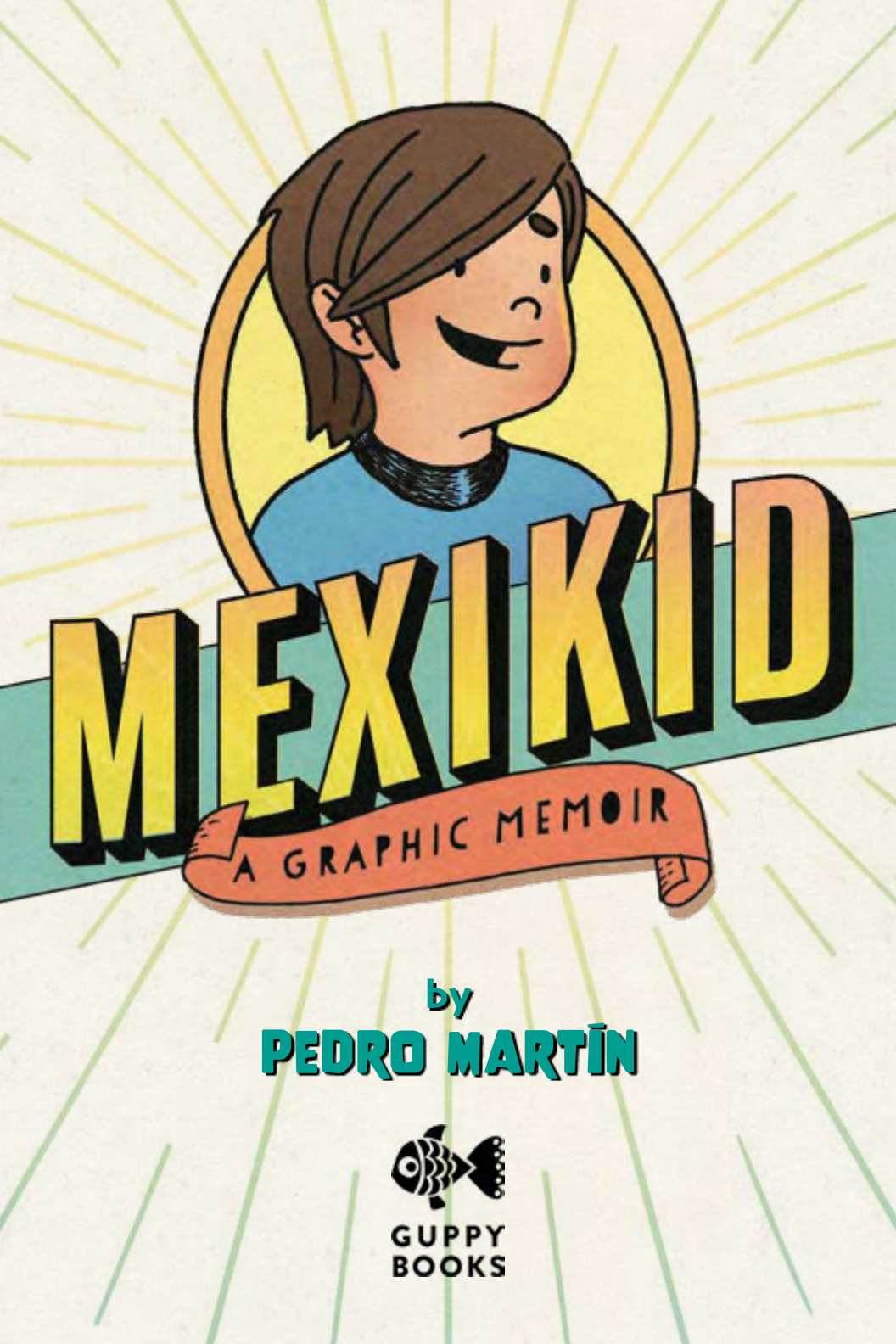


by

PEDRO MARTÍN

GUPPY
BOOKS

MEXIKID: A GRAPHIC MEMOIR

First published in the UK in 2023 by
Guppy Books,
Bracken Hill,
Cotswold Road,
Oxford OX2 9JG

First published in the United States of America by Dial Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Random House Inc, 2023

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Text set in Mexikid with permission from the author

978 1 916558 06 9

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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GUPPY PUBLISHING LTD Reg. No. 11565833

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

FOR MY WIFE, GINA.
The love of my life, my best friend, and my North Star.
She makes me want to be better.

FOR PEDRO MARTÍN. APÁ.
The funniest, most loving dad in the world.
His almost-daily calls at "tequila o' clock" have
given me endless things to write about.

TO MERCEDES MARTÍN. AMÁ.
My inspiration.

CHAPTER 1
READY. SET. GO?!



They call me **PETER...**

but my **REAL** name is **PEDRO.**

If your family's from **MEXICO,** like mine is, you usually have a couple of names you can go by.

Some people go full-on Mexican and keep their real names.

Some of us slip and slide between an **AMERICAN-STYLE NAME** and a Mexican one.



I come from one big **MEXICAN AMERICAN** family, and I mean **BIG.** I'm the seventh of **NINE** kids!

NINE!

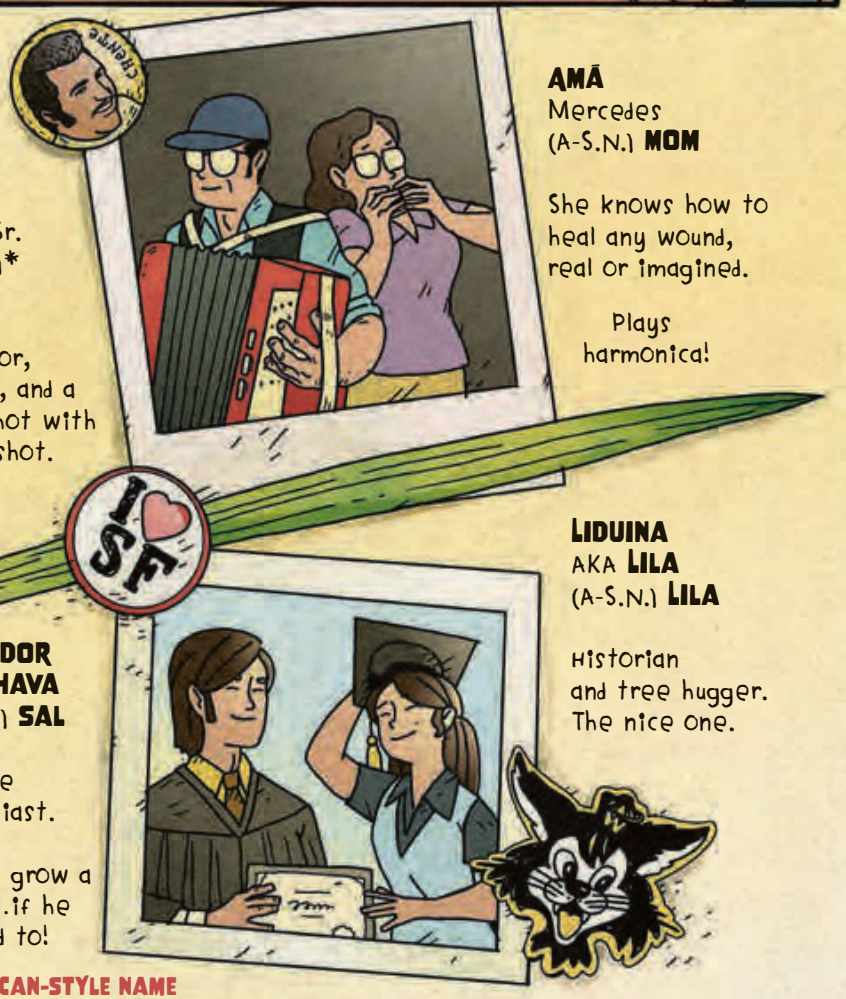
Let me introduce you:

The hastily prepared, super superficial beginner's guide to:

The MARTÍN FAMILY!

Hey, hold on! Isn't "Martín" an American-style name?

Not when you pronounce it "Mar-teen" and roll your "r's" like a fancy Spaniard.



APÁ
Pedro Sr.
(A-S.N.)*
DAD

Inventor, farmer, and a crackshot with a slingshot.

AMÁ
Mercedes
(A-S.N.) **MOM**

She knows how to heal any wound, real or imagined.

Plays harmonica!

LIDUINA
AKA **LILA**
(A-S.N.) **LILA**

Historian and tree hugger. The nice one.

SALVADOR
AKA **CHAVA**
(A-S.N.) **SAL**

Science enthusiast.

He can grow a beard...if he wanted to!

*AMERICAN-STYLE NAME

LEÓN
(A-S.N.) **LEON**
(Some of us get off easy on the name-switch thing.)

Half of the "Leon and Noe punching and pranking team."



NOÉ
(A-S.N.): **NOE**
(pronounced "No-ee")

He loves flowers!

Kidding. He loves **PUNCHING.**

RUTH
(A-S.N.): **RUTH**
(In Spanish it sounds like "Root.")

Business-minded adventurer. Ghost whisperer.



HUGO
(A-S.N.): **HUGO**
('Cuz in spanish it's "Oogo." It's a no-win scenario.)

Best guitar player in the family. Also the only guitar player in the family.

ALEJANDRO
(A-S.N.): **ALEX**

The baby. All-around lovable smart-ass and poop-stirrer.

ADÁN
(A-S.N.): **ADAM**

Half of the "Adam and Alex team of Amá's favorite kids."

He's almost totally unflappable.



AND THEN THERE'S ME...

Fair is fair. Here's the Martín family guide to

PETER AND/OR PEDRO

LEON & NOE

He's not fast.

And he's weird.

LILA

Leave him alone. He's just creative.

That's code for "He lives in a fantasy world."

RUTH

That's my fault. I took him to see Star Wars once and he's never been the same since.

SAL

He likes comic books too. And he can draw pretty good.

HUGO

Except for the hands.

He sucks at hands.

ALEX

He collects dolls.

He calls them "action figures."

ADAM

APÁ

We think he should become a priest or maybe a mariachi.

Both make hundreds of dollars a weekend!

AMÁ

<He's a great translator when I have to go to the doctor or shop for a bra.

He knows a lot about bras now.>

NOT TRUE. MOVING ON.

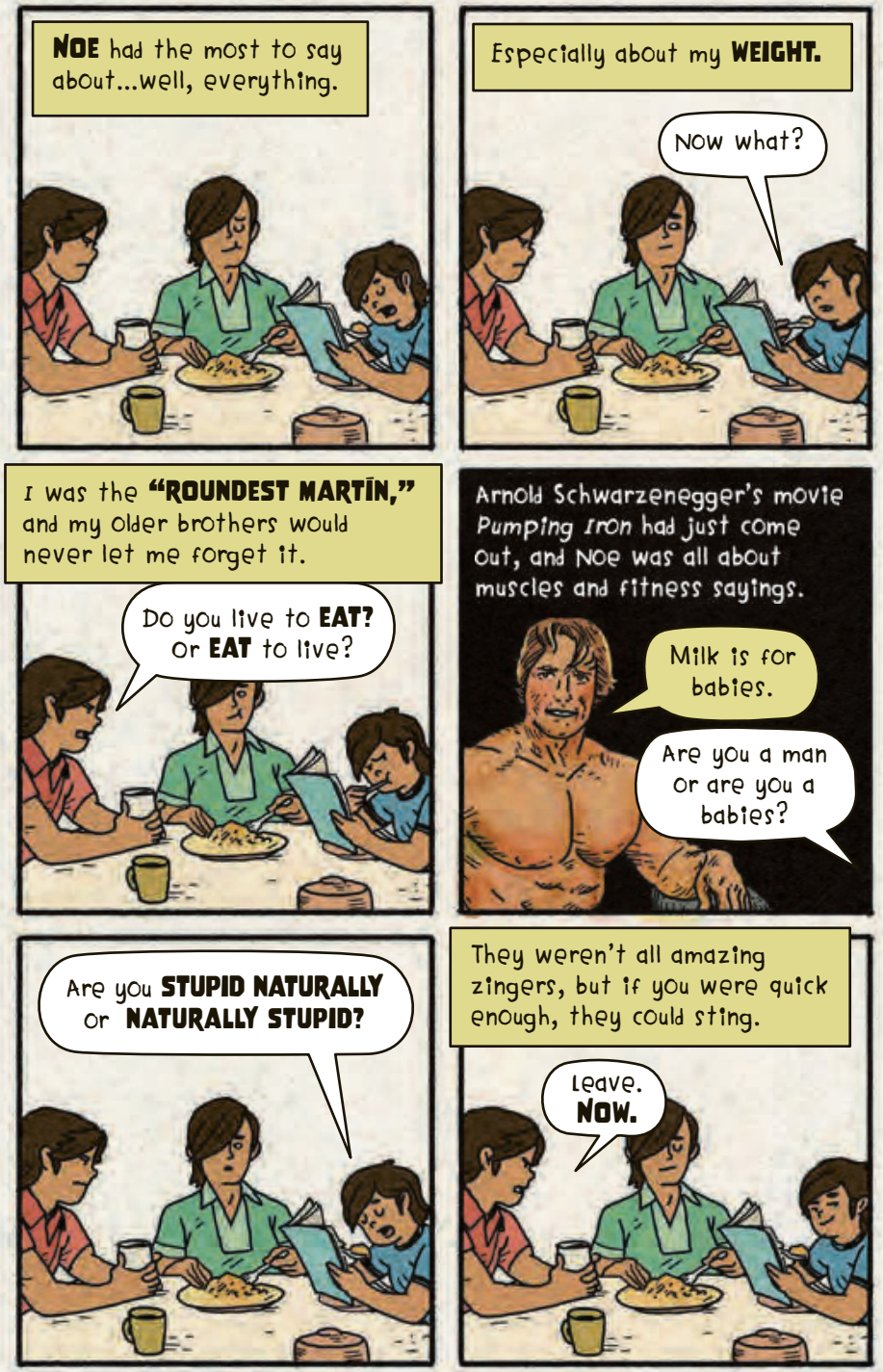
Our house was built to comfortably fit a family of five. But we were a family of eleven! And we were about to get **EVEN BIGGER.**

THE YEAR WAS 1977, DINNERTIME.

"Dinnertime" was just a concept, really. With that many people in our house, you ate when you could, where you could.

We almost never ate at the dinner table at the same time.


Not because there was no room, but because we did not enjoy eating together.
Dame tu plato.
NO. NO quiero más arroz, Amá.
If you're finished, GO!
Are you still talking? Why are you still talking?
I have two more bites, DUMMY!
Because I have INTELLIGENT things to say.
Oooh, he called you "dummy." That's a slapping offense!
Shh. Slap him during the commercial!
Personally, I would rather focus on TV than my big brother NOE while I eat.


NOE had the most to say about...well, everything.
Especially about my WEIGHT.
Now what?
I was the "ROUNDEST MARTIN," and my older brothers would never let me forget it.
Do you live to EAT? Or EAT to live?
Arnold Schwarzenegger's movie Pumping Iron had just come out, and NOE was all about muscles and fitness sayings.
Milk is for babies.
Are you a man or are you a babies?
Are you STUPID NATURALLY or NATURALLY STUPID?
They weren't all amazing zingers, but if you were quick enough, they could sting.
Leave. NOW.

Making dumb comments about what each other looked/smelled/acted like was **SO** common in our house that it didn't really bother me.

Being **DEFINED** by what I looked/smelled/acted like was a different matter.

I am a richly layered cake of a human being once you get to know me. My **SMELL** does not define me!

FINE! I like sitting over here anyway!

The bar seat was really the best seat for watching TV. Unfortunately, it was also the greeter position. If anyone came through the front door, you and your dinner had to say "Hello!"

If it was a family member coming through the door, the greeting was typical big-brother stuff.

FWIP!

BLOOP!

Dude!

BUT if it was a guest or "compañía" that came through the door, you had to stand up, swallow fast, and make them feel welcome...

¡HOLA, HOLA! ¡Arrímese a comer!*

...even if you weren't sure who they were.

<Have a seat! Take my plate. I haven't touched it except to fish the car keys out!>

With compañía in the house, the next best place to sit was on the living room floor.

It rendered you invisible to adults and closer to God.

I mean closer to the TV.

Hablé con el señor que cuida el cementerio y me dijo que está empeorando...

*Hello, hello! Come and eat!

One of my favorite shows was **HAPPY DAYS.** It was the perfect show to have on when adults were talking about **SEEMINGLY SERIOUS** matters.

¿En que será más de tr

AAAAAY

All the clapping and catchphrases nicely drowned out almost all the bad news you might overhear.

Necesita vender los animales...

Hey, grades aren't cool. Learning is cool!

Ir a MÉXICO en esto

CLAP CLAP

True!

That's why you're the Fonz, Fonz.

A ayudar al ABUELITO

AAAYY!

Huh?

But that night, two words did get through. **"MÉXICO"** and **"ABUELITO."**

My ABUELITO lived thousands of miles away in **JALISCO, MEXICO.**

We'd been living in California, USA, since before I was even born. Our family moved up here to pick strawberries and start new lives.

But Abuelito stayed behind, so I didn't see him for years at a time.

All I really knew about him was that he lived through the **MEXICAN REVOLUTION,** like, a hundred years ago.

Now he was just an old widower living with one relative or another.


Suddenly, the old guy was the topic of some really **INTENSE CONVERSATIONS.**
¡ÓRALE! NOS VAMOS EN SEIS DÍAS!*
*Agreed! We leave in six days!
WAIT! What's happening?
I think Apá said something about **GOING TO MEXICO?!**
¡Abuelito nos necesita! **¡ARRÉGLENSE!***
WHAH?!
*Abuelito needs us! Everyone get ready!


From what I could tell, we were going to **MEXICO** in six days to bring our Revolutionary War-era abuelito **HERE!** To California! **TO THIS HOUSE! TO LIVE WITH US!**
THIS IS CRAZY! Why does he need to come here? There's **NO** room here!
He can have the **TOP BUNK!**
I hope he brings his mules.
He's bringing his **MULES?**
Where are they supposed to sleep?
The **TOP BUNK** is free.
Yeah, Adam's bunk already smells like **"MULE."**
They'll feel right at home!

This always happened around here. **BIG DECISIONS** were made, and suddenly we all had to adjust our **ENTIRE LIVES!**

You'd think my vote would count for something here in the **USA!**

I'm kidding, we didn't vote in this house. This house was a Mexican-family-style **DICTATORSHIP.**

Ya dije, vamos a hacer espacio. Verás.*

But why now? Why not wait until Sal moves out or Alex runs away or something?

You know, to the circus or the zoo.

Probably the zoo.

Peter, stop asking so many questions. He's our abuelito and he needs us, OK?

Get with it.

Aw, man.

*I already said, We'll make room. You'll see.

As I walked back to my over-shared, mule-scented room, I noticed a picture of Abuelito on the fridge.

What's so important that you need us to come **ALL THE WAY TO MEXICO** to bring you back **HERE?**

My amá had covered the fridge with all kinds of photos and souvenirs from throughout the years.

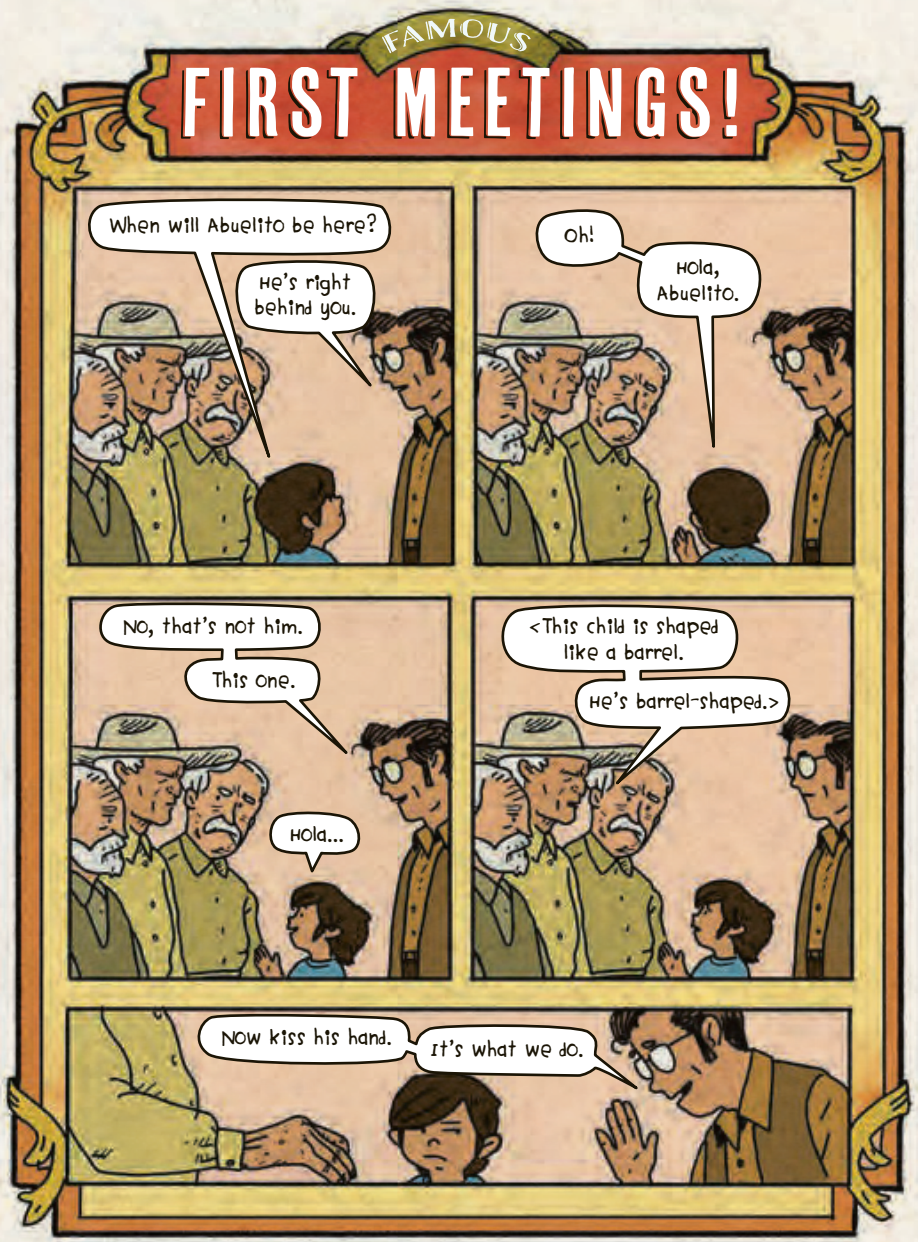
THE BOTTOM DOOR had pictures of all of us doing sports and wearing uniforms.

There were also pictures of aunts, uncles, and cousins from all over the place. Most of them I hadn't seen in forever.

There were a couple of Abuelito too. All looking the same. Old and stern.

That was his thing. **OLD AND STERN.**

I'd see my **ABUELITO** every few years or so, but I remembered the very **FIRST TIME** I met him. I was really little and he was **SUPER OLD,** even back then.

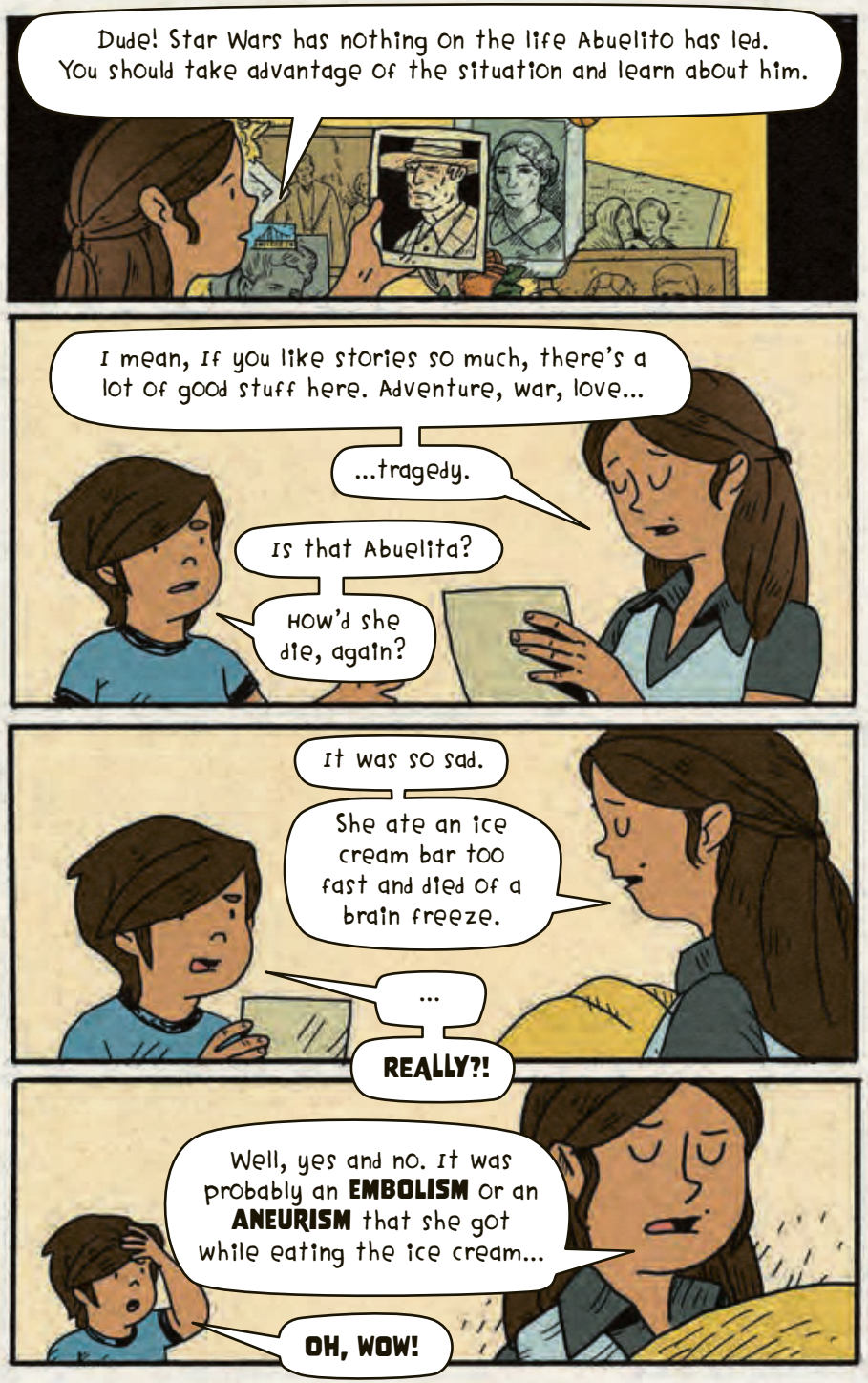


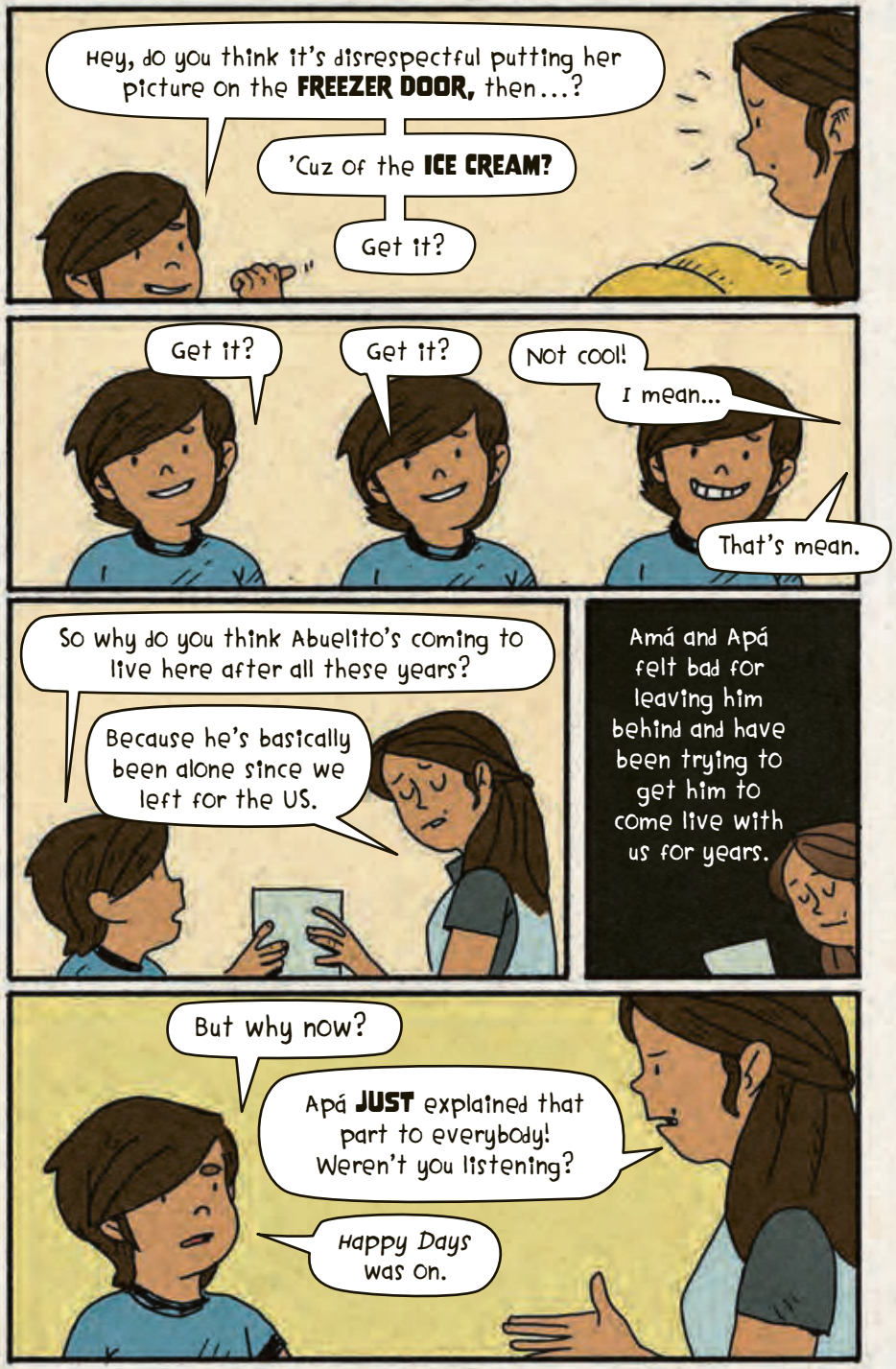
(In our family, You can either kiss an elder's hand or get pinched by an elder's hand. The choice is yours!)

The top of the fridge had pictures too. These were mostly funeral cards and newspaper clippings. The **FREEZER DOOR** is where we displayed those of us who had **DIED.**




Lila was the sibling I was closest to. She totally got me and was never mean.
You're worried about Abuelito coming to live with us, huh?
Kinda, yeah.
It'll be fine. It'll just take some time for him to get used to living here.
Well, what if he doesn't like us?
You mean "YOU"? What if he doesn't like "YOU"?
We won't have anything in COMMON!
Does he even like STAR WARS? Has he even seen it?
HOW do I even START to explain Chewbacca to this man?
My Spanish isn't that great, AND HE SPEAKS NO ENGLISH!
It'll be an awkward staring contest that will last FOREVER!


Dude! Star Wars has nothing on the life Abuelito has led. You should take advantage of the situation and learn about him.
I mean, if you like stories so much, there's a lot of good stuff here. Adventure, war, love...
...tragedy.
Is that Abuelita?
How'd she die, again?
It was so sad.
She ate an ice cream bar too fast and died of a brain freeze.
...
REALLY?!
Well, yes and no. It was probably an EMBOLISM or an ANEURISM that she got while eating the ice cream...
OH, WOW!


Hey, do you think it's disrespectful putting her picture on the FREEZER DOOR, then...?
'Cuz of the ICE CREAM?
Get it?
Get it?
Get it?
Not cool!
I mean...
That's mean.
So why do you think Abuelito's coming to live here after all these years?
Because he's basically been alone since we left for the US.
Amá and Apá felt bad for leaving him behind and have been trying to get him to come live with us for years.
But why now?
Apá JUST explained that part to everybody! Weren't you listening?
Happy Days was on.


Well, you should ask him yourself.
In the meantime, you need to grab all your old toys and clothes and give them to Amá.
WHAT? Why? That stuff is mine!
Amá needs to make space for Abuelito's stuff. Your stuff is going to get bundled up so we can take it to the poor kids back in Mexico.
WIN-WIN.
NO-NO!
So on top of adding an old man to this already crowded house, I'm losing my most beloved tight-fitting T-shirts and gently loved toys?
WHAT? Stop looking at me.
Stop.
STOP!

Everyone in the family had at least one special skill or superpower.

Seriously, **STOP IT!**

Lila had what we called **"THE LOOK!"**

She didn't say anything. She just looked at you with deep and penetrating disappointment.

(Sigh.)

She just stared at you until you collapsed under the weight of your own shame.

It's pretty awesome when it's **NOT** pointed at you.

OK!!! Stop looking at me! I'm excited to take on this old-timer and give away all my cool stuff.

YOU "WIN-WIN"!

The upside is, with all your stuff bundled up to give to the poor, you'll have a little room to get some new stuff in Mexico.

OR...

Or new stuff from the Kmart. **GEEZ!**

Yes! We're going to **THE KMART!**

Lila's other superpower was to know me too well.

CHAPTER 2 SOLO LO ESENCIAL

I wasn't the only one excited about going to Kmart.

We were all going to need some new stuff for the trip.

And **EVERYONE** had their own agendas.

ESTOP!

OK, niños, only the **ESSENTIALS.** Watch out for each other. I'll **WHISTLE** when it's time to leave!

Legend has it that all dads have this one superpower. A whistle only **THEIR** kids can hear. My dad has one, and it's crazy how well it works.

FWEEE

It's not even a regular whistle. He sucks in instead of blowing out.

I can't even explain it. You kinda have to be there.

FWip

FFF

FFFT

When Apá told us to get **"JUST THE ESSENTIALS,"** we listened. Everyone knew exactly what was essential (to them) and scattered to the far reaches of the store to find it.



SAL AND LEON
"You gotta listen to the latest!"



HUGO
"You gotta run the fastest!"



AMÁ AND ALEX
"We need fresh chones* for the youngest."



LILA
"I should take in the greatest."



APÁ
"Keep the family safest."



PETER AND ADAM
This trip might as well be the funnest!"

*Spanish slang for "underwear."



NOE
"You gotta look your coolest!"



RUTH
"Yuck. This stuff is the fakest."

Personally, **MY ESSENTIALS** were always superhero/Star Wars based. For the most part, everybody in our house reluctantly accepted that fact about me.

They'd even **ALMOST** gotten tired of making fun of my love of action figures. Almost.

But with Abuelito coming to stay in the same house with me, possibly even share a room with me...

...would he think I was a big weirdo?

Did the boys my age in Mexico have this sort of thing, or was it all knives and lassos over there?





Something to let him relive those days of fighting in the Mexican Revolution. Maybe one of those belts with all the bullets in them.

Well, he didn't really fight **IN** the Revolutionary War. He spent most of his time **IN BETWEEN** it.

What? How is that a thing?

He ran a mule train between the two warring sides to make sure all the people had food to eat. It was more important and often as dangerous as shooting at people.

So he didn't fight?

NO, but he made many decisions that changed the outcomes of several battles.

Cease-fire!

CEASE-FIRE!

Whenever your abuelito would appear, both sides would respect a **CEASE-FIRE** in order to greet him!

Hola, Snack Guy!

It's Snack Guy!

Your abuelito made sure both sides got what they deserved.

Here, this dried fruit will improve your digestive system!

PRUNES

I gave the Federales a bunch of **PRUNES.** They'll be pooping all morning.

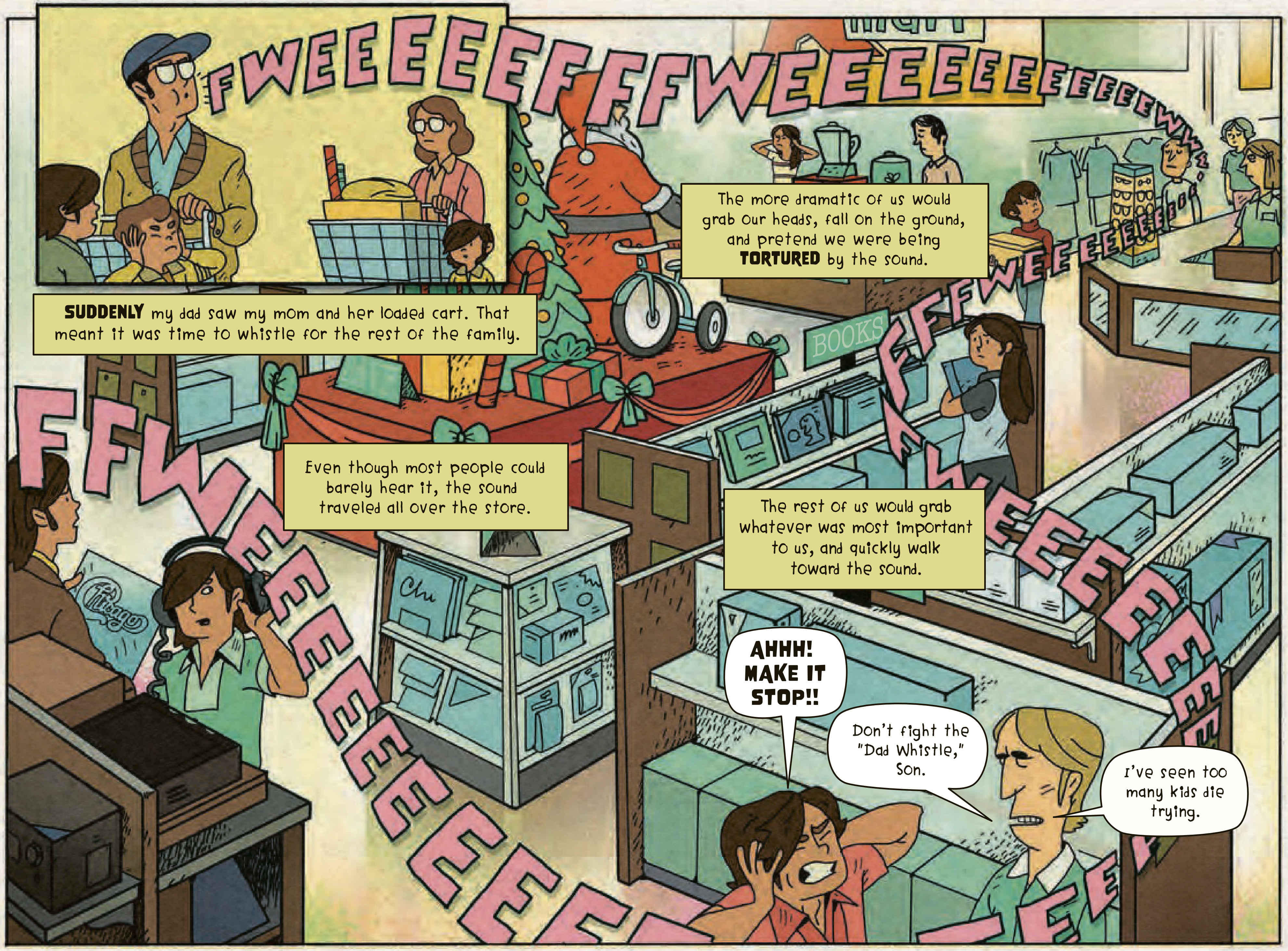
Tee-hee!

Sometimes his choices in snacks would change the outcome of many important battles!

WOW! What else did he do?

Well, at the battle of Zacatecas... Uh...

FWEEEEEE


SUDDENLY my dad saw my mom and her loaded cart. That meant it was time to whistle for the rest of the family.
The more dramatic of us would grab our heads, fall on the ground, and pretend we were being TORTURED by the sound.
BOOKS
Even though most people could barely hear it, the sound traveled all over the store.
The rest of us would grab whatever was most important to us, and quickly walk toward the sound.
AHHH! MAKE IT STOP!!
Don't fight the "Dad Whistle," Son.
I've seen too many kids die trying.