

THE BIRTH OF A COLOSSUS.

"My father taught me something invaluable . . . Research is the mother of development for a country, for a company and for people": Roberto González Barrera.

The first year of a new decade lapsed; 1930 finally offered a different panorama to our country to that of the first twenty years of the century, a time marked by revolutionary upheavals and political and economic chaos. Although cracks of revolutionary revolts still subsisted at that time, common people began to think again in the medium and long-term planning, recapturing their life projects in a country that wanted to re-organize itself and grow.

1930 was the same year in which Roberto González Barrera saw the light for the first time in the village of Cerralvo, state of Nuevo León, on the first of September of that year. Born in a humble but hard-working family, Roberto spent the first years of his life accompanied by his grandmother, who was in charge of looking after small children while grown-ups were devoted to work. In those days Don Roberto M. González Gutiérrez, head of the González Barrera family, was channeling all his efforts in the job he carried out at the port of Galveston, Texas; therefore, he had no chance of spending as much time as he wanted to be with his family.

Always precocious and committed, Roberto aged five, was looking for some occupation in order to contribute with something for the family's economy. He began running some errands for his neighbors of the town and ended up selling groceries such as egg, vegetables, bread, etc.



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Once in the elementary school and with knowledge of the basic arithmetic operations, Roberto González Barrera used to sell various items during his spare time; he even rented boxes used by shoe polishers in town.

□ I was very happy& my childhood was very happy& I didn't miss school, I attended my classes and I even had some free time to go out to the street and make some money& although we were very poor I was a happy boy always□ , Don Roberto recalls about this time of his life.

□ I remember one day my grandfather asked me: let□ s see, of all the things you do, what is the most profitable one? I answered: well& selling vegetables. Then he told me: Therefore devote yourself just to that don□ t do anything else□ .

Meanwhile, Don Roberto M. González Gutiérrez lived and worked in the United States. Once he could save a significant amount of money, he returned to his country to invest the product of his work in the capital city of that time in Nuevo León, Cerralvo. When he came back to Mexico, he had the opportunity to be again with his son and realized of the activities his son carried out to obtain some economic benefit.

Don Roberto González clearly remembers when his father told him: □ No, no, son. You are misbehaving; you spent your time with your friends on the streets□ .

This fact occasioned that Roberto junior were forced to stay at home and conform to his 1 peso Sunday allowance his father gave him& □ But on those days I earned between 10 and 12 pesos by myself □ which was a lot of money in that time- with the things I sold! I could not conform to one peso for Sunday□ .



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Roberto González senior then decides to send his son to a military school, where he could get some discipline, in spite of the boy's negative. Needless to say, Roberto did not spend a lot of time under such regime, and soon he was back at home and decided to work.

Thus, at 11, Roberto González Barrera quits school to collaborate in the groceries warehouse that his father had founded; in such place he reaffirmed his abilities as a salesman that eventually would be so useful for him.

At the age of 15, still with his father, he earned a salary and at the same time he was managing his own businesses, consisting on buying and selling diverse products. He developed such activity until the age of 18.

It was in that time when a difference between them leads to their separation, and young Roberto González gets a job in the Mexican Oil Company (PEMEX). He was assigned to the exploration area and traveled to Veracruz, where he was employed as a driver and taking charge of the work that nobody wanted to do: haulage of explosives. □ Due to the risk involved, it was the best paid work in those days, so I accepted it□ .

Roberto's managerial restlessness impels him to begin a friendship with one of the entrepreneurs of the area, dedicated to coconut oil manufacturing. So, the revenues from his risky employment allowed him to associate with such entrepreneur in his coconut factory in a relatively short period and obtain good results.

However, after spending two years in Veracruz, he caught malaria; this fact encouraged him to leave PEMEX although he was offered field chieftainship in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas. At the same time, he finished the partnership in the



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coconut oil factory, and he received the significant amount of 200,000 pesos. When returning to with his capital to Cerralvo, his mother convinced him of settling down there again and looking for an association with his father, to whom he bought half of the family business.

With the outcome of that partnership, González senior and junior undertook new projects. They bought a power plant to provide electricity to Cerralvo and neighboring villages; they acquired an ice factory, marketed dairy products and bought a movie theater, apart from the grocery business.

In 1948 the formal history of what is GRUMA today begins. In that year Roberto González Barrera had his first encounter with corn, as he made a trip to Reynosa, Tamaulipas with the purpose of selling some remnants from the grocery store. After he arrived to his destination, a handmade device at the place where the merchandise was discharged drew Don Roberto's attention. Such device milled dry nixtamal to produce flour.

When he asked about that powder coming from that rustic device, he was told it was flour to make tortillas, but such business was only profitable during the time of cotton, when an important number of workers arrived that generated sales of 15 tons in one month.

And he recalls: "I saw the product and I liked it. I remembered that I had only seen stone mills and there were no tortilla shops as today; in that time it was a big griddle with six or eight ladies that prepared, distributed and sold the tortillas". Don Roberto took a sample of the flour to his father who, born a researcher, became enthusiastic with the opportunity in front of them: "We felt there was a chance of industry". Certainly, they were not wrong. Nowadays, tortilla made with corn flour is one of the most widely consumed products in Mexico.



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So, the mill was sold to the González family in 75,000 pesos, a quantity that represented an uppercase investment in that time, and the next step was to transfer the facility to Cerralvo, the birthplace of MASECA.

That was the beginning of years of effort and research, time during which Roberto M. González Gutiérrez spent most of his time to improve the features of that device they acquired, as well as the quality of the flour being produced.

□ My father was born an engineer, he was fond of researching by nature, he thought that the first thing to do was the elaboration of a good product□ , Don Roberto remembers.

But □ achieving such purpose meant the selling of the power plant, the dairy products facility, the ice factory, the movie theatre, even my children□ s broken toys were pawned. Those were hard times, and we were running out of financing□

In a certain moment when nothing was left for sale, a friend of his father, General Bonifacio Salinas Leal, a credited military and Governor of Nuevo León, helped them. □ The general was like a second father to me, without further guarantees he trusted us and he fell in love with the product, he lent us money and in that way this business began□ .

Thanks to his father's tenacity, the technological process achieved good results, while Roberto junior was devoted to fostering sales of what was being produced: the business began to grow. When an acceptable level of sales, a good quality of flour and reliable machinery were achieved, they moved to Monterrey and then to Acajoneta, Nayarit, where Don Roberto González Gutiérrez advertised the product.



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It is said that he went from store to store with a guarantee: □ if it is not sold, don't pay it to me□ .

While settled down in Nayarit he had to retire from the company due to health problems at the age of 50. Meanwhile, Roberto González Barrera went ahead. At the age of 30 he was the General Manager, he sold him his share and the partnership continued with General Salinas Leal who, prior to his death, sold his share to him too.

Don Roberto says: □ in order to prosper, it is necessary to love what you embark upon□ . In that manner, the necessity of being prepared on diverse administration and finance topics arose, and he learned along with his father and partner that research is decisive. □ My father taught me something invaluable . . . Research is the mother of development for a country, a company and for people□ .

Roberto González Barrera, proudly born in Nuevo León, is considered today a man of corn and for corn who lives passionately with his industry: GRUMA S.A. de C.V., a corporation that he has strengthened during 50 years thanks to his efforts and tenacity.

