

Who tells your story?

I grew up in the rural area in Zacatecas on my *papa's* and my *abuelo's* farm. We depended very much on the farm for food. Later on in my education I learned how to process and grow things like grains, plants and vegetables. Every morning I woke up to the roosters, pigs, cows, and horses asking for food. I liked taking care of the animals because some of them gave us things like milk, and most of them had been with my family for some time. I didn't have a hometown. It was more like a village in the mountains. Each house was miles away from the next, and we had to walk through creeks, hills, and forests just to get to school.



I started to go to school when I was six, which was about six hours away. I had to get up early to feed all the animals, and only then could I start my walk to school. On my walk to school I had to deal with snakes that used to scare me so badly. If we needed some things that we didn't have, we had to go to town, which was a 1-5 hour horse ride away. We rarely had enough money to buy candy or soda, but when we did, I made sure to enjoy it.

I had six siblings in total, four brothers and two sisters. My eldest brother died when he was a year old. If he did not die we would be seven in total. My parents told me that he probably had a respiratory infection. Back in those days there was very little knowledge of any doctors, and they were so far away that my parents made some effort to take him to the doctor. When he was extremely sick they rode the horses to the nearest town that was ten hours away. His disease or his infection was so severe that my mom had to carry him all the way down to the nearest town while he was dying. They told me that he died right before they got to the doctor. When they got to the doctor, the doctor told them that my brother had already died.

My siblings and I get along pretty well. We rarely fight with each other. I only disagree with them when they want to do something bad or stupid. When I was growing up I used to hang out with Juan. He used to take me exploring and showed me things that I have never seen before. He taught me things until he left home to find a job.

I remember one time our cow chased us because it was having a baby calf, and we were looking at it. Once the cow had the calf, I think that it thought that we were going to steal it, and the cow ended up chasing us for like a hundred and fifty meters. When we got away, we laughed so hard.

There was a girl named Esperanza that I had a crush on. There was a famous band that was coming to town, and I was deciding if I should go. I decided to go, and when I got there, I saw that Esperanza was also there. I asked her if she wanted to dance with me, and she did, so we started to dance with each other. I felt so scared and so nervous. This was one of the most fun nights that I had while I was in Mexico.

I came to the United States with my cousin in 1990. He was the one that helped me get the money together so we could come to America. We used to be together all the time, and he always picked me to hang out with him, even though he had a lot of brothers and sisters. My cousin and I decided to come to the United States. He was able to buy two plane tickets from *Zacatecas* to *Tijuana*,

Mexico. **I remember the day that I left. It was somewhat depressing because I was not able to know the unknown. I didn't know what was about to happen in my life. I looked at my parents, and when I said goodbye to them, I saw the sadness on their faces. It was like they didn't want to hold us there, but they didn't want to let us go either. But they knew that there was something better out there than what they had to offer.**

Before this time I had never flown on a plane. It was extremely scary because it was the first time I flew on a plane, but I tried to make the best of it and enjoy it. We landed in Tijuana about 2 or 3 in the afternoon, and we were able to find someone who agreed to smuggle us across the border. A few hours later, someone picked us up and took us to the border, and we hung out there for a few hours. Then, in the middle of the night, they decided to move us to the other side. **We had to walk through mud, tunnels, and storm drains. In the beginning of the tunnel, the ceiling was extremely high, so we were able to walk through. As we started to walk further north, it started to become so small and narrow that we were barely able to move. All of us were suffocating because there were like ten of us, and it was so narrow and humid. Everybody was pretty close to each other and it became so hot. We almost overheated, but it was only a struggle for like a hundred meters. When we got out of the tunnel, they had someone to pick us up on the highway. We had made it.**

When I first arrived in America, it was not what I thought it was going to be like. I thought it was going to be easier to get money to help my parents. Once I got here I found out how hard it was to get money. You really have to work to get some savings. As soon as I could, I got two jobs and I started saving a little bit of money. I was still living with three or four people in a one bedroom apartment. We were rarely all home at once. I never knew how to iron my clothes or make a meal. I was always depending on my brother who was here for some time. I think he had to learn some of it himself because back in our village men never used to do things like cook, clean, or wash clothes. Those are all jobs for women only. We now had to learn everything.

I had to face a lot of racism. Also I had to deal with a language barrier. You're not able to communicate many times. People were telling me things and I could not understand. The only thing I knew was that they were angry at me and telling me bad things. I remember one time I was riding my bike, and I got to a red light and there was a man by the post. Then suddenly, I saw police cars from every direction surrounding us, guns drawn, pointing them at us. I was scared and panicking. I saw some cops yelling at me looking pissed off. I believe that they were telling me "move away, motherf*****". A female cop told me in Spanish to move away, and then I finally realized that I should move. I tried so hard to pedal and move away. When I got away I saw that the man was on the ground, getting handcuffed. Not knowing the language really made that situation terrifying.



I believe that my first job in LA was a good job. One of my distant relatives, who I had never met till I got here, turned out to be the manager. He was somewhat abusive, but at the same time it helped me out because it got me prepared for my other jobs. He always told me to move faster and to hurry up. At first I started as a dishwasher, then they used me as a busser. He always demanded so much from me. I remember one time he was yelling at me to clean a table, and I tried to take the plates away fast, and I ended up dropping all the plates and breaking them. I turned red out of

embarrassment. I could not raise my head up or do anything but stay low and clean it up and move away. I felt like that day he learned not to push me that hard or else I was going to mess up. He always pushed me to do extra things, and it felt like he owned me at that time. He always tried to get away with things, like stealing some of my hours. If I worked 20 hours, he would steal 4-5 hours of pay from me and take advantage of me. He always told me that I was doing things wrong, and that I had to be there and leave at the exact time. I never complained about it. The only thing I complained about was when he didn't want to pay me. One day that we were not busy, I told him that he had to pay me and that he could have told me to go home so I wouldn't have got paid for that day and you didn't. Finally he chose to pay me, but not all of the hours. In LA I made a decent amount because of the hard work. I never ran out of money, and I was able to help my family and pay back my uncle who helped me out. I never struggled with money. The very same guy that was abusive to me got mad at me because I used to ask for a ride when the bus didn't come. One time he told me "Let's go buy a car for you. I'll sign for you and you pay for it." So thanks to that I got my first car, and it helped me get my second job and move around. I was able to save some money because the rent was cheap. Thanks to that car I never had to worry about money for myself and could help out my family.

My other jobs were not that nice either. They were so strict with us. We had to clock in right on time and clock out. The manager always complained about it. The other job was so busy that to open up the restaurant I had to push people out of the way to open up and get everything hot and cook everything. We had very little time to do things like go to the bathroom. We had to be eating as we cooked. Many times we just ate under the counter because there was no time and we were so busy. If we had to use the bathroom, we had to run there and run back. All of us cooks looked after each other. They would ask "You want to go to the bathroom? We have a little bit of time right now. Go."

When I got that second job I felt empowered because I didn't have to depend much on the first job. After I got that second job, I think that the first job manager started to respect me and be grateful for me being there helping him out

because I was capable of doing things that he didn't think I could do. I only had three jobs the six years there in LA. Those three jobs were able to support me and my family back in Mexico.

Then I met my wife, Veronica. I was seeing someone, and Veronica moved near where I lived. My sister in law knew her, and she told her to come and watch my sister in law's daughter. At first I was not into her. She wasn't as pretty as what I loved back then. She was still pretty good looking though. I thought that I would be able to help her in America. After I first met her I started to go out to eat with her. I felt sorry for her and I worried that she would get taken advantage of by someone. I wanted to protect her and treat her well. I feel like I have done that. I love her and I want to treat her well. We ended up getting married on July 26th, 1999.



My wife and I decided to move to Texas because it was an opportunity to get a better job and better pay. It was also because we were getting bored of LA and it was somewhat of an adventure. We didn't have much to do in LA, and we were trying to get away from some family members that were not very nice to us, and we enjoyed the time in Texas. Then I found out that my wife was going to be having a baby boy in August, which was a shock. When we started dating we didn't want to have

kids. Then we kind of decided on having one. When I first held Kenny it was a weird feeling because I loved him, but at the same time I was scared to touch him and hurt him. I was one of the youngest, so I never had to deal with kids. Having him made it so that I had to push myself harder because he had limited us economically. We stayed in Texas for barely a year before moving back to Colorado.

We had Kenny in August and moved to Colorado in early October. We were in Colorado for 3 months before we moved to Texas. We decided to move back because the place where I was working was going to close. We also moved back because Colorado is a beautiful state, and I enjoyed the weather changes and the sunshine. I always liked Colorado better than Texas. Back in Texas it was humid, windy, hot and they had tornadoes.

I was in Colorado for a few years when I found out that I was going to have another baby boy. It really shocked me, but this time it was a little bit easier because we had learned how to take care of a kid.



At the time I was working in a restaurant, and my boss started talking to me about getting my own restaurant because he liked how hard I worked. I had been looking for a business to buy because I didn't want to work for someone else my entire life. I felt like if you were a manager or something similar you could get fired for small things, and I didn't like that. So Oscar told me to get money together so I could buy the franchise.

I had to save up for like three years. We never spent money unless we really needed to in that

time period. We had to save up about \$50,000. When I finally paid for the restaurant, I realized how many issues it had. I had to use my entire life savings to get it running. So we struggled for a few months. But fortunately, a person in Texas wanted to buy my house down there, so I was able to sell it and pay off all the extra charges.

When I finally got the restaurant, I never felt like I had too much power. I just felt like my employees were a part of my crew. I saw them as part of the family, and I wanted them to trust me and respect me, and I trusted and respected them.

I ran the first restaurant for a few years. Then I got to the end of the term of the lease. The landlord was divided on who to lease to. He had a lot of people that he could give it to, and we fought very hard to get it. Luckily, he chose us.

I wanted a second restaurant as a plan B so my employees would have somewhere to work, and I ended up getting the second restaurant. I was able to keep both restaurants. It made it a little harder for me, and I refused to get partners because it can get complicated and we could have different opinions. It took me like 6 to 7 months to gather up the money I needed for the second restaurant. My first restaurant was paying for everything, so it was hard. When I finished paying it off it was a great relief and I was happy that we made it through. I now feel confident about how we are running the business.

I never told my parents that I was going to stay in the states permanently. I always told them that I would go back. They would ask, "When?" and I would say "Soon." But it was getting harder and harder for me to go back. There were some complications with the way of life in Mexico, like gangs and cartels taking over the country. It made it extremely hard to make the decision to go back because people did not have the freedom to build a business and live off of it. Also, as each year passed I had more obligation to help my parents, sisters and brothers back home. My parents were getting older and older, so they depended a lot more on me. This made it harder for me to go back because of all the people who depended on me to make money.

My dad always wanted me to come back. He always told me that he was saving some of the stuff that he had. Every time I sent him some money he would tell me that he was trying to build something for me to come back and take care of. He would tell me that it was mine, and he would say "I built it with your money that you sent me." **I think that he hoped or dreamed to see me back there and to give me everything that he had. When I heard this, it made me extremely sad, but I felt like it was a hard reality that I might never come back; that I might never see him alive again. I might never be able to hug them or help them in their older years when they need the most help. That's the only thing that keeps me thinking about going back, and it's one of the hardest things I have to deal with. Every time I think about this I feel very guilty, especially when I have a little bit extra to eat or to wear. When I'm cold I have jackets to wear. When I'm hungry I have good food to eat. I always wonder if they have enough food to eat, if they are enjoying their meals, if they are healthy, how bad their pain is. Are they suffering? I have to think about this every time I enjoy something, and that stops me from enjoying life to the fullest.**



I never felt like I reached my American dream. I wish that we could expand the business. I believe there are opportunities to expand the business and diversify. Getting into the real estate business always attracted me and got my attention. I don't want people to know much about immigrants, but my advice to immigrants is that they need to come and get their stuff together and work hard so we can make a better country together.



I feel like we should try and help immigrants get adjusted to a different culture and world. Back in our country, many things are legal like drinking and driving under age, or driving without a license. Many times we are committing crimes and we don't know that we are, so we should educate immigrants so that they don't end up in prison.

If I could go back in time, I would win the lottery and go back to school so I could help people in need and people that could use my knowledge.

story told by: Edward