

Who tells your story?

I grew up on a ranch in Mexico called *Salamanca Guanajuato*. I always loved it. It was really beautiful, but it was a poor place. There weren't a lot of the things that we now have in the United States. I'm not saying that I was ever hungry. I was never hungry because my parents worked a lot, which allowed them to buy us food. The place itself was really open. There was a lot of agriculture, and everyone would always farm. There was no grass either. People would spray the grass so it wouldn't grow. They would do this so that they could plant. The ranch wasn't a ranch where there were a lot of horses. People would fatten pigs but there were not a lot of animals.

Most of the ranch is dirt. The dirt is really loose so whenever a truck drove through or there was wind, the dirt created huge sand storms. We had a lot of mesquite, which are really spiky bushes. The bushes also had this vine type of seed that we would eat all the time. There were also a lot of cacti. It was really interesting because the ranch was both a dry and wet place. It is really hot in Salamanca, so when it rained, it would get humid. Whenever it would rain, there would be a lot of mud since all the streets were dirt. I remember one time, the rain got so bad that it flooded the ranch. Another time it rained so much that we couldn't leave the ranch for three days.

Since people would focus on agriculture, we had a lot of asparagus and strawberries. We lived close to this place called *Irapuato* which is called the world capital for strawberries. I worked on harvesting strawberries for a bit when I was small. I really loved when I would wake up and smell the wet dirt. I wouldn't know how to describe it, but it was that smell that when you smelled it you just loved it.

The ranch was really small, so mostly everyone knew each other. Everybody would treat each other like family, therefore anybody could have invited you to their house. It was never a dangerous place. There were two traditions that we would all celebrate. One was Saint Anthony's feast day. Everyone would come at five in the morning to the church, and we would catch up with each other. Everyone would leave because they would baptize or do something special on that day because it was

a feast day of a saint we all loved. Everyone would invite you to go eat, but you had to say no because someone had already asked you. The other tradition that we would have is Christmas. It wasn't like in the United States where you would do a little gathering. Over there everyone would do their own nativity set outside their house and all the kids would go house to house because everyone would give out candy and cookies like it was Halloween. We would gather a 3 foot basket of candy. After all of that, at 12 at night we would go home and have dinner. It is something they still do.



I had 3 siblings. The oldest was named Juan Carlos. He was a huge trouble maker ever since he was little. I always had a stronger connection with my older brother Juan Carlos, mostly because I always wanted to be like him. Once I grew up, I noticed

the things he did were bad. The second oldest was my brother Felipe. He was so similar to my brother Juan Carlos. They were both bad. They would never listen. Then there was my younger sister. She was more calm and chill. My parents were both really hard working.

I was always a really calm kid, and I didn't get into trouble a lot. Out of all my siblings, I was the calmest because I would see my two older brothers always get into trouble, and my mom would beat them. I didn't want to get beat by her, so I would always listen to her. Even though they were troublemakers, both of my brothers were really hard working. They started to work at a really young age and still went to school. One time they got me into huge trouble when they and some other friends robbed the bakery truck. The driver, who was transporting bread to a bakery, got off the truck to tell the bakery he was here. At that moment, my brothers and their friends took all the bread. I was just arriving when I saw them do it. My brothers left, so when the driver got back, he only saw me and wanted to take me to jail. But before he took me to jail, he wanted to take me to my parents to make them pay for the bread. Since my parents weren't home, I wanted to take him to my grandma's house instead. One of my neighbors told him not to because my grandma was really mean. The lady knew that I would never have stolen the bread, so she asked me who did it. I told her it was my brothers and her son.

When my family first immigrated to America, I was 10 years old. We had to cross a river called *El Rio Grande*. We all crossed together except Felipe and my dad. Felipe was in a seminary and my Dad was already here. My dad had gone to the United States a few months before us so he could already get a job and be ready for us when we got here. When we left, I felt so happy and excited because I had never gone anywhere before. I also really loved hearing about the U.S. Whenever I would hear about it, I would get goosebumps. I had always thought that the US was the most beautiful place. We crossed through the river with some people that my dad paid to get us through. I remember a guy had me on his shoulders because the river was fast and deep, and it was too dangerous for us to cross alone. After we crossed, there was a car waiting for us like a 100 meters away. We crossed

the river in the night, and we would wait to not see any lights to make sure migration officers wouldn't catch us. After the coast was clear they told us to run to the car. We ran as fast as we possibly could to the car, and once we got in it was already running, so he pressed on the gas and we left.

I remember the exact date: the 2nd of February. Once we got to the hotel, one of the guys asked me "Do you like hamburgers? Do you want one?" I stayed silent. He asked me again and I continued to stay silent. Finally I responded "I don't know what that is." He looked shocked and said "Let's go get one." I will never forget that time when we went to Burger King. As soon as I opened the box and saw it I fell in love with it. Then my mother said "Give half to your sister" and I said "NO!" I started running away from my mom. She chased me until she caught me. She cut the burger in half, and once I ate it I knew it was the best burger ever. As soon as I took that first bite all the flavors were so different. The meat was less greasy, and the bun had little seeds and was so soft.

After we settled down the guy who drove us all the way to Aurora called my dad and told him that we got here. We told our aunty that we were here and we went to her house in Aurora, where we were going to be staying. After we settled in my aunties house, I laid on the carpet and I loved it. I had never seen carpet before because we never had that in Mexico. I would find a little corner in the house, and I would sleep on it. There were so many things that I didn't know existed, but that's just something that made America so much better.

After we got settled with my aunty, our dad sent us to school. It was hard for me because I didn't know how to speak English. I would never be able to answer questions or do tests because I didn't understand the language. I still loved school because they would give us food, and back home they didn't, plus it was free. I loved the food that they gave. I was really skinny, and that's where I gained weight. They would even give us food in summer. It started to become easier after about 4 months because I was able to understand and speak a little English. My friends really helped me because they were the ones that spoke to me and translated things for me. That's what helped me to learn English.

I really enjoyed that we had roads in the United States that were really organized and smooth. We never had any pavement in Mexico; everything was dirt. Everything was also really organized. It was way cleaner. The weather was so shocking. Once we got to winter it was so cold. We never had any snow in Mexico, and here it was just freezing. I still loved it because it was something very different.

Once I grew up, it was never hard to get a job. The only thing that I would struggle with is to get paid well. I would always get paid minimum wage, which was really hard to live with. I would be getting 120 dollars a week. I was working on painting apartments for my first job. When I got my first paycheck I felt rich. I felt like I was finally grown. I wanted to buy everything, but obviously I couldn't. The first thing I did with my money was take my family out to dinner. After I quit that job, I started working in insulation. There were people that would get jealous because I would get more work do to being more experience. To this day I still work in insulation. I got settled in America by working everyday for about 15 years. Then that's when I started my company called Mile High.



After I was stable, I met my wife at her house. My friend wanted me to drive him to see his girlfriend, and I said no because they lived too far. Then he convinced me because his girlfriend had a friend. Once we got there she didn't want to come out because she thought I looked like a cholo since my friend would dress like one. Finally, she came out and we were talking. I said "We should meet again," but we rarely did because her parents wouldn't let her go out a lot. But when we knew each other better, we would hang out more. I asked her to move in with me and she did. I still lived with my parents. I only had a little air mattress, and she still moved in with me and my parents. **I knew that she was the one because she had seen me at my worst and still loved me. She taught me how to love.** Once you live with someone, you see their worst side, and she taught me how to love her worst side too. We were going to get married, but her parents couldn't come, so we ended up getting married 25 years later.

When I found out that she was pregnant, I was overwhelmed with happiness because ever since I was a little boy, I have always wanted to be a father. I would always pray to God to let me have a child.



Once I had him in my arms I started being more responsible because I knew that I couldn't let anything happen to him, no matter what. I was still a very active and rough dad. I would always play with them even with my second child and try to toughen them up a bit.

If I had a choice to go back I would stay here. I would only go back, but only to visit. America was everything I thought it would be and more. It surpassed my expectations because I thought that we would have it tough. The reason that I thought low of America when we came was so that I wouldn't get high hopes and get let down. But it didn't let me down. To me, it's the best country in the world. I have been all around the world. I've been to France, Spain, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and none have been as good as America. None of those countries had all types of communities that could all come together.

Knowing the result that I came out with, I would go back and sacrifice everything migrating to the United States all over again a million times, knowing that I would be successful and have a wonderful family. I want people to know that immigrants are hard workers. Immigrants don't steal jobs for fun. We work to get our families through hard times. You could hire anybody, but if you hire an immigrant they would work double. Before stereotyping immigrants, see what we have sacrificed to get here. **Hispanics always have a strong connection with their family. We have left our home and family just to get a better life, not just for us, but for our children.**

story told by: Juan Carlos