

Who tells your story?

My name is Alberto Avendano. I grew up in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico. I lived in a very small town, so that meant there weren't a lot of people. The little town was named Comedero Sinaloa, where everybody had a little farm with pigs, horses, and donkeys. When the rain would get the fields wet you could grow corn, potatoes, and much more. When it didn't rain, nothing would grow, which was kind of hard. It was a cute little town, but now that little town does not exist anymore. They moved everyone out and made a reservoir.



Growing up there were 11 kids in my family, 7 boys, and 4 girls. That made it hard on my daddy and mama. My daddy was a chauffeur, and my mama used to make dresses. One of my brothers was 2 years old when he died. My mama took us to the river one day and my little brother walked right into it. She left him sitting down by the water while she went to go talk with somebody. He fell in the river and died shortly after. I remember constantly telling my mama "It's your fault! It's your fault!" Life was pretty hard after that.

I was 12 years old when I went to Tijuana, Mexico. I was young so we didn't get to do anything besides go to school. One time I remember me and my older brother were sleeping when my mom said "Come on and get up, you kids got to go to school." We never got up, so my daddy got up and yelled at us, "You sons of a bit**** don't wanna get up" then chased us. I got up right away to run, but my brother was far behind me. My dad kicked him. I laughed because my brother got mad at me, and I said "What are you getting mad at me for? Because I'm faster than you?" That was always a funny memory.

I was about 17 when I went to America. I was supposed to go for only one year, but look at me now. When I first came I went to live with my sister in California. In Mexico I had a girlfriend named Estella. She decided to also immigrate to America. One day when Estella came to America she met my cousin. He was jealous of me, so he called immigration on me. Immigration took me to a big place in California with lots of hispanics. They would take all of your clothes off, then they would tell us to shower. After the shower while we were still naked they would tell us to bend over while they put white powder in our butts to make it cleaner. Then they would give you a little room until they called your name, and they would put you on a plane. This usually took a couple of days. I think I was there for 6 days. The plane would take you to a town that had the same processes. Then after repeating the process, they would take you to another town, but the mayor didn't want us there either because it was filled with immigrants, so he told us "Get the hell out of here." They said when the train came the immigrants with money could pay to sit down on the train, but I didn't have money. So me and six other guys got together and we had to sneak onto the train. We still had to eat, so we would steal food from the ladies that would sell food. I always felt bad for the lady because she would say "Give me my money! Give me my money."

It took over 15 days to get home. The train went around dropping off all of the six guys at each stop. Me and the last guy were still on the train when he asked me to get off with him and marry his sister,

but I couldn't because I needed to see my family. Once we got to my stop I was too embarrassed to go home because I always used to dress nice, but I was dressed very badly. I waited until it got dark to go home so no one would see me. Once I got home my mom told me that she had just found out that immigration got me, but I told her "Mama, it's been 15 days." While still in Mexico I went off to the Mexican army.

When I got back I went straight back to California and worked at a company that fixed old TVs. One day there was a woman named Rosa who told me there was a man in Denver, Colorado that wanted a person that spoke Spanish to do the same job, but in Denver. That man's name was Mr. Jurgen- a white man. He told me he would pick me up in two days. I was shocked because it was so soon. I asked him "What about my parents?" He said "Just tell them that you're going." My mom and dad didn't want me to go. I told my mom, "We are always searching for work, and this is my opportunity." The next two days passed and I wanted to pack clothes, but Mr. Jurgen told me not to because I would get new ones. So we went to breakfast, and Mr. Jurgen bought me the biggest breakfast I had ever seen. I asked him "How can I eat all this?" At the time it was a lot of food to me, but now I can probably eat that every morning. Then we got on a plane and went to Denver.

I moved in with him and his wife. They gave me a room upstairs. That's around the time I started to work with glass. I was so lucky to have had him. Mr. Jurgen eventually even bought me an apartment. One day he told me he had to go to the hospital, and once he got out he wanted to talk. I suspected it was about leaving me money because he was rich. So he went to the hospital, but he died in the hospital so I never got to talk to him. He was a very good man and he got me where I am today.

I used to always pick up girls and take them for a ride in the Mustang convertible that Mr. Jurgen bought me. I remember there being one girl that refused to get out of my car. I had to trick her to get out of the car so I could drive away. Eventually, I met my future wife Jenny through her friend that I knew. Pretty soon after she was pregnant. While she was having our first baby, I was actually playing soccer. She got so mad because I had accidentally

missed the birth. Then the next kid was eventually born. We got married in 1964. Then we had our last kid. One day my wife told me that we had a problem, and at this rate she was going to have 20 kids, so we laughed and she got fixed. I wanted to officially buy a house, but I needed to get a down payment of \$500. So I called my parents and they sent it to me, but this made my mama sad. My mama told me this meant that I was probably never going back to Mexico, but I wanted to get a home.



My wife had cancer for 2 years before she told anyone. She was the strongest woman ever. One day I was taking a shower when she told me to take her to the doctors. That's when they told her she had 3 months. She didn't want people to feel sorry for her. This made me so mad because maybe something could have been done to save her if she had told somebody. 2 months later she died. That was in 2016.

Not long after my wife passed, I don't know exactly what happened, but her friend Mary said "I've come to stay with you for three months." I said "WHAT!?" I made up an excuse to say that my nephew was living in the basement, because she was just very possessive. She was already trying to tell me what to do. She kept coming to see me. Gaby, my daughter, was so mad because she didn't want a new woman in my life. But I told Gaby if she wanted to see me happy, I had to have someone. She would tell me "What about mom?"

and I said “Well, she's dead. I can't keep being alone.” I mean, I had this lady. She wasn't pretty, but she took good care of me.

Today I like to spend time with my family. Mary and I go out to dance. We go to church. Mary and I also go to places that serve free food for the old people. I'm happy, but I would like to tell new immigrants not to come. It was so much easier to come here in my day, but it's gotten so much worse. I always hear about people dying on the news. It is so dangerous.

story told by: Max