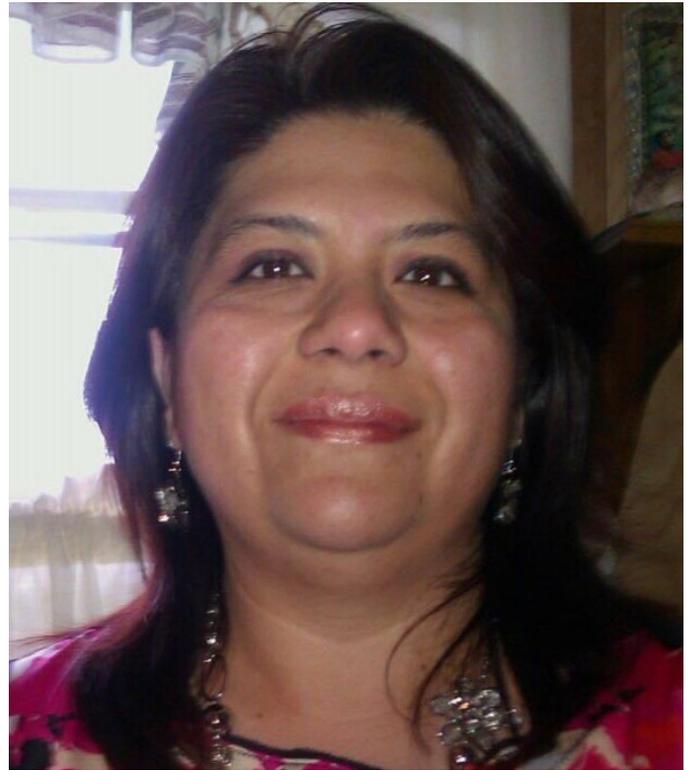


# Who tells your story?

I am Lizabetha Hernandez. I am from Michoacan, Mexico. It was a very small town. We had just one little tiny grocery store that did not carry very many things. They didn't have phones. There was not much vegetation around and it was very dry. Our streets weren't paved; they were very muddy streets when it rained. Everyone had lots of cattle, pigs, and sheep so it smelled like a farm. People also had lots of dogs that would be on the street and you would hear them barking all the way into the late-night hours. My mom used to have a butcher's shop where they would kill the cows to sell the meat, and they would do that like three times a week. That was our income for the whole family. My dad had a little farm with mango trees and that was good. That is how they supported my siblings and me. My family was my mom, my dad, my brother, my sister, and myself. I am the oldest one. My brother is 3 years younger and my sister is 12 years younger than me. I was very close with my mom, but not as much with my dad. Since I was the oldest, I would always fight with my brother. I was quite older than my sister, so my mom would always put me to take care of my sister. I would walk her to school and I would not like that, and I would have to rock her to sleep. I also had my homework to do, but my mom would always get home late, so I would always have to take care of my sister. And with my brother, I was older in age, so we would get along well besides the regular brother fighting. Nowadays we don't spend as much time together because we all have our own families, but we try to talk on the phone often. That's it. We don't spend a lot of time together right now, but back then we were good. We still help each other out a lot. If somebody needs s

something we try to pitch in for whoever needs something. Right now we do have a close relationship. The three of us, even if we don't see each other that often, we always try to help each other as a family.



Growing up we had tons of dogs. My mom loved dogs, so we always had like three or four or five dogs at the house. They would stay outside, but we would play and give them food all the time. My favorite memories from back then are probably just being able to play outside without electronics. You would find fun things to do, just with all your cousins, and in a small town, you would just be with everybody. Me and my cousins would play jump rope and volleyball. We would go to the fruit trees and cut down fruit, eat some and talk. We'd go to this ice cream shop in Michoacan. Michoacan had the best popsicles in Mexico because they had all different flavors. I would get

these Mexican popsicles that made my mouth water. When we got them we would go outside and play. We'd make our own swings and go to the river.

When we left to come to America the first time I was around 4 years old, and we were just here for 4 or 5 years, and then we went back to our hometown. When we left I brought nothing. I was young so I guess you get used to starting over. My parents wanted to leave because there were not that many sources of income. They wanted us to have a better life. We didn't have a lot of income back then so it was very different. When we first came, the hardest thing for my family was finding a place to stay and having enough money to buy groceries. I remember we used to go to churches to get groceries, like the food kitchens and the food banks. The surroundings are different from Mexico, and the freedom you have over there is different. I especially miss the food.

When we first came it was hard with the language. I remember trying to leave school by myself because I had a hard time, and my mom would have to come and try to find me because I would try to leave school. I didn't understand anything. I would get so frustrated.

It is very different in the US because you have more opportunities in the US to provide for your family, there are lots of jobs and there are more chances that you will get an education. In Mexico it's very hard to have a job that will pay enough to provide for your whole family, and the opportunities for education for people are hard because they don't make enough to be able to send their kids to college. In Mexico, there are not a lot of opportunities for jobs and education, but there

are lots more opportunities in the US. My parents were able to provide a better life for us while we were in the US, and they saved to start something in our hometown. When we went back to Mexico I got the opportunity to go to a better school and go to a high school in Mexico City, but that's because of how hard they worked to save up. My parents came back to our hometown and started a small business. That was my mom's butcher shop. From school back in Mexico City I got to know lots of new friends with different kinds of mindsets. I came from a very small town where everybody knew everybody, and coming to a big city I got kind of scared, but I had some good friends that helped me through it. But at the same time, I did not finish high school. I still felt different from my classmates. Coming from a small town and going to a big city was just different. I decided to go back to my hometown, so I only spent one year in high school, and that's it.

When I came back to the United States for the second time I was 17 years old, and I stayed with my uncle and my aunt because my mom was denied entry, so me and my brother had to come to live with my aunt and my uncle in Indiana. It made me scared because they sent me away to try and go back to school. It was like, "Am I going to go back, or am I going to stay over there?" When I was in the States I wondered, "What do I do?" It felt scary because they were making us be apart. I stayed only for a year or a year and a half, but my brother stayed. I went back to my hometown because I didn't want to go to school. I wanted to be able to provide for my parents because they were back in our hometown. I'm like, "I need to work," and they said, "Well no, you have to study.

You need to study.” But I said “no,” and I went back again to my hometown.

When I stayed with my aunt and uncle they treated me well, but it was kinda hard sometimes because I could not ask for things I needed because I felt like I was asking for too much, being a burden to them, so it was hard. We got the paperwork from my dad's side, so we did enter legally that time. That is when we got a green card. On the way back to the US it was scary because I was on the plane with my brother. I was not there for very many years, so we were wondering how everything was going to be. I'm 17 and he is 13. How are we going to do this and what are we going to find?

Throughout high school, people would make fun of me for not knowing what the teacher was saying or not knowing what to do. You feel like you can't do anything, but they made me go back to high school. You would feel like the kid that was getting made fun of for not knowing what the teacher was saying. I did not know where to go, and there were very few Hispanics in Indiana back then. Life in Mexico is different from here because over there you would wake up and clean your house. I would go and help my mom a little and then come back home. You would spend the afternoons talking to your family, your friends and neighbors in town and just do the little things. But in the US it was more like you had to go to school from this time to this time and come home and help your aunt, but I didn't know if I was helping her enough. I worried about what to do or if I was doing things right, versus in Mexico where I had a lot more freedom.

When I permanently moved to the US it was hard because it is just something totally different. It's a very different culture. You have to try to understand what they are saying. You have to learn lots of English. When I had my first kid I was like, “I have to learn English, or who is going to help him with homework? How am I going to do this? I just have to learn and speak the language of where I am living right now.” The biggest challenge I faced was the language barrier because it's hard when you start a job and you don't know what they are saying to you. Back then there were not a lot of people that could speak Spanish. I knew I would have to start speaking English even if my English was not that good. I couldn't be scared to speak it because if you are, it's harder to work.

When I got my first job in America, it was my first job ever. My first job was at a factory where they would make windows for RV's. I hadn't worked in a factory or anything else before, and it's hard to start something that you don't know how to do. But on the other hand it's exciting, because it's something new and you can provide for your family. I was not treated very nicely because people would scream at me because I didn't understand what they were trying to explain. It was very difficult having people come and yell at me because I didn't know what they were saying and didn't know what to do. After people get to know you and are nice and try to explain things to you in Spanish that you understand, it gets easier, but we were treated poorly at the beginning. I had a couple more factory jobs after that but they treated me much better.

Getting a house wasn't that difficult. I think that that was one of the easier things to do because I just went to the bank and that person was very nice with helping me get the loan and then we got our first house. We did not stay there because I lost the first house. My father got sick so I had to choose between making my house payment and keeping the house or paying for my dad's chemo back in Mexico. My dad got sick about 12 years ago. That was the first time he got sick. It was hard because in Mexico we didn't have money to pay for all the medicine. You don't just get the medicine, it's not like you can just go to the hospital and be treated in the ER and you're good. Over here you have to provide and pay for your medicine and medical care upfront before they can even treat you. Since then he has gotten better and is doing good now.

The first time I got married I was 19. I think I made the right choice at that time, and I have 3 wonderful children from that marriage. I also got married a second time and that was to a man named Victor. Many things made me want to be with him. He is a really hard-working person and he is really good with the kids and our son. I did go on some dates. We both worked a lot so we would have to make time for dates. If we did they were around like 9 or 10 pm because we worked like 12 or 13 hours a day. We would go to get coffee or just sit outside work and talk. He helped me when I needed help, and he got me through a lot of things going on in my life at that time. I have 4 kids, and their names are Isaac, Diego, Emily, and Noah.

When I found out I was pregnant the first time it was very exciting but also scary. I was very nervous. The other times I got pregnant I was

more calm and relaxed because I had already done this before. Holding your child for the first time... there are no words to explain it. It's like after all the pain you just forget the pain and you just fall in love with that person that made you go through all that pain. I have a good relationship with my kids and I have lots of good memories with them all. Isaac is the oldest and he likes to travel. He likes money and he works in public relations. I feel that Diego is more centered than his brother. He is very smart and kind, and he likes to help others. Emily is extremely shy and she doesn't speak loud. She is very quiet and sometimes I can't hear what she is saying. And finally, Noah, like his brothers, is super smart, especially with numbers. He learned to read at a very young age and reads very advanced books. Overall I would say that I have very wonderful and amazing kids that I love a lot. The hardest thing about having 4 kids is trying to keep up with them. You are always wondering if you are making the right choices for them or providing enough. Sometimes I can be shy so I don't ask them a lot, but they know that they can come to me if they really want to talk.

When my first child was in college, it was something that was new for me since he did not have a full scholarship, so I had to adjust a little bit so that I could pay for his college. Diego had a full scholarship, so it was not as hard. When your kids graduate it makes you feel very proud. When Diego graduated it made me feel even prouder. I have two kids that have graduated college, and it is a very good feeling because I get to see them do this and I didn't even finish high school.

Watching my kids grow up, go to school, graduate, then getting jobs and doing stuff that they love is the best thing. Just letting them be themselves

and seeing them do what they want to and stuff they love is the best memory I have with any of them.



Right now I own my own business so I try to treat everyone fairly. It is challenging owning my own business and sometimes stressful, but it's all good and it's nice knowing that I've accomplished something. The worst part is trying to get everything according to code and not knowing anything about opening up a business. With the city codes there would be certain things that you would have to do to install a gas line or you have to do to have a sewer line, having a grease trap, or depending on how many square feet it is, how many employees you would have to have, or needing a certain amount of sinks, and going through the health department. I did not know that you had to do all of that. But in the end I did it.

My biggest dream when I first came was what most people want, a better life for my family and to be able to provide for them. In Mexico it is hard to do that. When I first came my biggest dream was to have my own family and have a nice house and a good job. I am most proud of having my kids graduate college, having my own business, owning my own house. I feel proud of where I am now. You learn a lot of things, like who to trust and who to not trust, to always keep an open mind. You learn to always be open to the fact that you are always going to face challenges, and that you will have to learn to overcome them. Looking back I would never redo anything in life. You have to go through some stuff to get where you are, and you have to go through the bad things to get to the good things. I feel that I am good and proud of where I am now.

story told by: Rikki Bragg