

Who tells your story?

After I had been deported, my girlfriend told me she was pregnant. That is when I decided to come back for her and my child. We drove a truck, and we were about 100 feet from the border. The car could not stop because the immigration was watching close to that point. It was the middle of the night. The coyote said, "Open the doors, take your stuff." We jumped out of the car as it was moving and started running.

My name is Manuel Loya Hernandez. I was named after my father. I was born in Chihuahua, Mexico where I would eventually grow up. Growing up in Chihuahua was great. I would spend most of my time playing sports. When I was ten a neighbor taught me how to play basketball. From then there was a great love for the game. I would play all over Mexico and I would eventually be representing my state. I would later teach my kids the game and they all would pick it up very easily. I have one son who played professionally in Mexico and the other is preparing to play in high school.



I attended school at Virgilio Casale, but I stopped going to school around middle school because it simply wasn't enjoyable. So then I started working. My tío taught me how to work with glass, and so I would pick up the new responsibility of working. I learned to be determined to work hard and I loved making money.

In 1994 I ended up migrating to America. My plan was to go for a little while, work, make some money, and then go back home to Mexico. That would later change the longer I stayed in America. Back home in Mexico it was hard to make money. It wasn't worth the labor that you would put in to make very little money back. Even though I needed the money I was leaving behind my friends, neighbors, aunts and uncles. But I knew that leaving was for the better. I crossed over to El Paso. From there I bought a plane ticket to Dallas where my mom, tia and tío lived. Back then it was very easy to cross over because this was before 9/11.

When I arrived my mindset was work, make some money and go back to Mexico, but it was hard. The U.S is expensive. You get money, but then you have to spend it to stay. When I arrived everything was so much different. The food was a lot different. The people were way different. Everyone is almost on their own here, but in Mexico it feels like everyone seems connected. The language barrier was hard too. I would always have to have a translator around. When I would try to learn English I had to unlearn the movements that I was accustomed to. My tongue would hurt at the end of days from trying to speak English.

I eventually moved to Colorado to live with my girlfriend. I had met her in Mexico and we planned to be together in Colorado. We would end up having two kids. One is 17 and the other is 25. I was very happy to have kids but they definitely changed my life. Kids are very expensive, so for me that meant I had to work more. I worked for a glass company, and I continue to work in glass today. Me and my wife would end up separating, and after I found a new girlfriend. I then lived with her.

At the beginning we had some financial problems and it was hard. Later on in our relationship we had our son. When I had found out that she was pregnant I was in Mexico because I had been deported. My girlfriend had sent me any money she had left to pay the *coyote*, but the less you pay, the longer the journey would be. We drove a truck, and we were about 100 feet from the border. The car could not stop because immigration was watching close to that point. It was the middle of the night. The *coyote* said, "Open the doors, take your stuff." We jumped out of the car as it was moving and started running.

After we had gotten past the border we were just walking endlessly day after day. Five days to be exact. We would soon face a problem because we had enough food but not nearly enough water. It was so bad that we would drink from any water that we could find. We came upon a little pond and there was a dead bird in the middle. We had to drink from it because it was the only source of water for me and my group. The water didn't affect me much, but it helped me keep going. My journey was just desert after desert. There wasn't much hope for us and it hurt a lot. Blisters on our feet, feeling the thirstiest we've ever felt in our lives. It was very hard. At a certain point we would eventually be in San Simon. Feeling exhausted, being stressed about many things. We had gone into a gas station to get things we needed and to wash off because we didn't want to look like we weren't supposed to be there.

After I crossed I traveled back to Denver, Colorado to go to my girlfriend and to be there for my new son. I had arrived before his birth, so I was able to accompany her during his delivery. His name is Manuel Alexander Loya. He is named after me. My relationship with him was different because he was the only one I was able to fully be there for. He makes me so happy and is really the only one of my kids I was able to enjoy.

Around three years later cops would show up to my home as I was leaving for work. They would deport me again. This time it took me longer to come

back because the United States were more on watch. For a few months I would work as a *coyote* and they would soon help me and take me back over. This time it was much easier. We had to get over the border, and we walked just a little and got picked up at a house out in Albuquerque. What hurt the most during that was being away from my son. I would spend so much time with him playing, and I felt like I missed out on so much time with him. When I had gotten back to Colorado I focused a lot on working and trying to provide for my family as much as I could.

Everything was great when I returned. Yes, not everything was perfect for me, my spouse and my kids but everything was important to the person that I'm becoming. I have continued to work and do the same thing since I was little. The glass that my tío once taught me. Now I have my own business where I get customers so I can install shower doors, windows, and all kinds of stuff. Having my own business has helped me a lot to just enjoy my life more. I don't have to wake up at 4 a.m. and work until 4 p.m. I've made a great living from it. Glass is truly what I love doing, and I even have my son help me from time to time.

Everything here in America is great and I love it, but I want to move back to Mexico some day. I want to go back to my real home. Somewhere where I can feel safe and where I don't have to worry about anything.

My experience as an immigrant was honestly hard but fun. Being from Mexico is what makes me the man I am today. If I had never been through these things I wouldn't have learned to work or to persevere through a hard time. In my lifetime, I never really thought anything was hard. I learned that as I go on and if things don't go my way, I'll go and fix it. I feel like there's nothing in this world that I can't do or achieve. There are hard things that I've had to persevere through in the past, but I always knew that I could make it through.

story told by: Manuel