

Who tells your story?

Growing up, Lima could be a little sad in winter because it's very gray. There aren't many sunny days. So in Lima there would be a lot of traffic. It was very annoying, more so than here. Right now in summer it would be very hot and very humid as well. I would probably try to go to the beach. If I was in the mountains in Peru I would see some rain right now, but in spring or summer it's definitely prettier. All the flowers, trees, and snow in the mountains are very pretty. It would smell very humid right now. Whenever I'm back in Lima, I go to the mountains. That's where I spend most of my time. A day in Peru would be waking up in a tent and then grabbing water from the lake to make coffee. That's on vacation days, not on work days. I would also go on a hike, explore, take photos, and probably hang out with my dog that would be camping with me. But when I left, I left my dog, and I really miss her. It's the creature that I miss the most, and I'm trying to bring her here. I mean, I left my family and friends, but I get to see them whenever I visit and sometimes they visit, but my dog, I have not seen her in a while, so I am trying to find a way to bring her here.

Some of my favorite memories were going to the beach with my family; not only my mom and dad but my cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Those were probably my favorite moments in the summer. My family is pretty funny. My mom's side of the family are all artists. Some of my cousins are musicians, others are designers, others are photographers. I'm a photographer and my mom is a designer and photographer. My grandma likes dancing. She used to be a teacher, so we always have a lot of fun. We are a free spirited family of

artists. With my dad's side of my family, my dad and his wife and my brothers and my grandma, we have a lot of fun too because my dad is a very funny person. We always make jokes and we talk about what I have been going through on my adventures in the mountains and the beach or when I go traveling. But I don't really see much of my dad's family. They live abroad, or I just don't see them much. But my family in general are fun to be around, but we all are busy.



My parents did not get along very well. They got divorced when I was ten, and that was rough. My childhood had pretty moments but also rough times, and I had to go through my parents' divorce, and that was pretty hard for me. They started dating other people and when I was in high school I was pretty depressed.

Then I moved forward and joined the seminary when I was 17 or 18, because I wanted to become a priest. That is when I left my home. I was living with my mom at that time, but then left my house and another stage of my life started.

The first time I left from Peru to go to the United States was for fun. I was invited. My friend paid for everything and we went to Florida. That was my first time in the states. It was exciting to get my Visa in Peru. It was always kind of a dream to go to the states. I don't really know why Peru is so pretty but I guess growing up we always watched so many movies about the states. I wanted to go to Disneyland but instead we went to a park in Tampa and then we went to the beach and we had a Miami trip experience. It was fun for me and my friends. When I came to the United States, my first impression when I came to Florida was that the girls were very pretty. I was like "I think I like Americans more than Peruvians" and I was actually amazed by how many pretty girls there were. The first time I came to Colorado it was amazing because of the mountains and the outdoor culture here. I really loved it the first time I came here four years ago. Florida was fun and being in other states was fun, but I never considered actually staying anywhere in the States. But in Colorado I think I could stay. I really like it here and all the opportunities you have with friends to go outside, to go climbing and hiking. Everybody seemed to like it and you always have someone to go on adventures with. The process of coming here was something I was not looking forward to. It was just something that happened because I started getting jobs here. I also had a girlfriend here so just the circumstances made me migrate, so it was not something that I was trying

to do, it just happened. But I never made that decision. It was just a decision that was made for me by the circumstances. I just started coming to the United States and spending time here doing some work here. Little by little I would get more jobs and I would spend more time here, so every time I went back to Peru I already had a time I was going to be back here, and that was for like three years. Then at the end I just started to notice I was spending more time in the States than in Peru, so I just decided to rent a place to live and buy a car.



I started dating Meg. I met her at a birthday party at the park. It was my friend's birthday party, so I was there and there was this other friend that introduced me to Meg. She was trying to get us to date and we were both like "I don't know, I don't want to go on any dates with anyone." We became

good friends because we tried to avoid dating, and we just realized we should just try dating, and it's working out so far. My first thoughts were that she was a tough person. She likes outdoor activities and she is committed and she is good at them. That made her seem like a tough person. She's been through things in her life that have made her strong, and I like that she is also very caring. Talking to her I could tell how much she cared about her students and her job and myself and her family. She's always reaching out to her family, she's always worried about her students and me, and that was something that I really liked about her in the beginning, and I still do. She also loves God, and that's something I like as well. She's very devoted and has a very strong faith. She likes going on adventures and she is a free spirit. Before I would find a very pretty girl and she would not be that interesting, or I'd find someone very interesting but I did not like physically, but Meg is a good combination of everything. She definitely did help me a lot even though. We have not been dating for a long time, but she let me use her car to move around. She has introduced me to good people who have a higher need for different jobs. She's always trying to connect me to different people who could help me get some jobs and things like that. She has been helping me a lot with my last personal project. I do work for different clients, but I also do personal projects like films and movies, and she's been excited about my last project and she has been helping me a lot with it, trying to share it with everyone and trying to get support from people, even economical support. She has helped with translations or going through whatever I wrote in English and correcting it and making it sound better. She really cares about me and my professional success.

Everything made sense to say that I lived here and accept that I was living here. Going back and forth every time I'd just bring different things like clothes, but I don't really own too many things. My belongings are very few, and I did not have a family that I brought, but coming here was not a one day thing. My friends have always been supporting me. My friends also make me smile when they text me funny things from Peru, especially if I miss them or if I see photos of my friends doing cool things or when Meg calls me because she is very funny. She is a very funny person, and she has a great sense of humor. That is something that I really love about her, and I laugh a lot with her. We laugh with each other and we make each other laugh. That is something that helps keep me happy and full of joy. Whenever my friends and I hang out they also say "You should move here, you should stay and not go back to Peru. We like you."

There are some things that I miss about Peru, like speaking in Spanish. It was definitely challenging speaking English in the school where I went. Growing up they taught us English and also in Peru we watch movies in English and we listen to music in English. I was familiar with it, but I wasn't fluent in it so it was definitely hard and challenging. It was very challenging to just go and talk to the cashier for a coffee. It was challenging but interesting at the same time. In the beginning it was harder than it is now. Three years ago my English was not as good, and my brain was not as used to speaking English as it is now, so I would get very tired. But I miss speaking Spanish with my friends and Peruvian slang and things like that. I am excited to do all that when I go back. I also miss the beach. I definitely love the beach. I love

the ocean, and I grew up going to the beach, and there's no beach in Colorado, so that's something I missed. Also, the food in Peru is really good. The seafood is fresh and we have a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables like tropical fruits that you don't really get here. I also miss my friends and my family of course, but I get to talk to them and sometimes they visit.

But there have been times when things are very hard. In other states, like New York for example, the transportation works perfectly. You can go wherever you want and you don't really want to have a car because of the traffic. But here in Colorado it's hard not to have a car, so not having a car was something that was definitely challenging considering the distances. Definitely at the beginning the language was challenging because going to the bar, loud music is playing, and trying to understand what people are saying is pretty hard, so social life was hard in general. Everything is more expensive here than it is in Peru, so that was a really hard challenge. I always try to get enough jobs so I can afford a life here, because health insurance, car insurance, house, food, everything is more expensive. That is definitely a challenge a lot of people have helped me with, like giving me a ride or being aware that I don't have a lot of money. When we would go for lunch they would buy.

I was not able to afford a place to live so in the beginning I would live with friends. Some friends would host me for a couple weeks, then other friends for a couple weeks, but thank God I found a friend that was willing to rent out a room in her house for a very affordable price. Whenever I go grocery shopping there are so many things that I know are good for a healthy nutritional diet, but I

avoid buying them because I don't have the money. I just buy the cheap things. I don't have a car because I can't afford it. A car is expensive and insurance is expensive, and also health insurance. Right now I have very cheap health insurance, but before I did not have any, so I couldn't take too many risks because I couldn't put my life at risk because I didn't have any insurance.

My life has really changed since I came to the United States. I speak in English a lot more, I spend more money on a daily basis. I guess I'm making more money because if I was not making more money I would not be able to spend money. But the money I make I have to spend it to live here. I can't save much money. Everything is more expensive. I started driving a car if I needed to go somewhere. In Peru I was more used to taking the bus or taxi because taxis are not expensive in Peru. If I had a choice right now I would rather live in the States full time because Meg can't go to Peru full time. That would be my only reason to stay here, but if she was able to go full time to Peru I would probably choose Peru, or if we were both flexible with our jobs and could work from wherever we are I would be able to go back and forth and also go to other states.

I've never faced any racism, or not that I was able to realize I like how I am, so I don't really care. Everytime people treat me differently it's funny to me. I don't really care. I even like to make fun of myself. Whenever I'm ordering food, maybe the other person does not understand me. I like giving them a hard time, making them feel bad, but then I'm like "No, I'm kidding. I think I take advantage of that to make fun of myself and just have fun. My life is pretty good. I do a lot of work differently than I would work in Peru because in

Peru I had a company and I would have people that would work for me. Now here I am independent, and I just do everything they hire me to do. I don't have anyone that works for me, so I work more on the computer than I did in Peru. In Peru I was working more in the field, like taking photos or filming or shooting a video and going on expeditions to do videos, and then someone would work on the post production on the computer, but now I do all that myself, so I work more on the computer. I'm also happy because I'm dating someone that I really like and love, and we get to have a lot of fun together and go on cool adventures together. I also have some good friends who I go for beer with or go to dinner or concerts. I work in my friend's office. They have free space for me, so they just let me go and work there, and I chose to do that because it's easier to work in my house and I don't work in any other office because I don't need a office. I just work with my friends at my friend's office because it is good to have people around, but I just work on my own. My business is mine and I don't have to work at any other place.

What I have learned throughout all this is to be humble. I've learned that life is hard and hard to keep everything under control. I have learned it's ok not to have everything under control because that's what makes us human, that's natural. You don't have to have everything under control. I have also learned that we are all different and we all have different perspectives of life and different backgrounds and different experiences and different teachings and beliefs and opinions. That does not mean some are right and some are wrong or you have to discriminate or think someone is less than you are or you are less than someone else. I have learned we are all different but we are

all valuable. There's no reason for division of any kind.

I think I'm proud that I made it here. Being able to be here and being able to afford to live here is not easy, and I have a lot of friends in Peru that would like to do that and they did not, so I'm very grateful but also proud.

story told by: **Xavier Castillo**