

# Who tells your story?

My name is Mariana. I believe it means something related to Mary. I was named that because it's my grandma's name from my moms side. I loved my name growing up. My mom knew that she was gonna name me Mariana after her mom and my grandma, who are also named Mariana, hated their name. My mom thought it was a good name though. "If I ever have a daughter, she's gonna be named Mariana," she said.



*Guadalajara* is a huge city. It's probably bigger than Denver. To put it into perspective, it's kind of like LA, like a big city. Back in the day, it was like a small town. Everyone knew each other. But it began growing a lot to the point where it's millions of people. It's very modern, not really what people will think of when they think of Mexico. It's kinda the opposite of a small town. Think more like LA. Huge, a lot of people, mostly everyone is Mexican, not as international as the US.

My favorite Mexican tradition is Day of the Dead. Day of the Dead is mostly a Southern Mexico thing. Where I'm from is like in the middle, closer to the north, closer to the US, but we still put a lot of emphasis on Day of the Dead. It's a day to remember the people who have passed. We do this so that they can come visit us and that they're with us all the time; but especially on that day. We like to put food on the altar so that they can take them

as offerings. It's a special day to remember them. I also really loved Mexican Independence Day which is on September 15th and 16th. It's a party all weekend long. We would go to smaller towns because *Guadalajara* is so big and they do not have much going on. When you go to the smaller towns farther away, it's just like the plaza and everyone is gathered in that plaza. It's like the town square with fireworks, lots of music and hang out games.

My house was kind of medium. It had two stories. My mom, my dad and I all lived there; I was an only child. We had dogs throughout my life as well. My house had a small patio in the backyard. It was yellow. Our house had three rooms. Since I was an only child, one of them was mine and the other one was my play room because we didn't have anything to fill it with. I was kinda spoiled in that sense where I had my own playroom. My next door neighbor was one of my closest friends. I was very close with her. Back in the day before phones were a thing, we would knock on each others' door. If we were done doing homework and waiting for each other to come outside and play, we would just run around the neighborhood and go look at our crushes that lived on the other side of the street. We would go get milk and hang out with them. Doing all the silly teenager things.

Life growing up was slow. I think it might've been because I was an only child. It was kinda quiet when it was just my parents and I, but love filled. It was also a lot of fun because my triplet cousins spent time with me.



It still got lonely though. I think that because I am an only child, as I got older I started to realize my parents have their own things going on. I didn't have anyone to talk about that stuff with or bond with. When you have siblings, you all experience the same things, and I didn't have that. I did get a little lonely at times. It was very vibrant to me, mostly when I saw my family. My dad grew up in another city and another state, so I mostly spent all of my childhood with my mom's family. She's one of 13. There was a lot of chaos most of the time; except when I was in my home because it was just my parents and I. The hardest part for me growing up was being an only child. At parties, I was that kid who would prefer hanging out with the adults, listening to all the drama and all the *chisme*; and because I did that, I knew too much. Because I was an only child, I would overhear the adult conversations. I knew the realities that we struggled with. My parents tried to cover that up and provide me with the best life, but I always knew we struggled financially and I was always hyper focused on money. I would think things like "We can't do that because he can't afford that," or "We can afford this." That was really stressful for me. I always knew what we were struggling with. My parents didn't know that I knew and I had to go through all of that alone. I didn't have a sibling to share that with and that was really hard for me.

Me and my dad go with the flow. He is an amazing dad. And my mom was more of the disciplinarian. "You have to do your homework. You have to do this right." She's huge on integrity. "You have to do this right because it matters to do it right." That is what my parents' personalities are like. Then there's me. We were chill, kind of introverts. We're fine just chilling because it's just the three of us and none of us are super loud. It was never chaotic in my home, we always went with the flow and were easily entertained introverts.

My mom started thinking about leaving for America when I was 12 years old. It started just as an idea. We had one aunt living in LA and that's when things in my parents' marriage kinda exploded. She started looking for options to leave

the country. Her cousin was in LA, so that's when my mom started considering it more; but I honestly thought it was gonna be a joke or that it was not gonna happen. My mom and dad's decision was not to live in our house anymore. He had moved out by then, so after she had thought about it for a couple years or months, she approached me and she was like "I am moving to the U.S, either you stay here with your dad, or you come with me." My mom was my everything. My dad had moved out. She was the one who did everything for me. Staying in Mexico with my dad seemed less reasonable than letting my mom leave Mexico on her own. She probably thought about it for four months, and then I said yes and we left in October of 2008.

I was afraid of leaving everything. I left in the middle of 8th grade. I had been at the same school since first grade. It was my community, they were my everything. They were people who knew me. My friends were a huge part of me and so is my family. We only had one aunt in LA, but my whole family and the people who I spent every single day with were in Mexico. My dad by then already knew how he had hurt my mom. He's still my dad, he's a great father, and it was really hard to leave him. It's like everything you knew is gone.

I was hoping it would only be for a year. My mom made this decision to move, and she said "I need to only leave for a year. I need some time for myself to think without your dad. I can not be in the same county as your dad." I was feeling like I wanted to die. It was horrible and I didn't wanna do this. I wanted to be with my dad. It was constant sobbing and tears. The language and just the goodbyes were a struggle, and saying goodbye to my dad for the last time. I think when we did, in my head I was like "I'll see you in a year," and we didn't. We ended up staying. Also as I got older I started noticing that my mom would put up a front, but I knew deep down how much she was hurting. She would hold her tears, so that was really challenging. Being at the airport, being on the plane, I noticed my mom was feeling a lot, but she had to put on a strong face for me.

When we were on the plane it was my mom and I and my aunt who lived in LA, so she flew to *Guadalajara* so she could be with us for the plane ride, and so we had three tickets and the three of us were together. But then something happened in the cabin. They were looking for one person to move to first class because someone wants to switch. My aunt and my mom we like were not switching, we were gonna sit together the whole plane ride. So they were like "Mariana, do you wanna go to first class?" and I was like, "No, I wanna be with my mom". This is such a huge move for me and they were like "no you should try it". So the whole plane ride I was on my own in first class with food getting brought to me. It was amazing. It was kind of like a metaphor. Like a hint of what God had in store for me. It was a huge change and God was like "you'll be fine, I'm gonna provide for you." But because I was so bougie the whole time I don't remember what I saw out the window because I wasn't really looking out.

When I first arrived I saw my aunt's family, who had picked us up from the airport to take us to my aunt's house where we were gonna live. I'm glad that when we first got here we were with my family and with someone that we knew because they took care of us and we lived in their motorhome. It was good having them. They were amazing to us. Racist comments were made and people were not the nicest. Whether it was people I met when I started school or random people at the store, it was just a matter of not taking things personally. I knew that speaking English was going to be really hard. But that was the scariest thing. People would talk so fast at me once I started school, and everyone knew I was the new girl. I feel like there were people who gave me more patience and grace with me learning English and there were other people who had no patience for me and would say very racist comments. It was hard speaking English. I was lucky enough in Mexico from kindergarten all the way until I moved that I grew up going to a bilingual school, so half my classes were in English and half were in Spanish. That was helpful because I wasn't coming in with no background in English. I knew English, but speaking it was not there. I

was so shy, and I thought with the move I would not speak, so that was hard actually speaking and telling people "Can you slow down? Because I can not understand you." Some people would slow down, and some would say "um, no."

We moved and my mom was not working and my parents had divorced. I was a middle person. I was always aware of our financial struggles, even when I was little, but because my parents weren't talking now it was super weird because I was like the middle man between my mom and dad. Like, "Dad, Mom says this, Mom, dad says this." All of that. So I knew my dad had stayed in Mexico. He sent us money monthly so we could survive in the US because my mom was not working, so I knew that we struggled because I had the communication with my dad. He was telling me to tell my mom how much he was sending because he was sending money from Mexico to U.S dollars, and so it was difficult. We lived in my aunt's house, but in the backyard she had a trailer, and that's where we lived. So that was hard. We lived in like a truck, and that was difficult, knowing you're in the U.S. and the trend is to get the I pod touch and the next I-pod. The iPhone commercials would come up and I knew that was not for me. I'd known ever since we were in Mexico. For Christmas I wouldn't ask for the most expensive thing or all the things I wanted because I knew we couldn't afford it. I think parents are so amazing towards their kids. I think they try to pretend everything's fine, so my mom didn't always tell me that we were struggling, or if I wanted to go to the mall and get a shirt, she would get it for me, but I knew we were struggling because my dad was telling me how much he was sending.

We said it would only be for a year, and then we came, and I graduated from my middle school, moved onto high school, so all throughout high school we kind of just played it year by year. "Do we stay another year?" So we stayed. "Do we stay another year," and like that all the way through senior year. Then from there, I moved to college and ended up graduating.

I wanted to do a volunteer year between graduating and starting a job of just getting closer to my faith. I wanted to give to a community somewhere. In college I heard about this program called the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers and I applied. I got in, so right after college I moved. The home I stayed in for the Volunteer program was in the downtown area. It is an old building which is very beautiful and huge. There were ten of us living there. It was like a house with ten rooms. It was like an old school building in the 1800's with a lot of wood, a lot of character and cool colored walls.

In my situation I couldn't get a job, and so technically my first job was two years ago when I became a math teacher. I was lucky enough I didn't have to work in college because I had a full ride scholarship. It was such a miracle and such a blessing I didn't have to do that the year when I moved to Colorado. The year after my first year at Annunciation I went to another school, and that was pretty hard. I loved the students but a lot was going on, and I would say that was the hardest year. I love the mountains. I moved from *Guadalajara* which is a huge city to LA which is a huge city to Denver, which was the smallest city that I'd been in, and so I liked how it was a little bit of a slower pace lifestyle than LA. I love the mountains and nature here.

My first love was in Colorado, Marky Mark. I think he liked me. He's so cute and he's similar to me and he made me feel safe. We had been chatting, and he said "I would love to take you out for coffee and go on a walk with you" and I said "Sure thing." I felt excited. Our date was at City Park. I think we dated for a year and a half until he proposed. I felt over the moon excited. My whole life changed, and it was exciting to finally start our life together. My wedding was a big party. We had a two day wedding, one where on Saturday we got married outside and we had the reception, and then the Sunday wedding where we had the Catholic ceremony in the church and then another party. It was so good to have a lot of my family from Mexico that I haven't been able to see in 15 years.

It was the happiest day of my life. Seeing all of my people in one place and his people too. Dancing was my favorite part, and the actual ceremony where we were saying our vows to each other.



We had pets in Mexico. I had a dog who passed away like two weeks before my mom and I left and we always had dogs growing up, and currently I have 2 cats. I want 2-3 kids. I would name them Lucy. I love the name Lucy. If it's a boy, I love the name Santiago, but I don't think Mark would be about it. We go back and forth with names that sound more Mexican. He's like "I can't say it like that." I love the name Santiago. I like the names Andrea, Henry. After the wedding we moved in together. I felt so excited to start our life together. Our first home was closer to City Park and similar to the first house when I moved to Denver, old school, old building, lots of wood, lots of cozy. It was like a townhome, so small.

I miss Mexico because my family is still there and I haven't been in 16 years. I don't regret moving. I think God had a plan for me. I do wonder what life would have been like if I stayed there, but I don't regret it because it led me to meeting my husband here and meeting my students and being at Annunciation, so that was all worth it.

Mexico and the U.S are very different cultures. The U.S is more diverse and it has more opportunities

for people, more focus on freedom and independence and all that, where Mexico is more of like a family and being with people.

**I'm proud of being an immigrant. It took me a while and I think I hid it for a long time in high school, but I think it's the coolest thing being able to hold both of those places in your heart. You have the richest of Mexico and the richest of the U.S, and you like to hold those. I wish people knew that immigrants are hard workers and they are compassionate and they want a better life. They want what any human being would like. They want safety and comfort and love. Immigrants are humans. They deserve respect, and they deserve the dignity and the love that everyone does. I am proud of how far I've come, how far my mom has come and of the little life we have created in the U.S.**

My American dream is to live happily in a home with my family and husband. It was like the very typical dream of a home and family, being able to have a job and give back to the community. It's still a dream to go back to Mexico and provide my mom the opportunity to also go back to Mexico. I'm on my way to achieving my American dream.

story told by: Jada