

Who tells your story?

My brother all the time would tell me, “If you have a dream, do it, because life is too short.” I couldn’t because for me, my first priority was to make sure my house was clean. I had to work and go shop and cook food, buy clothes for my family and me, do stuff for my job, my husband’s job, and my son’s school. I put everyone’s feelings first before mine, and eventually, I forgot myself.

My name is Gregoria Rodriguez Tarin. I was born in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico in 1954. I stayed and grew up in Mexico until 1976. My family and I were comfy in one bedroom, but during the summertime it was so hot. We had no air conditioning, no nothing. During the winter time, we had no heater, no nothing. But no matter what, we were happy. In the neighborhood I lived in in Juarez, I would always hear people yelling in the middle of the night or even the afternoon. I would also hear lots of cars, mostly in the night. Cars would make random loud beeping noises in the night and would wake me and my family up sometimes. I do miss those times.

It was four boys, three girls and my mom. **We were very poor, but very happy.** In the house I lived in, my brothers, my mom, my sisters and I lived in only one room. This room had part of the kitchen we had, bathroom, and everything in one room. But you know what, it was clean, because something my mom showed me was how to clean properly. We were poor, but our house was clean from me and my mom mostly cleaning. My brothers and I had no TV, no radio, no nothing. My brothers, my sisters and I sang, played, and talked to keep ourselves occupied. I would have good conversations, thank God. I don't want to lie to you *mija*, I had never had problems with my brothers. We would fight, but not in a horrible way until one of us would cry. I am very happy with my brothers and my mom.

I was close to my brother, Artitho, and my sister Lollies. They were my very close brother and sister.

Everybody but those guys, those were the two people I had a strong connection with more than anybody else in my *familia*. I was especially close with my brother because he took care of me the most when my daddy left me and my family. He helped raise me with our mom. We then started to build a strong connection and we have just been close ever since.

I think the best food back at Juarez would have to be Enchiladas and beef soup. I have very good memories from my grandma. My grandma makes the best enchiladas in the world. My mom made soup when it was cold weather and I really enjoyed it with my brothers. Good memories. The thing I didn't like about Juarez was the crime because now people lose respect for everybody, and it's very sad because Juarez is no longer intact. People have a defect you know? People have lost a lot of their respect back in Juarez. There's too much crime and it's very bad.



I did not smell fresh air because there was too much pollution in Juarez, but my favorite smell was the *mercado* where we went to grab our fresh groceries. People in the store that were constantly cooking. The fresh vegetables and the fresh fruit

always made me forget what our world smelled like. Also, the grocery store, Walmart, always had funny smells. It would smell like pencils every time I visited to grab things for me and my husband.

My father was a mechanic. My father would put windows on cars. I remembered when I would go and visit his shop sometimes. I would observe him and see he would get paid little money. That's how we were poor and broke. When my dad still lived with us, my mom never worked. When my daddy left my family. My mom worked as a housekeeper. **I started to work when I was only ten years old.** When my daddy left, I started to work right away. I worked in the fields, picking up cotton. When I did work in the fields, I also picked up wheat and corn, depending on the season because every season is different. I was very young when I started to work. Then as I got older, I worked in the hospital, and of course did housekeeping because in Mexico, people don't always have a lot of money. You can't have preparation for your future school years. I had an education because my mom gave me that education, but preparations, we didn't have any. Only six years in school and that's it *Mija*, no money for nothing. I really wish I did something, like become a doctor, because I love medicine. That's why I worked in housekeeping and in the hospital, because I liked anything medical.

When I still lived in Juarez, one of the days I was trying to learn how to swim. This person came up to me, helped me and she showed me how to swim. This person then pulled on my stomach, very hard and I farted and there were bubbles that came out of the water. This is a funny memory I have. Every time I remember this memory I laugh like crazy. It was an embarrassing moment for me back when I was little, but it never stopped me from laughing. I didn't care if people judged me because everybody does farts and it's normal, so I didn't care.

My dream when I was little was to become a singer or doctor. I wanted to become a singer because I loved music and always wanted to sing with *Mariachis*. I love to sing along with the music.

I mean, I don't have a beautiful voice, but I love it when I sing. I just wanted to travel the world, see different people, and talk with people that are from different countries. I mean this dream, seeing the whole world and singing, was a big dream I had when I was little. But now that I look back at it, I realized I would have to leave my family behind, and I didn't want to do that, so I stayed and helped my mom with anything she needed help with. My hopes and dreams were to also help more of my family. I helped my family, but I want to do more because my family in Mexico is not in misery like before, but they are still very poor. I can't do anything anymore, not working anymore, so I help my mom only. That's the only person I help.

I don't miss anything really from my childhood. All the time I tell you how much I love right *mija*, and your brother and even everybody I know. You guys are my babies and all the time I want to take you and your brother to Juarez, all the time. Maybe even we all can walk the areas and go to where I grew up from. We can go to the park, the movies in Juarez, the churches, and the school. The school I went to is still there, maybe we can visit and even I can show you around if my memory is good enough to remember. I would love to show my friends that I still have a connection with, I would love to show you guys to them. I bet they would love you because you are my babies.

When I left Juarez, I was about 22 years old. I married an American citizen from the USA and he had a job where he fixed papers for immigrants that wanted to cross over the border. I left with my husband because I loved him and I wanted to marry him more than anything. The only way was to come to America.

Me and my husband still lived in Mexico together before we left. When I left with my husband, I had my kids with me when I told my family and mom I was leaving for America. I told her, "Mom, I have to go to Texas because the jobs here in Juarez are not helping me and my husband get more money." My husband never worked in Mexico where I lived either because he was an American Citizen.

He couldn't find any job because he was called an illegal where I lived. When this situation happened, he came up to me and told me that, "You know what, let's go to Texas because here, I can't find a job to help you and myself." I am glad I came to America because of all the opportunities I received, the opportunity to fix my citizen papers, to find a job and support my family. However, I was sad when my husband and me had to leave because I knew I would have to leave my brothers, sisters, and especially my mom behind and not bring them with me. When I told my mom I was leaving, my mom cried a lot for me because she knew I would miss her and she would miss me. I cried with her. I loved my mom and she knew that. I miss Mexico more than staying here in America.

I told my brother Artitho that I was leaving Juarez for Texas, he told me, "Don't go to Texas, you are an Immigrant and you are gonna face and suffer discrimination. Stay here in your country where you can be happy and don't have to worry about being an immigrant." I said to him, "I am married to an American guy, my husband doesn't want to live in Mexico where I am from. I love him so much so I will follow him to Texas and live my happy married life with him." My sister Lollies came up and agreed with her brother. She wanted me to be happy but not in this way. Not becoming an immigrant for a man and moving away with him. It was sad news to my brother and sister, but they didn't argue anymore. We all said our last goodbyes and I finally left my home, my childhood, the place where every memory holds. I left and it was all because I loved an American citizen and I wasn't ashamed. When we arrived at the border, that day it was very windy, and there was so much dust in the air there. It was because of Holy Week, I remember every time it was Holy Week, the days would become windy. The wind would pick up the dust and make it dusty for us to see sometimes. I fully crossed the border and not the river. I crossed it with my other sister in law, your Auntie Gloria, and my husband. Because my husband helped immigrants cross with papers, he helped us cross, and we had to do it with papers, I remember that. The year we crossed, it was easier for all of us

because it wasn't crowded with people. So the year 1976 was much easier for us to just sign and leave.

My husband and I traveled in a car to Texas from Juarez. I remember the car being an Impala Super Sport 1954. It was such a beautiful old car. I remember the color being a very bright shiny silver. We arrived in Texas with a good looking, fine car.

What I missed when I finally crossed over the border was my mom's hugs. I also missed my furniture because in Mexico, my husband would buy me the most beautiful furniture there was. I left everything back at Juarez, even my favorite clothing I left. I very much regret not packing them, but they couldn't fit in the bags I packed to leave Juarez in the first place. They were too heavy and there was just too much. So I missed those things mostly. The only thing that I did bring back from Mexico was a doll. I showed it to my granddaughter and she even played with it when she was a baby. My grandma made it for me when I was a child. She gave it to me and ever since then, I have been taking care of it and just adoring it because I love my grandma. It is the only memory I have back from Juarez and also from my grandma.

Believe it or not, I never dreamed about coming to America because before I got married, I thought I would stay In Juarez my whole life and find my love life there. I never thought I would make a living life here, but when I went to Texas, I really loved it because it was so beautiful. It was green, raining, and Texas definitely had a lot of lakes. I really enjoyed the first day when I went to Texas. I don't know why I never dreamt about coming to USA but I just didn't. I remembered one of my friends from Juarez, she said to me, "I want to marry an American man because I don't want to live in Juarez anymore." I said, "What's going on? Juarez is a very beautiful city, it is your roots, you were born here and you were raised here and you look very happy here." Then she replied and said, "I am not happy here in Juarez and wanna move somewhere really far away from here and start a new life." I let her be and I let her follow her own dreams. I didn't

stop her, but it wasn't my life. I was happy in Juarez and she wasn't. Sadly, I did move from Juarez and I still miss it today. I never would've thought of having my life in America. In Juarez, you could find more respectful, kind, and lovely people than here in America. I mean you can find a kind person here, but it is rare to find one because of the crime and just how people are in America. The difference is that in the United States, you can live in a small apartment and you can have everything you need to survive. In Mexico, you would not have this kind of stuff that America has for you. It is more comfy here than back in Juarez. The people there though are much kinder than you would expect.

I remember the day when I first arrived in Texas was cold; not super cold, like when you would have to wear a jacket and gloves and all those kind of things, but it was cold enough for people to just wear *suéteres* and walk on that nice day. It was windy and very dusty like when I crossed the border. It wasn't worse like that day, but definitely dusty.



The grass was wet when I first stepped into Texas. It was such a perfect day. It was so beautiful, from the smell and the bright colors. It just finished raining so the sky was sunny, but I wished I had a camera with me so I could have taken a picture to show how beautiful that day was. It was warm and chilly so it was the perfect temperature to go outside. I remember it being very humid, but I didn't care for that because of the colors and smells I saw and felt. It smelled so fresh, it smelled

definitely cleaner than Juarez, but that didn't make me miss Juarez any less. I definitely smelled a lot of pines, fresh cut grass, wet rain in the sky, and just a lot of flowers that surrounded many areas.

I first got my apartment with my husband and kids. My neighbor helped me. Her name is Juanita Martinez. She was an old lady and during that time when I was struggling alone, she was the only one that helped me. She showed me where the stores were before I went by myself. She showed me where I needed to pay the bills. She showed me great schools where I should take my kids. She helped me a lot and I miss her so much. She was a good person, an excellent person. She passed away and I miss her too much. She was such a good friend. I wish I could have hung out with her more than I did before.

When I walked into my apartment, I cried when I walked in. My husband asked me, "Why are you crying?" I said, "I want to go back to Mexico. I don't want to leave my mom, my sisters, and brothers." I cried for two or three days straight. I did bring a little bag from packing in Juarez. It was just my clothes and my son's clothes. I then started to clean the kitchen and the living room, because in this apartment we didn't have any furniture. We only had a table and two chairs. I couldn't bring any furniture from Juarez and that reminded me and hurt deep inside of me. So me and my husband went to the K-Market and I bought blankets, and stuff like this. We maybe slept on the floor for a month. It was always cold or always hot, but the blankets were the only thing we could only afford during that time. The next month I think I started to buy more furniture for me and my family. We didn't have to sleep on the floor anymore. We slept on air mattresses, me, my sons and my husband.

The thing that worried me the most when me, my sons and my husband finally found an apartment in Texas were the rats. They really scared me the most. The tornados also scared me because when they sounded the alarm to tell us that a tornado is nearby, I would always get scared and be worried for myself and my family because I hoped that we

didn't get hurt. I remember one time where a tornado was in Texas, the alarms scared me and the wind outside was very bad. I heard trains and heavy wind against our windows and our apartment. It was very awful. Then the windows broke in our house. The hail was big and hard. It came in and damaged my floors and many other things. The sky I remembered looked green, like the grass by the lakes in Texas. It's funny because I came and arrived in Texas two weeks earlier when the tornado happened. It was the first Tornado I ever experienced.

My dream when I did come to America with my family was to go to college, graduate and learn to become a good nurse. I didn't want to learn to become a doctor because, too much money and during the time I came to America, I had my kids and if I ever became a doctor, I wouldn't see my kids as much. So I dedicated my life to my kids and my husband. I never got the chance to do what I wanted to do. I forgot myself. When I came to Colorado, I went to Emily Griffith Opportunity High School. It costs too much money to learn to become a nurse or a CNA. So I took classes to bake cakes and decorate and everything. I never liked the baking class, but I also didn't have money to learn to become a nurse. So I took the opportunity to just join a class because I didn't want to do anything when I came to Colorado. Right now it doesn't matter but then it did, because I took the time to prepare for my future and my life, but those baking classes never helped my future self, so right now I'm just doing nothing with my life.

I never had any connections to help me find work. I would knock on doors and ask for a job. I was very independent because I did start work early and at a young age. So later on, I learned how to ask for jobs, food, and everything. When I was little I would ask people for food because in my house we wouldn't have anything to eat. I never stole anything from no one, I asked first. I would knock on their doors and ask, "Ma'am, do you need help with the dishes because I need money to buy food for me and my family." Some people said yes

and other people would say no. So when I came to America, it was easier because I was so used to asking people if they needed help with anything with their house.

When I did find a job, my first job in Texas was in a nursing home. I worked mostly in the kitchen for my friends. I remember being there for 6-7 months and then they changed me for housekeeping. One of the people that worked in the nursing home told me that 2-3 people had quit housekeeping so they asked me to start doing housekeeping. This was my first job. I did find another opportunity to make more money. I forgot the company's name, but this was in a factory for Radio Shack stores. I made toys for kids in this company. I left Texas to come to Colorado and my first job was in a nursing home again and in the hospital.



You know it's funny because I never thought about being born here in America other than being born in Juarez. I never had a dream of coming to America so I never learned their language. First I did feel embarrassed talking in the English language because when I would go to stores, I would ask for help and I wouldn't understand them and they wouldn't understand me, so it was pretty bad. Now I don't feel embarrassed anymore because I feel like I don't care. I can talk how much I can from the American Language but my knuckle head self didn't want to learn the American Language. I remember the first time I started to speak the English language, people made fun of me and said, "You said this wrong and this is

the correct way to say this". That's how I got embarrassed at first, and then I got sad later because I would say, "Well, my first language is Spanish." I thought about revenge to the people that made fun of me, so when they did try to talk Spanish, I would say, "You said this wrong in my language and this is the correct way to say it." It was mean of me to say this but it was only to the people that made fun of me.

My brother all the time would tell me, "If you have a dream, do it, because life is too short." I couldn't chase my dreams because for me, my first priority was to make sure my house was clean. I had to work and go shop and cook food, buy clothes for my family and me, do stuff for my job, my husband's job, and my son's school. I put everyone's feelings first before mine, and eventually, I forgot myself. Now it's too late because I am too old to find a job and I don't have a good memory to remember anything for a job, like paperwork and all these things.

My journey was sad, I remember all the days and nights I spent crying because I left Juarez and my whole family. I do and don't regret it because I do wish my family came along, but what my brother had told me that I would be reminded as an immigrant is that I go to Texas. I didn't want that for my family. I didn't want to see them suffer more than they already did before. Juarez is such a beautiful city, and I am glad that my family didn't leave so that they could spend the rest of their lives living there.

I recall an African American lady coming up to me from my job one day and starting to say, "You're a wetback!" and all these things. I said, "Yes ma'am, I am a wetback from Mexico. I crossed the border." This was the only time I had an argument with somebody. All the time I would be called by her, "You're a wetback!" You know what I said back to her, I said, "You know what? Mexico was first, then the United States, so I never felt like a wetback." This was the only time I did have a serious fight or an argument. Ever since that argument I had with that lady, I

never cared to be different from America and their people because I am me, and I would never change myself for people that don't even treat me as one of them.

I would really like to come back to Juarez. It feels more like a 50/50 for staying here or staying in Juarez. I felt more safe in Juarez because, in my experience, there was less crime. Now that I am here in America, I feel less safe because their crime here has increased more than where I am from. The neighborhood I lived in back in Juarez was very quiet, nice, comfortable, and safe. So yes, I would prefer to live in Juarez more than in America. Also because I miss my mom. She is 93 years old and I want to visit her one last time.

The first time me and my husband started to date, I said, "I love you" and he never said it back. It's funny but still, he's a little knucklehead. I was sitting outside on the porch of my house, I was drinking a coca cola and eating a hamburger. My husband used to have a beautiful black car, he was so handsome and every woman wanted to date him. So I looked at myself and said, "No, there's no way he can date a woman like me. I'm too poor and ugly. He wouldn't look my way." He did look at me. Every woman he could think of, he looked at me. We were looking at each other and I said, "*Hola!*" Apparently he liked that *hola*.

I remember me and my husband were walking to a park in Mexico. I was wearing shorts, sandals, and a beautiful red blouse. I wore these things because it was very hot. He was wearing jeans, a shirt, and shoes. It was nothing big and fancy so it was just something we would wear in our daily lives. It was a Sunday before Valentine's Day and he brought me a balloon and chocolates. I saw these gifts and I told him, "Aw! Thank you, I love you!", Of course in *Spanish*. This is funny how I remember one of these parts. I did say to him, "You love me?" "Yea," "You think I look nice in this red blouse?" "Yea," "Do you think I look good?" "Yea." This part made me laugh. I said "Do you think I look fat," "No?!"

One day, we were driving in the car and he finally said, "I love you." Ever since that confession, I don't ever remember him calling me beautiful or even saying "I love you." I mean he was nice to me and was not mean and hurtful to me, so I think he showed his love through his actions. I never actually had been told, "I love you" except from my husband a few times. My mom and my dad never said, "I love you" to me or even hugged or kissed me to tell me how much they loved me. My grandma did, she hugged, kissed me, and told me how much she adored and loved me. She would always say to me, "I love you baby" or "You look so beautiful today mija!" So for me, if your papo never said he loved me, I'd say it's okay because I would hear that mostly from my grandma and I would always remember how much she loves me.

My husband introduced me to his family. We were at a carnival, in the church. My husband's mom, she was in the church. He said to her, "Hey mom, this is my girlfriend," and I remember she said, "hm..." and gave me a stanky look. I said, "Whatever" and now I don't care.

In December, 1971, he proposed to me outside of the store. I was buying gum and he came up to me and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I was buying gum, do you want one," He said, "Yea why not". Then he took my hand and said, "Okay then, let's go." He then proposed to me. He never said, "Let's have a big wedding," or anything like that. We never planned to have a big wedding because his family hates me. I mean we did have a wedding in a church, but I never wore a big dress nor did he wear a suit.

When I married him, I married him in the courts. We did have our wedding in a church, but we first got married in the courts. I remember we couldn't really marry in Mexico because my husband was born in California, so the Mexican court was like, "No, you can't have a wedding because you were born in California, you need papers and stuff and blah blah blah," So we moved to Texas and we got married there. The church, wedding, everything was in Texas so we could be engaged. When we got married through the courts, my first dress was a

cream colored dress. The first dress wasn't a big dress. The day that we got married in the church, I wore another dress. This dress was a yellow dress. I'd say both dresses were beautiful. He was Catholic so we got married in the church. I already had my kids with me when I got married.

I drank like crazy at the wedding because it was only the second time in my life I drank. So I drank, danced like crazy with my friends, and sang like crazy with my friends. I definitely had fun on my wedding day. You know when you get married, you go to the salon, get your hair done, all this stuff. No, not for me. I only put the radio on, drank beers, and ate *carne asada*. It was very nice, I liked it.

I always dreamt of having 5 or 6 kids. Back in my house in Juarez, I had a very big family. More brothers and sisters means more happiness. This is why I dreamt of having 5 or 6 kids because of my family. Life back then with my kids, the things that I needed to buy, started to cost way too much money. Baby things were too much money for me because I was just poor and didn't have money. I didn't want to stress about money, kids, schools, all this stuff. So I said, "3 kids is enough." I really wished that I could have provided more clothes for my family. I wanted to find a great job and help my family with anything they needed the most. That never happened to me, I never found the right job.

On March 31, 1973, I had my first kid. It was cold, not freezing cold, it was definitely cold and it was raining. It was when Ricardo was born. When I gave birth to my first son Ricardo, I think my happiest memory was when he first talked. For my second son, Juan, I think my second happiest memory was when he first started to walk. For my third son, my third happiest memory was when he first started to crawl. All of this made me so happy because I love when kids do all of these things, but when they crawl, I find it more adorable than walking and talking.

My kids were good and bad. It was between a 50/50 to raise my kids. Easy because I was young and I

could control my kids. I didn't let my kids get the best of me because I was very hard and strict on them. I never gave them a lot of free chances because of how they acted. When my kids never listened, I would discipline them. The thing is, I still loved them. Our whole family was a 50/50 between fun and not fun. We were a normal family if you call it. We weren't very happy but we also weren't very sad. So maybe we can call ourselves a normal family.

Sometimes my family would make me feel tired from not helping around the house. I was the only one in the house that would clean, cook, and go to work. I would complain but not all the time. **I did love my family but I felt like I was mostly a person that cleans for a family.** Job and family were the toughest challenges I had coming to America.

No matter how much I do for my family, no matter how much I'll feel tired, I will keep fighting for my kids' rights because when I was in Texas with all my three sons, I took my sons to school and they didn't want my kids because we all were immigrants. I tried and tried and fought with them with my words. It seemed to never work. I went up to my husband and said, "I need to leave for Mexico because my kids need to go to school. They need education. I don't want them to grow up and be dumb as me. So I need to go back to Mexico because the schools here in America don't want my kids." He then told me and said, "You know what? I am an American Citizen, I will put my kids and my wife's papers to show that they did immigrate. I would tell the school, "You need to accept who they are and where they came from." I was on the news because I opened a door for more immigrant kids to go to school.

I recall when my first son went to the Marines. That was the first time I have ever felt depression. My third son Fernando also left for the military. It was very bad for me because I worried so much that I was suffering horribly from depression. Then when Rick came back from the Marines, he came back sick. I got even more depressed because it

was my son and I felt so bad for him that it affected me and my mental health. I was never over my depression for my sick son. I still feel this sadness in me because my son is still sick and I still feel horribly bad for him because he never deserved this.

Many times, I cry because I don't want to stay here and I want to go back to Mexico, especially when my kids were sick and I had to take them to the hospital. I was lonely because my husband would be working or he would be out with his friends and not be by my side. You would say I practically raised my kids by myself. It was hard for me because at the time I didn't understand the American language. I have or own a car and I would have to ask people for a ride to a place. It was a very hard life when I came here at first because, as I told you so many times, I didn't understand the language so I was very lost. I try, and try, and try and never depend on somebody else. That is how I became independent. I am proud of myself for never depending on people.

I don't miss anything really from my childhood. All the time I tell my grandkids how much I love them. They are my babies and all the time I want to take them to Juarez, all the time. Maybe even we all can walk the areas and go to where I grew up. We can go to the park, the movies in Juarez, the churches, and the school. The school I went to is still there, maybe we can visit and I can show them around if my memory is good enough to remember. I would love to show my grandkids to my friends that I still have a connection with. I bet they would love them.

To immigrants, may America welcome you, but it won't get any easier from here. I suggest you find a good job and help you and your family to find a home, food, and everything that you need to survive.

story told by: Jael