

Who tells your story?

Something I wish people knew about immigrants is that many immigrants risk their lives coming here. A lot of people don't realize that immigrants risk everything when they come to America.

My name is Clemente Ramirez. My name was given to me by the calendar. This is because back in the day, on the day that you were born, that's how they would name you. And on the calendar, November 23rd came up as Clemente, then my last name is Ramirez. I was born on a ranch in Tlacotes, Ojo Caliente, Zacatecas, Mexico. There were only around 800 people there, so everyone knew each other.

While we were growing up, a lot of the time we had to plant our own food. Beans, corn, squash, chile, tomatoes, everything. On the farm we had animals, chicken, pigs, goats, and that's how we survived. I had to take care of the animals. At midnight when we couldn't find them, we would have to go and look for them. I was only around seven or eight, so I would have to go to the mountains and find them. If we couldn't find them, our dad would get mad so we had to find them. Back in the day I had to take care of the house because I was the oldest one, and my dad would be in California or Texas working. They used to pay him 50 Cents a bushel of tomatoes. So I had to take care of the house, I had to go get firewood.



There were no stoves back then, so we used firewood to cook and sell. We would use the money from the firewood to buy soap because we were really poor. Having all of those responsibilities affected me because I didn't have a childhood because my dad was in the United States while there was a war going on in Vietnam, and I had to take care of the house.

The house that we lived in was a little adobe house. We would go to school around 20 miles from the house. Everyday we had to either ride a bicycle or walk. I never missed a day of school. We would have to walk in hot weather, rain, and it used to rain a lot back then so it was a challenge.

Sometimes we had to cross rivers to get to school. In school, I was really good at math and good at science. I was really good at school all around, and I also had really good grades. I really enjoyed when I got good grades so I didn't have a hard time with any of the teachers. I played a lot of baseball growing up. We never had time to play though. We had to grow our own food, find the animals, feed them, and by that time it was late already, so we had to go to sleep and get ready to go to school. We really only had time to play baseball on the weekends. At the time it was the only sport we had, so that's what we played in our free time if we had any.

I had 9 siblings, but the youngest girl, Jiovana, died at around 18-20 because of lupus. My brother Transito, was almost a year younger than me, so we both had to take care of the house. He's the one that helped me with the animals, and then we had to go plant the beans, corn and all of that, so he was a lot of help to me. As for my other brothers, they were just kids, and the girls would follow us and they were the ones that made lunch for us. I never had any problems living with them. But when I left I didn't get to grow up with them, so I hardly know them because I didn't get to spend any time with them because I was here in America at such a young age. I don't know too much about my

parents either because I never spent time with them growing up. The biggest challenge I faced living in Mexico was probably having to go harvest the corn and beans. I didn't want to get up at 3-4 in the morning because I was just a kid.

I was 13 when I left Mexico. I was always ready to leave because of all the work I had to do. I found out I was leaving for America when some relatives of my mom from here went over to Mexico and that's how they found me. They needed somebody to work in America. I never really thought about what America was going to be like before I left. All I knew was that I was going to need papers. When I was coming to America, I was here on a stolen passport, and once that passport expired, this guy had to return my passport to El Paso, and that's how I was able to get into America. The trip took about three days. We had to go to Guadalajara and then come back and cross the border. It was pretty easy.

I was really worried about leaving my brother behind because we grew up together and did everything together. So when I left it was just him in Mexico and me in America, and I was worried that he was gonna have to do most of the work by himself.

When I got to America, I liked it because it was really nice and different. But I also didn't like it because I used to live in the basement in the laundry room, and I used to sleep in a little Army cot with one little window. I grew up in Five Points and back then, that was the "ghetto." The cops never wanted to even go into that neighborhood because of the people that lived there. I used to live with these people called the Cisneros. I used to call them Grandma and Grandpa, and they were like my aunts and uncles. They were my 5th generation relatives.

Once I got here, I had to work and go to school, so I had no time to play over here either. That's when I turned into a bad kid. I had to work for my food and clothes and stuff like that. They never paid me, they just wanted me to work for free. So

sometimes I didn't have enough money to buy things, so I had to steal them. I would steal things like jeans, shoes, and shirts. It was easier back then because I would just put them into my clothes and nobody would see because there were no cameras. I felt good about it because at the end of the day I was getting new clothes that I needed. It was difficult not having anything in common with the people here because I had to learn English right away, because at school, nobody ever spoke Spanish, so I had to learn English all in a year. I used to go to Sacred Heart Catholic School. I went to high school at John F. Kennedy High School, and when they would bus us, that's where they would take us.

One of the first "jobs" I had in America was working as a *Coyote*. I used to work for this one guy, bringing people across the Rio Grande. I had to cross them over and get them all together over in Juarez. I had to bring them all the way over here, but I didn't get paid. The guy I worked for would just collect money and never pay me. I also worked at a grocery store, but I never got paid so I wasn't able to send any money to my siblings or my mom. So sometimes I had to resort to stealing money to be able to survive. I didn't really enjoy working at the grocery store because I had to clean the shelves, unload the food, sweep and mop the floors, so I didn't like all the work I had to do. I also worked as a truck driver, and that helped me really get used to the city.

Growing up, I didn't really face any racism because I grew up in a community with a lot of minorities, so we all kind of went through the same thing. It also felt nice to know that a lot of people in my community were able to relate to me.

I met my wife at the store that I used to work at. She used to live across the street from the store, so I would see her almost everyday. She had beautiful hair and a great personality. Sometimes I would have to steal money from the store to be able to take her out on dates. I ended up quitting my job at the store so I could be able to buy a house with her. We were together for around two years before

we went to the City Hall and got married. We ended up having three kids together. Marivel, Clemente, and Marina. We wanted four kids, but once we had the 3rd, we felt like three was enough. When my first daughter was born, everyone was really happy because she made the 5th generation of my wife's family, so everyone loved that. Coming home with her was such an exciting feeling because it always feels good to spend time with your kids, picking them up, holding them. I never liked seeing them cry though. If I had to describe my three kids, I would say that Marivel, the first born, was the feisty one. She was the one that we had to take everywhere. We used to take her fishing with us in this little basket because she was so small. My son, Clemente, is the one that's more calm and laid back. I used to send him and my daughter with each other to Mexico when they were younger so they could learn Spanish. My youngest daughter, Marina, was more of the shy and quiet one. She never really got any of the benefits that my first two did, because she was so young. At first, being a father was hard because I struggled a lot with having to take them to school and pick them up because we never had anyone to rely on to help us. We didn't have help because I never wanted anyone else watching our kids. We were really protective of them. So when I was at work, my wife was at home watching the kids. Then once they got older, nobody really had to watch them, so it didn't become that big of a worry.

One thing that was really important to me as a father was making sure that my kids would be able to grow up the way that they are now. They're really smart kids, so the only thing that mattered to me was making sure that they stayed on the right path. I also feel like it's important for my kids to really know who you do and don't consider your friends, because they can set you up for failure if you don't pay attention. One time I got in trouble with the police because somebody set me up and said that they wanted drugs, and I knew people that did and sold drugs, so I took them and it ended up being an undercover cop. But since I knew the guy, they assumed that I was doing the same thing that he

was. So I got arrested because I was blamed for all of that. I ended up having to go to jail for a while. I had to do stuff like that to survive though because I didn't have money or an education. That's why **I tell my kids that it's important for them to stay on the right track because I don't want them to go down the path that I did.**

I really enjoy Colorado because of the mountains. I really like the smell of fresh air, the sound of the water flowing, being able to go out there and camp with my family and the smell of cooking outside. I don't only enjoy being out there by myself though. **I like being out in the mountains spending time with my family and grandkids. It gives us all a time to go outside and spend time with each other, whether that's camping, fishing, making s'mores. Whatever it is, I would rather do it with my family.** Fishing is what I really enjoyed doing. I enjoy fishing because it's really relaxing and it gives me a sense of calmness. I also really enjoy eating the fish because getting fresh fish out of the water is a way better feeling than going to the store and getting fish because you get that rewarding feeling knowing that you caught this instead of going to a store to get some.



Something I feel like a lot of people that come into America think is that it's just gonna be easy. A lot of people assume that it's easy to just come in here and find a job and make money. Many people don't realize that it's gonna be hard to make a living when you get here and that there's gonna be struggles and setbacks. Coming here, I never really had an American dream because in Mexico, all I really knew was work, so I never really sat and thought about what I wanted to do when I got to America.

Something I wish people knew about immigrants is that many immigrants risk their lives coming here. A lot of people don't realize that immigrants risk everything when they come to America. It's rough because people have to come across the desert. My brother, for example, almost died in the desert on his way here because they got lost and were out of food and water. Some people get brought in tankers, and a lot of them die because they lose their oxygen. So that really just shows that I got lucky with being able to come on a visa because I don't know if I would've made it.

One thing I miss most about Mexico is the freedom that we had. We never really had to worry too much. It's hard to explain, but I just miss being free out there. Mexico is really different from America because in Mexico, you don't need a lot of money to survive and be happy. But here in America, you can work a lot and still be short on money sometimes. **I don't regret my decision to come to America because I made my life over here and I'm happy with my kids and grandchildren, and that's all that matters to me.** That's also one of the things I'm most proud of. **I'm really proud of my family, and the accomplishments that my kids have made here, because I know that it was never easy for them. So I'm very proud of them.**



story told by: Jiovani