

Who tells your story?

My name is Ely Galaviz, Eli anai is Hebrew for “my eyes are fixed on the lord.” I was born in *Tabasco*, Mexico, a small tropical town. When I was 11 I had to move to Hermosillo, Mexico. I lived there for six years and moved again to *Culiacán, Sinaloa*, Mexico and lived there for 2 to 3 years.

Tabasco was a small town which was good because I knew all my neighbors. We hung out, played outside, and played in the pool at my house. We would also climb trees and grab fruit because it was normal. We used to have trees with lemons, mangos, and oranges. I really enjoyed my house because it had a big yard in the back. In the back, my dad put some swings and it had a lot of trees. We had chickens, turkeys, bunnies, dogs, and a lot more animals. I just loved it. One of my favorite memories was when we spent time on the beach. I don't really like the beach, but the beach there had clean water.



I have three siblings. My older sister, Xiomara currently lives in Louisiana, and we are 8 years apart. My older brother, Isai, is an engineer in Culiacan, Mexico and we are 6 years apart. And finally Juan, my younger brother, is a plumber here in Denver Colorado. We are 6 years apart as well.

I connect more with my older sister Xiomara and my little brother Juan, but I love them all.

My parents were pastors, so we traveled a lot. We don't really take vacations, but my dad had to go to meetings with other pastors in other cities. We got to go with him, and one day we got to stay at Hilton hotel, which was really nice. We also got to meet people who were very famous. But I remember one time, when we were on one of those trips, they were trying to park in the street, and then my sister was looking with her head out of the window and she was giving my dad directions like “Yes, it's more back, straight, straight.” She would say things like “Yeah, ok, that's good, let's go.” I don't know what my brother was thinking, but he just started rolling up the window, but my sister's head was still there. She was like “Stop, Stop.

You're hurting my head!” He was not thinking at all, he was just in his own world. Then my mom heard my sister yelling and that's when my brother stopped. I think that was my favorite memory as a child.

My little brother was born when I was 6 years old. As a child, I remember my mom was always teaching us how to clean, put our toys away and not leave any clothes on the floor by separating them into clean and dirty. I remember she was teaching us that and I think I really liked helping my mom in cleaning the house. But I was still little, and she always said “No you're not supposed to be doing that, you're still too little.” I always tried to do the dishes and she wouldn't let me. My mom mentioned that I liked everything in order, cleaned, and sometimes I can be very extreme on those things. But I think she is the one who taught me to be like that. Ever since I was little I was very organized, even with my toys. I had specific toys in one area and other toys in another area. I think I just tried to be obedient and clean up my things because that's what I felt like I had to do.



I never wanted to leave. I finished high school in Mexico and wanted to go to college. My parents were separated and my mom couldn't help me financially, and because my dad was making more money than her. I asked him to help me and he did. He said I had to decide whether or not to stay and live with my mom or go with him. So I said whatever is affordable and better. I didn't really care, and I love to move and know other cities. In the end he decided to take me with him and we decided to study in *Juarez*, Mexico. But what I wanted to study would have taken me more years than it's supposed to. So I told him that it was a lot, and that I wasn't happy and not interested. He told me he had a friend in *El Paso* and was okay with me staying there. I wasn't interested in English but in the end I moved to El Paso, Texas.

I was concerned about leaving my home and going to a country where I didn't know the language. The only thing I was thinking about was how I didn't know or understand English. I was afraid that people wouldn't understand me. I was just worried because I didn't understand English. I always thought that everyone was born and raised in America with no mixed cultures. I was scared and concerned to leave my home, my family, my friends, everything.

I got on a plane to Monterrey, Mexico and took a bus from there to San Antonio, Texas and then stayed in El Paso, Texas. The scariest part was the bus ride. We had to stop and talk to American officers. I was nervous because I was by myself and some of the officers weren't very nice. I was always trying to stay calm and remember to be respectful and honest. The environment was just sad. I was waiting to talk to the immigration officers and at one point the officers didn't let some families in. They were crying on the phone calling their families. "I can't go, they didn't let me in." That made me even more scared because if they said I couldn't go, I couldn't do anything about it, but, go home.

I stopped at a gas station to get food and drinks but my first impression of the United States was the gas station's bathrooms. Normally public restrooms in Mexico have no water, it's just toilets, but I always thought the United States was clean. But I love that there was actually running water to wash my hands.

I visited to San Antonio, Texas. I was so happy to see my family, my niece and just to know more about San Antonio. I didn't really notice anything different because San Antonio looked just like Mexico because they have a lot of the same history from there. I didn't really think I made it to the United States because it looked so much like Mexico.

I never ended up going to college because I met my spouse, Osvaldo at my first job. My first job in America was helping lead bible study for kids at a church. My spouse was working there. I thought he was cute but I thought he was married or engaged. I thought that because in Mexico anyone who worked in the church had to be married. He wasn't.

Our first date was at a Cheesecake Factory. It was interesting but fun. We talked, we laughed. I just had so much fun. When we left it was pouring rain. He kept yelling at me to get in the car, but I loved it. I couldn't remember the last time I saw rain. I had so much fun!



I got married when I was 21 years old. I had my son Uriel when I was 23. Uriel is now 5 years old. He is a very smart and observant kid, he is bilingual. He is very social especially with the older kids he looks up to. He loves to dance and sing. He loves to encourage other kids to play with him when they feel left out in games. He just loves and enjoys life. Then my youngest son Haziel is 3 years old. I had him when I was 25 and he is a really happy kid. He hasn't fully figured out emotions, but normally he is super happy, but other times he is really mad. He loves to make new friends and encourage other kids. Every time he makes a new friend he is so excited. He always introduces me to them. He is a very happy and loving kid. I love them both very much! Me and Osvaldo **pray for my kids to be gentlemen, to love God and show the love of God, through their actions and decisions.** It's hard to be proud of myself but I am really proud of the family me and my husband created. I love the way that we care, love, and support each other and for the community around us.

Not all immigrants decide to move to another country because they are really struggling in their cities. Most people think that if you're an immigrant it's because you were struggling or because you didn't like your city. I know other

friends that moved to the United States, but it's not because they don't live well in Mexico or there is a lot of violence. They just like the United States.

As an immigrant I struggled with the language and the culture differences. There are some cities in San Antonio and El Paso that may have a little bit more Mexican culture. But it was still difficult to adapt because America doesn't do the same things that Mexico does. Sometimes it's still hard for me because of the language differences. One of the main things that really impacted my life is how America is very open to other people from other countries to be here and stay here but still bring parts of their cultures. I think they try to love other people from other countries and from other cultures because they have different varieties of food and activities. I think what really impacted me is that the United States really cares for other cultures.

As a little kid I always dreamed of owning my own house, which I got in Denver, Colorado. I don't have an American dream, but when I first came to this country, I only came to go to college and then go home. Which never ended up happening, I never went to college, I never moved back home, I stayed in America with my family.



story told by: Maeve