

# Who tells your story?

**The only way I can describe Mexico is “*bakuna matata*,” a place without worry.** The smell of mud and rain filled my nose. In *Las Canchas de Futbol*, there were cows and horses and the beauty of nature. I would always play there and joined a team, *Necaxa* and we got trained by someone who played for Necaxa.



I got my name from the bible, a name my abuela suggested to my parents, Joel. That's the name they gave me, but my full name is Joel Ramirez. Everyone in our town knew each other, but we mostly kept to ourselves. The person I really knew is my elder brother, Lalo. He and I would always spend time together. We would sometimes even sneak out of our house to visit our grandpa's house so he could tell us his stories. He would also give us *feagles*, a purple fruit that tasted as sweet and sour as a kiwi. We would come back without our mom knowing. My grandpa later on died when I was 8.

I don't remember much about him or his stories, but I remember loving each one.

My best friend's name was Farfan. Farfan would take me to *Las Luchas Libre* fights. He even taught me to fight. Me and my brother were walking around our neighborhood when one of our neighbors offered us pizza. It became my favorite food in Mexico. He made homemade pizza, with homemade cheese, pineapple and ketchup. I still haven't changed my mind about it, I still love it. I loved school. It was hard and fun. My favorite subjects were Geography and History because I liked learning about places and the history of those places. The place I loved learning about most was New York, which I've always wanted to see. One time we went on a field trip. We went to a museum, it was as if you combined the Children Museum and the Natural Science Museum! They had a movie theater as well, it was amazing!

The only thing that I disliked about school was the bullying. They would hit me, hide my backpack, and they would put gum in my hair. The gum wouldn't come off so I had to shave off my hair. When growing up I wanted to be one thing, I wanted to be a chef. When I was very young my mom would make my brother and I prepare the house before my mom and dad came back. My brother cleaned and I would cook, and ever since then I loved to cook. The thing I loved to cook was anything with *salsa verde*. It could be *carne con salsa verde* or even *pollo con salsa verde*. One day on my birthday I waited for my dad to come back from work. I waited and waited. I was awake almost until midnight, until I fell asleep and my dad came and kissed my forehead. Since that day during the weekends our dad would make my brother and I help him at work so we could spend time with him. When arriving we helped him make a house. We would call how many bricks we wanted and bring them inside so no robber would take them. They were extremely heavy. It took some time but we finished making the house. Then one day when I was 14 years old, we left Mexico to live a better quality life.

We moved to Colorado since we had family there. Nevertheless it was difficult and weird. We didn't speak English and it was very different from what I was comfortable with in Mexico. Everything was different. But it was all gonna be worth it if we could live a better quality life. **It would be WORTH IT.** Since we went to America, I got to see my parents more often. But of course it came with some downsides. I was still young and went to school in America. I didn't speak English, so my teacher gave me a dictionary, and said, "Teach yourself how to speak English." She didn't want to teach me. Fortunately I had a friend who helped me. His name was Ivan. He helped by translating what people told me. My experience with racism didn't end there. I went to a 7-ELEVEN with *mi primo*. He was darker than I was. He was brown and I was white. We went in and the cashier was also colored. He liked my *primo* and allowed him to buy stuff, but when I tried to buy something he wouldn't let me get anything, and was rude to me and only allowed my *primo* to get stuff.

After high school I had a few jobs. I worked in the convention center. I enjoyed it, there were a lot of things I could do. But the schedule was hectic. They would call me and tell me what to do. The schedule was random. I had to rely on the phone they gave me. When I was 21 I had my son. His name was Zander Ramirez Marban. He was named after his mom and I. When I first saw him I was emotional. Happy but also awkward. I'm no longer with his mom, but I still don't love him any less. Then I started working at a restaurant. A dream come true for the younger me. It was great but I also experienced racism at work as well. I got shamed by my people and called a "fake Mexican." I even got pulled over by a police officer. He pulled me out of my car in the rain and yelled at me, "Why don't you speak English!" I didn't understand him. Getting all wet. "***Para mí, me tocó todo.***" **(For me, I experienced everything.)**

A few years later, I was at a party, it was New years. When I met my soon to be wife, Griselda. I've met her before when I was 13 or 14. But this time it felt like I finally met her. I was teaching her how to

play cards when her mother said "You two look like a couple." So we pretended we were. Until her son (me) got jealous and tried to pull me away from her. I kept getting close to her, and her son would continue to pull me away. He eventually gave up. It was funny but annoying. Ever since that day I started hanging out with Griselda as "friends." I would call and text her. It didn't matter if she was busy or late. She always had the time to respond. She would pick me up from work and take me to my house. She always puts others above herself. That's when I realized she would always be there for me. I haven't met someone who was always there for me. More than everyone else. That's when I decided that I wanted to be in her life. So on Mother's day, I asked her if she wanted to be my girlfriend, and she said yes. So I took her out on our first official date. I took her to *el centro*. It was on a Wednesday and I knew a bunch of places since the restaurant I worked at was in *el centro*. I knew bars and restaurants. She was a little worried that some of the places wouldn't be open. I told her "It's fine, most places are still open." But she didn't believe me. The first place I took her to was closed. So I took her to different bars and restaurants. They were all closed, which had never happened to me before. So we had to go home since I failed her. But I was able to make up for it by taking her to other dates. To the restaurant I worked at, to the mountains to look at the beautiful stars, and other restaurants.

I then got a dog named Pumba. I love the movie "*The Lion King*" and Pumba always acts like a pig, so it just made sense. Everyday is a special day with him. He comforts me everyday, and acts like me. That's why I love him. Then a year later I went to the place I've always wanted to see when I was younger, New York. **I saw a lot of culture there, a place built by immigrants.** But then a virus happened. The restaurant I worked at was shut down due to the virus. I had lost a dream, but I had to provide for my family. I worked in construction. Everyday I had to wake up at 4 in the morning. It wasn't my dream but I had to. For my sons and girlfriend. After a while the virus calmed down a bit.

I was able to marry my girlfriend on August 24, 2021. *Fue el día más feliz de nuestras vidas.* It was the happiest day of our lives.

I was still working in the same place, for my family. I then got a dog for my wife since I had one, and so Pumba wouldn't be lonely. Her name is Gigi. I love her craziness and her loyalty, the opposite of Pumba, like Yin and Yang. Pumba would trade you for a hamburger, and Gigi would always choose you. Since my experiences in America, I now see America as home because of my kids since they were born here. It would be weird for them if they went to Mexico, but in Mexico I still see it as weird if I ever went back. But now I see America as home because of my family.



**I think the American Dream is to lose your worth, because in America it's harder because there is a lot of racism and other problems and we should try to fix those problems if we want to live the American Dream.**

Luckily I have lived the way I have wanted to live. I have no regrets. When we have regrets we're stuck in the past, so we have to keep moving forward.

**Lastly, my wish is for people who say, "keep immigrants out" to know about the children coming here for a better life. I wish they knew why immigrants are immigrants.**

story told by: Dylan