

Who tells your story?

I was born in Mexico, Yucatan. The town was called San Jose Petuch. It's Mayan. My life in Mexico was awesome. I learned a lot of stuff. I grew up to be a free spirited kid, running in the streets, running in the wilderness. I learned a lot from my ancestry. I was a student and I worked in the ranch with my grandpa taking care of the cows. There were a lot of deer, a lot of fish, a lot of octopus lobsters, badgers, monkeys, all kinds of animals and eagles. I was raised in the ocean. I worked as a fisherman. I also worked as a tour guide taking tourist people to see flamingos and alligators.



I was showing the tourists the way of life, how we see the environment, how we see nature. I explained to them that it's very important to take care of it and maintain it. The tourists that I guided were respectful and they were happy to see a place that was different from their homes. They wanted to explore. They wanted to eat the food. They wanted to try everything. The tourists litter about 40% because they come and eat and drink, but now there is a good way to implement more cleaning. We explained that we had to keep the town clean, so now everywhere in the town there are trash cans. Sometimes they get full quickly since there are a lot of people. But hopefully they can keep it up, especially since this month is spring break. Chichen Itza was a bit close to fodic a bit. There were a lot of people from all over the world.

The people in Mexico are very welcoming, nice. We walk on the street. We don't drive cars to go place to place and we eat healthy food. Everybody is aware that we're kinda low on money, but everybody's happy. The people treat me nice. Some are bad like any place, but it's a small town so we know each other. Some people treated me with respect and some people didn't treat me with respect, **but I didn't care. I was a little kid.** Since our town was a tourist town, we had to show that we are capable of having tourists over in the town. Every month we would go out and clean the town or else you'll be fined 25 pesos.

In Mexico you feel very free because you can make your own schedule. You don't have to work eight hours a day. You can work three hours and you're good. Like I said, over there, we don't work for businessmen, we work for ourselves. As long as we take care of our stuff, the vegetables and fruit. We also go hunting so that's more food on the table. I went a couple times with my grandpa as a kid. It was awesome. I went hunting one time at night. My grandpa explained to me a lot of tricks about hunting. He killed a deer one night and I had to carry it. It was kinda a rainy night, like it was sprinkling, and a lot of animals were out at night. We saw a bunch of animals like snakes. We only took our bicycles there, but that night was a cool night for me because I never forgot that night.



Other than hunting I played a lot of sports, day and night, and I never got tired. I would go help my grandpa, come back, and I'd go to school. I'd come back from school and play at night. We played in the school too, so all day we played sports.

We all had fiestas and we would travel far and wide to go there. The fiestas were amazing. Mexico was a cultural place and part of the culture is that you party a lot. That's just part of our culture. Everyone's invited, and we love to party. It's part of our DNA. Typically I just walked around with my friend, fooled around a little bit, went to see the *cruidas*, which is bullfighting, and then at night we went to play at the stand like a *canivan*, but stayed there the whole seven days. This is traditional. They do seven day fiestas for St. Jose. We go play around and eat food, and at night they play the *bailes* which is live music. St. Jose is their town saint, and each town has their own saint.

My parents are not here in the world. They're in heaven now and watching over my family.

They sadly passed away. They both got sick at a young age after I was born. My dad, I don't remember anything about him. I was just a little kid looking at pictures of my past. He was there when I turned one year old, but my mom was cool and was happy and was a hard worker. Before my mom got sick she married someone who became my stepdad, but he was abusive to me and my mom. His family was hurting my mom a lot more than me, and they were an obstacle in my life and that's all I will say about him. The people who took care of me after my mom passed were my grandparents, my cousins, and my aunts. If I can ever meet my dad I will say "Hey Dad, let's go have a beer" and talk and catch up. I wish I could meet my mom again. I would say "I love you so much and I miss you, Mom," and give her a big hug.

I was 16 years old when I traveled here. The real reason I came to America was kind of stupid. I just wanted to come here to see the people that were here before me and to make a little bit of money to start a business in Mexico. I was planning to stay

for two years, but life didn't go as planned and I stayed here. I knew what I had to do to get here in America, *and that was to cross the border*. The reason why is because I grew up without any parents. I grew up kind of a rebel. I wasn't scared of anything and I needed something new in my life. That's why I think I needed something new and to learn new things.

I got to the border by a van full of 15 people. We were squished inside the van, but we started to walk after being dropped off. I walked for nine hours and all I had were a couple of cookies and two gallons of water. At the end I had almost a gallon and a half of water left when I made it here because it was quick. If I had gotten lost I would have needed it, but I kept up with the group. The trip that stayed in my mind was that I saw a bunch of kids in the middle of the night in the desert, and I didn't know if they were being trafficked. I just saw the kids with five guys and two women, and they were like waiting, and they couldn't communicate with their pick up rides, and they were just there and it was cold.

When I crossed the border I was worried about my grandparents because I was helping out a lot in the house, so I was worried that they would have to work twice as hard when I was gone. I was risking my life, so I became worried that I would never see them again. I already knew that I would never see my grandma again because she was old and a little sick at the time I left. My grandpa is still alive, but my grandma isn't.

I didn't think anything about what the United States was like. That didn't cross my mind. I just knew it was going to be different from where I'm from. A lot bigger, a lot more people, and dangerous. My first thought was just to get there, never how it would be or what it would be like. I already knew it was going to be different. I already had pictures because I had family here before. When I came to America I felt like I was an outcast, like nobody knew me. I didn't know how to behave. It was just different. I walked in the streets for a while, and in a way it felt good that

nobody knew me. I didn't care for anything. It was kind of cool in the beginning, because I didn't know them and they didn't know me. It was good for a bit.

I got robbed a couple times riding the bus and the people are like, "stupid kids." They see you walking by yourself, follow you, and talk trash about you, and I didn't know how to use money at the time. The bus at that time was 75 cents and I put more in the bus and I didn't know. One time a guy told me, "Hey, it's only 75 cents. Why are you putting in 2 dollars?" **When I was getting robbed I felt angry, and sometimes it was my own fault.** They took my money and sometimes they put a knife to my neck and took my money, but it taught me that not everybody is your friend and not to trust a lot of people. I was surprised how everyone was here. **Everyone here that I meet is an egotistical person, so I just take it easy. That's the thing. I can't control what they say and think, and I just have boundaries and try to take care of myself.**

I was living by myself in an apartment at age 17, so I never lived on the street. My thought was, "*I have two hands, two feet, eyes, ears and a mind and I can earn money no matter what I have to do.*" My first job was as a sushi chef, and I got the job quickly because I got connections. On the first day, I prepared a lot of food, cleaned, and cooked. It was really hard, and I didn't know how to use a knife, so I was cutting my fingers left and right. I didn't know anything about Japanese food so it was challenging, but like I said, I have a brain and hands and feet. I wasn't afraid. My trip was for two years, but I started hanging out with the wrong crowd, and I got involved with dumb stuff, and after two years I didn't have enough money to go back. That's why I stayed longer. I was immature. I was very young and I didn't know what I was doing, and I didn't have a voice in my life to tell me what was right or wrong and no one cared. I did what I have done and I don't regret it because it let me have the life that I'm living now.

When I came here to America I became a man after all my obstacles and challenges. I don't care where I am, I just need to become a man with boundaries and respect. What comes around goes around in everyone's life. I changed myself to have peace in my life so the people I love and care for can be safe but America didn't change anything for me. I just became a man, a person that I'll give my time to important problems. I don't just go and mess around with dudes or anything else I value my time with the right crowd.

When I met my wife she was 16 and I was 18. I met her here in Denver, right here at our house. She was nice. When we had our first kid we felt tired all the time because we were young and had a kid, so when we were trying to get comfortable it was a challenge and it was stressful. It was one of the hardest things because people don't know you are just trying to live a good and peaceful life, but it's hard. **I even bought her a car immediately when I could afford and I told her I don't want her to take the bus or any public transportation and want her to drive it to keep her and my *hija e hijo* safe.**



I was 22 and my wife was 19 when we had our first child. We didn't plan to have a kid, it just happened and my princess was born. I found out by my future wife sending me pictures of the pregnancy test telling me **"Do you want to be involved, yes or no?" I said yes.**

When my daughter was born it was amazing, like holding a part of me in my hands. When my daughter was able to do activities with us the first thing we did was go for walks. We went on bicycle rides when she was a kid and went to the park, ate ice cream, and a lot of other things. When we played together we just played with a ball and sometimes kicked the ball to try to teach her how to walk. My daughter grew taller than me and her mom. I just hope she works hard just like her dad. We have a lot of expectations of her.

A few years later we had a son. My son is a smart kid. We are just trying to teach him responsibility. We play games, watch movies, play sports, and we try to do a mix of outdoor and indoor activities. I was happy just to see my kids healthy, eating, breathing and *alive*. I was really happy and thankful. When they were born here I felt that they would get a good education, and I was happy because my kids can get a piece of the whole world because a lot of people travel here from different places. I feel like that should be one thing America can be proud of. A lot of people from different places can get along and a lot of people that get here are smart and competitive, and that is one thing my kids should know: you're gonna be in a competitive country. My daughter is now thirteen and my son is nine.

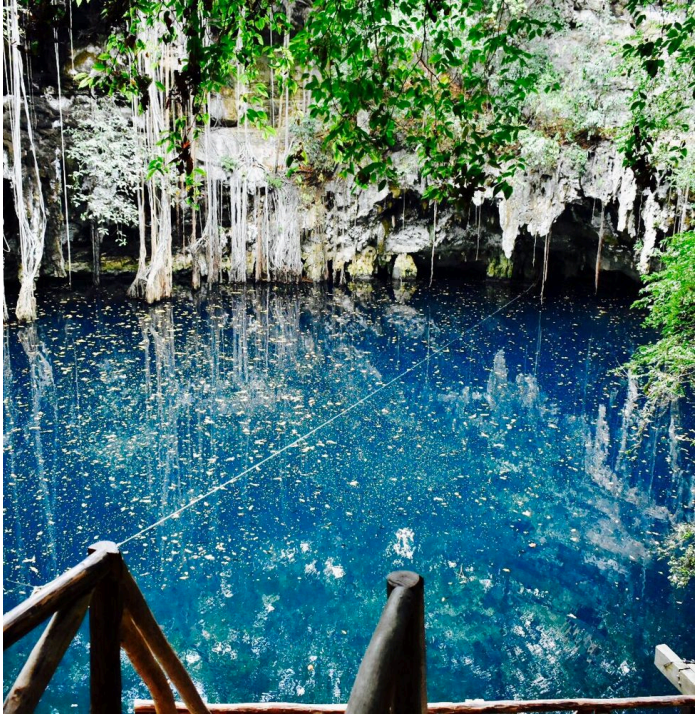
I will try to lead my kids down the right path because my mistakes won't always lead to a happy ending like mine. So I will try to talk to them and let them know from what is right and wrong and to stay away from danger and it is easy to show them now these days because it's easy to show them what you mean you can go on the internet and show them the dangers of this world and if you go in stores you will see pictures of kids missing wherever you go people make money by selling kids and women. **I won't let that happen to my wife and kids. The bad thing about this is that now I have a weakness in my back and they are my kid and all the time till this day my kids are my safe spot and if something happens to them my life is ruined and how the person who did it will yell until I lose my voice.**

Even though I think it's good to live in America, I love my culture. It's a privilege to get to know a little bit of it and the freedom I had in Mexico. I will never change it for something, even walking with no shoes on, no shirt, no one criticizing me. I was working, doing stuff, and no one told me anything. It was cool. The thing here that reminds me of my home is the smell, like every time it rains or when they cut the grass. It reminds me of Mexico, my home. I just wished that immigrants new that it's a trap you coming here planing not planning to have a family but you planing anything or just come here to make money and when it's time to go it will be worth it but If you come here and if **you start hanging out with the wrong crowd and start wasting your money you're going to stay longer cuz all your goals are done you have to restart all over again.** For the people who were born and living in America we are good people and were not criminals and just coming here to earn a little bit more money and to have a better life for us and the people we care for.

I think my family will be proud of me because I made it back with two kids and a wife, but I did things that I'm not proud of shortly after my son was born. My family won't be happy about it either. When I was 25 to 26 years old, I was drinking and driving. Which got me with the DUI, and it put a lot of stress on my family. They took me to jail, asked me a bunch of questions, and I didn't see my family for a month. I got involved with a lot of classes, a lot of money by paying lawyers and donating money to a lot of donations that go against drunk driving. My kids were sad that I was gone for a really long time. My son was a baby and he didn't recognize me at first until he was staring at me. Coming home he was like "I know this guy." My daughter got a little bit sick. She didn't want to eat. She was sad that I wasn't around so she got depressed. She was depressed and she knew what was happening in her life. She was four to five years old. It was hard on her because she needed her dad. I felt sad and disappointed in myself because that's not how a dad wants to see his kids. You want to give them the best life and feel happy.

I almost got deported. It was hard to change their minds that I am a good person and that I can stay with my wife and kids.

Now my wife and I are done with problems in immigration.



Now I have an American dream. My American dream was to get married and to have a family and I have achieved it. Now I'm going for Citizenship. I still think my life will be the same, still poor and working until retirement. For the people that came here that are single and start a family they will have the same dream, but for me, I didn't have one, but that happened, and I'm happy with it. I'm happy with my wife. She cared, but she had other things in her life she had to care about like school. **I will say work and controlling my kids so they will behave isn't easy but each mind is their own world and all I'm trying to put in my kids head is to never forget where they come from and how they are and to be respectful if someone disrespect them just walk away.** Now we have a nice and normal life, and we are a happy family.

story told by: Olivia