

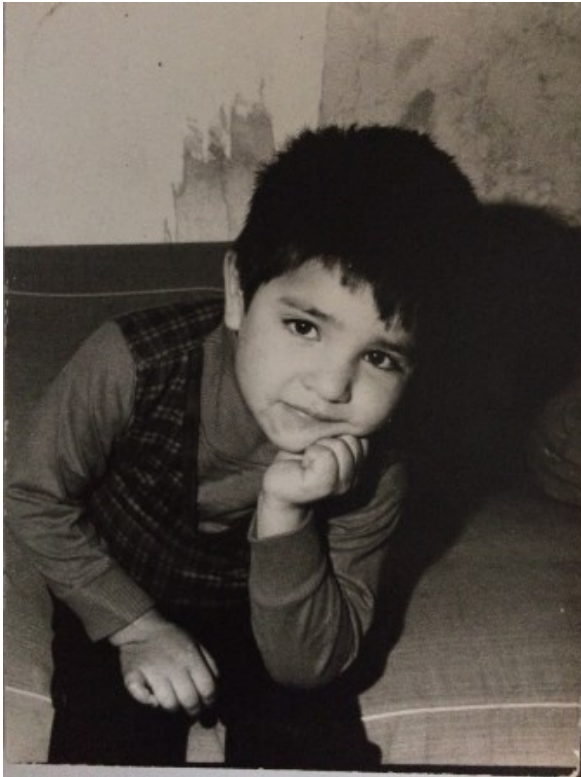
La Tierra De Oportunidad

by Jesse Flores

Sept. 15, 2016

Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to recognize the contributions and important presence of Hispanic and Latino Americans to the United States and a time to celebrate our rich heritage and culture. To me, Hispanic Heritage Month is also a personal time to reflect on my humble beginnings and why I appreciate the life I live as an American Citizen.

This is my story.



My birth name is Jesus Manuel Flores-Retana, I am a 1.5 Generation Mexican-American born in Cd. Juarez, Mexico, (a border city south of El Paso, Texas) along with 12 brothers and sisters. Today I am known as Jesse Flores a proud Naturalized American citizen, married for 30 years to my high school sweetheart Laura, from Baltimore Maryland. We have two adult children, Nick a 28 year old graduate of Humboldt State University and Alexa 26 college student, we also have two dogs, two vehicles and a mortgage – Yes I am living the American Dream.

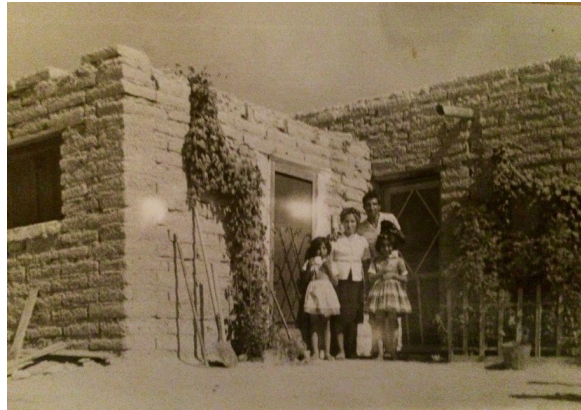
Like so many other Americans and immigrants from around the world, I am enjoying what this country has to offer and making the best of the

opportunities - relishing in a typical American lifestyle. It's become very easy for me to blend in with my neighbors, co-workers and friends. However, my early beginnings weren't so common to the typical American family.

(Photo at left--me at age 5)

My memory takes me back to 1970, I was 5 years old, at the time we were a family of 13 siblings (ages 3 to 15), mom & dad and 2 grandparents from my father's side. We were living in the "lomas" (hills) of Cd. Juarez, Mexico in a 1 bedroom 800 s.f. adobe home, with minimal electricity (a few lights and receptacles), no running water and a small wood stove for cooking and heating. My grandparents shared the sole bedroom and the rest of the family shared the studio like open living room/kitchen space. The toilet was an outhouse shack and bathing was a challenging process of heating water in an open fire pit outside and carrying it into a makeshift semi-private bath tub in the corner of the kitchen (temporary curtains would go up for privacy).

The water source was delivered weekly by water trucks onto a 55 gallon barrel standing outside at the corner of the front yard and paid for upon delivery. Hard to believe 17 people could survive with only 50+/- gallons of water a week. The fact of the matter it was sometimes less than 50 gallons and varied week to week, depending on how much we were able to afford at the time of delivery. I recall several occasions tagging along with older brothers or sisters to ask neighbors if we could borrow a bucket of water.



(photo at right: Flores family adobe home. Mom, Dad and two sisters)

At early age my grandmother used to tell us; “think about others before you think about yourself” and I truly believe is a notion engraved in the Mexican culture, we never went without. Neighbors were always willing to help even when it cut them short. We had very little of the basic necessities but we were happy.

My father was a self-employed free-lance photographer (the makeshift bath area also doubled as a darkroom). He traveled (by foot) primarily to schools to offer his services, early version of picture day. His wages were pretty minimal and therefore we were expected to pitch in. Like any normal kids, we attended school and played the only difference (I later found out) we worked hard. Depending on the season we all had various daily chores, some gathered firewood, older siblings went rabbit hunting (with a sling shot) others trekked 3-4 miles daily to milk a relative’s cow. I typically tagged along with several older brothers and sisters combing the neighborhoods for aluminum cans and glass bottles. That was just a normal everyday thing for us to do - no complaints, it was the norm. I didn’t know it at the time but life was hard and only getting harder – something had to change.

Living in the “lomas” of Cd. Juarez close to the US border, at night we could see the bright lights of El Paso, Texas and “La Tierra De Oportunidad” (The land of opportunity) the United States of America. To us, it was mystical magical place. Occasionally mom or dad would catch one of us staring to the north to the bright lights of El Paso, and they would remind us of a promise that one day we would live in that beautiful bright city and United States.



(photo at left: Ten of 13 Flores kids upon first arriving in US)

I'm happy to say my parents kept their promise, it wasn't easy (that's another story) but we did it! They lived long enough to see all 13 of their children become productive Naturalized American Citizens and realize the American Dream. All of my brothers and sisters are married and share a story similar to mine, thanks to the fact that we all know where we came from and truly appreciate and will never take for granted what this great country has to offer.



Flores Family: Me, Laura (Wife), Nick (son) and Alexa (Daughter)

