

David's Faith in the American Dream

by Natasha Munguia

David is the father of my brand new brother-in-law. Currently he is retired and lives at home with his wife and two dogs, and this year has become a great grandfather.

David was born in Mexico City, Mexico in 1955 into a single mother household with his older sisters. Life in Mexico was difficult, even after they moved to Guadalajara. His mother didn't have a husband to help provide for the family and things eventually got so difficult that two of his sisters were sent to live with his oldest sister, because his mother couldn't provide for them. David had to overcome polio as a child and it led him to have a physical disability. David's mother eventually became involved with a man who had no desire to have children, so she took David and put him into an orphanage.

He remained there for over two years, he would visit his mother periodically and one day he said he cried so hard he guessed that they decided to let him stay. At the age of nine his mother sent him to work to learn different trades, where he often wasn't paid. When his mother was diagnosed with cancer, two of his sisters left to the U.S. because they got jobs as housekeepers for wealthy families. When he turned 15 his mother lost the battle to cancer, he was still attending school and working two jobs. He was barely making ends meet, had no living relatives in Guadalajara and his sisters decided that he should come to the U.S. to live with them.

David saw no future in Mexico and was in need of a family. Before he left Mexico he remembers that there was a movement trying to overthrow the Mexican government. He recalls that the leader of the movement wanted to implement a more socialist government, some argued similar to Cuba, but he was killed, and the movement died out. He recalls big companies such as Macys, Coca Cola, and Pepsi that were owned by the U.S. had caused resentment, because they were profiting off of Mexican labor. The U.S. was able to do this because in 1965 the Mexican government implemented the Maquiladora Program, created for employment opportunities and to attract foreign investment. The Maquiladora Program allowed U.S. companies to use cheaper labor in Mexico to reduce manufacturing costs which were plausible due to the "807 Assembly Provision" which exempts the U.S. from paying taxes (Hing, 2010).

With poverty, loss of family, increasing clash of political ideologies, Mexico's declining safety, and the beginning of Mexico's economic downturn David felt he had no other choice than to leave for the U.S. His sisters offered to pay for his crossing with the requirement that he bring along his nephews whom were left in Guadalajara. David was 17 years old, responsible for the well-being of his nephews and didn't know much about the U.S. An individual who he calls the Boss dropped them off in Tijuana, Mexico and there he met with a "coyote". A coyote is a person who is hired to help people immigrate into a country illegally. The coyote trained him about what to say and do when crossing. When he attempted to walk through the border, the woman passed through easily but he was stopped. Border officials asked for his identification, but he didn't understand much English so he told them that the coyote was his mother. The officials explained that he was too old to be without identification, so they returned to Mexico. When they returned they got into a taxi. He remembers being so nervous that the coyote gave him a pill to calm his nerves. Because he was so sleep-deprived, for fear of losing his nephews, the pill caused him to fall asleep for hours, until he awoke in Los Angeles.

East LA at that time was predominantly Mexican and Spanish speaking. It was rather comforting to David because it felt just like Mexico. David wasn't permitted to go outside much his first six months residing in the U.S., mostly because of fear of deportation. His sister was able to get him a job at a bakery since that was the last trade he was working in. After some time David was laid off to make the position available for the owner's incoming relative.

David's sister took him to a photography shop so that he could learn the trade and then got into contact with a big printing shop. The owner of the shop didn't need anyone but still hired him. The owner paid him \$25 a week and gave him a bus pass. The printing industry wasn't easy for him to learn, but he enjoyed the challenge. It took him two years to learn the craft well working as a pressman. David was able to obtain lots of jobs through this industry and worked within a printing company for 22 years. He recalls that he had to prove himself to employers because they didn't believe his skills and qualifications because of his physical disability but he managed to out produce the bigger and stronger employees already working there. Although he often had to prove himself worthy of getting any position, he says he has never felt discriminated against, and in fact has felt respected.

David recognized the importance of learning English. He felt the need to ensure communication between him and his bosses. He felt that since he was able to speak English his employers never required him to show proof of status. David considers himself very lucky because although he remained an illegal immigrant for over 17 years, he became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1989 due to the Immigration Reform and Control Act which granted amnesty to many undocumented immigrants. He is unsure if other people view him as American but he views himself as American. He regularly votes and encourages his children to partake in the government process.

David always worked two jobs in order to provide for his wife and children. Throughout their lives together they have resided in Highland Park, a city near Los Angeles. He still feels deeply connected to Mexico, remains proud of his roots and always tries to communicate the importance of being Mexican to his children. When David looks at his life, he doesn't believe that he has achieved the American Dream. He doesn't believe that he has made it, but he does recognize that this country gave him a chance to learn and succeed:

“[I'm] thinking only in this country you can do things like that, you know, if you work hard, if you really put your mind to it, I think you can do anything, if you're not being lazy or if you want to get better yourself, I think that there is always a chance in this country, you know in Mexico I think no matter what I would have done, I wouldn't be able to do not even a quarter of what I did here. And I do love this country and I appreciate it so much, for the opportunities that they give, that everybody has...”

References

Hing, B. O. (2010). *Ethical borders: NAFTA, globalization, and Mexican migration*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press.

Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, Pub. L. 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359, codified as amended at 8 U.S.C. § 1101.