

Topic: My Mother's story of how she came to live in the United States.

Abstract: My mother was born in Mexico City in 1954. She grew up in a strict Catholic Convent in the heart of the city and was trained to be a perfectionist. My mother came from a wealthy family; my grandfather was a very successful entrepreneur. My mother's family betrayed my grandfather and no other choice but to move to the United States. My mother suffered much hardship as being shunned as different even among other Hispanics. My mother strived to become something greater and honed her skills in athletics and academics.

Key Words: Family, Successful, Shock, betrayal, determined.

From rags to riches?...Not exactly.

I fell back into my father's black-leather reclining chair and pulled out my notebook as I sat across from my mother. I listened intently, pen at the ready, as my mother wove the legend of how she went from having her life carry on as normal, to having it drastically altered in the blink of an eye.

The legend begins with the newly created life in Mexico City of 1954, my grandmother and grandfather were so happy to have their first child, though my mother tells me my grandfather was a tad disappointed, as he wanted a son as the first born, not a girl. My mother was a mix of Mexican, Greek and French blood decent; my grandmother having the Mexican side, and my grandfather, a Texas raised man, held the other half. My grandfather owned his own company that was very successful and was a master craftsman and entrepreneur. My grandmother was a housewife who was very caring and well mannered. Skill and talent, along with a golden heart and mind; these traits poured over into my mother.

My mother then later became the eldest of the twelve total children. She described that she did her best to look after each and every one of them, like a secondary mother, caring and helping them with whatever they needed. My aunts and uncles were a "rowdy" bunch my

mother tells me, this is not very surprising since my family has a history of being very competitive, especially with one another.

My mother would have watched over most of my aunts and uncles more if she did not have to attend a very private school in the city. She was enrolled in a girls only catholic convent where she spent most of her days growing up. “The school” she tells me, “was amazing, it was like walking into a...a...a fortress”. My mother explained the schematics of the many parts to this one massive two story structure. She says that the front’s entrance had massive wooden doors like a castle would have, the large doors had smaller doors that opened inward to different passageways. She went on saying that she, along with the rest of the girls, attended classes on the bottom level where the rooms surrounded the heart of the school; a massive yard filled with trees and grass. The upper levels were almost never explored by students, for those were the offices and quarters of the nuns along with the “Mother Superior”. My mother and the rest of the girls lived in a smaller separate building where the dormitories were. “Now that was interesting, living there” my mother interrupted herself in her buildings lecture. My mother cracked a small chuckle as she stared off remembering those days long past. She continued on telling me that the dorms were segregated in regards to social status. There were “group dorms” and “personal dorms”. Personal dorms belonged to the members of families who made significant contributions to the school, and the grouped housed those who did not; my mother had her own room.

The studies and ethics within the convent were rigorous and rarely ever lenient. My mother was forced to study for hours and hours on end until her other responsibilities need attending then a strict curfew. One of the major responsibilities she held was setting up each individual table for ten, with fine china and silver-ware. “It was like the size of the cafeteria

in Harry Potter!” she exclaimed. “Only...it wasn’t as tall and open”. The dining hall was large enough to hold four hundred students. Every student had very strict routines throughout their day that taught them unwavering discipline. My mother explained that every morning the nuns would inspect their rooms for cleanliness and should something be seen not to their liking they were struck or had more responsibilities added onto their schedules. Not only the chores and self-discipline, the academic portion was “as good as boot camp, for your mind” my mother puts it. They practiced penmanship, should something be construed as imperfect, their hands were struck with a ruler; should they not have a perfect score on an assignment, it was as good as failing to the instructor. My mother had evolved into a perfectionist.

After spending every grueling day within the walls of the convent, the students were allowed to leave them only on certain times of the year; summer and holidays. Every time my mother was released from the school, she would always look forward to seeing the rest of the family. My mother had once lived in a single story *hacienda*, which was essentially a large private estate that was approximately twenty acres in size. My mother got to see her brothers and sisters again and more importantly, my grandparents. She got to spend time riding her horses and taking care of the rest of the animals that the ranch-hands looked after. To celebrate the times the whole family can be together, my mother’s family from all branches along their friends, threw large fiestas and would have a seemingly never ending chain of food. Having a dining table “as long as a football field” that allowed everyone to feast and exchange stories and laughter. Life was good for my mother and her family, for she was happy to be brought up with the deeply embedded Mexican tradition sense of importance of family. She would believe in this, for a few more years at least.

One term during my mother's schooling, it was approaching the end of May and summer was within grasp. Until the fateful day that my grandfather appeared in the convent and suddenly demanded to have my mother pulled out of school all together; and took her home. "I was so scared" my mom stated. "I had no idea what was going on or why he did that". That is until they arrived at the family estate and my grandfather had all of my aunts and uncles and my grandmother and he said "pack everything you can carry, we're leaving, right now..." My mother told me how panicked she was and how she did her best to try and calm her siblings and assured them that it would be alright even though she didn't know for certain either. Soon after they were packed, they set off for the U.S./Mexico border.

My grandfather had arranged all of the proper paperwork and passports to enable his family to cross. "He didn't tell us what was happening still" my mother said to me. She said that after they crossed the border they met with one of my grandfather's friends and followed them to their home in Tyler, Texas. Soon after my mother's family had arrived, my grandfather sat everyone down and explained what and why this had happened.

My mother carried resentment and pain in her voice as she explained the incident. Since my grandfather was very successful in Mexico he had the opportunity to socialize with political and higher classed individuals. One of his contacts within the police department had informed my grandfather to leave the country as soon as possible, for they were now after him. It had turned out that some of the family members that worked within the company had embezzled large sums of money and framed my grandfather for it. My grandfather had tried to look into it further, but the deeper he dug, the deeper he saw the betrayal from his own family, until they grew nervous enough to conspire against him. My mother, had learned firsthand what the term Treachery meant, and her heart hardened.

For the next three years my mother and her family lived in my grandfather's friend's garage-turned multi room home. My grandfather started another smaller company that dealt with landscaping, which proved to be moderately successful since he had experience while living in his hometown of Brownsville, Texas. Over time my grandfather had earned enough funds to move the family out of his friend's garage and bought a small home within the town. For a time things to have picked up and then a personal choice arose in front of my mother that would define her identity. Since my mother had lived within the U.S. for enough time and she had recently turned eighteen, she had to choose her citizenship; either become a citizen of Mexico, or the United States. She chose the latter, and chose to acculturate herself heavily, laying down the memories of her past life, leaving them behind.

A few more years past then another life-changing event occurred. My grandfather and grandmother had made very good friends with another couple who had a small family of their own. The family told my grandfather of the wonderful new opportunities he had heard of in the state of California, and that living there was all around much more pleasant than living where my mother's family was residing. After much persuasion, my grandfather made the decision to sell their home in Tyler, and move into a larger home with his friend and his family. With the combined funds from selling both their homes, both families packed up and headed for San Jose, California.

My mother was not very happy at first with the move, but San Jose and its "big-city" ways won her over, as she was accustomed to it back in Mexico. Attending one of the many high schools that San Jose has to offer, my mother's life only grew more difficult. The high school she attended was racially dominated by mostly the white community, and she was constantly made fun of since she could not speak a word of English. Doing her best to adapt

herself she applied herself into one of her deepest passions, sports. My mother loved to play tennis, volleyball, football, soccer, did field & track as well as body building. All the while she never faltered in her academics, she remained as vigilant and dedicated as she was back in the convent in Mexico City. My mother was still being picked on verbally and at times physically that she was very different, even amongst the Latino/a (s) in the school. Not being able to say a response to these actions frustrated my mother to no end until she bought her own copy of the English-Spanish dictionary and began to read it. My mother learned English fluently within three months time. No one dared cross the wrong side of my mother's path, else they desired a damaged psyche and possibly body. My mother had gotten a job at the local Flea Market to add onto her busy schedule. My mother's spirit to achieve higher and push herself to her limits only increased as she grew older, until she reached junior year in high school and graduated a year early. My mother had transformed herself into a calculator and exercising machine, a tough young woman who did not grasp the concept of "good enough".

She continued to work at the local Flea Market, enjoying every moment of being young and ahead of the curve. Things seemed to be as good as they could get for my mother that is until she met a young man her age who also worked at the Market. My father reached out his hand and smiled at my mother and introduced himself. The rest is history. My mother is still one of the most appreciative, dedicated, devoted, caring, direct, toughest, brilliant people I know or ever will know. My father isn't very dissimilar from her either. My father has the most gentle of hearts, the most calm and tactful minds, incredibly intelligent, and by far the most articulate people you can meet. My mother, my father, and I aren't the wealthiest of the

social classes, but we live in gratitude every day for what we have. And I am proud to call myself their son, a son who holds the most valuable gem within him, the true love of family.