

Topic: My two sided culture

Abstract: I am a Mexican born and raised in the United States. I consider myself a Mexican American who practices traditions and customs from both countries. My parents are Mexicans born in Mexico that immigrated to the United States. They helped pass on the Mexican culture that I am part of. As I got older I stopped practicing some of the Mexican tradition. I changed religions from Catholicism to Christianity. My Spanish is no longer as fluent as it use to be and I sometimes don't feel accepted as a Mexican in the place where both my grandparents and parents were born.

Key Words: Mexican American life, parents immigrated, change in religion, culture, change in fluency with Spanish over the years.

Being both Mexican and American

I realize that people have a difficult time believing me when I tell them who I am. I mention to them that I am full Mexican and they seemed surprised like they have just seen a ghost. I consider myself a Mexican American since I have a Mexican background but I was born in the America. My mom and dad were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States when they were young. They were brought up to think that America was a better place to raise a child. My Grandparents lived in Mexico most of their lives. Only my mother's parents decided to immigrate to America and I always notice the different feeling I have when I am with each of them.

Having my parents being born in another country has given me the opportunity to be able to compare lives of two separate countries. People like me who were born in this country feel they are also part of Mexico even though they haven't lived there at all. The reason for this is that parents like mine have brought up their children with culture and traditions from Mexico. I

would have to say that over the years my mother became more Americanized and many of her practices would be like those of Caucasians. She has been in the United States most of her life and she tells me she would never go back. Her style of cooking, the cloths she wears, and even the way she speaks has changed over the years. This sometimes created confusion among my parents because my father still holds onto his traditions from back home. He misses his homeland and says he will never forget where he came from. He never had the intention to change his lifestyle and to this day he continues to be the proud Mexican he is.

It can be somewhat confusing when parents can't come to a consensus on which way to raise their children. I have seen both parts of the Mexican American culture that I am part of and till this day I have not chosen one over the other. I like to think of myself of being both Mexican and American because it makes life easier. When I go places I seem to be seen differently when I present myself as an American. I get more respect and I am talked to as if I were someone with higher social status. It amazes me that to this day I find traces of racism. I try to find a better word but inequality among different nationalities still exists. I also feel being a Mexican born in the United States makes it more difficult in other parts of the world, especially Mexico. When I am over there I feel that I am not accepted as a Mexican. People look at me differently and I feel I do not own much respect over there. There was one time where I was in a small city south of Mexico. It was obvious that I did not belong because everyone was dark skinned and most of the people were shorter than me. I felt like I was being judged the whole time and I felt extremely uncomfortable.

Living in different cities in California has helped understand that people change based on where they live. I was born in San Jose and lived there for five years. From there I moved to

Salinas where I could remember most of my childhood memories. In Salinas I noticed there were many people who were proud of their Mexican nationality. I would see people driving their vehicles with the Mexican flag hanging on their rear window or families that had Mexican music so loud playing on their cars that the entire block could hear. Living in that city has taught me the core values of what it is to be a Mexican. I am happy I was able to experience part of being my Nationality without living in Mexico. The next place I would move to was Gilroy and things were really different for me here. At the beginning people around me saw me as being different. It was eighth grade when I moved and I instantly was well known around the school. People saw that I talked and acted differently from the rest of the school. I thought it would be a bad thing that I was so much different but people actually were interested to meet someone that wasn't like everyone else. As time went by I noticed myself adapting to the norms of the city. I began to fit in like the rest of the people. Before moving to Gilroy I did not see myself talking to people of other Nationalities very much. It's not that I didn't like them but I was uncomfortable around them because I had so little contact with them when I was young. Growing up in Gilroy has given me the opportunity to socialize with people of all races and now it comes naturally to me.

One thing that does not come as naturally to me is speaking the Spanish language. When I began speaking as a child Spanish was my primary language. Both my parents would speak fluent Spanish to each other and I quickly picked up on it. My first word was "mas" which meant I want more. I never heard English spoken at home since my father felt uncomfortable speaking English. His English was very choppy at the time, and he always preferred speaking to my mother in Spanish. I wasn't fully introduced to the English language until I began attending school. It was difficult to pick up on everything kids were saying at the time. I sometimes felt

that people were speaking badly about me and there was not possible way I could know for a fact if they were. I tried very hard to listen attentively to my teachers and I picked up the language fairly quickly. Once I got good at it I no longer spoke Spanish to my parents. They would speak to me in Spanish and I would rely in English. My father had no problem with this since he understood everything I was saying. As I entered middle school I began losing my Spanish. I remember having trouble pronouncing several words and at times could not find the words I needed to complete my sentences. I asked to be put in Spanish classes and I have been taking them ever since. I learned to read and write in the proper ways and I also increased my Spanish vocabulary over the years. I still chose to practice my Spanish since I know it will only benefit me in the future.

My future is extremely important to me and I know that the only way guarantee a good one in through God. I am a strong believer and have been since I was about fifteen. I was introduced to religion by my parents but their change in practices made them feel they lost part of their culture. My parents were Catholics when they first started seeing each other and even got married through a Catholic church. They would attend occasionally but my mom never connected with it. It wasn't until a life changing experience that my mom would be welcomed to a Christian church for the first time. She was instantly intrigued by the information the church provided and asked my father to join her in what my mother would call a transformation in her life. Personally, I am glad my parents made the switch. I feel awkward in Catholic churches because I am not familiar with them anymore. I am certain that if my grandparents from either my mother's or father's side where to hear of this they would be disappointed and sad.

Both my father's grandparents and mother's grandparents were full blooded Mexicans. My mother's parents came to the United States and had difficult lives trying to provide for their eight children. In America, they continued to have a traditional Mexican marriage. My grandpa would work long shifts in the fields while my grandma stayed home and tend to the all her children and her house. My mother recalls my grandmother's attempt to work outside the house was a complete disaster as her house became a chaos and the household did not function smoothly. Soon after, my grandfather made my grandma quit, and everything went back to its normality. My fraternal grandparents are very traditional as well, but the difference is that they call Mexico home. They live there, and I visit about every couple of years. I can't help it to notice that they are different from the Mexicans in the United States. For instance, I feel reluctant to speak Spanish as I know that they will begin to mock me for speaking so proper or not having the correct words to say. I try not to favor either of my grandparents but I seem to have a better connection with the ones from America. I am able to relate to them more often and they are able to understand my Americanized Spanish.

I feel a real honor calling myself a Mexican American. I love everything about my culture and the way I was brought up. I thank my family for always being there for me and more importantly, thank God for helping me get through all of life's obstacles. I see myself continuing to practice both sides of the Mexican American culture for the rest of my life and the life of the future generations that I will be part of. I know I will never forget my true identity because once one allows this to happen, a person does not know their true selves.

