

Topic: My cultural experiences growing up.

Abstract: My outlook about life has remained positive even though I understood that I grew up in a poor family. We might have been economically distressed but we were rich with culture, and love. My mother played a major role helping me learn of my heritage and supporting me in my interests for American pastimes. Through my mother's creative ideas to make money, I was able to establish a well rounded personality that satisfies both my rooted Mexicana, and my life as a U.S citizen.

Keywords: Mexican Folkloric Dance, parental love and support, Fiestas vs. American parties, living in a poor economic status, and creative fundraising,

Life, as I know it.

Growing up, I never realized that being afraid of la chancla and el cucuy were unique and significant to identify as a Chicano. That the delight of having frijoles and arroz as a side dish with dinner was apart of who I am. As a young girl I figured all mothers would blast rancheras while they were cooking and cleaning, and that there was no other place to hold a party other than a backyard. The negative generalizations that constantly oppress Mexicans were averted from my childhood through my parents love and support. Although I grew up poor and life was a constant struggle for my parents they did what they could to provide a roof over my head, food on the table and the strength that it is being a Mexican in the U.S.

I am proud to say that within my family deep rooted culture has been passed down through generations of mothers teaching sons and daughters traditional Mexican folkloric dance. At the age of two, I was out performing at street festivals, and eclectic events as a part of Folklorico Juvenile, a dance group formed with my mothers' passion to teach the community of

our Mexican culture. Folklorico Juvenile de Hollister is how we were announced and we would walk out in single filed pairs take our formation and perform traditional dances from all around Mexico. This group of about ten became a major part of my childhood. I never realized it at the time but this was my mothers' profession. Teaching dances as here mother taught her, was now what paid the bills. Our practices were held in any location with a large concrete area, because my mother could not afford a studio fee. Our financial situation did not bring down my mothers focus to keep the roots alive. My grandmother educated my mother with her wisdom and enthusiasm for folklorico dance, and my mother passed these teachings to her children, as well as many others in the San Benito County. Looking back, I am very thankful and proud to have had this experience. I gained valuable knowledge of various dances from different parts of Mexico, and from this I became proud of my heritage in a way that I cannot explain. It is simply spiritually moving and will always be a major part of who I am.

Dancing will remain my escape and connection to my Mexicana soul as a part of my family, but the "American" sports that I was fortunate enough to explore also play a role in the women I am today. The ability to enjoy my childhood to the fullest was through the excellent job my parents did to keep the hardships of the family out of focus from my innocent view. They were always very supportive of my interests in school and sports. This allowed me to assimilate with the American state of mind because I made many friends along the way. I can remember all the fun that I had at each Hollister Heat Softball game, and the fun didn't stop there. My teammates invited me to many birthday parties and girls nights. This was when I began to make cultural distinctions. I had been to birthday parties before but none like these that had an agenda of what games were going to be played and what time the cake was going to be cut. The fiestas I went to were all held in back yards with a table committed to a delicious

buffet of Mexican cuisine. All the men would circle the barbeque pit drinking beer, and have an occasional shot of tequila in celebration for no apparent reason. The women or comadres at the fiesta also gathered together eating desserts and café con leche while discussing the latest news on anyone and everyone. All while the sounds of trumpets, guitars, and accordions blare on the stereo, with songs of la vida, and our beautiful tierra, Mexico. Whereas at my teammates birthday party, I was greeted with a smile by her mother, father and my teammate herself, thanking me for coming out, and offering me food and a light snack, and the atmosphere remained mellow. Not only was their party etiquette new to me but I found their home extravagant and I was amazed that they had a pool that was actually built into the ground. Her home was so much nicer and bigger than any house I had ever been to. I was in awe, taking it all in. Her bedroom itself was as big as our kitchen, and she had the princess bed I had always dreamed of with a see through sham hanging down over the bed from the ceiling. When it came time for my mother to pick me up in our 1980 Doge Caravan, I will say I was a bit embarrassed at our beat up old van for the first time, but I hopped in and could not wait to tell mama of my new experience.

“Ma, you wouldn’t believe how high the ceilings are in their home! A giant could live in there!” I exclaimed. “And their pool Ma, the agua is crystal clear and looks so refreshing! And you know what!? Her mom is planning to have a pool party in the summer and I am invited!!”

“Wow! Mijita that’s great! I am glad you enjoyed yourself, now we must hurry home because I left the frijoles cooking on the stove.”

“Yeah Ma, I had a blast! I am so lucky to have a friend like her.”

Retrospectively I am proud of myself for not letting this experience bring me down by making me feel unfortunate for not having a home and a life like the one of my teammate. Instead I felt lucky to have her in my life to share her luxuries.

High school was another point in my life that stands out with minor embarrassment due to my family's economic situation. My sophomore year in high school I tried out for the junior varsity cheer squad, and I became apart of a new team. Making the cheerleading squad was a positive experience. I was now officially a Baler and had to obtain a GPA of 2.0 or higher which was no obstacle for me but only pushed me to do better education wise. I had a new sense of pride and sisterhood that I had never felt before. I was used to my Mexicana pride, which came through dancing, but now as a cheerleader it was the same concept but of Anglo decent. Many may not be aware but, cheerleading is an expensive sport. Money was an issue but, my mother made it possible by doing what she knows best; cooking exquisite Mexican food. This is where the minor embarrassment that I was referring to comes in. The whole commitment as a Baler Cheerleader added up to about \$2,000 dollars for the year. This fee covered transportation to games, the uniforms, and a summer cheer camp, all mandatory to cheer. My mother and I attended the meeting together where this information was made known to all girls who had made the team. I remember turning to my mother with a face of defeat because I understood that we did not have that kind of money, and Baler cheer was out of the question. To my surprise my mother had already devised a plan to fundraise for me by cooking enchilada dinners and selling them to anyone and everyone. This included many of my teammate's mothers, who became my mother's frequent buyers. The Anglo women fell in love with my mothers cooking and told all their friends. At practice I found myself embarrassed by the comments I would get walking into the door about how good my mothers enchiladas were

last night. I was not embarrassed at her ability cook superb Mexican platters, but that my mother was doing this for the obvious reason that we were poor. I quickly recovered by making witty remarks that now all the girls can understand how I acquired my curvaceous body. I began to support my mother and her entrepreneurship by helping her cook and deliver orders. This experience provided for priceless memories in the kitchen between my mother and me. And it was because of her undying creative spirit and optimism I was able to cheer my sophomore, junior and senior year of high school. Enchiladas not only funded cheerleading but also a leadership camp I was invited to when I was elected for the high schools Associated Student Body. I owe all this to my mother.

These experiences have helped me identify with both my Mexican heritage and the American dream. My mother has proven to me that no dreams are to far from reach, and as long as you do all that you can, you can accomplish many things. My mother still teaches the art of Mexican dance, down to her great grandchild, the youngest member of our family an enthused 1 year old who has started practicing her zapatiado. Mama also finds her way into local elementary schools to teach children a folkloric dance to perform for their parents. She has fulfilled her dream to pass on traditions to her loved ones plus many more within the community. I am proud to say that I still know the Harabe Tapatio, and I am lucky enough to be attending Gavilan College where this semester I have been privileged to relive the joy of learning and performing new variations of Mexican dance.