

Topic: My father's life and the circumstances that led my family to migrate into California

Abstract: I was born in México but have lived in Gilroy most of my life. In Mexico, my parents went from rags to riches through hard work. When their business was no longer providing money, they fell into debt. My father had to make the tough choice of leaving us behind and migrating into California. A year later we followed after him. Now we have been living here for over twenty years.

Key Words: poverty, wealth, childhood, Mexico, California, family, childhood, alcoholism, school, work, future, debt, migrating.

Why my family migrated to California

I have seen Gilroy evolve from dirt fields into large shopping centers. This town has also seen me grow from a girl into now a young woman. I was born in México but because of some circumstances, at the age of five my family migrated into California. When I tell people that I was born in Puerto Vallarta they always comment on how beautiful this place is. I agree because it is a gorgeous place with the beautiful sandy beaches and magnificent sunsets. I always enjoy vacationing and visiting my relatives there. What could possibly make someone move from paradise to Gilroy? Like many people that have migrated into the states, my family's reasons for migrating here was to seek a better future.

My father was born into a wealthy family but lived in poverty. At a young age he was to help his parent's upkeep their farm. At his young age he worked and had no time to enjoy his childhood like most kids his age did. He was the third youngest son of fifteen children. His parents were cattle ranchers they owned the largest portions of land in their town. His family was considered to be one of the wealthiest families in town. The lifestyle my dad and his siblings lived did not reflect this because my grandfather was very stingy. He did not pay his sons wages for working the land. He would feed them and on special and rare occasions he would buy them a new pair of shoes and a change of clothing. Not only was he stingy, he was also an alcoholic and would spend the majority of his money drinking in "la cantina". My

father loved school and he was very good at math. Unfortunately he did not make it through high school because his father did not encourage it.

My grandfather was a man of few words and showed very few emotions. He was very strict with his children and wife. My father wanted to continue his education but my grandfather did not allow it. My

2

father saw it unjust to work the land without pay. If he continued to do so he would have no hope for a better future. For this reason it was no surprise that by the age of fifteen my father moved to a nearby fishing village where his sister had moved with her husband. My father stayed with his sister and started working as a fisherman. He enjoyed fishing and for once he was making money for himself. He continued on with his fishing and diving career for a few years. Eventually his brother-in-law offered him a job at the town's hotel as an accountant. He took the job and he started making more money for doing something he enjoyed; working with numbers.

Things were looking up for my father, not only did he have a well-paying job but he had met a girl that made him fall madly in love. This girl would eventually become my mother. She was fresh out of college and she took a job at the hotel that my father was currently working at. They both worked at the office and so their friendship began there. They built a relationship as friends and soon after, they started dating. One day after a year of their relationship my father literally stole my mother away from her parents. My mother's parents did not agree on their relationship so my parents, in rebellion, ran away to start a life together. They took a one week honeymoon and finally came back to town. Life continued as it was; same town, same jobs, but only this time they were living together.

My parents would not marry until several years later when my mother's grandmother's dying wish was for my mother to marry. By this time my parents had four children including myself. They had a simple church wedding with a simple reception. My family was very poor because once the children came, my mother was to become a stay at home mother and my father was to be the breadwinner. My

father had to feed all the family and also our dog Linda. Despite our poverty, we never went hungry. My father was an excellent fisherman and my mother was an excellent cook. Together they raised our family the best they could. We lived in a one bedroom hut made from “telapa” or “palm tree”. There were some hard times specially when my father got laid off during the slow season. My mother took it upon herself

3

to make ends meet by baking cakes. She had taken a cake baking and decorating class in college and she was sure she could make money selling cakes. She started by selling them by the slice to the townspeople and also the tourists. Her cakes were so tasty that soon they became so popular that she would have cake orders for weddings and quinceaneras.

My parents were honest hardworking people and soon their honesty and integrity would not go unnoticed. Little did my parents know that their luck would change for the better. My father made friends with a man that was looking for honest business partners. This man thought my parents were the perfect candidates for the job. Together with this man my parents were the first people to open the one and only souvenir shop in town. They went from making ends meet with the few pesos to making American dollars. My parents went from rags to riches in a matter of months. Our home went from a one bedroom hut made from palm tree to a two floor 3 bedroom home made from concrete. My parents hired a house keeper/ babysitter for us so that they could work as a team to make double the profit.

The souvenir business did so well that my father decided to open to different businesses in town. He took one of his brothers as his business partner. They opened a “cantina” and a grocery store. My mother was against opening the cantina but my father was sure he could make it work. Because my father was busy working the souvenir shop with my mother he would leave the “cantineras” or “female bartenders”, in charge. His bad judgment led him to lose money because the cantineras were stealing money and liquor from the place.

My father and his brother lost their investment in the cantina but they were determined to make the grocery store work. My mother was always business savvy and so when my father decided to leave my mother's business advisements out of the grocery store and so his business failed again. Not a year later people in the community were asking for groceries with the option to pay later. My father lost a lot of money with people not paying their tabs, partly because the economy was not going to well and also

4

because they knew my father was a kind man and would not do something drastic to collect the money owed. Debt was accumulated by my father and all the profit made by the souvenir shop would go towards paying the debt accumulated through the grocery store. When the store started to lose money my father's business partner withdrew his partnership from the store. My father fell into a debt far greater than he could ever imagine. It was a substantial amount that if left unchecked would grow even larger.

The souvenir shop was no longer making enough to keep paying the grocery store debt and because by this time other people in the town had the idea of opened their own souvenir shop and so my parent's souvenir shop had fewer sales. Eventually the souvenir shop was making little profit and so it went out of business. Having no other form of income, my father made one of the toughest decisions of his life; to leave his family in México and risk his life by crossing the border into the states. He had heard that people made a really good living here. In hopes of finding a job that would pay well enough to pay his debt, he ventured off to cross the border. It took one try to cross the border and when he got here, a very good friend of his welcomed him into his home located in LA. Weeks had gone by and my father had not found a job. He finally got a job offer by a family member that was working in Gilroy. My father's first job was as a dishwasher in a restaurant.

To make ends meet, my mother went back to baking her famous cakes. We kept communication with my father through tape recordings that we would mail back and forth. In his messages he would always say how much he missed us and wished we were all reunited soon. It was not an easy time for my

parents, they had never been away from each other for so long and they missed each other like crazy. After a year of working in the states my father was anxious to see his family again. He enjoyed the lifestyle that the states had to offer. He knew that going back to México would make my family happy but he thought about our future and how much more benefits we would have if we were to come to the states instead.

5

My mother knew that to see my father again she had to cross the border with her four children. Luckily she had the help of her brother who also made the choice to cross the border with us. She was afraid, but the thought of reuniting with my father made her grow courage. Because I was young I don't remember crossing the border. What I do remember is how happy we all were when we finally got to see my father again. We arrived at Los Angeles California. We were all so excited to see my father and we were even more excited when my father's friend treated the whole family to a trip to the happiest place on earth, Disneyland.

From Los Angeles we took a long drive to Gilroy. We have now been living here for over twenty years. Life in Gilroy is all I've ever known and I plan on one day raising a family of my own in this town. Today my siblings and I are all independent adults. You can say we are living the "American Dream" because we are homeowners with high paying jobs and best of all we are American citizens which allows us to have all the privileges granted by the USA.

My parents always longed to go back to the place they once knew as home, so when we all became independent they decided to go back to Mexico. I am very grateful to my parents for making the sacrifices they have made for us to have a better future. Today they travel back and forth between Mexico and California enjoying both the family in Mexico and us here.