

Topic: My life experience growing up as a pocha

Abstract: As a young girl I grew up speaking Spanish until I started going to Elementary School. But it never seemed to be an issue since my father spoke mostly Spanish and my mother spoke English. Actually I think we were the only ones on my mom's side of the family that spoke Spanish. It wasn't until I got older that it seemed to bother my Dad's side of the family. Not just the Chicano Spanish but also our "American ways", they called us the Pochos of the family.

Keywords: Living conditions, Mexican families, American families, being proud to be pocha.

Growing up Pocha

When I was young I thought it was a carino (nickname) given by my family. It wasn't until I got older and realized it was their way of saying I was different than them because my mom was born in California. My dad was the only one from his family that married an Americana. My mom would tell me stories about my grandparents and how they would try to send my dad back to Mexico, although my mom was already pregnant with my older brother just so that he could marry a Mexicana de Mexico. I thank God my dad never listened otherwise I would have never been born.

I felt very privileged as a young girl growing up in a family where I had the opportunity to either act Mexican or Pocha. I guess Gloria Anzaldua was right when she said "We created a language in which we can connect our identity to". Since I wasn't able to speak Spanish properly because I wasn't from Mexico or English properly since I

wasn't an Anglo. I was a Pocha and proud of it. As I started to grow up I came to realize that I wasn't the only one that grew up in a family where one parent was from a foreign country and the other from the U.S. It just seemed to be a problem in my family.

Especially with my grandfather who was a very proud person.

As a Pocha I was ridiculed a lot because I would switch from English to Spanish in the same sentences but I didn't do it intentionally it was just my way of saying I was different because I lived in a household where two languages were spoken. I have to admit I still do it today with my own kids even though I wish I would have spoken more Spanish to them because now days I see a true integration taking place. I see the Anglo wanting to speak Spanish. Because more and more Mexicans are starting to get jobs that some 20 years ago they would have never been able to because they were illegal immigrants.

I remember as a young girl seeing my dad work the fields in San Juan Bautista and Hollister, coming home full of mud and smelling like tomatoes and Garlic. Even I would go out there sometimes, because my dad would say the harder you work the more money you make. But I have to admit I hated working in the apricots. But it was the Mexicana in me that made it a part of my life. And I thank God I had the opportunity to experience the life of a true Mexican-my father. But on the other side of the fence was my mom and she showed me the American Independent woman ways. Which were so different from the Mexican women? She showed me that we all have voices and deserve to be heard. And today I am able to communicate with whom I choose to communicate with. So you see today I am proud to be a pocha it is who I am.

I grew up privileged, with a dad that worked hard as a farm worker in order to feed his family and a mother that was able to work in the U.S. and contribute to the family. I loved seeing my dad in the UFW (United Farm Workers) marches from Watsonville to Hollister. Except for the one time when someone opened fire on them while Cesar Chavez was giving a speech. But my dad was a very proud person and worked hard and he never spoke badly about anyone especially behind their backs and I loved my dad for making me feel proud of who I was even though everybody would call me a pocha.

Don't get me wrong I love my family, but believing every girl should have a Quincinera (15 birthday celebration) isn't exactly something I believe in. Don't get me wrong there are some curanderas (cures) I believe in such as the olive oil for constipation, or the potatoes on the temples for headaches, or the blowing of smoke in the ear for an earache. I mean come on after trying some of these curanderas on my own kids. And it worked of course I'm going to believe in them. The one thing that stood out most about being a Pocha was that I really was looked at as being a cultural traitor. Because my dad's family really did start to treat us as outsiders because we no longer spoke Spanish as frequently as we did growing up because now we had come to identify who we were and we were Pochos.

On the other hand I also grew up on oldies and cream of wheat, and cruised in lowriders, and hot rods. And cruising the San Jose Boulevard with my feathered hair and I hung around with all the other pochos in town. Except for they couldn't speak Spanish so they were really disliked by my family. We started to go around my mom's side of the family more because now we were becoming Americanized. In the beginning we grew up

around my dad's side of the family and they wouldn't speak English. They could understand it but they would refuse to speak English because they would speak it in a pocho (mexicaniced way). This would have made them out to be cultural traitors.

As a pocha I grew up speaking a language that was looked down upon because we were able to speak English or to work in a country where we had rights as U.S. citizens and most of my family had to work the fields or the jobs that most Americans wouldn't so I think there was some anger there because we were able to get jobs and go to public schools because a lot of my dad's family spent so much time going back and forth to Mexico that they were not able to get the education they should have gotten. And I was underprivileged because I never went to Mexico. But because I am a pocha I am able to communicate with both Spanish speaking and English speaking.

To be honest I sometimes wonder if my life would have been different if both my parents would have been natives of Mexico would I have had a quincinera, or a big catholic wedding like all my cousins did on my dad's side. And maybe my kids would be able to speak Spanish and listen to corridos and dance cumbias like I did. I was so lucky to have been able to do these things growing up I sometimes feel sorry for my kids because they weren't able to experience the close family upbringing I did because if there is one thing I loved about being Mexican is how close we were especially during Holidays, now days it is very rare for my family to get together because there is so much separation.

The honest truth is that after my dad died he took with him my entire Mexican heritage with him, because there no longer was a need to speak Spanish or listen to the corridos, or attend the Quinieras, or the Baptismos. The truth being that in a three year

period I lost two uncles a grandmother and my father. And since they were the primary ties to the Mexican in me I no longer felt those ties anymore.

To be honest even I miss the smell of garbage burning in the tin cans and the gathering on Christmas to make tamales. I especially miss my grandmas cooking she made the best tortillas in the world. I thank God I was given the opportunity to grow up in a Mexican family atmosphere I wouldn't change it for the world. If they call me Pocha it's because I have earned it-and proud of it. I will no longer allow my self to feel ashamed of existing. I will continue to speak my Chicano Spanish; it comes with my pocha ways. This is a part of my identity as a pocha.