

I was probably almost turning three, and I remember little bits of pieces of dream. I remember there was a big, huge, huge light in our faces. And I hear people saying, "Correle! Correle!" We had to cross this little river or creek. I don't know what it was. My mom went through. My uncle went through. He had my cousin, my brother. He had both of them in his arms. My mom tells me now that it was God's blessing to make us come over here because I mean, that river was pretty deep.

I Was Born in Mexico, But...

This is a story based on actual incidents that happened in a real town with real people to- AN AMERICAN GIRL. A dynamic films release.

I grew up in a very calm place, a very beautiful green place, where everybody is happy. Everybody knows each other. Everybody mostly works in ranches that I know. My dad works with horses. He is a handyman at the ranch. My dad does not know how to write or read. My grandfather died when my dad was about three or four. Other kids were in school. He was working. He's worked very hard to earn the place where we are at right now.

The Elementary School.

When I was a kid, I loved to play with my friends. Most of my friends did not speak Spanish. I learned English through school. I had a lot of friends. I played with them. There really wasn't a boundary between speaking Spanish or English. I was blended with everybody. Nobody was judged at all.

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It started changing around when I was probably in 6th grade. I had friends. They were pretty cruel sometimes because they would ask me questions that I had no answer to. They would ask me: "How come you don't wear this? How come your parents don't buy you this? How come you eat this kind of food? How come you don't travel like we do?" Wonderful World.

When everybody started speaking about traveling, I started to wonder what it would be like to travel. And especially, I started to ask questions. My parents, I would ask them: "Why can't I travel this place? Why can't I do this? Why can't I do that?" And they would always tell me, "Oh, you can't do that right now because it's not... we can't, we can't travel."

One time I remember--it was probably about when I was probably in 6th grade or 7th grade--there was a party going on for one of the girls, and they didn't invite me. But it just occurred to me that probably I didn't get the invitation, or it wasn't meant to be for me to go, right? After a while, I heard she didn't like me because I was Mexican, and I couldn't fit in with them.

Anybody for a soda? Uh, I have to go to the library. Well... I guess it's just not a soda day.

I started seeing that they didn't want to hang out with me. I said, OK, then I'm just going to hang out with my people then.

High school, I started hanging out more with Hispanic people. The girls I used to hang out with in 6th, 7th and 8th grade, they were all about going to school, having a better future. They would talk about how they wanted to study this, how they wanted to become a teacher, how they wanted to go to all these wonderful universities that their

parents could afford. On the other hand, when I started hanging out with girls that were Hispanic, they would talk about how, how were they going to do it to go to school. Newborn American babies. Newborn citizens of these United States. Free and with rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

I would hear comments. My uncles would talk about new laws coming in about, like, their licenses. They couldn't renew their license. I would ask them questions like, "Why? Why can't you renew it? It's easy. Everybody does it." And they would say no. And I asked my parents, and my parents would say, "Oh, you know, you can't do that right now until you get older." Until one time you know, I told them like straight up, "Why can't I do this? Why can't I...?" They're like, "Well, you weren't born here." And then I'm like, OK, I'm not born here. That means I can't go to school. I can't get my license. I can't do anything.

It's like a secret identity, kind of, you can say. They know me as, you know, being this person that was born here, which I'm not. All through high school, I played that role. Like, "I'm born here, you know. Don't even talk about that. I'm born here. What're you talking about?" And now, still, I am born here. That's all I can say: I'm born here. I was born in Mexico, but I was born here. If you talk to me something about Mexico, I don't even know who, like, the president, or if you tell me history about Mexico, I don't even know it. You know, so if you're... you know, I'm born here.

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The stress level is very high. I'll tell you that. Just thinking about like what's going to happen tomorrow? What's my day going to be? Am I going to get pulled over? Is my car going to be taken away? Is immigration going to pop out in my job? I had a lot of friends get pulled over for minor things like their light blew out. But that little light cost them \$2,500 in fees. Plus their car gets taken away. They still have a job they still have to get to. And when you go to the judge and they say, "You can't be driving for for two years," or, "You can't be driving anymore; I told you already," what do you say? "OK?" And when they ask you, "Are you guilty or not guilty?" I always think about that, and I told my dad, "One time, I'll probably say I'm not guilty." I'm not guilty living here without papers. It's not my choice. And he just says, "If I were you, I wouldn't even mention anything. Just say you are, and get it over with." And I say, "Why? I'm not guilty!"

Most of my friends that I've met there, they already knew they weren't born here, and they didn't have papers. And they knew it was a sacrifice of their parents to come here. And they knew they needed to go to school, and most of them, they're successful. They're still in school. They're not married. One of them, I think, they already graduated. She's a hygenist. I mean, she can't work as a hygenist, but she is a hygenist.

A lot of people tell me, "I don't even know why you go to school. You're not even going to be able to work. What's the point?" There is a point. I do it because of me. I do it because I want to be treated the way anybody else wants to be treated with education. When they look at me, I don't want them to see my skin color. I don't want them to see, you know, that I'm Mexican. I want them to see me. Like my mom tells me, "If you don't go to school, they'll just treat you like everybody else."

The way I did it was I worked. When I was 18, I started working a full-time job in a local restaurant. For about two years I did that. I saved enough to go to school. I missed a lot of things. When you're 18, what do you want to do? Party with your friends. I didn't have that, but I mean, I had money to go to school.

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I mean, even if it doesn't happen to me, I hope those people do get their papers and work. Because it could be the next doctor that helps you out, could be the next nurse. It could be the next lawyer or the next teacher. There's a lot of students, they have good hearts. There are a lot of people that want to work.

You know, I want kids to know, my age, that are here trying to go to school, they can do it! They can keep going to school. There is no law that says you can't study. There is no law that says you can't try to be somebody in life. I mean, it's better than being a gang-banger, I think.

My favorite thing to do in this area is hiking, walking around, talking to people that I know, walking on the beach. Especially in the morning when the sun's barely coming out, and the breeze hits your face, walking and smelling the ocean, how it smells so clean, so fresh, so peaceful.

Don't look at me in my face and discriminate me because I'm Mexican. Or why don't you treat me who I am? Give me a chance, you know, for you to know me. I can't say who I am. No. That's not going to happen. Just imagine. Imagine your next-door neighbor: Treat them nice!