

# 'Don't tell people where you are from'

## Cultural pride conflicts with biased perception

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Jansen Omsom // photo

Senior Carlos Blanco-Santana and his father, Carlos Blanco-Centurion, and mother, Amelia Santana-Munguia, stories from when they lived in Mexico while preparing a "Jugo de frutas congeladas and tortas de pollo en salsa roja con tortillas" -- a smoothie and chicken in tortillas.

Wetback. Spick. Beaner. Illegal. On and on the arsenal of words gets updated every year. I don't mind what people call me or my family. And I don't just mean my small family of four who left everything we had in order to come to the United States to just catch a glimmer of the American dream. No, I mean the millions of Mexicans that call the United States of America a safe haven.

I don't remember everything about the day we left Mexico, but I do have one memory that holds the most profound place in my heart. It was a foggy day in Cuernavaca, Morelos, a town elevated 5,000 feet in the mountains. It seemed so unreal, like it was a dream. There we were: my older sister and I in the back of the little red BMW that had been in the family since before my sister's birth.

We both sat quietly in the back, not saying a word, complete silence. I had my stuffed bunny rabbit to keep me company and my sister had her almudita, her little pillow. Nothing ran through my mind, no thoughts, no emotions, nothing. I was only two years old but it only goes to show the mysteriousness of the human brain that my earliest memory was of the literal and figurative departure from one part of my life to a new life in the United States.

My family lived in Boston while my dad worked at Harvard University for 14 years. The move from Boston to Mt. Pleasant when I was 15 was not an easy transition. I had no friends and I was alone with my dad. Don't get me wrong -- it was just us guys so freedom rang those couple of months while my mom was still in Boston tying up loose ends. But we both lacked the culinary gene in our chromosomes and it was then when we realized the struggles of being torn away from your culture and your family.

People have the misconception that Mexico is just a country with drug dealers slaughtering their people in the streets, or a place where 42 students can get kidnapped and never seen again. Its not that at all. We have a culture that spans thousands of years -- a rich, vibrant and colorful culture that celebrates the preciousness of life even though this benevolence isn't returned. The food, oh my lord, the food is what makes the day slip

away. Even though my mother is not as good a cook as my 93-year-old grandmother, the native dishes my Mom cooks still engulf me in waves of nostalgia and sadness knowing that it will be years until I can see my relatives again.

The month leading up to my freshman year still lingers. My father said something that I just dismissed at the time, but now it scares me to my core. "Whatever you do, don't tell people where you're from." The look of his greenish-hazelnut eyes could not have screamed anything more than seriousness. And he was right. To this day there are still those people that abuse this information to crack some chea jokes.

Sure, teenagers can be cruel. Teenagers are at a sensitive age where every little external stimulus profoundly affects how they view the world. I'm not surprised when the casually throw the aforementioned slurs words right at my face. It hurts. It really does. To know that these people, these biologically mature human beings, still choose to act as children and listen to the bigoted opinions of their elders and live through those words of hatred.

But those are just words. I don't care what they say anymore. I no longer shed the tears I did when I was a child wondering why no girls liked me or why boys would spit at me and call me slurs. I'm proud of where I'm from; I'm so proud to be from a country of hard working people that risk everything for a better life. People that do what has to be done.

Bigotry and ignorance are just motivations to prove my worth. To prove that I do in fact deserve to be here. That I deserve the priceless gift of education just like any other human. Just like any other human.

As an already established scientist, my father earned a H1B visa from Harvard University in 2000. He had developed very innovative techniques that Harvard wanted to implement in their research laboratories. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity and he took it. He packed his things, kissed us good-bye and flew for Boston.

For six months my father lived all alone. No sound of my two-year-old self screaming at my sister for something she did to annoy me, no sound of my mom preparing a masterpiece in the kitchen. Nothing. Just his thoughts were there to accompany him in a strange country with an even stranger culture that would give him a rude awakening to what was to come.

Why should he be treated like that, when he works with educated men and women but still use the word Mexican as an insult. He has white skin and graying hair and unlike my paisanos, he's tall. "It's when I talk is when they notice that I wasn't born here. It's two words in when they ask 'Where do you come from?' like they're scared or don't trust me," he told me.

What pains me the most, what sends shivers to my core is the fact that people with power don't treat him as an equal, people that have hatreds towards him hold him down, keep

him grounded and prevent him from soaring to his rightful place on top. They take his unbiased trust and throw it back at his face and see it when he comes home. On a normal day both my beautiful mom and my dad get out of our blue Nissan Sentra and their happiness to see me and our dog Sunday is palpable. Sunday cries and howls in happiness with his wagging tail. Their smiles brighten my life and seep into every corner of my heart. But on those dreaded days, the days when they both come inside and his face paints an image I wish I hadn't seen: a scene of anger, deception.

Don't get me wrong. This isn't a boohoo story that makes it seem like we have the most tragic life. I have friends who have had physically abusive fathers that weaseled their way out of their lives. We don't live in poverty. My parents don't drink or do drugs. All we have is each other and the will to move on despite what people call us to our face or to our backs.

We are just humans, we share one earth, one sun, one moon. All these limitations of expanding to the corners of our universe are impossible to achieve at the moment -- mostly because of the vast distances the space has. So why are we choosing to create distance between each other?

I don't harbor hatred in my heart. I don't want to become a man in the future that only has hatred to distribute.

One day we will all realize that there isn't enough space for hatred, just love.