

The culture of immigration

In the United States, 41.3 million immigrants living within its borders -- 11.4 are illegal. This massive population has sparked extreme debate between leading politicians in the U.S. However, finding the voices of the immigrants themselves has been difficult. Here are two witnesses willing to tell their story of immigration.

When an opportunity arose, current citizen takes chance for a new life

Ryan Rofhkopf
staff writer

Opportunity.

A sly, devil of a word with a meaning not easily comprehended in a community of unlocked doors, friendly casseroles and the assurance of a good, blessed future.

Opportunity.

Some never experience this word. This chance. To just have a single window cracked open to allow someone to try for something, anything better than the poor hand of cards they had been dealt at birth. Their forever inescapable and terminal sentence.

But if a chance presented itself in an instant to make an escape, regardless of right or wrong, of controversiality, or even of legality... many would do it. Many would take advantage of this chance.

This opportunity.

Tehuixtla, Morelos: 14-year-old Manuel Camarillo was sneaking out of the country. Terrified of being caught and anxious about the trip, he, along with a few other people, sat in the back of a truck, waiting. Once they reached a certain point, it was walking. While wading through bodies of water, Camarillo turned to a woman and helped carry her child across the depths. Then, large pieces of carpet were laid over them by the smugglers and they drove over the border and into California. Into the United States.

Camarillo is now married to Spanish teacher Christiane Camarillo. They have been married over 20 years. He is now legal, holder of a green card. He works in construction. He has two children, both born in the United States.

His story is one of hardship, struggle and ultimately triumph.

His original journey into the United States brought him into Georgia.

"The journey was maybe three or four days long. We left from my home in Tehuixtla which was about 35 to 40 minutes away from a bigger city, and the trip was then about another two

days in a bus and later a minivan," Camarillo said.

Some families in Mexico send first sons into America to support the rest of the family economically. Camarillo, the eldest male of his siblings, was his family's choice. The first time he ventured into America, he was 14 years old and only stayed in the States for a year with an uncle.

"The first time I came over here, it was just to try out. Just for me, personally, [it was] getting used to it in America, which is very different from other people who leave for work," Camarillo said.

Four years later, he was sent back into America for the purpose of economic opportunity. Crossing the border is dangerous and risky at the best of times and both times he went into America, Camarillo went with people who are called "coyotes." These people are basically human smugglers. Illegal immigrants pay them to get across the border without being detected.

"I was actually not nervous at all. Not nervous, I was more concerned about the risk. We never knew what was going to happen," Camarillo said. "I was just careful about everything. I was ready for whatever was going to happen."

Now, years later, Camarillo has created a life for himself here with his two sons Rosston and Alex and his wife Christiane. But within his life here in America, the Mexican traditions and culture still play an integral part in not only who he is as a person, but also play a major role in shaping his family's identity.

"It's my life. I became a Spanish teacher, I travel more with my husband. It's just opened the land of opportunities to me... and it has an impact on our everyday life. The food we eat for dinner, for example, has become a more of a mix between culture," Mrs. Camarillo said.

Being married to Camarillo has not only changed her culturally, but for Mrs. Camarillo, learning about her husband's life has changed her views on her own life and exactly how fortunate she is to be who she is and have what she has.

"I lived in a bubble... I didn't realize how fortunate we are. I've been to other countries and I've heard about my husband's childhood and how poor they were. And that doesn't even compare to what I had thought was poor... I've learned to try to ap-

preciate things more," Mrs. Camarillo said.

At the start of their relationship, future Mrs. Camarillo's family hadn't known anything about Mexican culture or about immigrants in general. However, as the years passed, the two families became one, and now Mrs. Camarillo's family has involved different cultures into their daily lives.

"We incorporate all of the customs as much as we can into our daily lives... My dad now does mission trips through church... My mom owns her own business and she interacts with the landscape workers and such more, knowing the background of some them," Mrs. Camarillo said.

For years, the family has traveled to Mexico to visit Camarillo's side of the family, bringing them back to the basis of his life and to the spark that created who he is today as a father and a husband.

"I knew him here, but I didn't know him there. He was in his element... He was just happy to be around his family, because he was raised that family is first. I got to see another side of him," Mrs. Camarillo said.

However, as of recent years the family has been visiting Mexico and Camarillo's side of the family less due to the risk rising in Mexico. Recent events in the country have not only made visiting harder, but also raised concern for the family members who live there.

"My mother-in-law wants us to visit more, but it may not be the safest place anymore. So that's been a challenge, especially for my husband because his sisters and family still live there... He's very concerned for his family," Mrs. Camarillo said.

Regarding laws in general, whilst being more aware than most of the downfalls of the system, Mrs. Camarillo understands the necessity of these laws in their enforcement.

"I feel like there are laws for a reason; agree or disagree, there always need to be guidelines and laws, or there would be no control over any situation," Mrs. Camarillo said.

However, as the issue is close to their own family life, Mrs. Camarillo does hold her own personal opinions regarding immigration laws.

"On a personal level, I would just change the cost of things. Every form, every step, cost money... to become a citizen after the whole process also cost, understandably, it is just not always

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Christiane Camarillo/provided photo

Spanish teacher **Christiane Camarillo** with her husband **Manuel** in the Dominican Republic last March for teacher Caroline Mullinax Muhn's wedding. Since the Camarillos did not go on a honeymoon when they married, they took this time to celebrate their marriage as well as Camarillo's.

feasible for some; unfortunately those who want to do it the right way, sometimes can't just due to some of the cost."

Camarillo's eldest son, Rosston, graduated from Wando in 2015. His senior year, the family visited Clemson on a college tour. During the welcoming ceremony, Mrs. Camarillo looked back to see her husband hovering in the back, quiet and still, with glazed eyes -- uncommon for him.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I just never had this chance. I never went past eighth grade. I'm just so glad that I can give this to Rosston now," he said.

Opportunity.

Sometimes it skips a generation.

And sometimes, it doesn't even matter in the end.

Family, culture, love, commitment and hard work can take years to pay off. But the end result is well worth the effort.

