Victor Reyes

Memories of growing up
Mexican American

Growing up as a first generation Mexican American, Victor Reyes struggled at times with the challenge of hanging on to his Mexican culture while integrating with the people and events surrounding him in El Paso, Texas.

“I was lucky that we lived just a stone’s throw away from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, where my great-grandmother, aunts, and uncles were” says Victor, who works today as a partner technical consultant at Microsoft. “At least once a week we’d cross the border to spend time with them. It was a chance for my brother, sister, and me to experience the way life happens over there.”

It was far different from his life in the U.S. “I have around 20 aunts and uncles and they’d flock to my grandma’s home on weekends,” he recalls. “They’d prepare food or buy it and before you knew it there would be a cookout happening with 30 or 40 people.”

Trips to Town

While relatives gathered, Victor’s parents would give him and his siblings a dollar and they’d head into town “We’d load up on the kind of candy and chips we couldn’t buy in the U.S. and then go back to grandma’s house to play soccer with my cousins and neighborhood kids.”

What he enjoyed even more was listening to his aunts and uncles sharing their lives, talking about sports; Mexican soap operas, called telenovelas; and simply what was happening within the family.

“Now, being so far away and so many years later, I find myself missing the people who have passed and those I haven’t seen in years,” says Victor.
Conversations with Mom

While his parents made sure Victor kept in touch with his Mexican roots, they were adamant that he receive a U.S. education.

“My father moved to Los Angeles when he was a teenager, and my mom arrived in her early twenties,” he explains. “When I was growing up, they both worked as servers in a restaurant. Things were lean sometimes, so they were determined their children would have better lives.”

Victor says school in El Paso when he was young was fine because most of his friends spoke Spanish. Things changed, however, when he went off to college and life became more English based.

“I had to practice it every day but was determined never want to lose my Spanish. To this day I call my mom to have a conversation in 100 percent Spanish so I keep it fresh.”

Victor and his wife, Elizabeth, who is also first generation Mexican American, primarily speak English, but are determined to keep Spanish alive in their three-year-old daughter, Ariella. He says it’s challenging because she knows way more English than Spanish, so they’re trying to turn the tide a bit so she’s more like 50/50 by making a concerted effort to talk to her in Spanish.

“We even switch her cartoons to Spanish sometimes, even though she doesn’t like it.”

Don’t miss the latest edition of the Powered By The People podcast to hear more from Victor on growing up Mexican American, his thoughts on how Hispanics are portrayed in the media, and why a knock on his door at 5 p.m. each workday means so much to him.