

A Friend From All Over

Even in everyday settings, Ricardo Guevara recalled, his mom and dad got pushback for being an interracial couple. “Even in the grocery store,” he said, “like the way the cashier looked at [my parents] being an interracial couple.”

Ricardo was born in Acapulco, Mexico, in January 2003. Because his mother was American and his father was Mexican, he was born with dual Mexican-American citizenship.

After high school in Mexico, Ricardo’s father realized IT jobs were more abundant in the U.S., so he studied abroad, at Southern Oregon University. After graduation, he continued to work in the U.S. Eventually he met Ricardo’s mother, Sasha. When they thought about building a family, they decided to have Ricardo and Aaron born and raised for their early childhoods in Mexico, as their culture and home life would be Mexican. As a result, both boys speak Spanish and English with equal fluency.

For the first three or four years of Ricardo’s life, Ricardo’s father spent weekdays at his job in Texas. On weekends, he crossed over the border to spend time with his family. When the complicated logistics became problematic for the family, they made the decision to move to America altogether.

Their first stop was San Antonio, Texas, where they lived until Ricardo was five. He remembers little from those early years, but does recall a visit to San Antonio when he was 13. That city, he said, “had a huge Hispanic population, so I think the immigration was seen as a lot more normal there...there was nothing at all like racism, or anything like that, or any judgment for immigration.”

As time went on, better work opportunities arose in different places, and the family moved around in the U.S. Ricardo was in third grade when the family moved to Seattle. It was there that Ricardo encountered the most divergent views on immigration. His name and his appearance prompted school kids to hurl ugly stereotypes at him.

“Hey, you’re poor right? Your dad is a [yard worker] right?” is what some kids would say in the halls to Ricardo during his middle school years.

Though Ricardo was definitely able to tell the difference in the way some people spoke to him in Seattle. People there simply had a different perspective on immigration, he said.

He explained, “maybe it’s also because we were older but people would like make fun of Mexicans a lot more in Seattle.” he said. “Like people would call me illegal.” Ricardo learned to let these insults roll off: “I took it as a joke so it was fine,” he said. “it wasn’t bullying-”.

Ricardo was 14 when the family moved to Portland. In Oregon, he found a very different reaction to his immigration story.

Portland is overwhelmingly white, with a population that is more than 60% Caucasian. Still, Ricardo noticed a significant change in greetings and social interactions. Jokes about race and immigration weren’t non-existent, but they were more inclusive--and Ricardo was in on it. Jokes in Portland had a softer edge than in Seattle, he observed.

“Portland is more accepting...of minorities and immigrants,” he contends. ... “People in Portland are a lot more nice and accepting compared to the people in Seattle.”

Ricardo’s experiences have not made him view Seattle as a bad city, but he understands that different regions of the world have different exposures and understandings about topics such as Immigration. With its large Hispanic population, for example, San Antonio generally displays even more tolerance than easy-going Portland. But he notes that it is a bigger part of Portland’s culture to be nice to everyone, including strangers. He understands that a lack of experience can lead to a more exposed misunderstanding and that this can be seen all throughout America.