

# CULTURAL STORY

By *Denisse Garcia*

Growing up in the United States was-and has always been a privilege for me. Here, there are different opportunities, the ability to become educated, the ability to move up socially, Speak freely, and the experience of meeting people from different backgrounds. This reality could not have been mine, I was originally born in Cuba.

Lottery Visas, as I recently found out, are extremely hard to come across. According to the Pew Research Center, " More than 22.4 million people applied in 2017 to a U.S. visa program that provides 50,000 green cards" (Connor, 2018). My mother was able to win one around the time that I was just born, meaning I would soon be leaving Santa Clara and arriving at Syracuse. The change was drastic-my parents went from being well respected, one even college-educated, to subsisting off of the Salvation Army's financial assistance. Even so, My mom had, among other things, a propensity for optimism. This led her through her first months in the United States, The economic downturn of 2008, and COVID 19, a virus that has left many small businesses-including my mother's, financially disenfranchised.

My mom's sense of optimism and hard work led her to open her own business. She is a licensed daycare provider, and while the economy was stable and she had a steady stream of parents, was able to save up enough money to visit her family in Cuba. She wanted me to come with her, she wanted me to see what it was like. This meant many things for me, even if at the time I didn't know it.

Being an immigrant has a couple of realities tied to it, one being that you may sometimes feel out of place among who you are around. I remember in elementary school I would bring last night's dinner for lunch, and other kids would be confused as to why I didn't have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or chips. I remember feeling a bit out of

place, so much so that I would ask my mom to pack me a different, more typical, lunch. I also remember feeling alone, since no one else had parents like mine, experiences like mine. I became a bit ashamed of my culture - More than anything I wanted to fit in. I wanted parents that didn't need me to translate for them, that understood the ins and outs of being American, and more than anything, I wanted to stop standing out.

The first time I went to Cuba to see my family, I was ten. When I got out of the airport, one of the first things I noticed were the colors - everywhere I looked there was vibrant color. The houses in the United States, especially in the suburbs, tend to be beiges and browns. But here, the houses are turquoise and banana yellow. There are paintings on the sides of buildings and old fashioned cars. Besides the colors of the houses, there are various native flowers that adorn random corners of neighborhoods, my mother would point them out to me. The most Ubiquitous one was "mar pacifico," a red hibiscus flower that grew everywhere. I never knew Cuba was so colorful.

At my grandparent's house, I discovered the different methods for getting clean water. Since water filtration isn't a thing everyone can get, My parents had a tank of water with small multicolored fish in it. These fish go about and clean the water tank. Then, my grandma would go and take out buckets of water to boil, killing off any bacteria or pathogens within the water. This clean water would then be put into a water jug with a spout, and this would be the water we used for bathing, drinking, and brushing our teeth. I was fascinated by all the different steps she had to take. I knew it was because running water was a luxury, and yet I wanted to watch her go about her chores.

She cooked for us during our stay. I remember how she would have me sit for breakfast, and make me

a small cup of coffee, and break off a bit of locally made bread. She would set a small tab of butter on the table for me, and turn on their old boxy television. For dinner, She would make us different meals, ranging from rice and beans to tostones. My favorite, however, was when she made us fried chicken-She taught me the recipe too. She would Marinade the chicken in garlic, lemon, salt, cumin, and pepper for a few hours. Then, She would heat up a small pot of oil, and drop the drum sticks inside, and pull them out once browned.

While I was there, I came to appreciate the little things and even came to feel a sense of pride from it. As a child I would feel as though I had to hide the fact that I wasn't born in the U.S. Now, however, I

feel a sense of pride and individuality when I think about where I come from. I think strengthening my relationship with my grandmother, and seeing first hand the beautiful things my country had to offer, helped me better understand my own culture. I learned to appreciate what it meant to be Cuban.

#### **CITATION**

Connor, Phillip. "Applications for U.S. Diversity Visa Lottery Remained near Record in 2017." Pewresearch.org, 2018,

[www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/23/applications-for-u-s-visa-lottery-more-than-doubled-since-2007/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/23/applications-for-u-s-visa-lottery-more-than-doubled-since-2007/).