

Dear Reader,

I was born in Mexico in this place called Puerto Vallarta. I moved to Australia when I was around eight months old. Mum's side of the family are actually from Spain, and my Dad's side is half-Australian, half-Mexican - his Dad was born in Mexico, but his mum was born in Australia and has European roots.

My parents met in Mexico but they decided to move here after they had me. I think it was to get my Australian passport, so they weren't planning to live here, but then they had my sister Nicole and they liked it and decided to stay here. We lived in Kenmore/St Lucia, then we moved to the Sunshine Coast and then we moved to Teneriffe and since then we just stayed around that area.

Probably one of my earliest memories of living in Australia was when we lived in St Lucia. I can't really remember, but it was a big house, and it was sort of foresty. Not like city-city. It was like suburbs. That was probably my first memory. Another memory is after we moved to the Sunshine Coast - this is one that I do remember more clearly, is every morning I would go to drop my dad off at the train station so he could go to work.

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In some ways I feel different in Australia. I never knew this, but apparently I have an accent when I speak English. Some of my friends say they sometimes don't understand words I say and they say, "Oh, it's because you have a bit of an accent," and I didn't know that. Other things I guess that stand out is usually food. Ever since I was five years old, my friends at school would be taking Vegemite sandwiches, and I would be taking like beans and rice or something else.

No one ever really said anything about my food, but they would ask, "What is that?" They didn't really know what it was because they'd never had that before. Sometimes my friends do say, "Oh, you always have really good lunches," because they get really bored of their lunches. But some of my friends would not like my lunch. I have other friends that eat more options even if they're not from different backgrounds, so they actually do like my lunches.

Another thing that I remember was in grade 2. We had to bring in food from our native country and I remember Mum made cornbread, and I remember taking that in, and I remember there was different foods as well. Another thing I remember is when I was younger, everyone at break would trade food, so they'd be like, "Oh, I've got a packet of chips," and they'd have a cookie, and they'd be like, "I'll trade you this packet of chips for a cookie." And I was just always sitting there eating my rice because I didn't have anything to trade with.

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I have some friends that speak other languages. I have a friend from the Czech Republic, and she speaks fluent Czech. I have another friend that's Greek. And I have another friend that's Samoan and Japanese. With my friend that's Czech, I remember in grade 4 another friend that was Macedonian, us three would have a little competition to see who could speak more fluently in a different language. It wasn't really competitions, like we'd have races to see who could count to 10 fastest in their language or something like that. When we did that, my other friends would just kind of sit there or do something else. But I don't think they were envious of us speaking different languages.



I know so many people that are from different places and everybody's proud of their culture. I don't feel like it's like they're all Australian and I'm the only one that's from a different country, because I've always had friends that were from other countries. I had a friend in primary school that also spoke Spanish. Sometimes we would speak Spanish to each other. When I was in grade 4, there were two girls that both spoke Mandarin and they were best friends, so they would just speak Mandarin to each other. And there's these two girls in my class that are both from South Korea, and in class they'll just suddenly say things and laugh, and no one really cares.

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We went back to Mexico recently and at first, it was kind of hard because my Spanish wasn't that good. I could speak and I could understand, but I did make mistakes or forget how to say words. But after we left, I realised that I had made like a lifestyle there. So it felt really weird leaving it because I felt like I had my life there, like, how you feel you have your life: you go to work, you do everything, that's how I felt there. I'd go to tennis lessons in the afternoon with my cousins or we'd play cards or something. The environment in Mexico is very different. The people are different. But once I saw my family, it was like – it was normal. Well, I think it feels comfortable because we're with people that do similar things to how we would do it. So it's like it's familiar and there's a sort of instant acceptance of us because we're related.

It took like three days for me to transition back to speaking English, but I remember that day we came back, it was New Year's Eve. We went with our dad to celebrate, and I remember I was talking with my grandma, and then I started saying words in Spanish instead of in English. I don't have a problem speaking English, but I was definitely speaking a lot more Spanish with my family. Even before I went to Mexico, sometimes I'd be talking with my friends and I'd accidentally say a word in Spanish instead of in English. That happened to me the other day. One of my friends is calling me, and I picked up the phone and I said "Hello" in Spanish instead of English, and I was like, "Oh, I mean, um" - yeah, sometimes that happens to me.

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I do feel like my family interacts differently from my friends' families. My closest friends, the first time I ever went to one of their houses, it was a Monday, and she's like, "Oh, on Mondays, it's the day that we have a family dinner." I didn't say anything but I'm thinking, "Oh, you only have a family dinner once a week? I always eat with my parents, unless it's, like, one night a week." But for them they'll get home at, let's say, 4 o'clock, and their parents won't get home till, like, 7 o'clock. So they'll make their own dinner; they'll eat in their rooms or they'll wait till their parents get home and order takeaway and they'll eat in their rooms. I have another friend that always eats in her room. Her parents will leave the food on the counter and then she takes it and eats it in her room while watching TV or something. I think it's weird because I'm not used to that, but sometimes we do eat together and I'm like, sometimes it's nice to be able to eat while doing something else, like watching TV. But I also like being able to talk with my family because dinner's usually when we catch up.

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I don't think I ever felt like I don't belong in Australia because I've grown up here and it's pretty normal. In my class, there's lots of people that aren't from Australia. The only difference I feel is sometimes, like, the food or that my family's closer than other families.

I feel like there's more community in Mexico. You walk into a store or something and they'll greet you like really friendly, as if you knew them. And that's how it happens. If you walk on the street here, you might say hi, but it's like you don't feel like you know them. In Mexico it's more familiar.

But there are other things I prefer in Australia. Like I would tell my cousins, "Oh, yeah, I walk to school," and they'd be like, "You walk to school?" and I'm like, "Yeah. It's safe". I can be like, "Oh yeah, I'm going to go out with some friends. I'm just going to walk down to Woolworth's here." In Mexico, you can do that but it's like there's a lot more risk, if you know what I mean.

Nerea