

HARRISONBURG 360 PODCAST
Finding a Home : Education, Family and Identity

[TB] - Tyler Belcher

[EGM] - Ena Guevara-Marquez

[SR] Salvador Romero

[SW] -Susan Washburn

[GN] - GN

[CL] - Camille Lynch

♪ Sean Fischer, "We Are Millennials" ♪ | **0:02**

Tagline | 0:03

Harrisonburg 360: Real people. Real stories. One community.

[TB] 0:14

Hello and welcome to the Harrisonburg 360 Podcast. We are your hosts, Tyler and Ena.

[EGM] | 0:20

The Harrisonburg 360 Podcast is an attempt to capture and record narratives of immigrants living in the Harrisonburg community. Using past and present voices of Harrisonburg immigrants, students in our JMU English class have collaborated to create a space focused on the importance of listening to each other's voices. Every person deserves a chance to share their story, and we, as a class, are privileged to share these stories with you in hopes of expanding perceptions of what it means to be an immigrant in Harrisonburg.

♪ Lance Conrad, "Affection" ♪ | **0:52**

[TB] | 0:56

Each week, Harrisonburg 360 is produced by a different team of students. This week's episode, Finding a Home : Education, Family and Identity, was produced by Tyler Belcher, Camille Lynch, Ena Guevara-Marquez, and Leah Smith. In this week's episode, we'll be comparing and contrasting the immigrant experiences of two individuals. We'll be discussing stories of education, family ties, and aspirations.

♪ Lance Conrad, "Affection" ♪ | **1:20**

[EGM] 1:26

We'll begin with an interview of Salvador Romero, an immigrant from Guanajuato, Mexico. You'll hear two voices in these clips - Sal, and the interviewer, Susan Washburn. Sal, now a home liaison for Harrisonburg city schools, came to America when he was thirteen. It took three days by bus to travel from Guanajuato to the Texas border, and then he traveled with his parents to Harrisonburg. He was then enrolled into the Harrisonburg public school system...

[SR] | 1:56

I started in the eighth grade and then I finished high school. I also went to Blue Ridge for two years and then JMU for a couple other years and graduated with a Bachelor of Science.

[SW] 2:09

Did you have any...were you just put in an 8th grade classroom or did they take you out for special time...separate...to learn English or how did they do that?

[SR] 2:17

When we first came here it was back in 1991 and so a lot of the ESL programs were fairly new and I remember just being in that small classroom with that teacher a couple hours a day. Other than that I was in other classes. Nothing really specific or structured

[SW] 2:39

No...What was the hardest thing to get used to?

[SR] 2:42

Again I think just going to school and seeing people that were different from you and just being treated differently and adjusting to different norms and language and the classroom itself. Everything was new so...it was different and difficult.

[SW] 3:07

You said that you were treated differently; do you have any experiences or anything that sticks out that you remember?

[SR] | 3:13

Yeah...I just remember I remember being one of the few Hispanic kids in this school and a lot of the other children you know... the Anglo kids had no clue how to treat somebody that's different. They were just a little ignorant and unfortunately they did not have much exposure with other races so they just...they didn't know how to act...or how to associate with me or the other couple of Hispanics. Man... there were times when I was bullied and pushed around and discriminated against. Not so much by the students but also by other people.

[SW] 3:54

Do you see a lot of discrimination in Harrisonburg?

[SR] 3:57

Probably not as much as before. I think the biggest reason that is that people from this area have learned to appreciate the different cultures and the richness that those cultures bring into the community and I think that's the biggest thing to know. People are learning to appreciate those

things and before that, when I first came here people didn't have a change to appreciate those things so. So I do see less discrimination although it's not an existent... its still around.

[EGM] 4:30

Being treated differently in schools was something Sal experienced throughout his time in public school. As he said in the interview, much of that stemmed from the ignorance of the community. Thankfully, things have changed since Sal was a student, with one major change being Sal now working in the education field.

[SW] 4:50

Do you see...did you always know that you wanted to go into the education field and work for the ESL program?

[SR] 4:57

I actually... My background is in kinesiology. I got a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology from James Madison and I also was an athletic trainer for a couple of years. And then I just decided to change careers, just change jobs and switch my career. And I've learned from the last year...I was in the educational field already but now so much in the classroom and I've learned so much this year and have realized that this is a field I want to be a part of. Just because of the great need especially in this community from the students. And that's the biggest thing that I think about. The people at this school, a lot of the time seeking to help them with kids who are having issues because they know that I have been there and that I can actually relate to the kids and I can tell the kids I've been there I've done that and they usually identify with me and we have a better and easier time figuring out problems.

[SW] 6:01

What do you think of the schools in the U.S.?

[SR] 6:07

My feeling about the schools now is that it's a whole lot different than 15 years when I first moved. I work for Harrisonburg City Schools and I have seen big improvement in the ways that we accommodate and service our ESL students. And everybody else in general so I have a very good feeling I mean I'm an educator myself so of course this is the field that I want to be in and I want to make a difference so I think highly of the schools. I do think that there are a lot of areas that we do need to work on...just like another place.

[TB] 6:44

A major change that Sal experienced first hand, was the expansion of diversity in Harrisonburg.

SW] 6:50

Does it make a big difference to live in a community that does have such a diverse population?

[SR] 6:56

It does make a difference because you can actually do some of the things that...similar to the things you used to do back in your country. You know, you can identify with people and can make connections with the people and that way you can actually feel like there is a little part of your country here in a way.

♪ Lance Conrad, "Affection" ♪ | **7:19**

[EGM] 7:25

The diversity of Harrisonburg that Sal spoke of is resonant of the city today. In fact, according to an article written by The Breeze, there are 53 languages and 49 countries represented in Harrisonburg City Public Schools. Our next story begins within these diverse walls, following a high school senior who is preparing to enter the world of higher education as an undocumented student.

[TB] 7:49

GN has been living in the United States with his mother, younger sister, and step father since he was two years old. We'll listen in as he describes his physical immigration process.

[CL] 7:59

So can you tell us where you're from?

[GN] 8:01

So I was born in Mexico, southern Mexico, to be specific. I came here at the age of two and have been living in the United States since.

[CL] 8:11

Can you describe your home country?

[GN] 8:13

So from where I come from, it's very rural as in, to get to a shop, you would have to walk a few miles to get there. So, we pretty much lived in an isolated place, but since then, it's kind of grown. Back in my home country, more specifically, my city, people know each other since it's very small, so you know everyone by their first name and everyone's very comfortable with each other. So coming here and seeing how people are more, I guess secluded ... and very private about their life, it was kind of kind of different, I guess.

[CL] 8:50

What would you say is important for us to know about your experience in coming to the US?

[GN] 8:57

So, there's a lot more freedom back in Mexico as and you can do what you want and don't have to worry much about it. And since I came here with my mother, who was at the time, like 19, she didn't know much about the country. So, when she had to go off to work, I had to stay at home by myself and pretty much make my own food. So, I kind of had to adapt and learn how to be independent at a very young age.

[CL] 9:26

What was the reasoning for coming to the US?

[GN] 9:30

So in my city, it's very traditional in the sense that women have to stay at home and men are just supposed to continue their education and get a job to support the family. And since my mother wasn't able to continue her education back in Mexico, she decided that it would be a better decision for her to come to the United States with me, so that I could receive more aid when it comes to education and I could possibly have a better future.

[CL] 10:00

What was the path like to Harrisonburg?

[GN] 10:05

So I originally went to Washington State, I think from there, I went to Oregon, and from Oregon, I went to California or Nevada, and I slowly made my way to the East. Then I arrived to Florida, then North Carolina, then Virginia. So yeah, I lived in a few states, but it wasn't for long it was a few months, simply because my mother had worked there and she had a place to live for a few months.

[CL] 10:35

How do you like Harrisonburg?

[GN] 10:38

I enjoy it. It's very diverse. Schools for example, Harrisonburg High School is very diverse, and I meet people from there, different countries and I get to learn about their experiences as well. I didn't really realize how diverse it was until I visited other high schools. For example, when I went to take my SAT I went to ... I forget the name. It's, it's near Weyers cave. I forget but

anyways, it wasn't as diverse so it was predominantly white. Very few people of color, so it was strange seeing that.

[TB] 11:20

The diversity we talked about with Sal has only expanded over the last thirteen years. But even with a substantial increase in diversity, GN has still faced challenges in school.

[CL] 11:30

How has that educational experience been?

[GN] 11:34

So at first it was a bit of a struggle since I didn't know any English. So, I was put into a group of kids who needed additional support and help with the language barrier, that I had and quickly adapted surprisingly. And they moved me up a grade since I wasn't in the correct grade at the time. So that was an accomplishment. But I guess another struggle would be communicating since I had to live by myself with my mother and I had a bit of trust issues when it came to expressing myself, which is why it was very difficult for teachers and for students in general to understand why I wasn't speaking in class.

[CL] 12:24

How has that experience impacted you?

[GN] 12:29

I guess it kind of reminds me of what my father said, which he said that I was very different when I was younger. So, I used to be very talkative. I would talk to anyone, I wouldn't mind meeting people. I was very talkative, I just enjoyed being with people but growing up isolated with my mother, by just living by my mother kind of made me more quiet, secluded and I don't tend to speak up on stuff, even if it may bother me, I prefer to stay quiet about it and just do what I need to do and just go on with my life.

[CL] 13:04

Has it been difficult to immerse your cultural beliefs or customs into Harrisonburg?

[GN] 13:12

Harrisonburg is very inclusive. They let you express yourself which I like, although I don't really tend to do that, but it's still difficult trying to relate to people since, for example, in the United States, I'm just seen as a very Hispanic guy. But if I were to be with family members or with other people from my country, they think I'm very white. Or as they say "bien agringado" [Americanized] very, pretty much I've become white or I'm transitioning to white.

[CL] 13:49

Have you found that hard to balance?

[GN] 13:53

I guess so. Yes. I've never really given much thought until my freshman year of high school. When I kind of started questioning who I was. I wasn't sure., I just didn't feel like I belonged here. I felt out of place. But I also felt out of place when I had to talk to family members or cousins, since they were very different compared to me. They were very ... they just enjoyed talking with people, they enjoyed hanging out and I was very ... I just enjoy being at home by myself and just working on my own thing. So that kind of just made me think that I didn't belong there or here. So I was kind of lost. I do try to keep to my roots, as in I still try to study Spanish grammar and I want to keep up to date with the news in Mexico because I feel like that kind of gives me reassurance that I am one of them.

[EGM] 14:56

GN faced difficulty in finding an identity between two cultures. Many immigrants, especially those growing up in America, find this to be a challenge as well, since they are trying to blend multiple cultures and interests into their daily routines. Let's listen in as GN describes some of his current hobbies.

[CL] | 15:14

So what do you enjoy doing in your free time?

[GN] 15:17

I really got into programming so I sometimes go just see what I can and can't do. I really have got into 3D modeling, specifically on Blender. I just like looking at videos and just messing around. It's fun.

[CL] | 15:33

That's really cool. Is that something you may want to go to college for?

[GN] 15:37

Although I do like art and animation, I feel like I can't really succeed in that field and I won't be able to provide my support that I want to, for the family. I guess one of my biggest motives is being financially stable, enough to support me, myself and my sister and my mother.

[CL] 15:59

So can you tell us a little bit about what your current occupations are?

[GN] 16:03

So at the moment, I guess I'm just a full time student as in, I am incapable of working since I am an undocumented student. So the only reason why I guess I, no wait, I'm trying to say is I'm a full time student because I can't work but also because I'm taking care of my sister. I've been taking care of her since she was born in 2012. So, since secondary school really, I have been with her. I guess one of the most notable memories I have with my sister is that when she started speaking, she called me father. I was like, I was touched but I was like, no I'm your brother.

[CL] 16:45

Do you feel like that dynamic is kind of hard because you are that to her, but you're not that?

[GN] 16:52

I feel it. Yes. Something that I guess stuck with me since then. Because although I am in the process of going to college, I feel like it'll be very difficult leaving her since I grew up as an only child, I always just pretty much thought of what I should do and about what steps I should do to be successful. But since my sister was born, I .. my goals kind of have changed it. I'm not really sure what I should do if I should take this route or that route, because I also don't want to leave her behind since she's still in primary school. And if I go for another four years, she'll be at the end of her secondary school and going to high school, I feel like I'll miss a big part of her life.

[TB] 17:38

Being undocumented poses many barriers to Pseudonym and his family. Undocumented individuals are not legally permitted to work, and employers who hire those with undocumented statuses are subject to federal penalty - not to mention that the employee will be subject to deportation.

[EGM] 17:53

The words “illegal immigrant” and “deportation” are often heard surrounding immigration these days.

[TB] 18:00

The current Trump administration has taken a zero-tolerance approach to undocumented individuals, and the Obama administration deported more immigrants than any other administration in history.

[EGM] 18:10

Being undocumented means being hyper-aware of who you disclose your status to, and how you move about society.

[TB] 18:17

For GN, this includes college applications.

[CL] 18:20

So right now you're in high school. Earlier, we talked about you also taking community college classes, right? So why'd you make that decision to do both?

[GN] 18:32

So there's this program at Harrisonburg High school where it's called the Blue Ridge Scholars Program, where students starting their junior can go to Blue Ridge and work towards earning their associate's degree, which I was curious about, because in my situation, I'm not really sure if I'm capable of going to college, more so affording it ... so through this program, I could go to college, receive additional higher education level, and also not have to pay as much as most students would have to. So I would receive tuition at a very, at a like a very small price compared to the actual tuition. So, I spoke to my counselor about it and what information I would need to disclose to be able to participate in this program, and I didn't have to go through the same process that a normal college student would have to, so I felt if I'm not able to go to college, this is a good alternative. And with this, I will still have a higher education level and will make me .. it will make it easier for me to find a career, either here or back in my country.

[CL] 19:42

When going through application processes, do you have to be aware of what you put on an application or how much you disclose on an application?

[GN] 19:52

Yes. I feel more comfortable doing it now simply because of the support that I have. I have, I'm part of the SLI program as well. So I've worked with Dr. Aleman here at JMU, which has helped me a lot. I'm also part of a matricula program, which I received an email about. So I was assigned a partner who goes to Stanford I think, and he's helped me understand the college process, which schools are better, which schools could provide me the most support and what I should what I need to do to be successful as well. He has helped me. He has provided me with multiple scholarships. So that's kind of has eased the struggle of applying to college.

[CL] 20:43

So in going to college you had mentioned you don't really technically want to go into programming, you want to go where you see success, money in the future, so you can take care of your family. Do you have any ideas of what you want to go into?

[GN] 21:00

So I guess I originally wanted to go more into art and animation. So like graphic design, but I decided to focus more on computer sciences. That's a growing career path. And funny story, I originally only looked at computer science simply because I simply search something in Google; careers that I guess offer the most money for a very short amount of time that's cool, because I kind of one of my motives just trying to be stable, financially stable since I had to grow up with my mother who pretty much worked every day. But I really got into the topic and since then I've kind of grown to love it. I'm not sure if it's because I searched it up and just kind of forced myself to like it, but I like it, which is a good thing.

[EGM] 21:53

Family, and being able to support the family is very important for GN. These values play a meaningful role as he pursues future options. GN has also considered a higher education in Mexico with the goal of seeking success for himself, and his family.

[CL] 22:11

So you mentioned possibly going back to Mexico after school? What would that be like?

[GN] 22:20

I guess, I don't really know much about the country and the States as of now. I have been thinking about applying to schools there. But if I do do that, I would probably just spend a year here working and saving up money before applying to schools and going back.

[CL] 22:39

And how would that look for your family situation?

[GN] 22:42

Well, my mother's kind of against the idea. My father is supporting. He's not supporting it, but he's supportive of the idea that I have, as in if I do decide to take that route, but he'll help me out and be able to help me pay for textbooks and anything else that I need.

[CL] 23:01

That's awesome. How does your mother feel about returning to Mexico?

[GN] 23:08

She feels against the idea, simply because she took so many risks to get here only for me to go back and she kind of, I guess feels kind of stabbed in the back in a way. So, she kind of feels like what she did was for nothing, as in I still could possibly take other major steps here in the US. But she feels like if I go back, it's a step back, I would be ... I wouldn't be progressing. I would just be returning back to the lifestyle that we had back there.

[CL] 22:44

So personally, do you feel like receiving a higher education and then making that decision to go back to Mexico, it would be taking a step back or a step forward?

[GN] 22:58

I feel like as long as I'm able to study and work towards a higher education, I feel like it's a step forward.

[CL] 24:06

And how would that look for your family back in Mexico?

[GN] 24:10

They would ... I feel like they would be more supportive. Yeah, they would be supportive simply because I'll finally be back and I'll finally be able to meet my family members that I haven't seen since I was very young. So I probably don't recognize them anymore.

[CL] 24:25

Is there any like animosity towards your family that moved to the US that your family in Mexico may have?

[GN] 24:34

I don't think so. My family, the family members that I have here in the US are kind of supportive as long as I reach a higher education, because none of them have gone to school higher than secondary school. So as long as I am making progress, they're supportive of the idea.

[EGM] 24:53

Both Sal and GN went through the education system in Harrisonburg, but had different experiences to reflect on. Whereas Sal attended schools that were of a caucasian majority and faced teasing by his classmates, GN experienced a new page in Harrisonburg's book, one where the highschool he attends is predominately non-white and discrimination is almost non-existent.

[TB] 25:14

Sal was able to witness and be a part of the improvements to Harrisonburg City Schools as an educator in the ESL field, and GN has been able to experience these changes first hand. The stories told here are intertwined in unexpected ways - Sal and GN don't know each other, but Sal's work in the education field has been felt by GN and others. Though there is always work to be done, the bridge between these two stories shows us we progress as a community, making way for those to come.

[EGM] 25:42

Something else we bear witness to in these interviews is the idea that craving an identity is a timeless endeavor. Both Sal and GN struggled in school to form an identity that was completely their own. Sal struggled with being seen as an outsider, and GN retreated into a shy, quiet state that contrasted the lively young boy he had once been. The desire for a concrete identity is human - we all want to be known and understood as who we are. It is our hope that this episode has allowed you to catch a glimpse of Sal and GN for who they are through their words and stories.

[TB] 26:19

In 2011, Jose Vargas wrote an article for the New York Times entitled “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant” in which he disclosed his status as an undocumented American and recounted his experiences hiding his identity. In this article he says:

“There are believed to be 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. We’re not always who you think we are. Some pick your strawberries or care for your children. Some are in high school or college. And some, it turns out, write news articles you might read. I grew up here. This is my home. Yet even though I think of myself as an American and consider America my country, my country doesn’t think of me as one of its own.”

[EGM] 27:00

GN grew up in America, Sal arrived in America at age thirteen. America is not an “exclusive” country, it is not “for” any one person more than another. It is Sal’s home, it is GN’s home, and it is our home together.

♪ Lance Conrad, "Affection" ♪ | 27:14

[EGM] 27:20

As this story draws to a close, we’d like to share this quote from GN about how he feels toward his experience as an immigrant in Harrisonburg:

[GN] 27:28

“I feel like what happened is for a reason and I appreciate the struggles and success that I have had. I feel like what happened to me or what I’ve been through has helped me mature, although might have not been the best process, I don’t really see how else I could have done things.”

♪ Lance Conrad, "Affection" ♪ | 27:50

[TB] 27:54

Thank you for joining us today on Harrisonburg 360. We’re grateful to GN and to our professor, Dr. Fagan for helping make this episode possible.

[TB & EGM] 28:02

We would also like to thank JMU Libraries, especially Kate Morris, Sarah Roth-Mullet, Bodeene Amyot, and Kirsten Mlodynia for all of their hard work.

[EGM] 28:11

Our hosts today were Tyler Belcher and Ena Guevara-Marquez. Our interview with GN was conducted by Camille Lynch.

[TB] 28:17

Our research and content producers were Tyler Belcher, Leah Smith, Camille Lynch, and Ena Guevara-Marquez, and our audio producer was Ena Guevara-Marquez. Join us next time for another episode of Harrisonburg 360!

[EGM] 28:30

You can also connect with our podcast and become a part of our community. You can find our Twitter handle @360Harrisonburg, and can visit us on Instagram and Facebook as @Harrisonburg360. Make sure to use our hashtag #Harrisonburg360, so we can connect with you! Thank you all for listening, and we hope to have you back soon!

♪ Sean Fischer, "We Are Millennials" ♪ | **28:49**

Tagline | 28:51

Harrisonburg 360 : Real People. Real Stories. One Community.

Sources

- Jose Vargas "My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant"
- <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/obamas-deportation-policy-numbers/story?id=41715661>
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- <https://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/undocumented-video>



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