

Bea Hanson's Leap of Faith

Podcast Ep. By Zarin Hendrix

Introduction

[Zarin Hendrix]: For the past century, Mexican citizens have been migrating to the United States. As of 2021, roughly 10.7 million Mexicans live here in the United States¹. This flow of migration was brought on for different reasons depending on who you ask. Some might say that they were looking for work. Others will claim that they wanted a fresh new experience. Whatever the reason may be, millions of Mexicans come to the United States to begin a new life. My name is Zarin Hendrix and amongst those immigrants was a Beatriz Blanco. My grandmother. Since her migration in 1968, her name has been Americanized. She now goes by Bea Hanson. Today I want to tell Bea's story. What was the catalyst for her decision to leave home? How did she overcome her new surroundings, and most importantly, does she have any regrets? On today's episode we will explore the hardships and triumphs that come with leaving home and what it's like to leap into a world that is so foreign from your own. On June 20th, 1944, Beatriz Blanco was born in Mexico City. Ever since she was a child, she was never afraid to experience new things.

<<Mexican National Anthem²>>

Early Life/Childhood

[Bea Hanson]: I feel secure that I'm not afraid to try new things or to meet people and talk to people because I always felt like I was ok, and I was special. Even during the hard times in my life, I always remember that it's okay because I am okay."

[Hendrix]: What's more, Bea and her family were familiar with American culture. Bea's aunt rented bungalows to American tourists. Her earliest memories were spent playing with American children there in Cuernavaca.

[Hanson]: We used to spend a lot of time at my aunt's house and for entire summers my brother and I would spend time there and this property had bungalows and that's how they made their living. They would rent the bungalows mostly to American citizens that would go and spend months in Mexico, in Cuernavaca, and they will lease one of these bungalows and so I got to interact a lot as a child with American citizens. Because some were women, single mothers that had a child, I remember specifically a little girl and she did not speak Spanish and I did not speak English, but we used to play all the time. I never knew what she was saying but it

¹ Rosenbloom, Raquel, and Jeanne Batalova. "Mexican Immigrants in the United States." migrationpolicy.org. October 4, 2022.

² Felix.blume, "Mexican National Anthem on December 1st of 2013," December 1, 2013, <https://freesound.org/people/felix.blume/sounds/210035/>. This sound is licensed under a Creative Commons 0 Public Domain License.

didn't matter, we were kids together and it was a very happy time, a very freeing time in my life.

<<Children playing³>>

[Hendrix]: While discussing her childhood and familiarity with American life, Bea shared an interesting bit of family history. On November 20, 1910, the Mexican Revolution began⁴. Like many other families during the war, Bea's father, brothers, and sisters were sent to Texas to be free from danger. The one who sent them away was Bea's oldest uncle, Lucio Blanco. A revolutionary general in the war. As for Bea's father and his siblings, they were given the opportunity to work experience American culture firsthand. Bea's father would even receive an education in San Antonio.

Family History

[Hanson]: And, you know, another thing is that my family was kind of a special family. My father was the eleventh child. My grandparents lived in a big ranch in Northern Mexico and his oldest brother, Lucio, was a general in the Army in Mexico, and in 2010 uh- 1910 when the revolution uh happened in Mexico he was a general, and a very well-known general that had a very special role in in the revolution, during the revolution. My father in those days, he was about 8 years old and my uncle, Lucio, to protect his mother and his sisters and of course his little brother, that was then just a child, he purchased a house in San Antonio Texas, and he took them to San Antonio to get them out of the country. And so, they lived in San Antonio for many years, just about all the time that the war was going in Mexico, my father went to school in the United States he learned fluent English, in fact, he spoke English with a Texas accent and he had great memories of living in the United States. So that was another part of the experience that I had as a child. Hearing his memories and stories that he had about living in the United States. his oldest brother who was supporting him and supporting the family here in the United States, he was killed. He was killed, um, captured and he was, they captured him in the United States. They were taking him, and they were in a boat going back to Mexico and he was um, he had uh handcuffs, and uh he jumped off the boat and he drowned. But rather than being captured he preferred to die.

<<gunshots and explosions⁵>>

³Pechenyshki, "Children Playing Outdoors," July 8, 2016, <https://freesound.org/people/pechenyshki/sounds/349405/>. This sound is licensed under a Creative Commons 0 Public Domain License.

⁴ National Endowment for the Humanities. "The Mexican Revolution: November 20th, 1910."

⁵ Ramston, "Real Explosions Real Gunshots," January 25, 2015, <https://freesound.org/people/Ramston/sounds/262436/>. This sound is licensed under a Creative Commons 0 Public Domain License.

[Hanson]: Let me tell you this too, my aunts, I heard this all my life, they were so proud that we were Blanco. It was a big name. It was because of the general, Lucio Blanco.

First Visit

[Hendrix]: At the age of 12 It was Bea's turn to visit the United States.

[Hanson]: I was probably about twelve years old, and my aunts brought me to San Antonio, Texas. We took the train and we slept. You had beds in there and we slept that night in the train and then the next morning we woke up and we were across the border and my uncle, their brother, Bernardo was the console in San Antonio, Texas, Mexican console, and so he had important government representation in the United States. So, when we came to visit and stay with him, well we were kind of VIPs. So, I had a very good experience when I came to the United States, and of course the lifestyle and the quality of life was so much higher than the quality of life in Mexico, even though we were not rich, we were middle class, so to come to the United States and see the comforts that people had and the lifestyle, it always gave me an impression that, of course, life in the United States was much better.

<<Ambient train station sounds⁶>>

[Hendrix]: A trip to the United States makes Bea reflect. She describes the difficult reality that many Mexicans faced.

<<Mexican Market Sounds⁷>>

[Hanson]: You see the people begging in the streets we used to see a lot of people just trying to sell food or sell candy or sell something just to make a living out in the streets. Newspapers, magazines, I mean anything. People are hardworking in Mexico because they have to survive, little children in the street, they will run to you in the car and will say, "Can I wash your windshield?" And they would wash the windshield and you will give them, you know, a little change and that's how they were making money to take to their families because everybody had to work in order to survive. There is a lot of real poverty in Mexico.

Big Move

[Hendrix]: When Bea came into her twenties, she had graduated from the National University of Mexico. While working as a teacher she began to receive mysterious calls.

⁶ ValentinPetiteau, "Calm Train Station – Morning – Ambiance – French," November 1, 2022, <https://freesound.org/people/ValentinPetiteau/sounds/656610/>. This sound is licensed under a Creative Commons 0 Public Domain License.

⁷ Uminari, *Mexico City Street Market*, recorded April 26, 2017, WAV file, converted to MP3. <https://freesound.org/people/Uminari/sounds/389716/>

[Hanson]: It was an interesting time in my life in Mexico because my mother started getting some calls all the sudden. Somebody, anonymous calls, was telling her that someone wanted to hurt me and to watch over me. Of course, my mother got all upset, and she was nervous, and my father purchased a gun and gave it to me. I was carrying a gun in my purse. I wouldn't have known what to do with a gun, but I had a gun just in case. You know, that was kind of a bad feeling. Knowing that somebody was trying to get you for some reason. I didn't know why, or even if it was true or not, but the calls came several times.

[Hendrix]: If Bea wasn't handling enough stress, a man, my grandfather, whom she met on a trip to Corpus Christi asked to marry her!

[Hanson]: Around that time, I got that proposal to marry Richard, and I thought, what am I doing here? Now that I look back, I can tell you that that was a God thing. It was the only way I would have left my family because I was so happy, I was so comfortable. There was no reason for me to leave. But it seemed like, why not? I've always been daring; I haven't been afraid of change or taking chances and I accepted his proposal. He came to Mexico, he asked for my hand, and then we flew to Corpus Christi, and we married here in Corpus Christi.

[Hendrix]: And thus, Bea stepped over the line. Into a brand-new world.

<<City Street Ambiance⁸>>

[Hendrix]: Culture shock. A phenomenon experienced by those who are unfamiliar with their surroundings which, in many cases causes feelings of isolation and disorientation. The first few months in the United States was an unpleasant experience for Bea. New sights, new sounds, and words that she had never heard surrounded her everyday life. This surely was different from her home.

[Hanson]: I didn't know anybody; I didn't have friends. I would go to the grocery store, we lived very close to Parkdale Plaza, HEB. I would walk in there and look at the meats, I was going to cook dinner, and the cuts of meat look different here than in Mexico. They just cut meat differently. So, I didn't know what I was buying. I didn't know how to cook it. It was simple things. The phone would ring, and I would panic. I didn't know if I was going to understand the person on the other side. The adjustment was very, very slow but I had no choice. I had to. So, what I did, I sat in front of the television during the day when my husband was at work and I would listen to whatever was going on in English, and sometimes I would get angry because they would be laughing, and I didn't know what they were laughing about. But it's interesting

⁸ Klankbeeld, White Noise City Center – Downtown Street Ambience 01, " September 8th, 2011, <https://freesound.org/people/klankbeeld/sounds/127590/>. This sound is licensed under a Creative Commons 0 Public Domain License.

how the words started to make sense and I started understanding, and I understood English long before I could make the words mine and use them, but at least I was understanding.

[Hendrix]: She didn't always get it right the first time. As it turns out, Bea unknowingly broke a few rules during her first few months.

[Hanson]: It wasn't easy, but I did it wrong and it worked on my behalf because I came with my visa as "tourist" because I had a passport and a tourist visa. So, they let me in, they didn't know I was coming to get married. So, we get married, and I stay here. I think it was, I don't know how many months, I think my visa was good for six months. So, when my visa expired, I went back to the government and I said, "How do I renew my visa?" They looked at me and I said, "I'm married, I live here" and they said, "You aren't supposed to do that." I was supposed to have asked for a visa to be married and that took a lot more time and everything. But now, it was done, I was living here.

[Hendrix]: I asked Bea what some of the most surprising parts of American life were for her. She told me about a belief that was held in Mexico. It was thought that Mexican Americans were ashamed to be Mexican. She was surprised to see the truth.

[Hanson]: It was very interesting to be because we had a distorted impression living in Mexico of what they Mexican people that lived in the United States really were like. We thought they were ashamed of being Mexican. We thought that they didn't like being Mexican. We thought that they avoided speaking Spanish as part of being ashamed. We had this impression and that was the biggest surprise to me, that these people love to speak Spanish. They were embarrassed to speak Spanish to me because they thought I spoke perfect Spanish, and their Spanish sometimes was mixed with English, or they didn't pronounce. Another interesting thing, a lot of the words that they used are the ancient Spanish, and it made sense because they lived here before this land was part of the United States. So, it was an older Spanish that they spoke, and then the fact that they love Mexican music. And that they would share with me that culture, and that was amazing. I mean how many years they have lived in the United States since the country is now part of the United States, and yet their culture and their language survived.

[Hendrix]: Additionally, in recent history, many Americans possess very negative opinions on Mexican immigrants. Many believe that, as a whole, Mexican immigrants are criminally motivated. As a member of both worlds, I was interested to understand what Bea thought.

[Hanson]: You know, I believe that a lot of the Mexicans that immigrated, especially the ones that came to work as laborers in the fields, they were people with low education in Mexico. You know, they were struggling, they needed to help their families survive, they sometimes didn't finish school, they just got out. The opportunity was there, "Let's go to the United States and work and make better money and send money back." But these people were not educated. So, I think that that was part of what gave people the impression that they were not as good, or they were lower class, or they were not as capable or something. But one thing, and of course,

there is nowadays, a lot more of that criminal element that I imagine has been part of the Mexican culture. A lot of people that needed to get ahead, just hang on with the cartels in order to make money and survive, and maybe some of those have come in. But my experience with the families that came here is that they are very hard workers, they came to work. They know, and they have worked all their lives to survive, and if they were going to make a better living, they were going to work very hard, and a lot of the people that stayed here they made sure that their kids went to school because that was their way to a better life.

[Hendrix]: Finally, I had one more question for Bea. “The American Dream.” The idea that, in the United States, if you work hard, your dreams will come true. Was this belief just an absurd thought? Does Bea feel like she has experienced the “American Dream”?

[Hanson]: Yes, I have heard of the term "American Dream" in Mexico. It was associated with the farm workers that were coming to work hard and have a better life. You know, we're so close to the United States that we receive a lot of the culture. We all had that impression that the United States was the better place to be and a better life, and the land of opportunities without a doubt. And I grew up with that belief, and to be honest with you, it's true. I have lived the American Dream. The opportunities have been presented, I've been blessed, I've lived in comfort. It has given me opportunities to be of help to others and to help others change their lives. It has been a total dream for me that I have never dreamt. If somebody had told me when I was living in Mexico that I would be living in the United States, that I would be the director of the Coastal Bend Food Bank, that I would have the opportunities that I have had, that I would be talking to you in English, I would have never believed it. That was not part of my dream at all, and yet, the doors opened. God had a plan, and that plan was a lot better than my plan and it has been fulfilled thanks to the opportunities that the United States has offered me.

Conclusion

<<Mexican National Anthem⁹>>

[Hendrix]: It has been 54 years since Bea made the tough decision to come to the States. At the surprisingly young age of 78, Bea has created a beautiful life for herself. Today, she works as the director of the Coastal Bend Food Bank, providing food to those who are in need. Bea now has two daughters and two grandchildren here in the United States. She resides here in Corpus Christi with her four dogs. Bea still believes that moving to the United States was one of the best decisions she has ever made.

⁹ Felix.blume, “Mexican National Anthem on December 1st of 2013,” December 1, 2013, <https://freesound.org/people/felix.blume/sounds/210035/>. This sound is licensed under a Creative Commons 0 Public Domain License.

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