

# Joe Gonzalez



Joe Gonzalez was born in Michoacán, Mexico and immigrated to Des Moines, Iowa in 1957 when he was five years old. He arrived via train and recalls pulling up to the Court Avenue depot. His father was already in Iowa, waiting for them to arrive. Joe arrived with his two brothers and his mother. As a first generation immigrant, Joe identifies as Mexican-American. He also has Aztec roots and isn't of Spanish descent. His life is still deeply influenced by his Mexican roots, but he has lived in the United States almost his whole life so he feels strongly tied to the United States as well.

When Joe first came to Iowa, he was the oldest of the children so he quickly became an interpreter for his parents. He joked that he couldn't lie about anything that happened at school because when conferences came around he had to attend conferences as the interpreter. Joe grew up learning English in school and spoke Spanish at home.

The Gonzalez family came to the states for the same reason that many others immigrate; they were looking for a better life and better opportunities. The life that his parents wanted for their children was not what Mexico could offer at that time, which became a deciding factor in moving to the United States.

Joe described life as an adventure when they first arrived in the U.S. because everything was so new. He described his younger self as fearless because he dabbled in everything and took anything and everything in. He was a sponge to this new world and wanted to learn everything he could to make the transition easier. Joe took life by the horns, but he knew his mother was very apprehensive and fearful. Her family, and a constant reassurance from his father, helped his mother through this massive transition.

He considers himself very lucky because he received an education. Joe decided he wanted to be a police officer in his final years of high school after he took one criminal justice class. The north side of Des Moines was recruiting police officers and Joe just happened to be there when they were recruiting cadets. In 1971 Joe was getting ready to join the police force, but there was a minor speed bump; he wasn't a United States citizen. Joe was lucky and knew a sergeant who was able to get him to a citizenship swearing in ceremony in Davenport. They drove out there together and just like that, Joe was a citizen. He laughs because he knows it isn't that easy at all now. Joe Gonzalez was hired on as a cadet on the police force on November 18, 1971. He was eighteen years old.

Joe believes his life would have been very different if he had not settled in Des Moines. He knows he would not have become a police officer. He thinks he probably would have worked in labor or a ranch job. Joe feels very grateful to have moved to Des Moines because he received so many opportunities he couldn't access in Mexico. One of his greatest regrets is not actively making sure his children spoke Spanish. He wishes he would have made it more of a priority because he believes when you stop speaking your native language you lose a part of your identity.