

Hispanic Heritage Month

Community Voices: Melisa

My name is Melisa and I am the first U.S.-born in my family. My parents immigrated to Elko, NV in the early 1960s. My father moved from the Basque Country in Northern Spain to work as a sheepherder near Elko, and my mother's family immigrated from Mexico to find work in Nevada's casinos. The U.S. held for them, as for many, hopes for prosperity and stability.



Melisa and her Mom, Letty.
Elko Basque Festival 1976.

Both my parents come from humble roots. My father knew hunger as a child and left home to work before he was ten. The effects of the Spanish Civil War and World War II shaped his childhood. My mother's family struggled to make ends meet in Mexico and lived with other family members to support each other. Theirs are stories of struggle, resilience, and determination. I am proud of all they have accomplished in the U.S.



First Holy Communion
with grandmother, Anita

My family's values are informed by our Mexican and Spanish-Basque heritage. First, my siblings and I were taught to honor our family and God above all. Being Catholic was central to our identity. Preserving our language and culture was also critical: we grew up speaking Spanish, were active members of our Basque Club, and kept connections with our family abroad.

I am awed by my heritage's vast history and antiquity. The blood of both colonizers and the colonized lives in me. On one continent, my ancestors' land is dotted with volcanoes, waterfalls, and pyramids. On the other, rainy green hills, secret mountain passes, and rich oceans. I am proud of these places and histories.



Melisa at Tenochtitlan,
Mexico



Family photo taken
overlooking father's village
of Lesaka, Navarra in Spain

Hispanic Heritage Month helps remind me to take time to learn more about other Hispanic and Latino cultures and to celebrate the great accomplishments and positive contributions of these peoples in the United States.

