

# How to be a Mexican American in Indiana

*Xavier Neier*

Be born in Tijuana; have a Mexican background, but be adopted by two Hoosiers; don't worry, you'll know what a Hoosier is later; don't memorize your mother's face, you'll have a picture of her later; don't remember all the details of the process, you'll have the adoption explained to you by your new parents. They aren't new, they have always been your parents. Go to Indiana, settle down in a quiet town like New Pal, a sleepy town, frozen in time. On the high shelf, your only form of contact to the other world sits high above your head: rough, itchy blankets, a pair of miniature dolls with their black suit and white and red dress, a baby's straw sombrero—aren't they nice mantel pieces? Don't open the navy-blue tote yet, let it sit in the closet under the folded Lego boxes. Pay attention to the two beanie babies on the dresser, one red with the Mexican flag on its chest and the other splashed with red, white, and blue, undoubtedly the American one. Get a younger sister; be mistaken as the younger brother because you're less responsible. Be seen at church; get mistaken as her boyfriend by the other kids. Her blue eyes and your brown eyes don't match. It's okay, they didn't know you were adopted. Take a look in the tote, even if you're not bothered by the adoption yet.

Go to the county fairgrounds, be approached by fellow Hispanics—after all, you're one of them, right? *¿Dónde están los baños?* Listen as they speak too fast; say you don't speak Spanish but in English of course; let their daughter translate the message, she understands two languages. Why not you? Get exposed as a fraud; take Spanish classes throughout high school; then take more classes at college; great, now you can read at a second-grade level; join the school's Latino club, you'll fit right in, right? Go watch their dramatic movies, see their tarot cards, and taste inoffensive flavors of catered Qdoba. Realize something is off, you're not connecting, like an observer but not part of the whole. You're not picking up their de's or los's or keeping up with their language, or your language? It's becoming a whole cultural class, and you're already taking too many classes.

Get overwhelmed with school and stop going to the club. Great, you didn't plan for this extended spring-break; leave the school, just for a minute, online work is better anyways; pause, open your blue tote now, just once more; some other blankets, dried palm leaves; look, her photo; that's your mom, or your real mom, or your birth parent? She could not have been taller than 5' 4", given how the kitchen cabinets towered over her. Read her face, her tiny, brown eyes, the thin strands of hair framing her face. Nothing, there is nothing to read from her distant face. Imagine her voice, what she must have said to you before handing you off; be careful putting the photo back in the box, or you'll ruin the memory; you are a Hoosier, an American. Go ahead, take more classes, do more tutoring sessions, connect to other Hispanic clubs; do these things, even when you don't fit in; you may never become fully Mexican, but you are still Mexican, and hey, being bilingual is a worthy skill. You could travel back to Tijuana, talk to your

second mother, hear her voice again for the first time. *Have you thought about what you want to say to her?* You'll figure it out as the years go by.