

STOCKTONSpeaks!

ANGEL CUEVAS

Angel Cuevas was born in 1936 in San Nicolas de Acuna Jalisco, Mexico. He grew up in a loving family but was challenged from a young age to seek a better life. As a member of a Mexican family, he was taught one of life's greatest virtues, respect for others and particularly for one's heritage. He has always tried to improve himself while, at the same time, respecting the family and culture into which he was born.

There were seven children in Angel's family. He had three brothers and three sisters. Angel was born sixth; only his sister Carmen is younger. He learned quickly that mutual trust kept the family together and resulted in strong bonds of love.

Like most Mexican families, Angel's was Roman Catholic. Mexican children begin early in life to prepare for full membership in the Church by studying catechism in Sunday school. One of Angel's treasured memories is being with his mom while she taught catechism classes to other young people. He also recalls his joy when he sang in the church choir.

School was a part Angel's daily routine as a young child. However, because Angel's parents had a big family to support and had financial troubles at the time, he only completed the sixth grade. His mother was a teacher and advised him to continue his schooling. Angel had wanted to follow her advice, but his father introduced him to the trades of fishing and farming.

Angel caught on to these skills fast and at a young age he was able to get a job. He began as a farm worker, and by the age of seventeen, he had four people working for him. Even in his adolescence, Angel was a successful business man. Farming the land gave him a sense of maturity and responsibility.

In the Mexican culture, the coming of age ritual, the quinceañera, is reserved for girls at fifteen. There is no formal ritual for boys. But, for Angel, one

of his first memories of becoming an adult was when he had his first girlfriend, also about fifteen.

On the other hand, Angel recalls that adults began to treat him as mature for different reasons. The older generation showed him respect when he succeeded at farming and was able to lend his relatives money. Once he was able to help his family in a tangible way, he was accepted as grown up.

Angel enjoys fishing and frequently fished at Lake Chapala Jalisco. He raced the other fisherman with his 17-horse powered engine canoe. Angel was a very good swimmer, recognized as the best around. He appreciated that others celebrated his skills and came to accept him as a member of the larger community based on his own achievements.

As the years passed, Angel's parents increased their pressure for him to consider how he might make a better life for himself. It was his parents who encouraged him to move to the United States. In 1961, at the age of twenty five, he acquiesced to their pleadings and entered the United States, coming directly to Stockton. Since his parents did not accompany him, he was now responsible for his own support and had to stand on his own two feet.

Once in the United States, Angel was quickly hired as a farm foreman. When he established himself financially and emotionally, he began to help relatives emigrate from Mexico. His love and devotion to family convinced Angel to use his position to get his family jobs on the farm where he held a supervisory position.

Angel and many of his relatives have stayed in Stockton. Their sense of culture, tradition, and family remains strong. The traditions that had been passed down to him, Angel now passes down to younger members of his family. Angel and his family spoke Spanish at home throughout his life in Mexico and in the United States. Angel feels that he is part of a Hispanic community. He says he has "always worked with other Hispanics and that is the cultural group of people that I associated with the most."

Angel is respected for his accomplishments within his community. He was able to raise and support a family in the United States. He has always been able to work for what he wanted to achieve. He values hard work as well as strong family bonds. Education, work, and religion are a few of the virtues that he venerates and wants future generations to acquire as they come of age. "I never gave up in life; I would always strive to be the best I could."

Author: Jenna Aguilera

Interviewer: Bunna Hang

Ethnic Group: Mexican-American

Generation: Elder