

Biography of Ricardo Flores

Ricardo Flores is a 42-year-old rancher from Mexico. He immigrated to the United States with his family of six children.

I am Ricardo Flores, a husband and father. My family of six children once lived on a very poor ranch near Guanajuato, Mexico. I couldn't afford the Mexican government's fees to dig the wells needed to save my crops from drought. So I abandoned my ranch, a tough decision. Today I live 1,200 miles away in Garden City, Kansas. I work at a meatpacking plant and earn \$15 an hour. That's more than one day's pay in Mexico! I came alone to the United States. Pedrito, my youngest son, cried, "Please don't leave me! I want to live in America too!" I was separated from my family for 13 years. I saw them only twice a year. This was difficult. But eventually I was able to save enough money for them to legally migrate to the United States. This was what I could give my children: visas to the U.S. Here, they could seek their futures.

- *What pushed Ricardo and his family to leave Mexico?*
- *What pulled them to the United States?*

Not once did my wife and I consider crossing the border illegally. Immigrants who swim across the Rio Grande to avoid the border patrol live in fear of being deported (sent back). It would have been far too risky for a family of eight. Getting visas for seven was difficult as well. It typically takes 13 years to get an application processed. Finally, we were scheduled for an immigration interview. Even then, the 1,000-mile journey stretched us financially. We had to pay for motel rooms, bus fares, and Mexican passports. We also had to pay for medical exams and application fees. I worried that my income and that of our U.S. sponsor's might not be enough to support my whole family in the United States. Fortunately, a cousin living in the United States decided to sponsor us too. Our visas were approved.

- *What challenges did Ricardo and his family experience in trying to immigrate?*
- *What do you think the role of a U.S. sponsor is?*

We enjoy our life in Garden City. Twenty years ago, 90 percent of the students in schools here were native-born English speakers. Today, more than half are from immigrant families. All my children, even 18-year-old Nora, are enrolled in school. They are hardworking and loved by their teachers. Slowly they are mastering the English language. I have joined a hometown organization. Nearly 100 workers in the Garden City area meet once a week. Each of them gives \$10, \$20, sometimes \$30 to our treasurer. He sends this money back to Guanajuato. They hope to build a cafeteria for the town's kindergarten. For our next project, we'd like to collect money for a new ambulance. It is our way of helping those in Mexico who cannot realize their dreams in America, as we have.

- *How are immigrants like Ricardo and his family affecting their communities in the United States?*
- *How are immigrants like Ricardo affecting the Mexican communities they left behind?*