

The Texas Lawbook

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I Wish I Could Thank Them All

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I was born at home – in a small, modest house on the west side of San Antonio. I come from a large family and am one of the youngest of 11 siblings. My parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico in the mid-1950s. Initially, my father came alone in order to find work to support a family of five children at the time, and he made many trips back and forth until he found solid work.

My parents received their proper education in Mexico, but not having mastered the English language created many barriers. Like so many other stories we read about, my parents were looking for a brighter future for themselves and their children. However, my father was not necessarily looking for riches or even a comfortable life. Like his brother who came to Texas before him, my father was looking for opportunities to minister under a more formal organization than what Mexico had to offer at that time.

When I reflect on my family's journey, I often go back and read a letter written by a Sears, Roebuck & Co. manager in 1955 that changed the trajectory of our story. It was addressed "To Whom It May Concern" (i.e., the U.S. Border Patrol) informing them that my father was gainfully employed earning \$1 an hour, which ultimately permitted my father and the family, at that time, to enter the United States.

Growing up, my siblings and I were always reminded of several things by our parents: Stay

strong in your faith, value the opportunities you were given by being raised in the United States, grasp onto the American life while holding on dearly to your Mexican culture, be happy with what you have, and, of course, always help others in need.

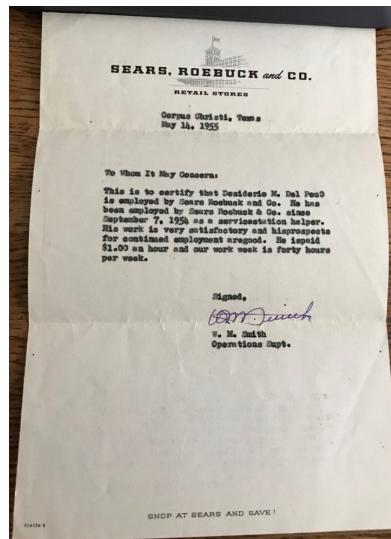
These lessons did not mean that we avoided the realities of being very poor during my younger years. As my father sought more meaningful work in ministry, we moved to various cities and towns in Texas, even ending up in a public housing project for a spell. Going hungry during the school day or going to bed hungry was not an uncommon occurrence. Wearing new clothes was essentially unheard of.

Despite these challenges, my childhood was not unhappy by any means. I have great memories as a child, especially those times when we would pile into "La Peligrosa" – the old family station wagon – for a vacation to Mexico or Colorado to visit my many cousins.

As I grew up, I had the opportunity to watch my older siblings turn into young adults. Some of them opted to go straight into the workforce while others pursued higher education, even if on a part-time basis. Going straight into the workforce can be very alluring when one grows up poor. I opted to go this route and fortunately learned to make a good living. It was not good enough though because I always had a passion to work in the professional world, so I continued with



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A letter that changed the trajectory of a family's life

my higher education, oftentimes on a part-time basis.

As I was finishing my undergraduate accounting program at the University of Houston, my professor commented that if I truly wanted a fulfilling career, I should consider a law degree. So, I did my research and one night at the dinner table with my wife and our young kids, I mentioned that I was considering attending law school. My wife's jaw dropped and then she said, "OK, as long as you attend on a full-time basis." While I was pleasantly surprised by her reaction, thoughts of turning up poor again flooded my head. Was I really going to spend our life savings to further my education at the age of 30-something with a growing family?

I felt like I had the focus and determination that I needed to succeed in law school, but I also recognized that I would need help. I knew no one that had attended law school. Luckily, I realized early in my life that success can be achieved when you couple a person's underlying focus and determination with mentorship and opportunity. I had personally witnessed this combination bring meaningful and fulfilling careers of all kinds to members of my family, including in ministry, higher education, architecture, office administration, armed forces and aerospace engineering.

As they say, the rest is history. I found great success at the South Texas College of Law-Houston and that opened up many doors. I have been extremely blessed with encouraging mentors throughout my career, as well as being the recipient of great opportunities. I have also sought to share my story and give back by serving as a mentor in all facets of my life.

I have practiced law for 23 years – 22 at Porter Hedges. I know without doubt that my successful career is largely due to those that offered words of encouragement and ample opportunities to prove myself – including my family, friends, colleagues and clients alike. I am so thankful for being able to work with

Porter Hedges – a firm that is not only dedicated to diversity and inclusion, but also a firm that has always generously supported my ideas in those areas, including my leadership roles with South Texas College of Law-Houston, the Mexican American Bar Association of Houston and the Hispanic Bar Association of Houston, just to name a few.

I wish I could individually thank all the people who helped me along my path, whether I personally got to know them or not. But I will close with a special thanks to that Sears, Roebuck & Co. manager that was generous enough to write that letter in 1955 on behalf of my father and his family.

Ephraim del Pozo is a partner at Porter Hedges in Houston who focuses his practice on energy finance and a broad range of corporate transactions, including commercial lending and acquiring and disposing of energy-related assets and companies.

