

I Consider Myself Blessed
Janet Dominguez, NMSHSA intern

As a child of migrant and seasonal farm working parents, it's valid to say I've moved among several different places. However, that traveling has only been limited to the borders within the state of Idaho. Not that I remember any of it because I was only an infant at the time, but my parents used to move us from town to town, chasing the crops to work in whatever was available. They worked hoeing endless rows of weeds so that the crops, like potatoes and sugar beets, could have space to grow in neatly. My dad also worked in a variety of other fields, such as wheat, alfalfa, and beans. The towns we lived in were Mountain Home, Bruneau, Grand View, and Marsing. Eventually, we ended up circling back and establishing ourselves in Mountain Home, Idaho, where I was born and raised. To give you some perspective, Mountain Home has a population of roughly 14,000 inhabitants. The other towns are so small that their populations don't even add up to 2,000 inhabitants, combined. In fact, they're so small that none of them have any real grocery stores. The view in these places usually consisted of crop fields as far out as they eye could see, which should have been no surprise considering the reason for which we were there.

Even though Mountain Home isn't some grand city, it's the place that shaped who I am. Here, I got the chance to attend a migrant and seasonal head start called El Arcoiris. Since my parents worked long and endless hours under the beating sun, El Arcoiris became my second home. My mom says she doesn't know what she would have done if that head start didn't exist because it eased her transition back to work in the fields – this being only a few months after I was born. Since I attended this center from just about three months old until I was old enough to enter kindergarten, I recall El Arcoiris as the place where I formed most of my early childhood memories. It's the place where I formed healthy habits such as brushing my teeth and eating a healthy balanced breakfast every morning. It's the place where I learned to count numbers and tell colors apart. It's where I learned to use my tiny little hands to write words, letters, and my own name after learning the alphabet. From daily nap time on the little blue cots, to painting on giant strips of paper laid out on the floor while wearing a white, oversized t-shirt – I had the time of my life at head start.

Although my parents couldn't be with me as often as I know they wish they'd been able to during my childhood, I still consider myself blessed because their sacrifices led to the formation of such a strong network of people that taught me fundamental knowledge, such as reading, writing, counting, painting, and so much more. I didn't realize it at the time because I was so young, but head start, specifically the migrant and seasonal one I attended, opened so many doors for my family and for me. It gave my parents the opportunity to continue working without having to worry about my safety, or that of my siblings. It allowed me to be surrounded by other children with similar backgrounds as mine – with equally hardworking parents. It also created unique professional opportunities for me like being an intern for the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association, specifically working with the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs. Thanks to these opportunities, I've been able to create incredible relationships with people that care about my future and my success.

Early on, my siblings and I learned that to thrive you have to be willing to suffer and sacrifice. We grew up hearing everyone around us reference the “American Dream.” However, we didn’t anticipate the path to achieving that dream to begin with calling a 15 square foot shed our home. Much less did my mother expect it to become the place where she’d give birth to me. My dad took the first job he could find, which was moving burning hot irrigation pipes that left his hands blistered and bloody by the end of the first night. Thankfully, my parents no longer have to endure the struggles that come with working out in the fields. This doesn’t necessarily mean they don’t have to endure other hardships, because they do, but at least there is a roof above my father’s head where he works now. He’s been a milker at a dairy for well over 15 years, where he alone collects approximately 65,000 pounds of milk on a daily basis. My mother stopped working in the fields about six years ago due to a double hip replacement surgery. Initially, it was difficult for her to come to terms with no longer being able to work in the fields – she’s always been an independent, hardworking woman. However, my father convinced her it was better than risking her body and her health. Since then, she’s looked after each and every single one of her grandkids, helping raise them into strong independent people, just like her. Fortunately, my parents are now able to look back on all the hardships they endured. From moving from place to place with five kids, to being able to say they finally achieved what they came to America for in the first place – to open doors for their children.