

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark brown hooded jacket, is seen from behind, looking out over a city skyline. The skyline includes several skyscrapers, with the Freedom Tower being the most prominent one. The background is a light blue map of the United States, showing state boundaries and names like NEBRASKA, ARIZONA, and TEXAS. The overall scene is set against a clear sky.

A MEMOIR OF LOVE,
HATE, AND **FORGIVENESS**

HOMELESS
BY CHOICE

ROY JUAREZ JR.

Homeless by Choice

A Memoir of Love, Hate, and Forgiveness

Roy Juarez Jr.

Homeless by Choice

Copyright © 2018 by IMPACTtruth, Inc.

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, 2018

ISBN 978-1-7325507-8-0

IMPACTmemoirs Publishing

P.O. Box 27311

San Antonio, TX 78251

www.HomelessbyChoice.com

Table of Contents

DEDICATION.....	5
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	6
INTRODUCTION	7
FOREWORD.....	9
1. MEETING MORGAN.....	13
2. FIGHTING FOR MY FUTURE.....	27
3. I WILL GET THE MONEY, I PROMISE.....	37
4. A HUNGER TO LEAVE THE STREETS.....	47
5. I KNOW WHAT I NEED TO DO.....	65
6. SHARING A HOT TEA.....	83
7. THE NIGHT GREW DARKER.....	97
8. IF YOU WANT TO LEAVE THAT’S FINE.....	111
9. DON’T GIVE THEM YOUR FUTURE.....	123
10. HOW SHARP WAS THE KNIFE?.....	139
11. ARE YOU KIDDING ME?.....	155
12. I DON’T BLAME YOU.....	171
13. USE YOUR VOICE.....	181
14. I’LL GIVE YOU MY BEST.....	193
15. WHO AM I?.....	205
16. I’M STILL STANDING.....	225
EPILOGUE: MY MOTIVATION.....	239

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my family and the students I serve. To me, family isn't just the blood that runs through your veins but the love that is in your heart!

To my mom and stepdad, thank you for all your support through the years. I know it's hard for you to hear my stories. I don't share them to hurt you, but to inspire those going through life's storms. I love you both with all my heart.

To my dad, I hope one day we will be able to build a healthy relationship before it's too late.

To all my biological siblings, you have always been my motivation to never give up. We survived the storm and came out stronger. Our story is inspiring change all over the world. Thank you for allowing me to share it.

To my step-siblings, thank you for sharing your dad with us.

To my adopted parents, Pastor Doris and Pastor Johnny, thank you for loving me and caring for me when you didn't have to.

Finally, to the students, this book is for you. Never give up on life or your dreams. Life gets better, but you must put in the work. I hope this book inspires you. Remember, always better and never bitter!

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the following individuals who made this book possible.

Elizabeth Nerio, who started out as my intern and is now a trusted colleague. If it weren't for her, this book would not have been possible. She spent countless hours research and editing. Her professionalism, attention to detail, and creativity will help inspire thousands.

Michael Facciolo, my operations manager, made it possible for me to focus on the book as he took care of everything else. His support was crucial to me getting the book done.

Nathan Hassall, I am thankful I met this talented man. He taught me so much about writing, editing, and how to bring a manuscript to life.

Sheri Long and Ashley Yazarlou, thank you for being another set of eyes and volunteering to proofread the book. Your thoughts and comments helped me tell my story more accurately.

And finally, to all those who have helped me in the process of writing this book—and throughout life in general—that I have neglected to mention, I extend my thanks to you.

Introduction

For the past eight years, I have attempted to write about my life. I have considered many ways to present my story, share my experiences, and introduce the individuals who have played a key role in my life. Each time I sat down with my laptop, I found myself in a new city, usually late at night in a diner. Even though diners can be busy in the evenings, I concentrate best in those circumstances. When I'm in need of a break from beating my brain, trying to resurface memories from my past, I'll stop, and people watch. If you enjoy people watching, there is no better place.

I find it challenging to resurface the memories of my childhood. I'm not sure if it's because my memories have thinned out as I've gotten older or if I've repressed them. It isn't until I encounter a particular sound or smell that brings them back to the surface of my mind. For example, a song on the radio that might have been playing during a traumatic moment in my life or the scent of a broadcaster's perfume that takes me back to a much better place in my youth.

I'm writing this book to share my life experiences and work with you in the hope that my stories inspire you. I promise that every story I tell will be told from the best of my recollection. I took the time to interview as many of the individuals in these stories as possible. Sadly, some are no longer with us, imprisoned or our encounter was too brief, and I do not know how to contact them. The individuals in my story that I have kept in contact with have helped me fill in the gaps of my childhood. This is my best effort to paint the most accurate account of my life.

My intentions are never to hurt anyone. For that reason, some of the names and locations in this book have been altered to protect those involved, but the stories have remained the same. The truth is, we are all human and are therefore flawed. The accounts of my life are filtered through my memory, beliefs, thoughts, and emotions. This makes them

ROY JUAREZ JR.

my truth. Each person in my journey has their own truth. I share this book with you with the best intentions in my heart.

I have traveled thousands of miles working in communities across the United States and abroad as a motivational speaker and activist fighting for homeless youth, families, and higher education. I stand in front of crowds, both large and small, sharing my personal story of growing up as a homeless teenager due to domestic violence. In the process, I've been asked by many, "Do you have a book reflecting your life story and work?"

I would give them the same answer: "I am currently working on my book."

My response wasn't a lie, I was working on it, but I couldn't get it done. I wanted to be able to sit down and write paragraph after paragraph of the great successes I've had in my life, but I couldn't. The issue may be because I still feel like I haven't accomplished enough, yet. There is so much more I am destined to do.

A dear friend and mentor, John Crowder, once said to me, "Roy, people want to hear your story. They want to learn from every aspect of your life. Don't worry about writing a bestseller or an insightful business book. Just write about your life and work."

So that's what I did. This book explores the highest peaks of my life; but more importantly, it also journeys through my lowest valleys. However, it was in those valleys that I learned some of my greatest life lessons! The lessons that taught me to forgive, to be better and never bitter, and to understand that we are all humanly flawed.

Some of the things in this book will probably surprise you. Some of you may not even like me after this, but this is my truth. One of the greatest lessons of being free is accepting who you are, flaws and all. Only then can we begin to shape and mold ourselves into who we want to be. I hope you enjoy some of the most significant moments in my life but also learn from my darkest moments.

Foreword

It was to be another day, another talk where I got to share my story. But this audience was a particularly special group, comprised of federally employed women, a kindred experience for me as an Army Woman Veteran. This group, many of them veterans themselves, identified with my journey. Little did I know that a young homeless youth had snuck into my talk for the provided meal and—as we later learned—he ended up with food not only for his stomach, but also for his soul. Roy Juarez Jr. was not just hungry, but he was also searching for hope and peace from the chaos that life had dealt him.

Roy took my words, held onto them, and made a courageous move to change his life. As he puts it so eloquently, he chose to “Be Better, Not Bitter!”

The pages you are about to read will rivet you, anger you, make you laugh, smile, and maybe even move you to tears. Tomorrow does get better, and sometimes you have to give it several tries before you are confident that your circumstance will improve.

I have five daughters, and while I love them beyond words, Roy captured my heart and became the son I never had. Even though it was tough getting him to trust me and accept my mentorship, it was—and continues to be—a worthwhile experience. Roy tested me, challenged me, inspired me, and to this day makes my life a blessing. I must add, in the spirit of transparency, that I blame him for my premature grey hair. Now I have to color it more than I should!

Roy had been through countless amounts of pain and outright abuse. Being too young to manage, cope, or much less forgive, he couldn't move on to explore his true gifts and potential. Like the peeling of an onion, each layer revealed his true gifts: Creativity, Innovation, Empathy, and Leadership. I recall an experience in 2005 when we served a fortune 500 company and many high-level executives thought Roy was already a

ROY JUAREZ JR.

college graduate with experience in business! The look on their faces when he disclosed that he was an intern and was still trying to finish college was priceless. Roy's work showed he had talent and a wittiness that—in spite of his lows—demonstrated he still loved life and was willing to use his experience to inspire change.

Read this book with the intent of filling your well, for unless you fill your heart with love, peace, and forgiveness like Roy did, you will live your life with an emotional scorecard always wanting to win, even if it means through manipulation or self-hate. Our story, as raw as it is, is about the true meaning of mentorship laced with the many tough lessons a homeless boy needed to learn in order to realize his true potential. We pushed and pulled, but ultimately, we held onto our powerful bond. Roy was me, and I was not going to allow him to end up just another statistic.

I am so proud of Roy and, frankly speaking, I was shocked that he asked me to write this foreword because I have probably been the toughest mentor in his life. I guess he knew that—in the end—love doesn't always mean kisses and hugs, but also truth, courage, and high expectations. Roy definitely is a much better person who has touched the hearts of thousands of youth and adults along his journey across the country and abroad.

I imagine every mentor hopes for the best for their mentee, I believe it is important to Live a Legacy rather than Leave a Legacy. Roy is one of my greatest Living Legacies. I see him on stage touching every generation with his love for humanity. Even though Roy has just started, I know that, in my heart, he will inspire many more individuals, for his purpose is still unfolding. He never ceases to amaze me.

Roy's story is the story of so many youth still living in the shadows. While not a celebrity that merely entertains for a moment, having Roy share his story can bring about healing, inspiration, provoke deep thinking about one's choices, and encourage anyone to keep going. Roy's story is a testament and an example that with the right decisions, mentorship, and forgiveness it will get better.

Love you Hijo and always remember I am here.

Consuelo AKA CCK

LTC (R) Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch

President and CEO

Educational Achievement Services, Inc.

ROY JUAREZ JR.

“Poverty is the worst form of violence.”

- Mohandas K. Gandhi

CHAPTER ONE

Meeting Morgan

“**H**OW CAN YOU love me? After everything I’ve done to you, how can you?” My mother cried in agony over the phone. She had found the rose and note I left on her windshield earlier that morning, before the sunrise.

“You’re my mom! I love you! I will always love you.”

That conversation always replays in my mind. At that point in our lives, we weren’t very close. I loved my mother, but our relationship had been fractured by everything that had occurred in the previous years.

Dropping my Mom Off at the Airport

I never thought that our lives would turn out the way they have.

ROY JUAREZ JR.

As I pulled into the Toledo Express Airport, I looked over to see my beautiful mother sitting in the passenger seat, smiling at me. Her jet-black hair sat just below her shoulders, and her olive skin was radiating from the sunlight. Although my mother is petite in stature, her spirit is that of a warrior. She was still standing after all that she had been through. The smile she wore spoke of her strength. It was the smile I had known as a little boy when times were good. The same smile I loved to run to as soon as I woke up, and the one that also put me to bed. I was happy to see her smiling again. We had made it through the storm, but we were left picking up the pieces of our lives.

Driving up to the curb, I thought, *She has no idea how much I love her.* Having my mother with me the past couple of days had been fantastic, and I didn't want to see her go.

"Mijo, thank you so much for bringing me out here. I can't tell you how proud I am of you," my mother said with tears forming in her eyes. "I love you so much... I want to give you something before I go." She rummaged through her purse.

"Mom, I love you too. And don't worry about it, you don't need to give me anything. I'm just glad you were able to come on such short notice."

She pulled out a handful of cash from her purse and handed it to me, "Here, it's money for a hotel."

"Thank you, Mom, bu-" I began to reply, but she interrupted me.

"Don't you dare tell me no, Roy! Take the money mijo, it's my gift to you."

I looked at the money for a second, and slowly moved my hand to accept the gift. I didn't want to fight with my mother over something sweet she was trying to do for me. Plus, staying in a hotel sounded nice! "Thank you, mom, I'll be sure to send you pictures of the hotel once I get settled in."

She sat there for a second before saying, "Okay mijo, this is it." She leaned in for a hug.

“Mom, I’m going to get out of the car to say bye! What kind of son do you think I am? I’m not Baby Ray,” I laughed.

She laughed with me and replied, “Leave my baby alone!”

“Come on mom, he’s not here! You can tell me. Who’s your favorite son? Baby Ray or me?”

“Both of you are my favorite, but I will admit...”

I leaned over a bit, willing her to finally say it!

“You are my favorite oldest son!” She began laughing, but I wasn’t amused.

I looked her dead in the eye and said, “Well then, you can get your own bags out of the trunk.”

We laughed, and both got out of the car. I popped open the trunk to unload the carry on she had brought with her for the trip. As I tried to pass it to her, she looked down with her shoulders slumped. I took a breath.

“What’s wrong, mom?” I asked as I put down her bag and gave her a hug.

“It’s hard hearing you tell our story, mijó. Every time I hear you speak at an event I can feel the pain building up in my chest, and I can’t help but cry. I feel terrible, but I know the kids need to hear it.”

I hugged her tighter. It hurt me to see her in pain. I said, “Mom, we’re not there anymore. We’re in a much better place now and our story, our past, can help others.”

“I know, you’re right. You need to help the kids... it’s just... hard,” she wiped the tears from her eyes. “I’m so proud of you, mijó. I’ll call you when I land.”

I took a step back and placed my hands on her shoulders, looking into her glossy brown eyes. Trying to put a smile on her face I replied, “Naw, don’t call me,” which made her laugh.

“You’re bad, Roy! Why did I ever have you?” She winked.

We hugged again.

ROY JUAREZ JR.

“Fine. Call me when you get home safely,” I said as I gave her a kiss on the forehead. “I love you mom, I’ll see you soon okay? Have a safe flight and don’t forget—I’m your best kid.”

“I’ll call you mijo, but I don’t want you to drive so late at night. It’s not safe.” In her stern, motherly voice she continued, “You better use the money I gave you to get a hotel!”

“I will mom, I promise,” I chuckled as I walked back to the driver’s side of my car.

I watched my mother walk towards the automatic doors. Just before she went inside, she stopped and turned to give me one last smile. As she disappeared into a crowd of people, I thought about how amazing and strong my mother was. I am beyond blessed to be her son.

Driving out of the airport, my GPS was set for home. It was still early in the evening, so I figured I would be able to travel at least 4-5 hours that night. Eager to get back to my hometown, San Antonio, Texas, I thought about driving through the night. However, I promised my mother I wouldn’t. I drove for about three hours, through the middle of nowhere. It was literally just acres and acres of farmland, but the lack of trees made for a beautiful sunset. I could see nightfall approaching. On the horizon, the sun was ready to rest for the evening, painting deep shades of reds and purples in the sky. As it said its final goodbye, the stars began to burn brighter against the darkness.

The lights of Indianapolis were shining off in the distance. I was near the outskirts of the city when I noticed a luminous yellow sign that read Waffle House. It caught my attention because the sign reminded me of the small tiles used in Scrabble—one of my favorite board games—and I was starving. I slowed down to examine the building. It seemed like a good spot, it wasn’t my usual Denny’s, but I thought, I’ll give it a try. I pulled into the near-vacant parking lot and parked directly in front of the restaurant. Before I got out of my car, I reached over to the back seat to grab my new favorite book.

The Waffle House

As I opened the front door of the diner, I was confronted with the sweet scent of waffles. I searched for a place to sit. The setup was typical of any American diner, a combination of booths and a long sit-down counter. What made this place stand out was the red leather upholstery that clothed the seats against the black metal framing. I was so tired that I decided to sit at the counter instead of waiting for a booth. I figured it would be entertaining to watch my meal be prepared. To be honest, I wasn't sure if I was supposed to wait to be seated or not, but I wasn't trying to find out. A middle-aged waitress, with 50s style reading glasses, approached me and asked if she could get me something to drink.

"Yes. Can I please have a glass of water, a cup of coffee, and an iced tea?" I asked.

She replied, "Of course, is someone joining you?" She pushed a menu in front of the empty seat next to me.

I smiled, "No Ma'am, I'm just really thirsty. I want the iced tea, but I need the coffee to wake me up and the water to hydrate."

"Well, okay... that's a lot of liquids, let me point you to the restroom now," she said laughing as she walked away.

Directly in front of me was my menu. As I read through it, everything sounded delicious, I really wanted a bacon cheeseburger with jalapeños and fries... but I couldn't be in a Waffle House and not get waffles!

When the waitress returned she set down my three drinks, chuckling to herself. "Alright thirsty man are you ready to order?" she asked.

"Well, I'm torn on what to order. I really want a burger and fries, but the pecan waffle sounds amazing!"

"Well, how hungry are you?" She said, willing me to make my decision.

For a second, I thought about getting both meals, but I had already gained 20 pounds on the tour. Finally, I said, "Okay, I either want the pecan waffles or a bacon cheeseburger and fries. As you can tell, I'm on a

diet. You choose for me and don't tell me which one you chose, just bring it to me."

She asked, "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'll love either one you bring me, I promise."

As she started to walk away, I called out, "Oh! If you choose the burger, can you add jalapeños?"

A puzzled look swarmed her face, "Jalapeños? You aren't from around here, are you?"

"No ma'am, I'm from San Antonio, Texas. I'm just passing through," I smiled.

"Oh wow, you are a long way from home. Well, welcome to Pendleton," she said as she walked away.

"Excuse me. Did you just say you're from San Antonio?" An excited voice asked from a couple of seats down the bar. I turned and saw a pretty young lady who appeared to be in her early 20s, with shoulder length, light brown hair. She sat there smiling.

"You heard correct, I'm from San Antonio," I answered.

"That's crazy! I just came from visiting family there!"

"Oh, nice! What area were you in?"

The young girl looked confused, "Hm, I'm not really sure, to be honest."

"It's okay, San Antonio is a pretty big place. I was just asking because I grew up all over the city, so I would probably know where you were at."

She leaned over one of the empty seats, "I'm Morgan, by the way. What's that book you have? Is it Gandhi's autobiography?"

I looked down at my book on the counter. "Yeah, it's his book. Have you read it? Oh, and I'm Roy. It's great to meet you!"

"No, I haven't, but I love his work. I'll have to read it sometime."

"It's a great book! I think it really humanizes Mohandas Gandhi. You should definitely check it out," I smiled. "Did you know when he was younger, he used to beat his wife? And at one point he contemplated suicide?!"

Her head tilted to the side as she said, “Really? I never knew that.”

“Neither did I until I read it. It just goes to show that you never know what a person has been through.”

For a moment, I contemplated telling Morgan about my Homeless by Choice tour, but I didn’t want to enter a long conversation. Most of the time I wouldn’t mind, but I was desperate to read more of my book.

“So, what brings you up here?” she asked.

“Well, it’s a long story, but basically I just finished speaking at a Youth Summit in Toledo, Ohio.”

“Oh wow. What do you do?”

Usually, when I’m exhausted, and people ask what I do, I say I’m a banker. That’s often the end of the conversation. In my mind, I was going to tell her I was a banker, but when I spoke, the words, “I’m a motivational speaker” came out of my mouth. I instantly regretted it and thought, *Great job Roy.*

“Really? That’s very interesting. What do you speak about? Is there something in particular?” Morgan asked.

I knew she was going to ask that.

I quickly gave her my rehearsed elevator pitch, “I’m actually an advocate for at-risk youth and homeless teens. I travel the country trying to inspire students to stay in school, to not give up on life or their dreams and hope that—through my message—they can understand the value of higher education,” I hoped it would answer all her questions and end the conversation.

I reached for my book to begin reading, hoping to give her a subtle hint, but her questions kept coming. “Wow. So what exactly is the message you give? I mean, how did you start speaking?”

I knew there was no way to get out of the conversation, which, deep down, I didn’t really mind. I stopped trying to fight it. I finally gave Morgan my full attention when she asked,

“So Roy, What’s your story?”