



**Remarks by Coach Tom Flores
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series
Eagle Leadership Award**

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Tom Flores: Thank you, Lou. That was meaningful. Sometimes I shock myself. You look back on things that happened in your lifetime and you don't appreciate them as much as you should because at the time that you're doing what you did, it was just part of the job, part of growing up. And for me, a little kid from Sanger, growing up in the Valley and doing all the things that little kids do in the Valley, was just a way of life in those days.

The recent movie that I tell people, the recent movie that -- what was the name of that movie, Barb? *McFarland*. *McFarland* could have been Sanger, could have been Corker, or could have been any of the San Joaquin Valley towns because that's the way we all grew up. In little towns, you got up in the morning and you went to work. And then you left work and went to school,

and then you went back. If you're lucky, you ate dinner and then went back to work until the sun went down. That was just the way. But nobody felt sorry for themselves because that was the way life was in those days. People don't understand it in this era. But when you hear the stories, the stories are true.

Thank you, Lou, for that introduction. Nikki has been marvelous to me. I grew up -- let me tell you a story how I got to where I got.

My dad never got the recognition that he should have. He was a quiet, silent man. He was born in Mexico, in the state of Durango. And when he was a little boy growing up in Durango, they lived in the hills. And his parents -- or his dad used to mine for dynamite at a little town called Dinamita. So at night, certain times of the year when the weather was right, I guess, the moon was out and all the crazies were out, the bandits would come through the villages and rob and steal and rape and pillage and do whatever they could. They all claimed to be Pancho Villa's bandits in those days. Whether they were or not, nobody knows. But more or less they were bandits.

So for the fear of his family, they grabbed everything they owned and they took a little cart down the railroad track and came all the way down to the bottom of the hill and jumped on the train and came to California. In those days, the *bracero* program was in use. And they settled in the San Joaquin Valley

because they had relatives there. And my dad went to work as a little boy, 14 years old. Did not go to school but he did work. There were six of them. And they all worked, and they all gave their checks to their parents. My dad gave his check to his mom and dad until he was 27 years old. And I think that's the reason he got married so he can get out of the house, really. And after knowing my mom as long as I did, he probably was so, yeah. She grew up the same way. But he married my mother and they had my brother and myself. I was the second of the two boys.

And the story I want to tell you is a really touching story to me because not known to my family or anybody, to be honest with you, we had a little store, a little *tienda*, when I was in the neighborhood. It was probably a precursor to 7-Elevens in this little neighborhood in Sanger, and it would be open seven days a week. Opened at 6:00 in the morning and close whenever the last person walked out, sometimes midnight. So my brother and I would help. We will stock the shelves and then play. And then stock the shelves and play and then goof off. And mom and dad will work the store.

One night, he disappeared. He said, "I have to go some place." Well, he went and came back two hours later. We didn't know where he was. I don't even think mom knew where he was. When he came back, he had a glow. And the glow was he had just

been sworn in as a citizen. He had been going to school. And he became a citizen. And he had tears in his eyes, that's why so much had been to him. He didn't have to but why he did it? Because he is proud of where he was and proud to be an American. That was my dad.

Well, my story was I just loved school. I started out school -- my mother sent me to a little school, Granville, in the country. We had eight grades, three teachers. So the first and second grades were in one or two rows. First and second grades are one building. The third, fourth, and fifth in another building -- another room. And the sixth, seventh, and eighth, another room, building. So I went when I was four. And the teacher sent me home because I was too young. I think my mother, once again, wanted to get rid of me. And then when I was five, she sent me back and they accepted me. There was no kindergarten so I started the first grade. So I was always the youngest guy in the class all the way through high school and college.

And if you wanted to do well, you had to catch up with the rest of everybody because they were older and maybe a little more advanced. But there was no tutoring, there was no after-school programs. But the one thing, I always loved school. I loved the interaction of school. I loved going and paying attention and doing well in my classes. And I loved sports. I

always love sports. Playing everything. It didn't matter what it was. I mean, I was playing sometimes because everything was new to me. My dad never knew what football was. He never knew what basketball was. The only thing he knew was baseball. And the only thing he ever did athletically was bought us, my brother and I, a mitt one Christmas so we could play catch. When I started playing football, the very first thing I did, I picked up a football and I said, "What is this? It's a funny looking ball here." So I picked it up and I threw it. And it was fun. We played catch. And some friends of mine told me, showed me what we had to do.

And it became a natural thing for me to throw a football and to play the game because I had the ability to do it. So I continued to do that. And my parents never went and saw me play or my brother until we were in high school. We got in high school and we used to play. And I remember one time we were in a very close game. And I think it was my junior year. And my dad lost my mother. He couldn't find her. And we're on the sideline, I look over and she's on the sideline. I said, "Mom." She's, "Well?" Mothers were greatest in "well" when they didn't know what else to say. "Well?" I said, "You don't belong here." "Oh, you don't know." "What do you mean I don't know?" It was, "Well, you don't know." And they say those were my

mom's favorite phrases. I never found out what the hell that was until I started saying it.

Anyway, that's how they learned sports. And they backed me up as much as they needed to. They were very proud of what I accomplished. And when I was going to college, I got hurt. And I was having a good career in college. And I did have a good career in college, but I got hurt and I had to have surgery. That was my first attempt. And the old saying, "Everybody who wanted to be successful has not lost a battle along the way." So you're going to lose before you win the big one. But you just hope you win more than you lose.

So my first attempt, I lost and I had surgery. My second attempt, I didn't make it with the Red Skins because it was too soon after the first attempt and my shoulder had not healed. And my third attempt came when American Football League started. And I got a call, said, "Would you be interested?" I said, "Who are you again?" "So we're the Oakland Señors." Their first name was "Señors." And I said, "Really?" I thought about this, what if they're just calling me because my name is Flores?

But fortunately, they changed the name after two months. They realized all the ridicule they can get from "Señors." Not to defame señors but it just didn't fit. So I said, "Well, let me go try." So I went and tried. I worked out. I got a straight back. And I said, "Well, I got one more chance." I

didn't own a car. I didn't owe a bill. I was single. And I had met my wife already. In fact, she's right here. My wife and my best friend. Fifty-eight years. And we dated for five years before that one. Talk about slow learners.

So I got one more chance, why not give it a shot. I don't want to look back in life and say I didn't give it a shot. And so I did. I signed the contract. My mother cried because I turned down a teaching job to do that. I said, "Mom, I love you but I have the rest of my life to work. And I know that I will always find a job because I have been trained to do that. I learned how to do that from you and dad." There's always work if you're not afraid to work. If you don't like to work then you're going to make excuses to not work. So I signed the contract and went to Santa Cruz, California for training camp. Eleven quarterbacks the first day. Eleven, we couldn't even get one picture. The lens wasn't big enough then, not like it is nowadays. It wasn't wide enough so that after the first day, we had four. And then there were two.

That was 60 years ago and I'm still in professional football. So I guess it worked. I guess it worked because if it hadn't worked, I would have found something else to do but I sure had a great time in fulfilling my passion and winning games and doing what I do best. And I guess it was coaching and playing and just being around the game. I love it. I love it.

I always tell my kids, I say, whatever you do, do it well. Do the best you can. And make sure you have fun because if you don't have fun then it's not really worth doing. Have fun. And then if you can't do it, go on and do something else. Always have a backup plan. But follow your dream. And I followed my dream and my dream came true. So I'm very privileged and proud to have accomplished what I did.

And I'm very privileged and proud to accept this award. Mickey, it's a wonderful award. For all of you, I have never been in a room with so many Hispanics. Nobody is going to steal my car. Okay, just kidding. Just kidding. I'm proud. When I came to Los Angeles, I realized how big we had become in the Hispanic community. The Raiders, I mean. And then having said that, how big or how important I was and Jim Plunkett, because we were kind of the pioneers that year or the leaders of the pack winning the Super Bowl. And until I travelled around the country and I run and find people that said, "My dad cried when he saw you win the Super Bowl on TV." I said, "What? Really?" And he was a Hispanic man. I didn't know him. I didn't know him from a lot of people. But he was so proud that another step had been taken for us. And now the steps are many and the roads are open. It's our turn. It's our turn. In every walk of life, it's our turn.

