

Eduardo Juarez Jr.¹
Mexico / United States

[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org
Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2020 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]



"Lalo's World"

Can you tell us about yourself?

EJJ: I was born in '83 in Mexico City, and we came to the US in '93. My dad had migrated to the United States since he was 16. He would go back and forth to Mexico and then, one of those times he went back to Mexico, married my mom and then returned to the U.S. My dad was here in the U.S. since 1990 because for him it was easy to just go back and forth. After three years my mom decided that, "My two children need to

¹ **Eduardo Juarez Jr.** is a cartoonist and Animator. Art printed with permission.

Interview with Eduardo Juarez Jr. by Claudia Hoffmann

be raised by their parents." We came to the US not because we had to. It was actually more like a vacation because we came here with a tourist visa and then just kind of overstayed. I remember the first couple of years, my mom would say, "No, we're going to go back. We're going to go back." One year turned to two years, three years, then four, and so forth, so by the time I was in eighth grade I was like, "Yes, it's not going to happen." We never really left San Jose [California] since we arrived.

When did you start making art?

EJJ: I was always into drawing. I remember I had teachers back in elementary school in Mexico who used to tell me, "You don't know how to draw." This was because I was always drawing outside of the lines. One teacher said, "You're never going to go to learn how to draw." Little did she know that I was going to end up becoming an animator. The earliest memory of me drawing was a teacher telling me I didn't know how to draw.

During the last couple of months of eighth grade, an adviser from the animation Magnet program at a high school just up the street came to visit and talk about the program. That was around the time that I was really into *The Simpsons*. I did an animation of *The Simpsons*. That was the very first cartoon I did. As soon as I walked into the high school that had the animation programs, I started drawing Homer, and one drawing went into two drawings, three drawings, and soon I had an animation of him running. I just kept expanding on it till I had a close to a minute long animation. All hand-drawn, pencil, and I actually still have the VHS tape of that one. That was the very first cartoon I've ever done, and I actually put it on a VHS. I did it all on my spare time, because for the actual class, we ended up doing other exercises. But yes, *The Simpsons* animation was the one that I was doing from the very first day I walked into that animation classroom, till just before the end of that school year, because it took me a while to do it all by myself. Animation 1 was the basics: a ball bounce, a leaf drop, maybe a fire experiment, just basic animation training. But I remember my high school teacher was pretty amazed because he saw what I was doing with that little *Simpsons* animation, and he saw all the motions I was doing: "What? You're in Animation 1, and you're already doing this run cycle, and Homer doing a flip and chasing another two characters at the same time? So you're pretty much already ahead of where you're supposed to be, compared to the rest of the students." But it was just me wanting to do that.

LALO'S WORLD

PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

2013



"Lalo's World"

Interview with Eduardo Juarez Jr. by Claudia Hoffmann

When I was in my junior year, some of the advisers from the animation program at San Jose State University visited my high school animation classroom: "You guys want to continue on? San Jose State does have an animation program." And for me it was like, "Yes, I'm definitely going to go there." That was one option, and there was another animation program in Montreal, Canada. I filled out the application for the program in Montreal, and that's when my parents told me, "You're not going to be able to go" and I'm like, "What do you mean I can't go?" - "You are undocumented." That's when my parents really sat down and said, "This is why you cannot go." That was the first time I fell into depression because I thought, "Well then what's the point of even graduating from high school?"

I was still drawing and doing animation, that was my way of escaping. I got into California State University. This is in 2001, and in 2003 California passed AB 540, which guaranteed undocumented students who graduated from a California high school, or have a GED equivalent, the right to go into university without paying for out-of-state tuition. This was before the DREAMers. Here in California they were called AB 540 students.

It still took me about 10 years to graduate in December of 2012. It took me about 10 years because when Arnold [Schwarzenegger] became governor, tuition just skyrocketed, and it keeps skyrocketing. For the longest time, I had to be a part time student because I couldn't afford full time. I couldn't get financial aid because I was undocumented. At least at that time undocumented people couldn't get any kind of financial aid. Everything had to come out of their pockets. My parents couldn't help me because they just financially couldn't. So when I was 16, I started working at a flea market, and I'm still there. Fortunately, I'm still there. So that's how I was paying for my tuition and my stuff.

You are still working and doing your art on the side?

EJJ: Yes. That I never stopped. To me, that was my outlet. I started *Lalo's World* my senior year of high school. I had a lot of things going on in my personal life. My comic books were my own self-therapy. I started writing stories criticizing my observations of life, my family, my friends, people around me. Everything. Things that I couldn't really express because I was a really shy guy. My comic was my outlet, my way of releasing my stress, my anger, my frustration of life. This was around the

time that I found I was undocumented, so I had a lot of frustrations about life and politics.

That is another reason why I got into politics, to know the reason why I'm undocumented. Why can't I be like everybody else? I'm a very political person even now, but I talk about it with the right people and not just anybody around. That was why *Lalo's World* was created because of my desperation about my situation at the time. I ended up writing eight comic books.

The last one took me a while. Issue number eight took me a couple of years to write because I had no more ideas. "What can I write about?" I ended up making fun of one of my friends after a 10-year high school reunion. Just making fun of everybody. If anybody went to my high school and read issue number 8, they know, they'll know what's going on.

Your family and friends might have found themselves even in the first seven ones?

EJJ: Yes. This is the funny thing, I don't think any of them have actually read it. My friends and family would always tell me "Good job. This is good." I'm like, "Are you really sure that you read it?" When I was an art student, I had professors that would say to never show your artwork to your friends or family because they're always going to like it.

Interviewed by Claudia Hoffmann