

NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Melissa Corral:

Attorney Overcomes Imposter Syndrome to Help Immigrants

BY MARY BACON, ESQ.

After fighting imposter syndrome, Melissa Corral is finally where she has always wanted to be: helping families like her own obtain legal status so they can stay in the U.S.—and she has never been happier or more fulfilled.

Corral was born in Chicago. Her mother had recently immigrated from Mexico to be with Melissa's father, who had legal permanent status. When Corral was 2 years old, tragedy struck her family; her father passed away in a car accident. Her mother had only been in the country for a handful of years and decided to move back home to her small town of Presidios, Durango, Mexico, where they could be near Corral's grandparents and extended family. Presidios was the ideal small town. Everyone knew everyone else—it was almost like one giant family. Elementary school could be summarized as a six-year competition with another student for the top grade in the class—and she enjoyed every minute of it.

Unfortunately, there was not a middle school or a high school in Presidios. Continuing in school would have required putting 12-year-old Corral on a bus out of town. At the time, women and children traveling on a bus alone was not a risk her mother was willing to take. Ultimately, her mother decided to move their family back to the U.S. to allow Corral to continue thriving in her education.

Corral's cousin was already in Las Vegas, so she helped Corral's mother settle in Las Vegas and obtain a

job at a local clothing store. Without knowing any English, Melissa was enrolled in Orr Middle School. The first two weeks were humbling—she did not speak English and did not know a soul. One morning, while clinging to her mom and with tears in her eyes, fate seemed to intervene. A school truancy officer, Lupe, sat Corral down at a table with a handful of other students. And almost instantly, she made friends and her whole world changed.

After the first two weeks of school, and with the advent of friends, the world became easier. Between language immersion and watching television with subtitles, she picked up English, earned straight As, and became a member of National Junior Honor Society.

Corral attended Valley High School. Her middle school teachers recommended all honors classes, but imposter syndrome set in, and she enrolled in all regular classes. After a semester, she knew she could do more. She felt confident switching to all honors classes and handled it well—eventually graduating fifth in her class. She loved being involved in campus activities. Already bilingual and appreciating the value of traveling and learning about other cultures, she took four years of French. She filled the rest of her time as a member of the Student Organization for Latinos, French Club, and hanging out with her best friend, Nilly Tabares, who helped her come out of her shell. Tabares is still her best friend 20 years later.

After high school, Corral attended the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, majoring in international business with a concentration in finance and a minor in French. Unlike most students, she worked full time through college. She credits much of her college success to The Orleans Hotel



& Casino. She worked full time as a reservations agent, and her manager was always willing to work around her school schedule.

Her only time off from The Orleans was during her senior year of college. She studied abroad in the southwest of France to put her seven years of French language study to the test, and it paid off. France was her first taste of foreign travel outside of North America and was also her first real taste of independence. She loved everything about the experience—from the language to the culture and the friends she made—who are still some of her favorite travel partners.

As a business major, she was forced to take a business law class—a class most colleagues cautioned her against. Much to her surprise, she loved it. While taking the class, she was also required to serve on jury duty. As a juror, she heard a sexual assault case with a minor victim and where the minor’s parents did not speak English as their first language. The minor victim’s parents were instantly relatable. It felt like the defense was trying to “catch” the parents telling a different version of events, when really, as someone who was trilingual, Corral felt like certain words were very easily confused in translation. Between the combination of her business law class and serving on a criminal jury trial, she knew law school was in her future.

After two years of prepping for the LSAT, Corral was accepted to William S. Boyd School of Law. Determined to only take out loans for tuition, she enrolled in the night program and continued to work full time at The Orleans. The first year of law school was a jarring experience—she went from straight As to average grades. Luckily, with the help of Professor Stacey Tovino and some friends, Corral was able to identify a test-taking issue and set herself on the path to success.

To give back to the Boyd community, she served as president of the Student Body Association (SBA), the president of La Voz, and vice president of the Organization for Part Time Law Students.

After law school, Corral clerked for Judge Linda Marquis for more than two years.

“Before I was elected to the district court, I served as the president of the Boyd Alumni Association and had the opportunity to work alongside Ms. Corral,

who served as president of Boyd’s SBA,” Marquis said. “Later, Corral applied to be my first law clerk. Of course, she was hard-working and smart, but Corral’s real-life experience and heart made her a real asset to our judicial department and her unique insight proved invaluable to me. It has been my absolute privilege to watch her passion for immigration law evolve over the years and lead her right back to Boyd Law School.”

After clerking, and a brief stint in family law, she worked for Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada in their immigration department and eventually accepted a job at the UNLV’s Community Advocacy Office, part of the Thomas & Mack Immigration Clinic. It was a full-circle moment. She now works in the same clinic she used to volunteer in, with colleagues she knew, helping families just like hers.

Corral is now deputy managing attorney of the Community Advocacy Office. The majority of her work is removal defense, and her passion for her practice sets her apart from most immigration attorneys. In one memorable case, she helped a minor who was a victim of a sexual assault apply for a U-visa to stay in the U.S. for her and her entire immediate family. Her practice includes appeals before local district courts, the Board of Immigration, and the Ninth Circuit.

To stay involved in the community and provide support to aspiring law students, she is this year’s director of the Andale 5K Race/Walk, immediate past president of the William S. Boyd School of Law Alumni Chapter, and she plans on running for president of the Nevada Latino Bar Association next year. She also enjoys snowboarding, going to brunch with her girlfriends, and traveling. Corral has been to 18 countries so far and counting.



Melissa Corral (right) poses with William S. Boyd Law School Dean Leah Chan Grinvald during Corral's tenure as the Alumni Chapter President during Homecoming 2022.

Melissa Corral celebrates graduating from the William S. Boyd School of Law in 2014 with her family.



Melissa Corral is sworn in as an attorney by Judge Linda Marquis in 2016.



Melissa Corral and other members of the Nevada Latino Bar Association attend the 2023 Hispanic National Bar Corporate Counsel Conference in Phoenix.



Melissa Corral (right) and her best friend, Nilly Tabares, at the inaugural Andale 5K in 2019.