

Regarding some background history for "**what persons and things in my life led me to be who I am today,**" I address your request by discussing:

- My upbringing as a youth
- My disappointments and triumphs that help mold my character
- Lessons I've learned in my life from my interaction with others
- Individuals and things that have been an influence on what I am
- Some stories that reflect what I've learned and practice

The Beginning:

Juan Antonio Flores or John Anthony Flores was born at 1:13 PM on June 16, 1935 on the outskirts of the city of Del Rio, Texas during the Post- Dust-Bowl Era of Oklahoma and Texas in an adobe house. My mother was born in Del Rio, Texas and my father was born in San Buenaventura, Coahuila, Mexico. I was named after my two grandfathers! Juan or John is my mother's father's name and Antonio or Anthony is my father's father's name.

My father worked at odd jobs after he migrated from Mexico, but most the jobs held were in agriculture. In 1937, my family joined the caravans of Okies and Tex-Mex's that trekked their way to California where work was expected to be more plentiful giving them hope for a better future.

We first settled in a community called "La Colonia" just outside of Shafter, California which consisted of several hundred Mexican and Mexican-American families living in all types of makeshift houses and lodgings. During part of the time living there, my family was on some federal program (WPA) in which my father worked doing maintenance, construction or whatever was required of him during the lean months, but for the most part, our family along with uncles, aunts and cousins planted and harvested onions, potatoes, etc. in that part of the valley. I started school here and grew my first "victory garden" as part of the WWII effort. I remember that when we moved, I took my 2" carrots with me. I also lost my little brother Refugio Jr. to the Whooping Cough at the age of 18-months leaving just me and my sister as children. Interesting that what is now an unheard illness that takes life, the prevention or cure for Whooping Cough came too late in his very young age! From there we moved to a small community called Lost Hills further north in Kern County where I would follow a dirt path every morning across a prairie of tumble weeds and dried bushes to a grammar school about a mile away. My sister wasn't of age yet, so I walked to school by myself. I still remember the cold and my wrapping my coat tightly around me as well as the wind coming into our shack (that's what it was) through the board cracks in the wall and nothing could be done about the dust coming in and leaving its layer of dust. From this location, we would travel up the Central San Joaquin Valley and other states following the crops of grapes, tree fruit and what was king then, COTTON!

From Lost Hills, we then moved to Madera to work for a large cotton farmer when I was just out of the first grade and while my father worked there during the planting and harvest season, we would take off following other crops so that we as children could help with the family income. We traveled upstate to Lodi where the wine grapes were harvested, Oregon where potatoes and cherries were grown and of course Idaho, the land of the big potatoes. We stayed during those annual Oregon-Idaho trips with a farmer who planted potatoes and sugar beets. Each morning, my mother would wake us up before sunrise and in the dark of the early morning we would be fed breakfast and then head out to the cold potato fields waiting for the first ray of sunlight so we could start picking potatoes. We would quit at 10 AM before the sun rays would begin damaging the potatoes lying exposed in the field. We would then go back to our camp which was a converted barn where the stalls and tarps separated the different families living there or in some cases, a tent under the trees or the back of a truck! In the afternoon after lunch and a quick nap, we would work from 1 - 5 using the infamous "short hoe" that injured many farmworkers from being bent over all afternoon chopping away at the weeds surrounding the sugar beets. We would go back to our camp, ate dinner and when the sun went down we went to bed since we had no electricity, bathrooms, etc. Back in those days, the farmers didn't provide any bathrooms or water as they do now, so you can only imagine the plight of where to take a bathroom break in an open field with no bushes or trees or anything that gave you privacy, especially the women. This opened my eyes to conditions that caused embarrassment and my inability to do anything about the situation. At least in the cotton and grape fields you had some kind of cover from the eyes of your fellow workers!

As you can now surmise, I didn't grow up with many luxuries, but the lessons I learned were priceless. Along with certain values taught by my parents such as honesty, loyalty, hard work and helping others. I was taught to respect others regardless of their background being that we worked alongside Okies, Blacks and Mexicans as we were all struggling to survive from one day to the other!

We did this for several years and when I was around 11, my parents bought 20 acres 7 miles north of Madera and for the first time, I had only one school to attend since all my previous years I went to schools in Shafter, Lost Hills, Madera, Lodi, Acampo, etc. in our migrant worker travels and I was never in any specific school for more than 3-5 weeks or as soon as the work ran out and we moved on to the next location and field crop.

I attended the 8th grade at Berenda Elementary School located 7 miles north of Madera on Hwy 99 where a train maintenance stop was located and there were children from several families that worked for the railroad as well as the local farmers attending the school.

For the first time, I made friends other than my cousins who traveled as part of our family caravan to the different crops and I remember 3 things that happened at Berenda Elementary School that had an important impact on my young life:

1. **For the first time** I realized I had a good mind and was good at math and spelling even though a previous teacher in another school years before, Ms. Clawson, told my

mother that "**Your son, Antonio, is a very smart young man!**" Nine words that I never forgot and kept in the back of my mind! To continue, when our teacher/principal was doing a math problem on the board from his text book, I challenged the answer to the math problem. He argued he was right because that was the book answer until I went to the board and wrote out the math problem with my answer which proved to be correct. I instantly got recognition from my other 8th graders as being smart as well as the students in the whole school. I remember feeling good about my correcting a text book answer!

2. **For the first time** in my life, I felt being treated unfairly or not as an equal since over the years, I was never in a school that long to be part of any group, etc. We lived among other Mexican families and our social life revolved around family members to have been exposed to this kind of experience and feeling. During that year, there was a train called the Liberty Train that was touring the United States displaying the Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, Bill of Rights, etc. and the school was holding a spelling contest with the male and female winners riding on a bus with other Madera school district winners to visit these documents. I won over everyone and I went home proudly to share with my parents my winning the spelling contest and my upcoming visit to Fresno to visit the train. When I went to school the next day, my teacher/principal told me that since I was a new student, it was not fair for me to go when there were other students who had been there all their lives and should have priority. I could not in words, express my deep disappointment other than I was never so crushed in my formative years. I never in all my years have had an opportunity to see the cornerstones of our country and I missed that once in a lifetime opportunity in the Spring of 1948!

3. For my graduation ceremony, I was given Rudyard Kipling's "If" to recite. **For the first time** I was given a task to perform on my own as opposed to working with other students. For your purpose, I am going to quote Rudyard Kipling's "If" as I will be making references to a poem that gave me my first direction in life as to what I wanted to be :

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing their and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired of waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dream your master;
If you can **think** - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truths you've spoken

Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after you are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor living friends can hurt you,
If all men count on you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son.

This was the beginning of my life's foundation with which I began in my early years to form my life's values: Inadequate living facilities for farmworkers; treatment of others; lack of concern for basic things, winning yet losing an opportunity to see part of America's history; learning a poem by a person I never heard of before describing what makes a Man a poem that made me pause and think on things that happen along my life's journey that raised questions on what I should do? What direction I should take? Who should I surround myself with? But most important, it began to lay the foundation in the formation of my character which would take me through life. Lessons learned that made me realize the importance of being a man of **Integrity!**

In my experience in directing programs or even my involvement with Sigma Chi, I've learned to "**keep my head about me and trusted myself when others doubted me, yet understanding the reason for their doubts.**" I've learned to be patient for things to happen that will support my position.

I've always been a dreamer and **think** of ways to make things better, some of which were carried out and whether I've triumphed or failed, I could still hold my head high in knowing I did my best.

I'm a student of time management and to this day, I organize each day the night before in order not to waste time wondering each morning what I have to do that day so I try to give my "**sixty seconds worth of distance run.**"

A long time ago I was taught that if you tell the truth you never have to remember what you said and again this is part of what the poem expresses. There are many other parts of the poem that are part of my being though I won't reference them at this time.

Even when I got to high school, my sister and I would be picked up by a bus at a country road corner and taken to the high school and at the end of classes, we would once again board a bus and go home. Even though we were now somewhat settled with a permanent address, my acquaintances were many, but my friends were few since it was only during school hours that I was able to interact with them. There was no walking to school with others or playing after school. Instead, we got home, changed our clothes and went out in the fields to join our parents nearby. For school vacation breaks or holidays, my immediate family were my sole contacts. All those days that others enjoyed such as holidays, summer breaks, etc. were work days for me.

However, in spite of these limitations, my competitiveness and emerging leadership resulted in my:

- Being a member of the California State Scholarship Federation as a result of my grades.
- Elected Boy's Federation President that represented all the boys in school.
- Elected Rally Committee Chairman and in cooperation with the Art and Home Economics Departments, I initiated the "first" school mascot coyote costume. To this day, 70 years later, a costumed coyote is part of Madera High school activities in sports and other school events.
- I was handball champion my senior year and used that skill to get an A in gym after beating Fresno State's handball coach!
- I was quarterback on the football team after never playing football until my senior year.

The reason for the above activities was that toward the end of my Junior year, my dad purchased an old jalopy that I was able to drive to and from school thus making it possible, in my senior year, to accomplish the last four school activities mentioned above. After my senior year, my jalopy became a cotton trailer!

As mentioned above, my family taught me some very important lessons that help mold my life into what it is now. Along with honesty, loyalty and hard work, they also taught me to share with others especially during the lean months when there was no work and we survived on beans, rice and tortillas along with an occasional chicken or pork meat since, as most families in those days, we raised some of our food. They also taught me to especially work hard at whatever I did since it was to my responsibility, as the oldest son, to not only help protect our immediate family, but also to assist in lending a helping hand to our neighbors during these rough months.

Let me give you a couple of examples:

When I was in my first year of college, I drove back and forth every single day. My parents couldn't afford my living in Fresno plus all the other costs of food, etc. being away from home. I remember one Saturday I was driving around the farm area and came across the one-room cabin of an elderly farmworker who my family had worked alongside for years. I stopped to say hello and it was late afternoon and he was cooking his supper. We talked for a few minutes and then he invited me to eat supper with him. I knew my mother was also preparing supper, but I remembered "If".

I accepted his invitation and he pulled out a grape box for a table, another small box for a chair and we had beans, tortillas, some meat and water. After finishing the meal, I thanked him and wished him well and went home for "another" meal.

My dad told me later that this gentleman could not stop telling my father and others about how "Antonio" who is very smart and attending college actually sat down with him and not only talked to him, but shared a meal with him as well! He would state that Antonio, who is educated and was going to college actually not only **took the time** to sit and visit, but most important **accept his invitation** for a meal. To him, my breaking bread with him made him feel important and good.

**If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch**

From time to time, I think back to this man who at this time I can't even recall his name, but who, without his knowledge, helped me address one of the points made in the poem "If"! It's made me think about what kind of influence do I have on others by my actions whether verbal or otherwise.

Another example I can think of is one morning, I took a break and drove over to the local McDonald's to meet my son. As I drove into the parking lot, I noticed this homeless lady sitting along the street curb with a grocery cart full of her belongings and a sign stating - **Homeless and Hungry**. I got off my pickup and went up to her and asked her if she would like some food and coffee. She said yes so I went in and bought a couple of sandwiches and coffee for her asking my son, who were already there, to wait while I attended to this lady. I gave her the food and drink and when I drove by later she was gone. I don't know her; don't know if I'll ever see her again, but hopefully a warm cup of coffee and something in her stomach made her day a little bit better.

I've spoken before thousands of people in my lifetime always keeping in mind that hopefully what I share with them will give them hope for a better future for themselves and their family as well as others. I've used this part of my role in life to speak at many schools encouraging parents to give their children the opportunity of an education. In my work at organizing many Fresno County communities as shown in my resume, my message was for them and their families to have a better life and even with all the Entrepreneurship classes I've taught, my wish was to give those in the audience that ray of hope for a better future. I therefore use whatever means available which I can use to spread my message of hope! This can include using my Mexican proverbs or stories

about my experiences of my many travels or things I've seen and experienced in my own personal life that will hopefully motivate them to better themselves, their family and their community.

I've been fortunate to meet with the President of the United States in the Oval Room, spoken before Congressional Committees, featured on the front page of the Wall Street Journal as well as have met many important people in my lifetime, but I've always tried not to **"lose the common touch"**

Growing up as a migrant farmworker certainly exposed me to the fact that if you didn't work, you didn't eat so therefore long hours and hard work were part of my daily life as a migrant and farmworker. As a result of my father's always pushing the family to pick that extra pound of cotton or one last grape tray before quitting work for the day pushed me to be the best I could be. As a result of **all** this, I became very competitive in what I did in life even though it revolved around farm work and always gave a 100% effort and if I failed, it's not because I didn't try.

As an example:

At the age of 12..13 I was probably the fastest grape picker in the county. I would pick over 500 grape trays per day which at that time was over \$30 which is what a person earned in a week at the prevailing wage at the time of \$0.75 per hour.

Our family was always in the lead when chopping cotton, picking grapes, picking cotton, etc. We wanted to be the best and we worked hard even though it was farm work.

During one of those cotton chopping days, I remember clearly, even today, when I decided that an education is what I wanted and needed! I was chopping cotton with my family and we could see the heat waves skipping along the cotton rows that seemed to stretch forever in all directions and I remembered some news from the day before in which I found out that President Truman made \$125,000 per year! At \$0.75 per hour, which was what the wages were at that time, in a 40-hour week, I could earn \$30.00!!!! Doing some quick math in my mind, I realized that in 52 work weeks, I would earn \$1,560 in a year "if I worked all 52 weeks! At that rate, it would take me over 80 years working 52 weeks per year and never spending one cent to make what President Truman made in one year! That's when I decided that I had to find another line of work!!!!!! I still remember the farmer's name and can take you to the exact field I was chopping cotton when this revelation came to me!

While Rudyard Kipling's "If" was instrumental in began laying the development of the foundation for my life, there was one other experience and two other written documents that coupled with "If" helped form 100% of my life's foundation. They were introduced to me years later in college and finished laying the cornerstones of my life. The experience was my being initiated into Sigma Chi and the two documents are:

1. **The Jordan Standard - This outlined 7 Standards to me were very important attributes that a person should aspire to have as a man, especially the last one that states "A Deep Sense of Personal Responsibility"**
2. **The Sigma Chi Creed - The opening words of "I Believe in fairness, decency and good manners' struck a chord within me since that is what my parents taught me to believe. The last line, "I will ever be a credit to my Fraternity" I expanded to include my family, my community and my country!**

So, as you can see, these 2 documents written by men that are much wiser than I will ever be, helped lay the foundation on which I've tried to conduct my life, my business and my interaction with others. It's not always easy, but at least I have a guide from which to work from as I meet the challenges of each day.

Sigma Chi opened the door to life-long friends that not all the grammar schools I attended or even high school would provide. Sigma Chi gave me long-lasting friendships that have continued for the past 66-years. There is no greater feeling than to have so many friends as part of one's life.

These two documents, if followed as a person travels life's journey will not only make that person become a better man as in Rudyard Kipling's "If", but they will add the extra cement and mortar to their foundation. This will insure that a person will forever be a credit to not only his Fraternity, but to his family, community and country, plus most important, a man of **Integrity**. **Integrity** encompasses all that the Jordan Standard, Sigma Chi Creed and Rudyard Kipling's "If" points that are addressed.

As my resume will show in certain cases, my competitiveness as well hard work resulted in the following:

1. The Community Action Program I directed was considered the number one community action program in the State of California This was under Governor Reagan's administration when his administration was not that all supportive of community action programs. With my staff's help, I organized 20 adult groups in Fresno County that led to gas lines replacing costly propane gas. Through Self-Help Housing (I was the treasurer) we built homes in Selma, Mendota and along Hwy 99 north of Fresno for low-income workers. We got communities to organize for the betterment of their community and with time, their voices and votes elected representatives from their community that would address many of their concerns.
2. The Manpower Program I directed, one of 87 nationwide, was considered the number one program in the nation as a result of our over 90% retention rate for more than 30-days of those trained and placed in employment plus being the first program to develop a senior citizen program that trained the client as handymen so they could earn extra income as well as the first ex-offender training program in the nation. The program was county-wide and some of our graduates went into business such as the Pinedale Small Engine Repair Shop!

3. As a Partnership Specialist with the 2000 U.S. Census, I was selected as the top male Partnership Specialist in the California Region which included about 100 with that job title. This involved my contacting 100s of churches, schools, city councils, nonprofits, supervisors and numerous other organizations throughout a 6-county area.

4. In the Reserves, after my stint with active duty, I became First Sergeant (E-7) and head of an Army Truck Company in the local Fresno Army Reserves that received its very first "Superior Rating" from the General Command overseeing the entire Western Region of the U.S. Army Reserve. I had a Captain, Gerald Butchert, who went on to head up the Westland Water District who told me, "Flores, you don't want to see me, because if you do, it's because something is not right!" He never saw me! I ran his company and the results were our Superior Award.

5. Out of college and Army service, my first job was as a Laboratory Technician Trainee at Fresno Community Hospital where after 1 year of training, I would be able to take the State exam. My Pathologist Supervisor, Dr. Bocian, recommended to the State that I be allowed to take the exam after 9-months of training. They approved, I passed and did this for a few years. I have never heard of anyone having their time of training waived and take the State exam. I did this for some years and dissatisfied with the income, I went into business with fraternity brother Frank Small and established a janitorial cleaning business, called Jani-King and he and I worked it day and night until we had 15 employees. However, the work was often 7 days a week due to a worker calling in sick and we'd have to jump out of bed and finish the worker's route. So, we decided to seek a better life and Frank went on to become a successful stock broker and I became involved with community action programs for the next 15 - 20 years being Executive Director of several organizations that are mentioned in my resume.

5. As you well know, with Sigma Chi I've received numerous awards that now makes me the first Sigma Chi to ever receive all of the awards mentioned below and probably one of the most, if not the most, decorated Sigma Chi Alumnus in Sigma Chi History:

- Order of Constantine
- Significant Sig
- Best Alumni Officer Award
- Best Alumni Chapter Award
- Best House Corporation Officer Award
- Outstanding House Corporation Award
- Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Board of Grand Trustees
- Plus, other citations and recognitions

Also, as you well know, I have also held other positions with Sigma Chi locally such as being the person in charge of the fundraising drive to raise \$500,000 for the renovation of the Epsilon Eta Chapter House. Originally, Mike Patton and Tom Downing were the Co-Chairs, but after Mike dropped out, Tom did not want to chair the fundraising, so guess who took over? Again, my competitiveness would not allow me to let the project die so I

took charge and spent 2-years of hundreds of phone calls and emails and got the job done! Now, I'm in charge of the fundraising effort for the Fresno Sigma Chi Endowment which to help reach a \$3,000,000 goal which has generated \$2,250,000 in money and commitments. Of this last \$750,000 needed, in the last 7 months we have generated over \$400,000 in cash and commitments! This will ultimately provide \$120,000, annually and in perpetuity, in scholarships to Sigma Chi undergraduates!

I've done other things such as being an Owner/Broker of a Real Estate company with another Broker that lasted a few years and my claim to fame in this venture was that I once sold \$8,000,000 worth of real estate in a 6-month period!

I also owned and operated a program that provided English learning to farmworkers that lived in rural labor camps that held a green card that would help them become U.S. citizens and now lead a much better life with their work in other occupations other than farming. The children that they raised have gone on to local and other colleges in pursuit of their American Dream. During the winter months when the farmworkers had little or no work, I would go around to stores that gave away their day old bread and pastry and would take these items out to the farmworkers so that they could at least have something with their coffee.

I also sold life insurance for Franklin Life and my claim to fame is that when I went to work for them, they were in the midst of an 18-month contest for a "free" all-expenses paid for the winner and a guest to Bermuda. The winners had to sell x number of policies within that 18-month period. I went to work for them with 6-months left in the contest and by selling 10 life insurance policies in one day in the last week of the contest, my wife and I got to visit Bermuda! Another example of my competitiveness!

In the fast food business, my wife and I owned and operated 3 food outlets, 2 in Fresno and 1 in Madera, that served all kinds of Mexican food, but our main product was tamales and the business was called Speedy Tamales. My wife and I operated it for several years until we got tired of the long hours and everyday work because too often, on Sunday which was our day off, someone would call in sick so if my wife went in to work, so did I!!! It was a good business, but no time left over to enjoy the fruits of our labor. I remember that at 3 AM I would get up and heat several dozen tamales and deliver them to a catering truck provider whereby food trucks would come in and load up for supplies for their business. It was called Fresno Catering.

As noted in my resume, most of my later years have been as consultant to numerous organizations regarding business plans, program reviews, school presentations to parents encouraging them to educate their children beyond high school as well as marketing for charter schools. I also spent my time writing 3 Mexican Proverbs books and marketing them and other related items. This involved my having a screen printing business to do tee shirts, cups, caps, aprons, etc.

So in closing, let me say that I hope that my life's work of helping others will be part of my legacy and somewhere along the way, others will be motivated by what I've done with my life and in turn help others that need help.....

I spent most of the day yesterday writing and putting together what I thought would best convey who I am and why my actions in my lifetime came to be! My apologies for such a long biography, but I felt it was important that I give you a very good glimpse into some of the important people whose names I never knew of have forgotten and some of the incidents that helped mold my character which leads to "**why I am what I am**"!!!!