

## Ep. 69: Hispanic Heritage Month

[Narrator] Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960<sup>th</sup> Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended. (Upbeat music)

Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I'm Chief Master Sergeant Christopher Howard, 960th COG senior enlisted leader and with me today I have Captain Jamillah Gonzalez 960th Cyberspace Wing executive officer. And we also have Tech. Sgt. Christopher Almaraz, 854th COS. Awesome thank you for joining me today. Right. Um today we really want to start talking about Hispanic heritage month uh want to learn about you some of your backgrounds and uh you know kind of to share your story of what uh what growing up was like to join an Air force and how Air force life is all integrated. So captain, can you kind of tell me a little bit about yourself man? Yeah definitely and I really enjoy and appreciate the opportunity to be part of this discussion uh in celebrating the awareness uh and getting the culture you know discussed from uh we celebrate this observance from the 15th of September to the 15th of October and so it's just an opportunity to step back and appreciate and get to know a little bit more about different cultures. To include the Hispanic right? Like every one of our airmen brings something different to the table and that's what I love about these observation Montes is being able to highlight a little bit about the background of individuals and what they bring to the table. Yeah, definitely. So um for me I come from a Hispanic background on both sides of my family. My dad was born and raised in Mexico and my mom was born and raised in Peru. Um they met in California, a state that's very well known for being a melting pot. And so I was raised there in the bay area of California and was exposed to a lot of different countries of Hispanic origin. I mean people of those countries and so I really felt that I had a diverse experience just growing up there um, and then joining the military and then going overseas and being part of a new organization and just getting exposed to folks from all different countries and backgrounds there. I think that um having been part of the Hispanic culture and understanding and being in California, I just felt like it really gave me some perspective and appreciation for the fact that we all have different experiences and they were all going to be coming together somewhere and when you're overseas, you know, people become your family. I mean, you know, they're the ones that you're going to lean on and so um just always being sensitive to, hey, um, we're all going to, you know, look at things a little bit differently, but hey, let's talk it through and work any, you know, differences out. Yeah, so for me it's again, yeah, I definitely appreciate the opportunity that or even that this platform exists to be able to give people uh a chance to, to share their story. Um no matter the background. Um it's great, I think it, it develops the air force out to a more diverse and inclusive culture.

Um, so I'm definitely thankful for that. So for myself, I was born in Guatemala uh and about 23 years old, moved to Washington state, lived there for about nine years and uh, yeah, I was raised by a father who was born and raised in Chapas Mexico and uh mom stayed back in Washington and uh we moved down to Texas fort worth. And so uh, so I have a definitely a blending of the northern culture um, and in combination with the southern traditions and values and, and notice that I say southern traditional values because up north that seems to be different. There is right, they, there's a sort of pride that comes from, from being down south and it was great to come down because I can start to see more people like me um, and begin to uh, to get that exposure of the, of the Hispanic culture and specifically the Tejano culture. Right? And you were, you were mentioned when we were talking before, um, you know, we're living in Washington that it was very unique because you and your brother were what? Yeah. So we were the only two Hispanic Children in the school. So uh so but at that age you don't know any different. Um and that's the that's where I think you know, if no matter what you're on the outside at when you're at that age, what kids show us is that you are still a person. Um and you bring a certain personality and things and uh and for us we knew no different. Um It wasn't until we got down here that we were like, oh we I would say yeah we didn't really like fit in because on the outside we are we're brown. And I mean the way we spoke the way that we behaved was very much of a northern manner. And so getting down here people are like why do you speak? So why do you say you guys instead of y'all? And you know and we would we would be so much is called like we behaved white. Um and because we didn't display some of those uh some of those more uh characteristics or behaviors of the Hispanic culture. But for us it was just this is Chris and Andrew um and so we found ourselves, we just wanted to get; we wanted to get involved in all the different crowds. Like all the different cliques and all that stuff. And that's one of those things that coming into the military that I came to appreciate even more because I mean we talk about California being a melting pot in all these different states having their cultural influence. But I would argue that the biggest one is the military right? I mean we got people coming in from I mean if it's Puerto Rico if it's Peru if it's other places I mean you have the entire United States coming into this whether it's the Air Force, the marines or whatever and that's if you stay stateside imagine you start to think you said going overseas. Yeah and then you start the you know the families that start to engage and then the cultural exchange I know being stationed in Germany for a number of years um brought a lot of States a lot a lot of things together and I think that was one of the points that you're making. We were talking before right Captain G. Was you know we talk about that family aspect in that culture. You know we bring everything together and overseas really highlights that. So I mean when we talk about culture, what do you think about your heritage and that culture and what we bring to the to the table man. So um when I think about culture just some things that I wrote down just is you know I think about music, I think about food, I think about religion I think about traditions and so bringing that all together. Um, you know, even when it comes to music for example, you know, having a mom that's from Peru a dad from Mexico, the music is different, you know, very unique, very regional. Um, and so just knowing that and hearing that and then going to different countries and saying, okay, I'm going to listen to their

music and they're each going to have their own unique instruments. Um, and uh, you know, the languages that go along with that. Um, and thinking about food, like you say overseas, you get together with folks there from different countries. So everybody brings their own dish and um, and getting to share that. I think about religion. Um, again in, in the military because we were able to come together and kind of understand that we're all going to have a little bit of a different experience coming, coming up, being able to share. Um, some of those, uh, celebratory occasions that happen in faith. Um, I think about all of those things and, and one more thing that I was thinking about when you were speaking, um, Sergeant Almaraz was representation and like you were saying you were when you were in a school and it was just you and your brother, you just go, hey, everyone's young, everybody's, you know, getting along and building friendships. Um, but there is a time where you do just kind of notice when you come to different areas sometimes either because you were in a melting pot like me. And then you realize that so there's not a lot of representation. You know, you kind of notice that at some point and you know, um, at some point along in your life, you know, when I think when you are usually like of a minority group, whatever that minority group maybe because in different areas you can go to the south and then be considered the majority and then you're in an area where now you became the minority groups. So, you know, everyone experiences it in different ways, but it's something that, you know, at some point you notice. So I think that that's part of, you know, wanting to bring these, um, events together is to kind of just look at that, discuss it and say, hey, what can we do better? And I think like we've noticed, you know, the military does a great job of giving us all an opportunity um, to discuss here, um, and enjoy, you know, the experiences that we have individually. And I say that, you know, I think that when we look at citizen airmanship right? We talked about the Reserve. We talked about some of those regional differences. You can even see that in the demographics across the Reserve, which is interesting, but kind of circling back, I think that one thing that really stood out about what you said is that that food culture, right? When we talk about, how do we include everybody, how do we get to know people? Um I find that eating is one of those unique social events that you'll ever find breaking bread, breaking bread, right, bringing it to the table and everybody bringing something a little bit different. Um and then even highlighting some of those cultures, right? Uh and getting out of the food, but going back to culture and your experiences, Tech. Sgt. Almaraz says, what are some of the other things that you feel like you're upbringing and some of the differences that you've seen come together as you served? Yeah, so I would say um one of the biggest things and I love that the um uh 16 therefore is put this out, but in one of their buildings, they have this slide show and it says the word esperanza, so hope. Um and so within the Hispanic community or the culture at least specifically Mexican uh is that word hope um and faith. And so ah that's something that I feel is very strong and prominent within, it's not that it's not in others, but just within ours. That's something that I've always had a kind of, my dad just brought me up was like just always have that faith. No, and so bringing that into the military or the air force um people have called me on and said, hey, you know, man, thank you like thanks so much for like you just always like no matter how bad it is, like you just you have this sort of positive outlook where you

know, we may not get the job done, but we're at least gonna get through it all right, or we are going to get jumped. So it's just like having the faith that no matter what we are facing, so that the adversity, right? And that's how the Air Force is this adversity. And so I've been able to really connect um with connect my cultural up bringing with the Air Force culture um hope being combined with adversity. So uh no, I think that, you know, another one of those great things about diversity, inclusion and you know, these observations uh during the month is breaking down stereotypes, right? When you start talking to individual cultures, individual people. Um almost always, it's based on a sense of pride in who you are, it's a sense of pride of where you came from. Um and it's a hard work ethic, it's a degree of hope versus the stereotypes that everybody throws out there. Right? So that's one of the things that I love about these conversations is that when we start really digging into, you know, how did sergeant Almaraz grow up, how did Captain G grow up? How did Chief Howard grow up? Right? And where was that background? Right? When you talk to our Airmen, Nine out of 10 times, I would say if not 10 out of 10 it was, you know, I had a parent that they had to push through this. I had a grandfather or grandmother that showed me this or shared this and that sense of pride in who we were. The sense of pride of why we serve comes out and that hard work that comes out and shows itself on the table. So these conversations help eliminate so many different things, right? Um I guess that you know that kind of drives to what drove you captain to serve and the military. So for me, um growing up I knew that I always wanted to support like a bigger cause. Um I did have a lot of what I would feel like was kind of like an ingrained kind of courage. I always did kind of push the boundaries a little bit. Um, and I think that the military, I did have a family member in it. Um I had an uncle and so he kind of introduced the idea um and I had a supportive mom that always said, hey, you know, you you're capable of doing whatever you set your mind to. And uh I think it was both those things combined, a willingness to do something more serve something greater and then just you know, just faith it I'd be able to accomplish something like that. What about you? Yeah, I would say uh I would say I share that too, you know, being able to serve for a greater purpose, that's greater than you. I always knew that I wanted to take care of people. Um, just being the oldest of grandchildren, being the oldest of, of the siblings, you know, I guess I was at a very young age born into that. Uh, and so coming into the military, I always knew I wanted to join. Um, but I wanted to join because I wanted to leave people, I wanted to take care of people. Um, and, and have their sort of show them that somebody does actually care about their interests. Um, and so the military, for me, it was that, uh, the discipline that it would show the um, the structure and just the, the camaraderie um, that exists that I saw existed within the military and so essentially extending my small family of three because, you know, my brother and my dad, of course I had my mom and my siblings, but in terms of my immediate family and so that essentially is expanding that that family, um, in being able to uh, being able to see the different parts of the world to get to know , um , things that I didn't know , things that were different than me . Um, because for me too, I always, I'm a firm believer that in order for me to be a better person, I got to get out there and get with people that are different than me that don't behave, talk, eat uh do the same things that I do because it's not that there's

anything wrong with people that do, it's just that uh if I'm to be the better, well rounded person and be able to lead more people, then I can't just be accustomed to leading people that are from this place or have these characteristics. No, I think that's one of the great points, right? Especially the military is like all of that different exposure to different people, different cultures, um different things, right? I can say that I'm very eclectic in my uh my likes and dislikes now based on all the experiences and all the people that I've met, right? Um you know, being exposed to zydeco music, being exposed to it, that's a Cajun thing, right? So my body's back when I was in a big Cajun zydeco um and then uh bloody mary's, but that's a whole different thing, so, but you know, and then even uh real enchiladas, what is a real into a lot of like, right, so growing up sometimes you think like Taco Bell is the best thing, you know, not so much right? Or that you think fried chicken fried chicken, right? Or you think that you know this kind of pizza is the only kind of beats out there and you get around the world right? You find schnitzel, you find, you know real uh enchiladas, you find uh real fried chicken, all these different things that you get exposed to in life, and then just the stories of people, and then some of the nuances, I can't explain how many times I just learned something from talking to somebody. So yeah, you know, like, talking to you guys, there's a lot of stuff that I picked up it, I wouldn't have picked up before. Yeah. Speaking of what is a real interest? I had had spaghetti the other day. And so I love spaghetti. And so for me, it's a funny story, because I mean, when I put I had camel spaghetti in Qatar, and I was like, I never thought that was gonna happen. Um and then had, you know, spaghetti a 'la Bolognese, which I learned that over there, but I'm sure that dish is probably origins or somewhere else, but just this other weekend, I had a I would call it a Mexican spin on spaghetti, because I've never seen any anything else. And it was like, with a spicy uh sort of creamy sauce. Uh and she's like, hey, yeah, I love spaghetti. Like, would you like someone? I'm like, yeah, I'm thinking it's going to come with the red sauce, right? And no comes out, and I'm like, is this like, is this like alfredo, like, what is this, what's going on here? She was spaghetti and she what she told me, like, she doesn't like uh the red sauce based spaghetti and because she grew up eating this style of spaghetti from her mom and everything of course is home cooked. And so uh for me in that moment, I was just like, wow. So I have to figure out how to cook the spaghetti because now I can't make that sauce, right? So just talking about food, I was just, you know that it's just like it's amazing that how right, breaking bread and bringing people together through food. Um you learn Air Forces diversity. I'm saying esperanza, right? But we're saying the same thing, we're going for the same sort of goal, right? Uh And I love for those to come together. And again, these platforms help for that. Um because they allow us to see yes, on the outside, maybe we are so different and that's good. But on the inside we all have a common goal. When we can identify those common goals, then we can begin to really like really create change, really create um lasting and impactful effects. Um and just be better off overall as an Air force uh institution, right? And yeah, it's all good. It's all it's like amazing, right? You see that and you start to see those connections, you're just like, I don't know, for me, I feel off of that. And I'm like, this is freaking amazing. Like let's go with it. Yes, I want more, right? You're like feed the machine, let's make the machine that is the air force uh in the United States, I would

say the machine that is the United States. Because the United States isn't a superpower because of mistake, right? We are a superpower because we have so much diversity. Um and when we can we can increase that inclusion and we can feed that inclusion. Uh huh. I mean no one's going to stop us. I think you can make a Yeah, I think you make a really good point with that. And I think that is something that the military as a whole has recognized in the U. S. And with that because of all of those different cultural backgrounds and all of that innovation is another outcome from that. So getting things done, getting them done the best way. Getting them done in new ways is kind of that that goal ultimately that comes and is um put into reality based off of being able to openly you know share and come to the better outcomes um together. For sure. So lastly I guess I was I was thinking you know, when you were speaking about um So I have a son and he's 17 years old now and when you are going through, you know, raising a child and you think about where are they going to be in the world and how is the military experience influencing them? Um I and being of a Hispanic background and him having even more of a diverse background. Thinking about how you include your family, both in the in the military, you know, um and in the reserve where you have the, sometimes you're in the military status, Sometimes you're not bringing that all together but also saying, okay, um you know, can I do I expose you to the language? How do I expose you to the food? Just always keep in a mindset of how do I bring up this human being to also um understand, enjoy uh and be a part of the next generation that's going to carry forward. Um this thinking and appreciation for others and all of their different backgrounds. So I mean I guess the question I would have for both of you as leaders, right? You as an NCO and you as a captain. We talk about that inclusion of culture. What advice would you give to your peers to your leaders or even uh two others were in uniform to be more open and drive those conversations and pull those cultures in? Yeah. I think um in practice the best um advice that I could think of is break bread with those that you work with because I think it is in those casual times that you get to have those discussions of, what restaurant do you pick? What type of, you know, food options, what music is playing there? Um So if you are new and maybe you find that maybe you didn't come up in an area where maybe there was so much diversity that that's a way to kind of bring you into an environment where you can have those discussions and get to know someone a little bit better and understand them a little bit more. So that's in practice. And then just in like philosophy mindset, I would just think, you know, kind of exposing, watching, watching movies, reading books, just things to kind of expose the mind to other ways of thinking and other cultural listen to podcasts, right? You've shared podcast with and listening to podcasts. Absolutely, yeah, that's, that's a good point about you. Something. Yeah, I would say, uh, hey, hopefully it's in you, hopefully in that person. You know, I would, I would say, hey, you know, you're part of a, of a large organization with multiple uh personalities, cultural backgrounds and all that. Just be brave, Get out there, and ask questions to things that you don't understand. Uh it and if it's through breaking bread with somebody, if that's how you feel comfortable, if it's through, uh, may be linking up with somebody to play some video games online, whatever your approach to be able to get to know somebody more, if it's in you, which I strongly encourage because you're living in a uh big melting pot, one of

the largest uh, that is the United States and then the Air Force be brave because the only thing that is on the other side of that is a level of awareness and gratitude that that nobody can ever take away from you and that nobody can ever give you unless you take that first step . And so I would challenge people to take that first step, ask a question. Um whatever that question is, hey notice that you do some of these things, I'm just curious right Inquisition. Human Inquisition is one of the things that as human beings, we whether it's getting to know a different part of the world, a different food um or learning how to play a different video game or whatever the case is when you are in the state of mind, you just, you, you crave that, you feel you want to just keep feeding that. Um and if that is through getting to know your co workers that are from a different place, hang on because it's going to be a great ride. So I think you make some great points right? Um and piggyback on that is uh you know, learning, learning about yourself, funding about others and just learning in general is a lifelong expedition that you have to be on. That's the only thing that keeps you growing that the only thing that keeps you inspired. Uh not necessarily only, but for the most part right that that yearning to know more keeps you moving, you don't get stagnant and then also for my fellow leaders out there, if that challenge the chilly out there of being open, if it's in you, I would challenge that if you're a leader out there. Um if you wear this uniform, get over yourself and about you. Um and it's really about understanding our airmen and what they do, why they do it, how they think and how they get after business. Because if we're fully engaged and understand what drives you and understand, you know, some of that background and what you bring to the table, we're only going to make this force a lot more lethal and really that's what it is about, right? So I want to thank you again for everything you do every day. Um and thank you for sharing your story. Thank you for being able to talk to your fellow guardians out there. I don't know that everybody could do that. So thank you very much and uh that gladiators um thank you for listening, thank you for everything that you do. Thank you for being part of this great cyber wing and most of all, let's get out there and have our enemies in the face through cyberspace. Yeah, yeah.