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Executive profile: Love of food spills out of childhood kitchen



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Food played a major role in America Corrales-Bortin's upbringing.

Raised in Mexico, the co-owner of Phoenix-based America's Taco Shop spent an innumerable amount of time with her mother in the kitchen.

"She cooked really good," America said. "Everything I know is from my childhood."

She remembers being by her mother's side as she prepared traditional Mexicali meals, absorbing the family recipes.



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Husband and wife Terry Bortin and America Corrales-Bortin bring a taste of America's Taco Shop home to their daughters, Analis and Alexa.

Following her mother's death, America brought those recipes and family traditions to Arizona, where she moved in with her older brother, Ricardo Corrales, and his wife, Claudia.

Ricardo and his wife became a second set of parents to America, establishing high standards for potential boyfriends, as well as setting a strict curfew that lasted as long as she lived under their roof.

When Terry Bortin, a third-generation Phoenician, first eyed his future wife across the room in a Scottsdale bar one Saturday night, none of his smooth pickup lines could help him.

Abiding by her brother's rules for when she went out, America turned down Terry's offer to buy her a drink. At least, anything but water.

And as far as securing her phone number that first night: "I think it was a flat-out 'no,'" Terry said.

When he asked if he could see her again, she said she would be at the same place the following weekend. Determined, he arrived a week later but only got a brief glimpse of her as she walked across the room.

"I had to go back a third Saturday," he said, before she agreed to a lunch date.

Of course, he still had to pass muster with Ricardo and Claudia.

Terry recalled spending an hour in the family living room being peppered with questions.

"I appreciated every bit of it," he said.

This fall, the couple will celebrate their 12th wedding anniversary. During that time, they have welcomed two daughters into the world and completely altered their marriage by becoming business partners.

America's Taco Shop came into being out of casual dinner table conversations the couple had in the early years of marriage, they said.

Terry in particular was fond of the thought of opening a restaurant. He had gone to Northern Arizona University for a degree in hotel and restaurant management and worked in the industry for several years.

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America was “very nervous” about the idea, but Terry was convinced that once people tasted his wife’s food, they would be hooked.

“I knew people were going to love it the moment they tried it,” he said.

As a child, America weighed two career options: lawyer and teacher. Ultimately, she settled on becoming a teacher, and scratches her head at why she ever thought she wanted to be a lawyer.

“I don’t talk very much, so I definitely don’t know why I wanted to be a lawyer,” she said.

They’ve built their venture into a solid success. They have seven restaurants across the Valley now, and they signed a deal this year to franchise more through Scottsdale-based Kahala Corp.

Still, they live up to a tradition of putting family first. Whether it’s going out to eat, or to the movies, or even to the beach, “we’re still centered on family,” America said. “As long as we have each other, we’re all good.”

Close-up

Company: America’s Taco Shop

Titles: Co-owners

Education: Terry, bachelor’s degree in hotel/restaurant management from Northern Arizona University; America, bachelor’s degree in education from Arizona State University and master’s degree from NAU

Family: Daughters, Alexa, 7, Analis, 9

Hobbies: Make meals together, spend time with family, travel, go to movies

Define success: When someone comes into our restaurants, tries our food and loves it. Making our guests happy.

Best advice: Terry: Be committed to what you do. Perseverance. America: It doesn’t matter what you’re doing as long as you’re happy. Stay true to who you are.

Favorite summertime activity: Go to the beach and swim.

Something people don’t know about you: America’s mother allowed her brothers to choose her name, and they named her after a Mexican soccer team.

Will never do again: America — Zip-line in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. **Terry** — There's not a lot I wouldn't do.

Items always in your fridge: Wine, chili, salsa, Mexican cheese, guacamaya sauce