



“Everything I know about the restaurant business I learned from my dad.

He opened his first restaurant, Juan Jose, in 1989 and then later opened Don Jose and finally Mi Tierra. I started working at Mi Tierra as a hostess when I was in high school. After learning the menu and learning how to interact with the customers, I wanted to be a waitress, but my dad told me I wasn’t ready. I would ask him all the time ‘Hey, can I wait that table’ or ‘Hey, it’s only 30 minutes to close, can I wait that last table’ and he would still say no. Even though I was his daughter, he wouldn’t let me advance until he thought I was ready.

It took a while of me asking, but he eventually let me start as a waitress and I really enjoyed it. I liked working with customers and meeting new people every day.

After I graduated high school, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to go to college. I had the opportunity to go, but I didn’t really know what I wanted to

do. So, I took that year after graduation to decide and during that time, I was still working at Mi Tierra. Then one year became two years and then two years became three and I realized that I liked what I was doing and wanted to stay in the restaurant business.

I then started working as an assistant manager, my dad wouldn’t let me go straight to manager, although I asked, before the opportunity came up where they needed additional help and I was finally able to become a manager.

My family was looking at moving outside of Florence for the next restaurant when my dad was told about the building El Agave is in now going up for lease. He said he was willing to help us get it started and I also think he wanted us to stay in Florence. We have always lived in this area together and it would have been hard not seeing them and my siblings.

El Agave has been open for almost three years now and since we opened my dad has always been there whenever I need him. I can always count on my dad and in the same way, he and my siblings can always count on me. Whether something’s broken or one of the restaurants is short-staffed, all we have to do is call and help will be there.

I don’t look at helping my dad out as payback, but more as appreciation. My family and my siblings have what we have because of him and it is up to us to keep the businesses going for the future. My son is almost four and he is already trying to help. The other day I was sitting with him in the restaurant with my back to the door trying to feed him and someone walked in and he said ‘Mom, Mom, a customer’. So, I think he’ll like it, but I would always give him the choice to do something else, like I had.

But I do hope that he’ll be the next manager running El Agave one day.”

- **Brenda Perez, co-owner of El Agave Mexican Restaurant**