



Abundant GRATITUDE

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT BY JORDAN BUSH

If you savor hot and juicy charcoal-cooked chicken, pay attention. Frisco's Peruvian rotisserie chicken is perhaps the best version you'll ever enjoy. It's founder (and namesake), Francisco Gómez de la Torre has been on quite a journey that ultimately brought him to Lancaster.

IN 2002, at age 30, Francisco Gómez de la Torre took the first of many great leaps in his lifetime. In search of a better life, he left his home and his family in Arequipa, Peru, to move to the United States. Francisco's wife, Veronica, and their one-year-old daughter, Daniela, remained behind without any assurances. "I came here because things in my country weren't good," says Francisco of his quest to "look for a future for my family, to support my family," all the while "not knowing if it was going to be ok."

"Some days... some days were harder than others," says Francisco. Daniela was the greatest source of his strength. Without her, Francisco admits, he might not have made it. "I remember once she called, and I couldn't pick up. She left a voicemail, and I saved that voicemail for years," he says. "I would listen to it whenever I was down. I don't think people realize how difficult it is to immigrate to another country," he continues. "I can tell you this: people don't do it [for] the heck of it. People don't do it because it's fun. Especially if you are a father, you have the obligation to provide for your family, and that's what I did."

To The Marriott, by Motorcycle

Stepping off the plane in Miami, Florida, Francisco initially found a job in Lexington, Kentucky, working in hospitality. He eventually moved

to New Jersey, commuting to New York City to work at the Hyatt Grand Central. Five years into his plan, the 2008 recession hit, and Francisco lost his job. "In one day, they had like a \$50 million loss on the books and cancellations after Lehman Brothers went down. I was looking for a job anywhere on the East Coast. Nobody was hiring. The only hotel that was hiring was the Marriott; that's how I ended up here in Lancaster." Construction of the Lancaster Marriott at Penn Square and Lancaster County Convention Center had finished three months prior, opening in June 2009.

Francisco landed an interview at the Lancaster Marriott and traveled to it by motorcycle. After the interview, "I went and drove around Lancaster County," says Francisco. "I loved it. I stopped on the side of the road, called my wife, and said, 'This is it. This is where we can raise our family.'" Francisco got the job. A year later, Veronica and Daniela were able to move to Lancaster after living apart from Francisco for seven burdensome years.

Frisko's Chicken

In early 2020, the pandemic struck, and travel came to a grinding halt. Now working at the downtown Holiday Inn, Francisco lost his job yet again. This time, he considered it as "a perfect opportunity to open the restaurant," he says. "I already had the idea, but it was very hard to leave my job to do something that I didn't know was going to be successful. With a family, there's no way you can just give up a salary, unless you have a lot of money saved up, which I didn't. The scenario was set up for me to [make a] move," says Francisco.

In Peru, restaurants serving chicken, fries and salad are extremely popular. Francisco's version, Frisko's Chicken, would offer Peruvian-style rotisserie chicken cooked in a charcoal oven, with the focus being

Founding partner, Francisco Gómez de la Torre, and his daughter, Daniela, at Frisco's restaurant on New Holland Avenue in Lancaster. Daniela recently graduated from Millersville University with a bachelor's degree in communications. Along with her younger sister, she helps her father with the business.



Francisco Gómez de la Torre removes rotisserie chickens from the charcoal oven, accompanied by a wave of savory and smoky aromas.



Fried plantains have a caramelized glaze on the outside, tender on the inside, with a candy-like sweetness.



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Frisco's rotisserie chicken is packed with rich flavors from the charcoal oven. Fried yucca is crispy yet tender on the inside, with a starchy flavor. Fried plantains have a caramelized glaze on the outside, tender on the inside, with a candy-like sweetness. Rich in antioxidants, it is sweet with welcoming notes.



Signage in the restaurant relays Francisco's journey to becoming a business owner.

take-out offerings. "I'm very proud of the sauces, especially because two of them, the medium [Aji] and hot [Rocoto], are made with Peruvian ingredients," he says, explaining that "Aji and Rocoto are Peruvian peppers that are very characteristic of Peruvian food, a heat you find on many dishes." The signature Cilantro is the most popular, being a mild but incredibly delicious recipe developed by Veronica.

Frisco's Chicken opened for business on New Holland Avenue in Lancaster on October 31, 2020. A few weeks into the opening, a second shutdown was enacted, limiting the number of tables restaurants could utilize. "That really didn't matter. Everybody was taking their food home," Francisco recalls. "That was our success, because this food is so good to take home. Even today, I think 80% of our sales are still to-go."

Following the success of the Lancaster location, three others quickly opened in Lititz, Mount Joy and Willow Street. "I used to explain it, 'If you dig a little hole and you find gold, wouldn't you keep digging?'" Francisco theorizes. After experiencing explosive growth during the pandemic, the business wasn't

prepared to endure the slowdown that followed. Simply put, Frisco's Chicken grew too fast.

Closing... Or, So It Seemed

On Friday morning, July 12, 2024, Francisco realized the business wasn't financially solvent enough to cover costs. "It was the day when I realized we wouldn't have enough money to pay our staff," explains Francisco. "In hindsight, maybe that was a mistake. We should have made harder decisions much earlier, so that the pain wouldn't have been that big," he continues. "I couldn't consciously ask people to work for me knowing that they weren't going to be paid. But actually, they did it anyway."

Two days later, on Sunday, July 14, all four of Frisco's locations closed.

The community response was tremendous. "That's literally the reason why our landlord helped us," explains Francisco. "They put their resources [at] our disposal to reopen and keep going. The whole month of July last year was just an incredible experience. The day we closed, I can say with confidence that it was the worst day of my life, and I've had bad days. My father passed when I was

eight years old. I moved to America by myself, leaving my family behind," he recounts. "People might think that I am a failure because I just, you know, closed three entities. I'm left with the baggage of closing three stores, but at the same time, it was so amazing to see what we had created."

Lessons Learned

"Since the very beginning, this was very personal. The business makes you money, it's important, but it was always about people. I see these restaurants as a way to literally bring happiness to people. I realized that early. Two weeks after we opened for the first time, this woman came to me and said, 'Thank you. Thank you. I got your food, and you brought back memories of my dad growing up ... my dad bringing home this kind of food on Sunday evenings and sharing it with the family.' I've tried to make that personal connection with our customers, which I think we've been very successful doing."

Two weeks after closing, on July 25, Frisco's Chicken announced the Lancaster restaurant would reopen. On August 1, the charcoal oven was reignited. Since reopening,



Seasonings that are used to prepare chicken, sauces and other menu items.

Frisco's Chicken has continued to evolve, adding new menu items and services. From wings to crispy chicken sandwiches, there's also Frisco's salad sandwich with red onions, a classic Peruvian-style sandwich inspired by meals Francisco enjoyed as a child. Catering for local events and businesses is on the menu. Additional parking is also now available (across New Holland Avenue from the Science Factory, next to Quips Pub).

Giving Thanks

Last month, on October 31, Frisco's Chicken celebrated its fifth anniversary. "I truly believe that being grateful is more important than being happy," says Francisco. "I'm thankful. It's a state of mind to me; it helps me be resilient. Be appreciative. It doesn't



Thanks to public outcry, Francisco was aided by his landlord to allow for the original restaurant to reopen only weeks after it closed in July 2024.

matter how much or how little you have. Every day, I get in my car and look at my house and say, 'Thank you. Thank you for the family I have, the house I have, the health I have.'"

"It's not difficult for me to be thankful. That's what helped me always keep going. It's a simple concept, but very hard to put into practice. I'm 53 years old; it's been a long journey to come to these realizations. Everything is going to

be all right. I believe that if you have your heart in it, if you always try to do good, things are going to be alright. No matter how hard or how painful, with a little bit of hard work, things are going to be ok."



Frisco's Chicken is located at 454 New Holland Avenue in Lancaster. For more information, visit friscoschicken.com.