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Emmanuel “Manny” Vizcaíno: A Life Driven By Love

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Emergency Medical Technician Emmanuel "Manny" Vizcaino works a shift at Northwest EMS in Maytown on Monday, June 19, 2017.

Vinny Tennis | Staff Photographer

If his bright smile and hearty laugh were not indication enough, Emmanuel

“Manny” Vizcaino’s life choices prove that he is driven by love.

This is not the love of fairy tales – although the story of how he met his wife is quite magical.

Over his nearly 40 years of life, Manny has been driven by a deep love for his family, his country and complete strangers.

Manny may have learned this love from his father, who moved his family away from the growing struggles in Venezuela to the United States in 1997. A 17-year-old at the time of the move, Manny dove into the work force upon arriving in Pennsylvania and gained a love for his new country. In response, Manny embarked on the process of citizenship.

“This country has given me so much,” he says. “It gave me a better life, so why not become a citizen?”

After years of residency, paperwork and financial investments, Manny received a letter at the end of 2016 that he would be sworn in as a citizen.

“It was an amazing feeling and a big relief,” he remembers.

Earlier on that journey toward citizenship, Manny’s love for people led him to his career of the past 13 years. Working in Hershey Medical Center’s emergency room first introduced the then-housekeeper to the emergency medical technician (EMT) profession.

“Seeing all the things they did to save lives interested me and motivated me to become an EMT,” Manny explains.

His father's heart attack provided the final push for him to enroll at Harrisburg Area Community College and get his EMT certification in 2005. He worked in the emergency department for two years before transitioning to the prehospital, or ambulance, side at Northwest Emergency Medical Service, where he has been working ever since.

"I get to help people and it's very rewarding," says Manny. "We can't save everybody, but we do what we can."

Despite his passion for his job, his love for his family was the driving force behind another career change. The retirement of an older coworker made Manny realize that he might not be able to support his wife and three children in the future as an EMT.

"The unfortunate thing about this job is that we do not have retirement," Manny explains. "That dawned on me a little bit because I need to secure a future for my family. I called my wife and said, 'I'm going back to school.'"

With a childhood dream of becoming a police officer and his family's future in mind, Manny entered the Criminal Justice and First Response program at the Lancaster campus of YTI Career Institute in 2015.

Manny attended hands-on classes for 18 months, followed by a 3-month externship at Northwest Regional Police Department. The husband, father, full-time employee and student maintained the role of class leader during his time at YTI, a position that helps establish a chain of command in the program. When he was not at school, Manny continued working full-time hours as an EMT.

"It was a lot to juggle and he did it," says Robert Pace, director of the Criminal Justice and First Response program. "Manny was self-motivated, he shined from the very beginning, he was the kind of person you could rely on and he was great at communication."

Manny was rewarded for his commitment, enthusiasm and leadership with the President's Award at the 2017 spring commencement ceremony. Pace, who nominated his former student for the award, says the decision was unanimous.

The award also reminded Manny that his two years of hard work were worth it.

"It was harder than I thought it was going to be," he admits. "So the award meant a lot because it was a reward for all the effort that I did."

Now that he has graduated, Manny will work on the next steps to becoming a police officer. Over the summer, he is training to test for the police academy that starts in January.

"I've heard that those are six months of your life you'll never get back," says Manny. "I know it's going to be tough but I'm looking forward to the challenges."

Pace, who himself was once a police officer, recognizes how challenging the process can be. But he has confidence in his former student and now friend.

"Being a police officer has been Manny's goal since coming here to the United States," says Pace. "I have no doubt that he'll succeed in anything that he puts his mind to."

In addition to preparing for the academy, Manny finally has time to spend with the family he loves so much. In June, he took his wife, Jessica, and their children on vacation to Cedar Point in Ohio. On his days off from work, Manny plays with his kids at home or takes them to the park.

As for that magical story of how he met his wife, she called 911 when her stepfather started having seizures, Manny responded to the call and the rest is history. Talk about a life driven by love.