

4-22-1983

Interview no. 612

Maria De Los Angeles Pompa

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Interview with Maria De Los Angeles Pompa by Esther Jauregui, 1983, "Interview no. 612," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Maria de los Angeles G. Pompa
INTERVIEWER: Esther Jauregui
PROJECT: Class project
DATE OF INTERVIEW: April 22, 1983
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 612
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 612
TRANSCRIBER: _____
DATE TRANSCRIBED: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Life history

Length of Interview: 1 1/2 hours Length of Transcript: 9

Esther Jauregui
May 3, 1983
Dr. Ruiz

I would like to thank everyone who helped me to make this interview such an enjoyable experience. I feel that having done this personal experience interview help me value the hardships that many people went through when they were growing up.

Thank you,

Excellent oral
Interview.
Would you consider
donating the tape to
The Institute of Oral
History?

A

I interviewed Mrs. Maria De Los Angeles Gomez Pompa at her home on a Friday morning. The following is what she had to share with me about her life experiences:

Through The Grace Of God

All of my grandparents were deceased when I was born. My father was an orphan at the age of seven. He was taken in by a man that took care of him and his brother and sister. He was born in San Luis Potosi. He began to work at the age of seven. My mother was born in China, Nueva Leon. Her family was wealthy. Her parents were from Spain. Her father was a curandero. He was the only doctor, supposedly, around the town. The townspeople would take the sick only to him and that was the manner in which he became wealthy. But, during the revolution, he had to give everything away. My mother had three sisters. In order to protect them from being raped, my grandparents went ahead and allowed the army to take their cattle, money and property. As a child, my mother did not work outside the home. My mother started working when I was eight or nine years of age. She worked out on the cornfields because my daddy became ill. He was asthmatic. My parents had ten children, because we were so many in the family, there was really nothing that my mother and I did together. Because my mother worked most of the time, she had no time left to spend with us also. But with my daddy it was different. I can remember that every Sunday we would go up across to a big canal that was almost a mile and a half away from home to hunt for rabbits. Every Sunday we would do this. It was the outing for the family. It was nice.

My parents did not expect nothing in particular for us children as we were growing up. They emphasized that we be respected by the community, to work hard, get married, have children and to be happy. I would always say

that I wanted to study yet education was never pressed back then. About seven years ago, my mother learned how to write her name. My parents were not involved in any community or political affairs. The only thing they did was work and be with their children. I was very close to my daddy. I just don't know how it came about. I could sit with my daddy and I could talk to him like I would be talking to a friend. I would never hold anything back. With my mom it was different. I just never talked to my mom. I don't know exactly why. Maybe it was because she was too busy with work and the children. I still admired my daddy the most. He was not educated but he worked hard. He was a carpenter. He would write and design his own contracts. I believe that what impressed me the most about him was that he would always say that if you applied yourself, you could be anything and he would apply himself.

We lived in a barrio. Nowadays, the barrios are so different then where I was raised. Back then, the barrios were clean. Everyone kept up their yards. We lived in a two bedroom house. Our house was the only house in the block that was not painted. We didn't have a television or a car like the rest of the neighbors. But even still, we were very happy. It didn't bother me that we did not have the same things as our neighbors. They had more money and personal possessions then we did, but yet, they were nice neighbors. There was a neighbor that would always bring us vegetables, lettuce, and other crops that she grew in her garden. We all helped one another.

As a child there were many chores that we did around the house to also help. My older brother used to go out and work shining shoes. He would get paid five cents per pair. He would also sell newspapers to help dad. My oldest sister, she was like my second mother because she took care of us, worked at home ironing shirts for other people. She would get paid

ten cents per shirt. There was a little bit of public assistance at that time, but my father was a very proud man. We never asked for any assistance. We worked for whatever we had. Besides the regular household chores that needed to be done, we, the girls, would gather wood and cut it every other day. My main chore was to clean the stove and have the ashes cleaned. Then, before I went to school, I would make sure that I would take the maiz to be grind. Every other week we would switch chores. There was no difference between the boys and girls. We all did something.

All I wanted to do when I was growing up was go to school. I wanted to learn English most of all. I went to Roosevelt school. The school had this policy about speaking Spanish. If your class was caught speaking Spanish you would receive a point and at the end of the six weeks the class with the most points would have to stay after school. My ambition at school was not to be caught speaking Spanish. After high school, I wanted to become a beautician or a secretary. I never did make neither one of the two.

As I was growing up, my daddy went everywhere with us. He would take us to the movies on Saturday evenings. After the movie, he would take us for a hot chocolate drink. That was our Saturday treat. Because my daddy went everywhere with us, we were known as the Gomez girls by the neighbors. My mother would stay home with the younger children. We never went to church together as a family because my daddy did not believe in going to church. He would say that you could praise God in your home or anywhere you where because God is everywhere. We knew that it was an obligation to go to church but yet we never went. I started to go to church after I graduated from high school.

My parents never argued in front of us. If they argued they did it privately. I believe that the first time I saw my parents argue I was about twenty four years old. Sometimes, When I was a child, you would hear voices and my mother would say to my dad to be quiet because the children were there. We kids never argued with the exception of my sisters Irene and Nina. They always argued and I couldn't understand why. I would always cry whenever I saw them argue. Whenever my mom would see dogs or cats fighting outside, she would call on us and tell us to watch how only the animals fought. She would emphasize that human beings love each other not argued with one another. I remember that once as a child I threw a rock and it hit my brother. Well, my dad put me in the corner, which was his way of punishing us, and I gathered a bunch of rocks and kneeled on them. I bleed alot that time and I believed that I deserved it. My mother would always use the belt. She was the strong hand around the house. I would not fight with anyone. I would mostly clown around. I could get away with doing many things if I clowned enough.

One of my favorite childhood memories was when my mom would get a piloncillo candy from the store. It was always a huge piloncillo candy. She would make corn tortillas on Sunday morning and placed them in this huge basket. She would also make chicken. We would then get some clorax gallons and prepared them with some water to go hunting. We would go and sit underneath a grapefruit tree and we would build a fire and eat our treats. That was a big treat for us children. We would all follow my dad in order. My mother first then the rest of us children. We looked like the chicken following the rooster with the little chicks behind.

During my school years there was not a particular teacher that I admired. There was a principal. At the time when I went to school, there was a lot of prejudice. I went to school with only Mexican Americans. The whites had their own school and so did the blacks. There was a railroad track that divided us. The whites lived on one side of the tracks and the Mexicans and blacks on the other side. The blacks lived closer to the tracks than we did. Their school was made out of this grey wood. Whenever I see grey wood at Cashway I remember the blacks school. Their houses were not painted. Some houses also had this grey looking wood. I like this principal because she never looked down at us. To her everyone was equal. There was another principal who didn't like us Mexicans. She believed that we should stay home and go to work. None of my brothers or sisters finished school. I was the only one. I used to like school and especially geography. We would study the states and their capitals and cities. Since we never went anywhere, I wanted to know more about other towns beside ours Mission, Texas. There was McAllen which was about four miles away but we never went there. I used to get out in the street and look down all the way through Conway, which was our main street, and I would say that that was the end of Texas. But when we began to study maps, I realized that it is bigger than what I thought. I always wanted to learn more. I think I wanted that more for my daddy than for myself. He would always say to us that we should study and that school was important. He believed that we should at least learn how to read and write our names. Then if we wanted to we could quit school. I didn't want to stop there; I wanted more. I was very proud of graduating. My daddy was unable to see me graduate because he was very ill in the hospital. In

place of my daddy and sister, our priest went and took me to see my daddy. My sister had sent a photographer to take my picture and then I took my diploma and tassel to my dad. He was very proud of me. My mom was unable to go because she had to work.

So then, after graduating, I started working as a window decorator. I was paid twenty five dollars a week. That was alot of money back then. I would also do a little bit of modeling for stores like Franklin. Then I worked at a pharmacy helping the pharmacist filling prescriptions. I did not know a thing about reading prescriptions but I learned within three days. I would do compounds and weighing with the assistance of the pharmacist. I would get paid two hundred dollars a month after the commissions I would get for selling vitamins on the side. The owner offered me an opportunity to go to school to become a pharmacist. He had already sent one of his workers who now is a doctor at Mission, Texas. I was always ambitious and I wanted a little bit more. I was unable to go to pharmacy school because I got married. But while I worked, I would help my dad with his medication. I would also help my family with the money and I would dress myself. I would be in every fashion that was in style. My sister would always criticize me because she would say that I was stepping out of line. We were poor and we were suppose to stay in that level and not go out and socialize with the richer ones. I felt differently. I believed that I worked and the rich man was no better than myself. We stepped the same dirt and we paced the same pavement, so therefore we were no different. I dressed well, and I was well accepted in the clubs. Back then, the Lions Club was big times. I would always go there. My sister would tell me that I was stepping out of line. I felt I belonged anywhere I wanted.

So, not only did I work at the pharmacy, I also worked cleaning homes. Again for a little extra money. I used to work for this lady that was very rich. I use to clean her house on Saturdays. She would pay me two or three dollars. She also gave me lunch. At lunch time, which was always 12:00, the fire department would blow the whistle. You would sit at the table whether you were hungry or not. So, then, with Mrs. Goodwin, I would get my plate which was broken, my cup which didn't have a handle and she would feed me a little bit of whatever they ate and a piece of bread. I was not allowed to sit with them in the dining area or in the kitchen. I was put out in the little screen porch. I was twenty two years of age then and I was still cleaning homes. I also worked in another house and the lady was nicer to me. Then I would work in a bakery till about 12:00 o'clock. On Sundays, I worked at a bakery also and I also worked in the fields. I wasn't embarrassed. I would then go to church for evening services. I would dress up like just everybody else did. I would wear my hat, my gloves, and boy let me tell you, I looked like a million dollars. I worked, and I felt that I could dress myself just like anybody else did.

In 1960 I got married. We left to California. We left from a small town to a big city. Then after being married for three months, I started working in California in credit collections and then I became a supervisor for another firm. I really liked my boss. I soon became his second right hand. I then had my son. I proceeded working but for a really fancy store called Broadway. Then I got into bookkeeping which I didn't have any experience in. After a while, I quit and I would only go in whenever they needed help.

I had many job opportunities and experiences. I worked in this trucking company as a teletypist. I didn't know anything about truck mileage but yet I learned. I also worked for a lumber company. And even though I worked in many jobs, I was never sexually harrassed by anyone. By the time that I had worked in these two jobs, I had my second child, Belinda. I was tired of the schedule from 8 to 5 everyday that I decided to quit and stay home for some time. When I lived in Los Angeles and worked at these various places, I became aware of how much prejudice existed back home. It was like a new world. It was a different way of living. Here everyone was equal. I was then awoken about things back home. I then became a fighter. I became involved with a union actively while I worked at the lumber company. My husband was a foreman there and I was in labor work. I got the coworkers together to sign up for the union and I would talk to them about how important the union was. I respected my husbands position with the company and he respected mine also. We eventually got the union. Then one day I was replaced by a younger girl and I resented that and so I quit. My husband was a little mad with me but he knew that I was a fighter even before we got married.

We had met back home. He was a neighbor who came from a better off family than ours. His mother had showed him a picture of me from a newspaper clipping from one of the times that I represented a store in a beauty contest. That became a big scandal. My husband was very well known in the hometown because of sports. He was offered a football scholarship but instead he went to the Navy. We dated and we married in December of 1960. I was able to marry in white and I didn't jump the fence like my other sisters. My daddy was not able to go to the wedding either because

he was very ill. He passed away in 1965. My mother was visiting a brother in California when my daddy passed away. I was proud to have been able to share the two events of my life with him and that he was a part of them. Ever since my father passed away, my mother has stayed in California. She was able to take care of my children while I worked. I was then given the opportunity to establish a relationship with her as a mother and daughter. Since my husband was offered a better job here, in El Paso, I have been apart from my family.

I have always cherished my family very much. I am glad that even if we are apart that we can still count on each other whenever we might be in need. I was always glad to have been able to give my daddy his position as a father. Even though he was not able to be with me when I graduated or when I got married, I was glad that I was able to do both the correct way. It meant very much to me to have been able to marry in white and have a small wedding. My father gave me his blessing when I went to visit him the day I married. My mother was there, and we talked. She did not see it important to go to my wedding. Maybe it was selfish of me, but everything I did I did it for my daddy because he was always there when I needed him. At the present time I still cherish the last card that he was to send me before he died. We always exchanged gifts. Nothing expensive but something with a lot of love. He was very special to me. He was my daddy.

I love all of my family very much. We might have faults, because we all do but to me my brothers and sisters are spotless. My family believes that I have been the only one that has done something for herself but I tell them that if they want to do something for themselves that all they have to do is to apply themselves. We have what we have worked for but not only by ourselves but through the grace of God.