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Interview no. 273

Gloria Martinez

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Gloria Martinez (1930-)
INTERVIEWER: Juan D. Martinez
PROJECT: Class Project
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 28, 1976
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 273
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 273
TRANSCRIBER: Juan D. Martinez
DATE TRANSCRIBED: November 28, 1976

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Resident of El Paso. Mrs. Gloria Martinez was born in Los Angeles, California in 1930. Her mother died when she was 8 years old and she lived with different relatives in the following years. In 1946, she visited Colonia Anchondo, Chihuahua, Mexico and married there. After living 8 years in Colonia Anchondo, she and her family moved to El Paso, Texas where they have been living ever since.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; World War II; El Paso in the 1940's and 1950's; the word "Chicano"; illegal aliens.

30 minutes.
8 pages.

I have decided to interview Mrs. Gloria Martinez. Mrs. Martinez has a very interesting past and she has agreed to answer my questions to the best of her abilities.

The reason that I decided on Mrs. Martinez is because her past is very different from the majority of chicanas or chicanos. This oral interview will help us understand how a chicana feels and what she experiences when she moves back into Mexico. She married and started a new life in Mexico after living in Los Angeles, Calif. and Clifton, Arizona. In 1954 she crossed back into the United States where she has been living in El Paso, Texas for the past 23 years.

Q. 1. What part of Los Angeles were you born in?

A. I was born in Santa Marta's hospital in East Los Angeles on January 25, 1930.

Q. 2. Where were your parents born? Your grandparents?

A. My father, Jose Dolores Gonzalez, was born in El Paso, Texas. My mother, Maria Villescas, was born in Clifton, Arizona. My maternal grandparents Romulo and Cresencia Silva Villescas were from Delicias, Chih., Mexico. I believe my paternal grandparents Juan and Francisca Blanco Gonzalez were from Camargo, Chih., Mexico.

Q. 3. What barrios in Los Angeles did you grow up in?

A. I lived with my parents in Maravilla in East L.A. until the age of 8 when my mother died. After that I lived with my grandparents, uncles and aunts who wanted to help Dad with us. He remarried and for a while my younger brother Gilbert and I were together with Dad. While living with my stepmother, Maria Luisa Perez, we made our first communion. Most of Dad's brothers and sisters lived in East L.A. His oldest brother, Jose Holguin, lived in Hick's Camp in El Monte, California. His oldest sister Atanacia Acuna had lived there, but moved to San Gabriel. While living with her, I was confirmed in the

old Mission of San Gabriel. It was from these two and in Hick's Camp while I was very young that I learned the old Mexican songs and dances. Uncle Joe played the guitar, and my aunt could really sing the old rancho songs.

- Q. 4. Were swimming pools segregated in some parts of California?
- A. When living with uncle Manuel Villescas, mom's brother in Maravilla, my cousins had paper routes and were allowed to go mornings to the swimming pool. We girls didn't have bikes and had to help with the housework. One day I heard my cousins and the neighbors discussing how full the swimming pool was and how they would like to go to the one where Mexicans were not allowed. The neighbors suggested my cousins try passing as Spanish because they were light and green-eyed. The neighbors were dark skinned. Whether my cousins tried or not, I don't know.
- Q. 5. Did you speak mostly English when you were growing up?
- A. We had to speak English in school, Spanish with our elders, and spoke a mixture of both with our friends.
- Q. 6. What was Los Angeles like during World War II?
- A. There were plenty of after school jobs for us teenagers. Shoes, meat, and sugar were rationed. There was crying when cousins and friends went off to join the service. Aunts and grandma waiting for the mailman day after day. Crying when they knew they had been injured or dead. Blackouts were scary when you were at home. One time during a blackout, my girlfriend and I were caught in the streetcar, in front of city hall. All traffic stops and you wonder if it's for real and will you be able to get home. Downtown streets and theaters were full of servicemen, mostly sailors. Passing Little Tokyo on the streetcar going into town was sad by day. At night all those deserted stores were scary too.
- Q. 7. Where did your father work?
- A. My father was in the grocery business all his life. From a young clerk before he was married to his own wholesale business that he was just starting when ulcers made him retire.
- Q. 8. Did you ever live in Arizona?
- A. We made trips back to Arizona when Mom was alive. After she died we went back two summers. In 1942, grandma became ill so my aunt Petra Gonzalez (Mom's sister) took us to see her. She died that summer. Her brother, Ricardo Silva, lived in Lordsburg and we stopped to have supper at his house before boarding the train back to California. In 1946, my Aunt Eloisa Beltran (Mom's older sister) took us to Clifton again. We would also stay with Mom's other sister Lupe Rascon who lives in Morenci.

- Q. 9. Did your relatives work in the mines near Clifton, Arizona?
- A. I believe my Uncles Rosario and Santiago worked in the mines. Grandpa had several houses, our favorite was a two-story house. He had a store in his younger days and supplied it from his farm in Delicias, which his brother was farming. When he died, Grandma couldn't run the store. After Grandma's death, my Aunt Eloisa worked in the P.D. (Phelps Dodge) Store. Mom's youngest brother Jose ran a gas station when he was discharged from the Army. I still have cousins working in the mines.
- Q.10. How did the Chicanos of Arizona differ from those in Los Angeles, California?
- A. It was a small town. We had to walk across town to the Post Office and to the theater. People who had known my grandparents and mom were very friendly. We ate pretty much the same food, but I think it was here I acquired my love of tea. Most of my cousins here spoke Spanish, especially those that had just arrived from El Paso, Texas and were living in grandma's two-story house.
- Q.11. Did you have relatives in Mexico?
- A. Yes, Grandma Gonzalez had a sister Cayetana Blanco Ibarra. Her husband was Juan Ibarra. My great aunt visited grandma in California and grandma visited her in Colonia Anchondo, Chihuahua, Mexico. It was here that my great grandmother Petra Blanco had died.
- Q.12. What year did you first visit Colonia Anchondo, Chih.?
- A. Thirty years ago in October of 1946 my aunt arrived in Los Angeles with her two foster sons, Nemesio and Socorro Martinez. In November of 1946, grandma and I returned with them to Mexico.
- Q.13. How far is Colonia Anchondo from the ruins of Casas Grandes, Chih.?
- A. I would guess about 10 kilometers on the road. In those days most of the women in Anchondo walked over farms and hills to a small chapel in Casas Grandes, entered the chapel on their knees, and gave thanks to God for a safe delivery and to offer their newborn back to God and the Virgin Mother for its safe keeping. It was over and around these buried ruins, before they had been discovered, that we traveled to take my children. First to the chapel, then to register them. Shopping was done in Nuevo Casas Grandes further on.
- Q.14. How far is Colonia Anchondo from the Mormon Colony of Colonia Juarez, Chihuahua?
- A. Again, it's pretty hard to give you kilometers. It depends on how you travel. On foot or horseback, you could go over the

hill behind us. On horse and buggy we went a different way through San Diego. By car it is best to go to Casas Grandes and take the paved road south to Colonia Juarez.

Q.15. Are there many Mennonites in Casas Grandes, Chihuahua?

A. Mennonites can be seen in Nuevo Casas Grandes or on the road opened up in recent years from Juarez to Nuevo Casas Grandes that goes by way of Ascencion and Janos.

Q.16. Are there many Orientals in Casas Grandes?

A. There are some. Thirty years ago most of the stores in Nuevo Casas Grandes were owned by Orientals married to Mexican women.

Q.17. After visiting Colonia Anchondo, Chih. did you come back to Los Angeles, California?

A. No. The contrast between L.A. and Anchondo was so great I fell in love with the country and in time with Nemesio Martinez. If the stars in Texas had seemed big, here in this valley, they seemed to cover the sky. The fresh air and the silence was beautiful. I had seen bigger rivers in the Fresno area, smelled the melons in farms in Mendota, Calif. and the fruit orchards in San Jose, but it was nothing compared to riding horseback up the hill and looking down at the neat patches of farms below. Spring was even more beautiful with the smell of apple and peach blossoms.

Q.18. What were your feelings when you realized that if you married this man from Colonia Anchondo you would be a poor farmer's wife and live very differently as compared to a life in a big city like Los Angeles, California?

A. At sixteen one thinks only positive thoughts and my living in so many homes had made me able to adjust to anything. I won't say it was easy, but I had a loving husband and this country did wonders for me. I had never been healthier nor will I ever be again.

Q.19. Who is Colonia Anchondo named after?

A. I don't really know, but I have read that Don Luis Terrazas had a man named Jacobo Anchondo in charge of his Hacienda de San Diego located right next to Colonia Anchondo. Perhaps it was named for him.

Q.20. Who were the first settlers there and when?

A. My great-aunt was one of the first settlers in Anchondo. Both she and grandma lived in El Paso around the Rim Road area in the early 1900's. They called it La Mesa. With the exception of Uncle Joe, dad and his brothers Sixto and Lorenzo Holguin were born here. His sisters Atanacia, Manuela, Luz and Emma were also born here. But anglos were coming in and calling them squatters and telling them to move on. Grandfather asked Southern Pacific for a transfer to California, and my aunt went south into Mexico.

Q.21. How did your relatives acquire this land in Anchondo?

A. It is ejido land, not for cattle grazing, but to be farmed. It can be passed on to the children but should not be sold. My father-in-law Santiago Martinez worked on the railroad passing through the middle of the farmland when he met my aunt and decided to leave the railroad and become a farmer. He chose the farm next to my aunt's farm. He became their son as they had lost their children and had only a stepson. Macario Ibarra, Uncle Juan's son, later decided he would rather work for the railroad instead of farming. In time, my uncle and aunt, acting as Santiago's parents asked for the hand in marriage of a young girl Escolastica Garcia who had arrived the year before to her uncle's farm. Even before my aunt was widowed, their two oldest sons became my aunt's sons working the land and living with her. The Ibarra's two farms now belong to the Martinez Family along with their own.

Q.22. The Hacienda of Don Luis Terrazas overlooks Colonia Anchondo from a hill. Did you ever get to see this hacienda from the inside?

A. Yes, in 1946 when I had just arrived in Mexico, I attended a Jaripeo and dance held in the Hacienda de Don Luis Terrazas in San Diego. One of the rooms in the main building of the hacienda was used as the school, where in a small town, dances are usually held.

Q.23. What finally made you and your husband move to El Paso, Texas?

A. Our oldest son Jose started school in the little schoolhouse when he became of age. But schoolteachers were hard to get and even harder to keep on the farm. My husband didn't want his children growing up without an education as he had. We decided to move to El Paso even though neither one of us was familiar with El Paso.

Q.24. What was El Paso like in 1946 and in 1954?

A. I had been surprised in 1946 when we arrived in the El Paso Depot to see the separate restrooms for the colored people. Our friends had told us they had to ride in the back of buses and streetcars. I had worked with a colored boy in Maravilla, however he used the same facilities we did. I had never seen this before. In 1954, I was even more surprised after renting 4 rooms in a house that had been divided up for 3 families that, not only did we share the outside restroom with them, but also with the 2 families in the next house and 2 in the rear house - a total of 7 families using a restroom that was stopped up most of the time. This reminded me of hearing my stepmother's family discuss the housing situation in L.A. They were angered by the ads which read, "No Mexicans or Dogs Allowed". Anyway, without a car we didn't see much of the nice places in El Paso.

- Q.25. Where did you first stay when you crossed the border?
- A. I rented a room in a boarding house downtown before crossing my family into El Paso. We were there about 5 days, then moved southeast to what we thought was the Mexican part of town.
- Q.26. Where did your husband first find employment?
- A. It would take 3 weeks for my husband's alien card to arrive, I took the first job I found as a waitress nearby. Again, I was surprised by the low salary of \$15 a week. Once my husband received his alien card he found work at Evergreen Cemetery within walking distance to our home.
- Q.27. How much was he paid for digging graves?
- A. He was told he would earn \$32 a week, but received \$35 after his first week. When he became their truckdriver, he earned \$5 more than the other employees. In 12 years his salary almost doubled.
- Q.28. How many children do you have?
- A. I had Jose, Maria Cristina, and Juan David in Mexico. In El Paso, I had Jesus Daniel, Martha Cecilia and Manuel Carlos. Six in all.
- Q.29. What barrios in El Paso have you lived in during your past 23 years here?
- A. About 5 days downtown, 1 year and 8 months on Durazno St., 11 years and 9 months in the Paisano Projects, 6 years in the Tejas Addition, and 4 years in Alta Vista.
- Q.30. How much rent did you pay in the Housing Projects?
- A. We paid \$26 when we moved in. When my son Jose started working at age 15, our rent started going up. He was getting more raises and earning more per hour than his father. Our rent was \$74.50 when we moved out in 1966.
- Q.31. While living in these different barrios did your children speak any English outside of school?
- A. Very little. I spoke both English and Spanish to them, but most of their friends spoke Spanish.
- Q.32. Would you say that your younger children are more anglocized than your older children?
- A. They were young when we moved to Tejas Addition. English was spoken more here by the children. They entered Kindergarten at 4 and 5 years of age, since I had to go to work

when my husband lost his job. The older children were speaking more English. Their father is now working with anglos and has also learned English.

Q.33. When was the first time you heard the word Chicano?

A. I believe it was in Los Angeles. I understood it to be the same as Paisano which is used more in Mexico - a fellow country man. Used among us, it was just another word for Mexican to me.

Q.34. What does the word Chicano mean to you?

A. Now, the word Chicano seems to be a battlecry. I think of Cesar Chavez and his fruitpickers' strike. I think of the riots on Whittier Blvd. I certainly think everyone everywhere should get a decent wage. I remember Whittier Blvd. before the bars on the storefronts. Aunt Emma lives right behind the center theater that was burned. Why must we have violence to get equality?

Q.35. After reading the book Chicano what was your impression?

A. The book Chicano ^{BY RICHARD VASQUEZ} made an impression on me because so much of the story was in areas I had lived in or visited. Grandma Gonzalez had a sister-in-law and her family living in the Irwindale area. The book could have been written by someone living in L.A. the same time I did. With the title of Chicano it is too bad our good qualities (such as family unity, pride, patience, friendliness, etc.) weren't stressed more. A Mexican girl in those days having an abortion? It's possible, but I find it very unlikely. But, I guess nowadays to sell a book one must stress the violence.

Q.36. Since your family came to the U.S. in 1954 legally, what is your opinion on illegal aliens entering and working in the U. S.?

A. I would like to see the problem of the illegal alien resolved in my lifetime, but it is a very difficult problem. The Mexican youth of today are more ambitious and more daring than 30 years ago. As long as people hire them, they will continue to enter the U. S. at the risk of their lives. I believe they have fouled up the Social Security System with their false numbers. Some are afraid to collect their income tax return, but I guess that is to the benefit of the U. S. While many are still being exploited, others are earning more than American citizens. The exploited steal from their employer, and the employers turn them in so as not to have to pay them. Sometimes I wonder if the employer would keep his family in the homes he gives his illegal employees for their families. If the Rodino Bill is ever passed, I believe some employers will cease to hire illegals. But, I wonder how a woman earning minimum wages to support her children will be able to pay minimum wages to a maid for the care of said children.

What about the Border Patrolmen left without jobs when there is no longer a need for them? We have nephews that have been beaten up unjustly with just an apology afterwards. I have seen the pictures in the office of immigration men shot down in service. I have had my own husband picked up because he had forgotten to carry his card. My own son, a Vietnam veteran, but still a legal alien, was told by an immigration officer in a checkpoint in New Mexico that if he had his own way, he'd send all us Mexicans back to Mexico. Is that the answer?