

Andres Munoz-Ramirez and Giovanni D. Romero (editors)

*The Memories of Hortencia Martínez de Benítez (b. 1926):
Struggles and Repercussions of Repatriation to México in the 1930s*

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California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).

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Project: Mexican American Community History Project [COPH OHP_21].
O.H. 1298.

Oral Interview with Hortencia Martínez de Benítez,
conducted by Christine Valenciana,
December 20, 1972, La Habra, California.

Introduction

The Spanish language oral history interview transcribed and translated into English below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), titled "Mexican American Oral History Project" (OHP_21). The project was informally launched in 1968 and became a formal project when Christine Valenciana conducted her interviews for the project between 1971 and 1976. As of 2020, approximately 90 interviews have been recorded with 87 narrators. The interview with Hortencia Martínez de Benítez was conducted by Christine Valenciana, at the time a CSUF student, on December 20, 1972, in La Habra, California. The interview lasted 33 minutes and 54 seconds, and is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH (see "Copyright Advisory" below); its quality is fair but background noise/voices render some parts of the interview hard to hear or inaudible. The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in 2019 by Andres Munoz-Ramirez (who also provided the English language translation) and Giovanni D. Romero.

Hortencia Martínez de Benítez (born April 8, 1926) relates the struggles of her family when they repatriated to México in the 1930s. She includes memories of the train journey, first impressions of México, her father having to work the land on a little farm outside of town to provide for the family (Hortencia was one of fifteen siblings), getting sick with whooping cough, and her education (which could not be continued beyond third grade due to lack of funds). She also discusses the challenges of having family in both México and the U.S., the cultural differences – with México being more family-oriented but offering fewer opportunities, and the U.S. offering more opportunities but being stressful and expensive, and the lingering issue of remigration/immigration and family cohesion.

The interview is of considerable historical significance as it provides insight into the experience of those who repatriated to México during the Great Depression, and it was recently used in Daniel Morales's 2016 Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation ("The Making of Mexican America: Transnational

Networks in the Rise of Mass Migration, 1900-1940). Up to two million people (the majority of them birthright U.S. citizens) were deported/repatriated to México in an effort, championed by U.S. President Herbert C. Hoover (1929-1933) and others, to free up jobs for “real Americans.” Although U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) ended federal support when he took office, many state and local governments continued with their deportation/repatriation programs. This interview shows the experience of a young girl who viewed the effects of repatriation through the struggles of her family.

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Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 1298)

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: Hortencia Martínez de Benítez [HM]

INTERVIEWER: Christine Valenciana [CV]

DATE: December 20, 1972

LOCATION: La Habra, California

PROJECT: Mexican American Community History Project [COPH OHP_21]

TRANSCRIBERS: Andres Munoz-Ramirez and Giovanni D. Romero

CV: This is an interview with Hortencia Martínez de Benítez for the Mexican American community history project. The interview is taking place at the home of Pedro Gomez at La Habra,¹ California. The time is five p.m. The day is December 20th, 1972. The interviewer is Christine Valenciana. Ya podemos empezar.

HM: De platicar.

¹ City (northwest Orange Co., California); incorporated 1925.

- CV: Sí, a platicar. Sí, eso es la idea. (voice/background: “¿No quieren algo para tomar?”) No, no, no. Está bien. (voice/background: “¿Oyez, quieren strawberry shake? Do you like strawberry shake?”) Okay. (voice/background: “Do you?”) Yeah, okay. (voice/background: “Ay jodido.”) (laughing)
- CV: Okay. ¿De dónde es usted?
- HM: De—
- CV: ¿Dónde nació usted?
- HM: —de Casa Blanca,² California.
- CV: Uh-huh. ¿En qué año?
- HM: En el año mil nueve cientos veinte seis.
- CV: Uh-huh.
- HM: Ocho de abril.
- CV: Uh huh. ¿Y de donde eran sus padres?
- HM: De México.
- CV: ¿Qué parte de México?
- HM: Mi madre de Lerdo.³ Nació en Lerdo.
- CV: ¿Era de Lerdo? O sí—
- HM: Uh-huh, era de Lerdo. Mi papá en La Laguna.⁴
- CV: ¿Y sabe usted de casualidad de en qué año vinieron su mamá y su papá?
- HM: Yo pienso que no. No sé en qué año vinieron para acá.
- CV: ¿Y qué más? ¿Y de qué clase de trabajo hacia su papá?
- HM: Pues era trabaja el de manejando su caro, trabajando con un patrón que se llamaba el Penn Rob.⁵
- CV: Eh, oído de eso señor.
- HM: Sí, no. No sé yo en qué trabajaba, pero yo sé que ahí trabajara con él. No sé qué clase de trabajo. Pero no sé yo. Pero sé que con el trabajo.
- CV: Elisio me hablo que, que iban en un carro.
- HM: Sí, uh-huh.
- CV: Con trabajadores.
- HM: Sí, uh-huh, sí. Mi papá era como un administrador algo que le dicen en México. Verdad no sé aquí cómo se era.
- CV: Creo que “foreman.”⁶
- HM: Sí. (pauses)
- CV: ¿Um, y cuantos niños estaban en la familia?
- HM: Éramos — um — quince. Quince hermanos.
- CV: ¡Es mucho!

² Neighborhood/former unincorporated community (Riverside; Riverside Co., California).

³ City (northeastern state of Durango, México).

⁴ Region; Comarca Lagunera (northern states of Durango and Coahuila, México).

⁵ Unidentified

⁶ Supervisor of other workers.

HM: Um, sí. (pauses) Traía — Traía mi hermano mayor lo traía chiquito y — y la — la mayor murió en el paso cuando venía mi mamá de allá — de México. Traía dos, y la mayor se murió en el paso, y luego el otro le quedo vivo que fue él que trajo chiquito para acá.

CV: Entonces — (CV starts a new question but is interrupted by HM)

HM: El otro se nació en México.

CV: Oh, yo no sabía.

HM: Allá nació y la chica nena nació allá también. Cuando ya se fue mi mamá iba esperando a la niña chiquita que es la nena nació. El año en que nos fuimos nació ella — sí. Son dos de allá y todos acá. Así es que vendrían estando aquí vendríamos siendo catorce, trece, um, aquí al lado de mi papá antes de irnos para allá.

CV: Ah — ¿Estaba la familia muy pobre antes de ir? (speaking over each other)

HM: Yo pienso que no estábamos muy bien, pero, sí, estábamos un poco pobre porque mi papá él solito para tanto hermano, verdad, y pues tenemos que carecer de algo. Que no nos faltaba que comer, pero yo pienso que, sí, estábamos pobres.

CV: Hm.

HM: Y mi hermano Eulogio que fue el que vino chiquito era el que le ayudaba un poco a mi papá a trabajar porque era muy grande la familia. Y mi papá solito no podía él.

CV: ¿Y sabe usted qué clase de trabajo hacia Eulogio?

HM: No, pues el andaba con mi papá. No sé. Ellos salían juntos en su carro a trabajar él le ayudaba. Después yo el oyó que él trabajaba en la pisca de naranja, Eulogio, mi otro hermano mayor. Así es de qué pues no yo estaba chica, pero yo no más porque oigo, oía platicar a mi mamá y mi papá platicas así de la familia. Hm.

CV: Hm. ¿Recuerda usted o fue usted a, a la escuela?

HM: No, no. Yo no alcanze todavía a ir. La que si alcanzo fue Celia la mayor que yo apenas empezaba la escuela. Yo no, porque todavía iba muy chiquita. Me fui de cinco años.

CV: ¿En qué año fueron?

HM: En el treinta pues cuando lo repatriados.

CV: Sí.

HM: En el treinta y uno, me parece treinta o treinta y uno, fue cuando lo repatriados.

CV: Hm.

HM: Pero mi papá no iba como repatriado; él iba pagando su pasaje de todos.

CV: ¿Puede usted explicarme la diferencia entre uno que fue repatriado y uno que no más se fue — que no más se fue?

HM: Pues no, no me explico yo como será esa — (interrupted)

CV: Porque mucha gente me da la impresión que fue una diferencia.

HM: No, no me explico en que forma sería conmigo chiquita, verdad, no se —

CV: Hm.

HM: Yo no más eso oigo que lo repatriados y que lo repatriados, y mi papá él decía que él tenía que pagar el pasaje de todos para poder que sus hijos regresaran a California. (voices/background) Y él se fue por mas no se la causa que se aiga ido, pero él nos llevó a todos.

CV: Hm. (voices/background)

HM: Y la que se quedó aquí fue Carmen.

CV: ¿Y por qué quedo aquí?

HM: Pues ella quedo porque se casó, porque se casó; ella estaba poquito de casada estaba esperando su primer baby cuando nos fuimos, y ella no pudo irse. Que ella pues si decía que ella se quería ir, pero no pudo que ya estaba casada, y a mi papá le pudo mucho dejarla, pero el no pudo el hacer nada por motivo que ya estaba ajena, verdad. Fue la causa de que ella no se fue ella para allá. (pauses)

CV: ¿Y recuerda usted algo de ir a México la primera vez de Casa Blanca, como fueron – en tren?

HM: En tren, uh-huh, en tren. Nos fuimos – nos fuimos en tren.

CV: ¿Recuerda usted de los detalles – de los detalles?

HM: ¿Como detalles de qué?

CV: ¿Pues cómo fue la – la – el viaje?

HM: Pues nos – nos llevaron a la estación de aquí mismo de California y luego ya nos fuimos en el tren ya de ahí agarramos el tren de Juárez⁷ para allá. Era también el tren que era pues era lo único que corría por la vía que es aquí el tracke, ¿verdad? Es la vía. No había camino de carretera toda de eso no había ni esperanza de que hubiera nada; nada más era pedregal terregal todo aquello, todo esto rentado. No había caminos como ahora los hay. No. Ahorita es el número importante esa carretera de Juárez para allá, muy transitable y todo. Casi todo el turismo va para allá, por ahí por esa parte nos fuimos en tren – y a sufrir. (laughs) Llegamos a Torreón,⁸ ahí fue donde llegamos luego.

CV: ¿Y con quien vivieron?

HM: Con una hermanita de mi papá, una Antonia García, que era la mamá de Román. Y llegamos a un mesón⁹ que le dicen allá. Ella era la encargada de cuidar ese mesón; allí estábamos nosotros todos con ella. (pauses) Porque mi tía Teresa pues no se en que parte llego; ella llego a otra casa, no llego con nosotros. También ella iba junto con mi papá – la hermana de él.

CV: Oh.

HM: Mi tía Teresa que fue la que insistió en que se fueran a México.

CV: Oh.

⁷ Ciudad Juárez; city (state of Chihuahua, México); founded 1659; opposite El Paso, Texas.

⁸ City (state of Coahuila; México); established 1893.

⁹ A country inn.

HM: Porque mi papá no —

CV: (inaudible) la idea —

HM: Si ella tenía la idea de llevárselo a México: que México y que México, hermanito, y que hermanito, y se lo llevó. Y mi papá no tenía esa idea de irse por mi hermana que estaba ya casada aquí, pero pues insistió, y el cómo era muy obediente con ella, insistió y se fue.

CV: (inaudible) Era ella — era ella mayor que él?

HM: Sí, era la mayor, mi papá era el más chico de la familia. Y mi tío Chon aquí se quedó el otro hermano, que es el papá de los Christines [?] (inaudible) de aquí, de Casa Blanca — (pauses) pues no más a navegar la vida pues que otra cosa, y ya de ahí mi papá pues yo no sé a él cómo la pasaría, no se hace enfermó Eliseo y pues empezamos a sufrir un poco más porque se enfermó de fiebre, y mi papá tuvo que hechar bien — bien este sus cosas poquitas de valor que llevaba empezó a malbaratarlas, a venderlas para levantar a Eliseo de esa fiebre; todo lo poquito que llevaba bueno pues — pues, tú sabes, se hecho a perder todo se quedó perdido. Y ya después de allí pues ya nos llevó mi papá a un ranchito, que le habían facilitado ahí una casita ya nos llevó para allá porque no teníamos modos de vivir en el pueblo, y ya nos llevó allí y pues otra vez a sufrir un poco más — hasta que ya mi papá le facilitaron un terreno: empezó a sembrar maíz, frijol ya fue con un poquito empezamos a no sufrir tanto, pero sí sufrimos bastante. Ambres no, porque no nos faltaba, pero, tú sabes, pues allá medianamente la pasábamos un poco, porque éramos muchos todos chiquitos. El más grande era Eulogio, Eliseo, Enrique, Daniel, Teri¹⁰ — Oscar todavía lo cuento chico verdad porque todavía no era un muchacho de trabajar mucho, no, porque todavía estaban chicos, pero los grandes si como Eliseo, Eulogio, y Teri que salió ella pues aventurarles a los ranchitos cercanos por ahí a ver, dónde podía pasarla para ayudarnos; estábamos chiquitos.

CV: ¿Y ustedes no estaban acostumbrados — (CV does not finish the question as HM answers it early)

HM: A no, no que esperanzas por muy pobres que estuvimos en California no yo (inaudible) y luego yo me enferme, me enferme de una tos que ahora caigo en acuerdo que es tosferina: porque me enferme de una tos que me daba comía me daba tos no comía me daba tos dormía me daba tos todo vomitaba mi alimento que me daba mi mamá, yo pienso que era tosferina. Y sufrí porque desconocí el clima pienso yo pues iba chiquita; pero no que esperanza ni ya no quede igual. (pauses)

[00:10:24] Spanish

¹⁰ Teresa.

- HM: Porque pues siempre uno aquí en California por pobre que sea tiene un poquito más en que vivir y en que dormir y todo, verdad, más comodidades y en México también, pero – (voices/background)
- CV: ¿Que fue, que fueron sus primer – primeros impresiones al llegar allá? Yo sé que usted era muy chica y –
- HM: No, ero muy chica, chanza que no haya notado una. Pienso yo por la niñez, verdad, que no toma uno en cuenta si se va a sufrir o no, pero, sí, era una cosa pues muy triste aquello – para uno – por qué se veía muy diferente todo, porque poquito que llevara grabado de aquí no se parencia nunca a hasta allá en México lo que veía un poquito aquí que me acuerde yo, verdad. Es muy poco lo que puedo recordar pero, sí, era un poquito más impresionante pero no era igual, porque fuimos a un vil rancho, y entonces ese ranchito estaba completamente aislado de la ciudad se puede decir porque ni la ciudad está compuesta como está ahora, y luego el ranchito pues era como unas viviendas algunas seis viviendas nada más. Hey. Éramos poquitos ahí en vivir muy pobrecito el rancho completamente, no ahora ya se puede decir que el rancho es un pueblo porque ya está cerquita del pueblo, verdad, ya hay más movimiento y todo más habitantes. Hm.
- CV: Hm. (pauses; voices/background) Pero de todos modos es lejos de –
- HM: Oh, sí.
- CV: – la ciudad.
- HM: Oh sí, sí, está retirado.
- CV: Hm.
- HM: Sí, tiene una un poquito más problemas que la ciudad. Porque, tú sabes, que en el ranchito carece lo principal es el agua. El agua potable que le dice uno agua para alimento (inaudible) y no hay tiendas de ropa no hay tiendas, tú sabes, de mercancía para comer hasta que va uno al pueblo a comprarlo a pagar su pasaje o buscar en que ir a llevar comida para comer. El agua pues tiene uno que cómprala para tomarla limpia. Es la principal base en el rancho el agua – (pauses)
- CV: ¿Fue usted a la escuela en México?
- HM: Eh, hasta tercero, ahí mismo en el ranchito.
- CV: (inaudible) tercero que –
- HM: Ahí mismo, ahí mismo en el ranchito fue la – la primera escuela que tuve yo hasta tercer año, nada más, porque ya no pude estudiar más, porque mi papá ya no tuvo para darnos estudio.
- CV: ¡Oh! ¿Uno tenía que pagar?
- HM: ¡Ah! Sí, tenía uno que pagar para ir al pueblo a la escuela y yo ya no pude. Mi papá ya no pudo darnos para estudiar porque no tenía para los libros ni nada de eso –
- CV: Hm.

HM: Veces nos daba un cuaderno y aquel cuaderno se llenaba, pues una libreta — sí, teníamos que borrarla para hacer más porque ya no teníamos para el libro —

CV: Hm.

HM: Y ahí mismo en el ranchito había ahí mismo mi casa de mi papá era la maestra y ahí le prestaba mi papá un pedacito de un cuarto para que pudiera clase los niños en una casa. Después no después ya empezaron a levantar una escuela, y ya empezó, tú sabes—el maestro empezó a arrimarse maestros (inaudible) en el rancho, pero el, el levanta la escuela, pero yo ya en esa escuela ya nada más estudie un año mas que fue tercero. Hm. (pauses)

CV: ¿Era difícil existir?

HM: Era difícil, uh-huh.

CV: Puedo ver qué. (voices/background)

HM: Sí, sí, era difícil porque no se podía hubiera las facilidades que el gobierno da ahora; sería muy diferente el estudio que hubiéramos tenido nosotros, y no lo tuvimos y mi papá le podía mucho todo aquello porque no nos pudo dar estudio, no se podía, así es de que por su, su medio no le ayudaba. Hm. Porque entonces aque—aquel tiempo pues ganaban a veces cincuenta centavos diarios no más, para tanta familia como éramos. Hm. Y luego no había tanta posibilidad de estudiar. No sohoraya ya, no ya ahora, qué barbaridad. Es muy bonito toda la escuela muy bonita—en muchos— (15 seconds of silence, 00:14:35-00:14:50; voices/background)

CV: ¿Como trataron, como los trato sus (pauses), uh, pa—parientes?

HM: Pues—

CV: Por ejemplo, hm, los hermanos de—de su papá.

HM: Oh, no, muy bien.

CV: Hm.

HM: Mi tía, muy bien, la hermanita de que estaba en México muy bien que nos trató bendito sea dios que nos trató muy bien.

CV: Porque en realidad ustedes eran gringos.

HM: ¡Uh-huh! Sí, fuimos a pues, sí, porque estábamos nacidos aquí verdad todos nada más que él era mexicano. Pero llegamos a casa de mi tía no, no nos quejamos teníamos allí pues nos trataba muy bien mi tía. Y la causa que nos fuimos al ranchito pues era que era muy pesada la familia y mi tía no podía sostenernos a todos ahí, ya fue cuando ya mi papá nos llevó al ranchito ese. No está lejos son veinte minutos de ahí. Pero, de todos modos, uh, ya empezamos a pues hacer viaje para allá, porque no se puede estar allá en el pueblo.

CV: Hm.

HM: Y ya mi papá pues empezó a sembrar ese terrenito para el frijol y maíz; fue cuando ya nos empezamos pues ya a comer elotes con sal y nopalitos¹¹ con sal y todo lo que había verdad.

CV: Hm.

HM: Sí, yo creo que no teníamos hambre porque todavía estamos vivos (both laugh) todavía estamos vivos de hambre no nos morimos, pero sí, sí sufríamos poquito.

CV: ¿Usted se considera ciudadana de México o de los Estados Unidos?

HM: ¡Eh! Pues me considero de Estados Unidos porque aquí nací, pero mexicana pues mis padres eran mexicanos, chanza que yo estiro más a México, verdad, porque yo nada más vengo aquí por visita y luego allá esta toda mi familia y mi esposo así es me considero más mexicana que de aquí. De aquí porque nací, pero para criarme pues me crie en México, y luego allá esta mi familia y mi esposo y mis otros hermanos. Vengo aquí porque pues aquí están la mayoría de los hermanos, verdad, a dar mis vacaciones mi paseo. Pero yo me siento más mexicana que Americana ¡jaja! Sí— (pauses)

CV: ¿Ha pensado usted de venir a vivir aquí?

HM: Ah-ah.

CV: ¿Unos años con su familia?

HM: No, no me gusta para vivir con mi familia.

CV: ¿Porque no?

HM: No me gusta el ambiente de vivir aquí para la familia, porque lo principal es que en México tiene uno su energía con sus hijos, y allá el gobierno no anda amparando a la juventud que ya es mayor de edad, es el primer punto que veo; yo no sé si estará bien o estará mal, allá la familia tiene que ser obediente con sus padres siempre que se pueda, y aquí la edad de los niños pues ya hasta cierta edad ya los corrige uno ya después ya se sienten en la edad de mayor, verdad, y ya no quieren que los corrijan sus padres (inaudible; background noise) a poco que he visto, no sé si en realidad serán todos pero yo pienso que no todos, verdad, pero pienso yo que aquí pueden agarrar más libertad los hijos que en México. Que para agarrarla donde quiera, ¿verdad? Pero puede valer un poquito más la energía de uno según yo (inaudible) México. Porque aquí hay facilidad para muchas cosas y en México es un poquito más diferente todo.

CV: Sí.

HM: Sí, y para vivir, no. Sí, me gustaría que viniera mi familia a pues, pues a estar de vacaciones, a conocer, a pasar el rato así con su familia acá nosotros familiares, pero yo pienso que vivir, no (voices/background) ni ellos podrían, porque ya están acostumbrados vivir allá en México. Porque a mí también se me hace muy dura aquí la vida. Muy aguitada. (laughs)

CV: ¿En qué— en qué manera?

¹¹ Dish made with diced nopales (pads of the prickly pear cactus).

HM: En, por ejemplo, el trabajo que aquí todo lo que, el que está aquí tiene que trabajar para poder vivir, principal que para tener su casa es muy pesado, muy pesado sus compromisos el alimento muy caro, todo, todo les cuesta aquí, y yo pienso que si nos viniéramos no podríamos nosotros salvar compromisos de aquí, porque mi esposo y yo no podríamos salvar, mis hijos están muy chicos, tendríamos que mételos a estudio pues ya la más grande tiene dieciséis años, y el otro tiene quince y así de ocho que tengo.

CV: ¿Cuántos niños tienen?

HM: Ocho, el más chiquito tiene tres años, el otro tiene seis, el otro siete, el otro tiene diez, el otro doce, y el otro catorce, el otro quince, y la otra dieciséis. Todos chicos

CV: ¿Qué clase de trabajo hace su, su – su esposo?

HM: Mi esposo. Eh. Trabaja de chofer en una línea de camiones. (voices/background) Es un chofer.

CV: Sí, es muy duro.

HM: Sí es.

CV: Sí.

HM: Sí es.

CV: Mucha gente piensan que – (talking over each other)

HM: – que porque están en California están bien.

CV: – todos somos ricos

HM: Ah-ah aquí hay más –

CV: Sí, tenemos mucho, pero tenemos que trabajar por el (talking over each other)

HM: Hm, pero están, pero es que, sí, tienen mucho de que vivir pero a si están de drogas, billes yo me doy cuenta que los billes llegan al menos yo estuve con mi hermano ahora con Celso, ahí estoy y, y luego este yo veo que, pobrecito tiene muchos compromisos porque por todo llegan billes, por todo, y yo me pongo a pensar digo hay no, yo pienso que aquí no era vida para nosotros, quizás (voices/background) se podría pero sería muy pesado, para mi esposo pues porque pues él ya está también ya de edad grande y, no, pienso yo que no iba a librar el a pasarnos la bien, (clears throat) y que allá pues pobremente medianamente la pasamos con lo poco que el gana la pasamos un poco bien, (pauses) y, no, por eso pues quisiéramos estar un poquito mejor, pero no se puede, (voices/background) no se puede, porque es muy grande la familia. (pauses)

[00:20:39] Spanish

CV: Tenía otra pregunta, pero ya se me olvido, uh. (inaudible; voices/background, 00:20:54-00:21:09)

CV: ¡Oh! ¿Piensa usted que entonces fue una buena cosa que la familia Martínez fueron a vivir en México?

HM: Hm. Pues bueno ellos iban un poco ya más grandes que yo, ellos sufrieron mucho allá, mis hermanos grandes sufrieron mucho, porque trabajaban mucho, verdad, también sufrieron sus pobrezas, no más que ya mi hermano el más chico que fue Celso; fue mi tío Chon hermano de mi papá y lo invito y mi papá pues le dijo, “pues hermano llévatelo,” verdad y—y luego ya empezaron así que aquí estaba Celso y él les decía que se vinieran y que y empezaron ellos a venirse, pero ellos, y ya estaban casados, y se empezaron a venir ellos a trabajar y quizás les gusto poquito el ambiente por acá, porque antes, no, (voices/background) estaba como está ahora, verdad, de tan dura la vida aquí en California. (voices/background) Y ya se vinieron pero—no, no me explico el motivo porque se aigan venido ya ellos, pero sí, sí, sufrieron ellos también allá; quizá ellos pensaron que no iban estar bien en México por los trabajos, verdad, también que son muy escasos, y poco que pagan; y quizás ellos aigan pensado venirse, y les gusto más y se vinieron, verdad, ya pues ya todos tienen aquí su familia. Si mi-inmigraron a su familia y todo pues como nacidos aquí, verdad, inmigraron a su familia, y también se vinieron a sufrir ellos poquito, porque de aquí a que hicieron ellos su, su residencia para su familia y todo, tuvieron que navegar. Como Oscar también, el pobrecito, sufrió mucho, cuando se vino porque allá dejó su familia, y era muy poco lo que el ganaba, entonces ganaba sesenta y cinco centavos la hora para pasarla el aquí y mandarle el a su familia en México; después ya pensó pues inmigrarlos, verdad, arreglar para inmigrarlos, y así se fueron viniendo. Ya después fueron por Pancho que es el otro que está aquí y ya nos quedamos allá cuatro, nos quedamos allá cuatro, pues que Eulogio pues se casó allá y el no, como era no, no era nacido aquí verdad, no se le hizo muy fácil venirse. Enrique pues no el allá, el veces viene en vacaciones, y yo igual pues ya van tres veces que vengo, pero así cada tres meses cada año me estoy tres meses, me voy, como ahora ya tengo tres meses aquí. (pauses) Mas el motivo muy grande que aiga sido de ellos pues sería por vivir aquí no me explico.

CV: ¿Tenía usted trabajo cuando estaba aquí de vacación?

HM: Eh, sí, sí, estuve trabajando, sí, en la nurseria, ahí donde estaba Oscar trabajando. Primer año que vine estaba Oscar ahí en la, en la—“Select;”¹² ahí estuve trabajando tres—tres meses si y pues decía yo bueno ya que vine porque no de hacer algo por mi familia, verdad. Y pensabo yo vine con la mira de inmigrarlos pero no pude, no pude porque necesitaba yo mandarles para allá para que se ayudarean—

CV: ¿Trato usted de hacer lo?

HM: Yo quise hacerlo, pero no lo hice, ¡pensé hacerlo, ey! pero no lo hice porque el hecho ahora de ver que iba a dar muchas molestias a mis hermanos para

¹² Unidentified; presumably the name of a business.

- que me anduvieran llevando a inmigración y esto y el otro y, se me hizo muy, muy penoso darles molestias.
- CV: No, es difícil así.
- HM: Sí, uh-huh. O dicen que no es difícil, pero para mí si era, porque yo no sé inglés, por eso se me hace un poquito más difícil, porque no puedo andar ni yo ni conozco muy bien aquí que andarme cruzando en Los Angeles y todo eso. Y el siguiente después ahora el año pasado volví a venir con la misma señora y se (voices/background) no lo volví hacer para que otra vez, tres meses también. Y ahora ya vi el ambiente muy diferente; ora si menos me anime hacerlo, porque ya no vi un poquito más descompuesto, porque, tú sabes, se ve unas cosas entre familia que —
- CV: Porque creo que mi mamá me dijo una vez que, que usted trataba de — de —
- HM: Uh-huh.
- CV: Traer su familia.
- HM: Sí, sí, yo si traía esos pensamientos de (inaudible; voices/background) sí, yo, sí, pensaba arreglar esto, siempre ambicionaba porque mi esposo siempre ha querido venir acá, y dice “arregla tus papeles, a tus hijos,” “deja,” dice, “porque te vas a morir y logramos ese papel dice muriéndote tu no nos va a servir de nada tu papel, ya emigras a tu familia,” dice, “están tus hermanos se quedan solitos se van con sus tíos o algo,” pero, Christine, no sé, será que Dios no quiere que arregle o se me ha hecho imposible todo, no sé, pues total que no me he animado hacerlo, verdad, y yo si aspiro que mi familia venga a conocer y que conozca (cough/background) a sus parientes, sus primos y todo pero es mucho dinero para mi sola el hecho de ver que no puedo porque ya la edad ya no me deja trabajar muy a gusto porque ya me canso mucho. (both voice agreement) Y por eso yo pienso que yo no, no puedo ya arreglarlos porque es mucho dinero todo, para arreglar uno los papeles, (pauses) y mucho tiempo y citas, y citas y yo no podría en donde estoy trabajando no podría estar pidiendo un permiso porque me quitarían el trabajo, verdad. Que mi esposo hubiera estado un poquito más cerca, siquiera en Mexicali¹³ o Tijuana¹⁴ ahí estaría mejor, pero está muy lejos (voices/background) son muchas horas.
- CV: Hm. Son como unos tres días.
- HM: ¡Uuy!
- CV: De aquí hasta — (inaudible; background noise)
- HM: Sí. Se hacen como tres días, yeah, son como tres días de camino viendo uno bien son tres días yo pienso completos, bueno con la noche, verdad.
- CV: Hm.
- HM: Por ejemplo, salirme una noche y has de cuenta de día, sí, son como tres días. No, sí, es retirado para dar citas que se presente tu familia tal tiempo,

¹³ City (state of Baja California, México), founded 1903.

¹⁴ City (state of Baja California, México); founded 1889; across from San Diego, California.

- cuando, con que movimiento de dinero, que sería muy fácil en el avión, pero hay cuesta mucho.
- CV: Sí, mi familia quieren ir pero (inaudible; voices/background) mi primer caso no tienen tiempo.
- HM: Exacto.
- CV: Y también no tienen dinero.
- HM: Dinero es la base; el dinero, es la base para moverse uno de, de una parte, a otra.
- CV: Porque siempre mi papá dice “¿Porque no vamos a México?” mi mamá le dice, “Pues no tenemos suficiente dinero.” (voices/background)
- HM: Sí, yo fíjate he venido seguido y puedo decirlo, vine antes del año porque yo me fui en Octubre con Eliseo, y me había venido yo con Celso, porque como van mis hermanos yo logro esa venida con ellos no pago mucho dinero; les gratifico, tú sabes, para ayudarnos en el camino con una cosa muy poca, y luego toca la suerte que fue Eliseo, y no fue gran cosa lo que pague de pasaje porque ellos, por muy necesitados que vengan, no me aceptarían mucho dinero porque soy su hermana, verdad. Ahora esa última vez fue Celso me vine con el otra vez y ahora va Oscar y me voy con él, eh, así es de que es un poquito fácil para mí, hm, me ha salido muy pesado mis, mis viajes. El primer año, sí, se me salió pesado porque fue cuando murió mi papá tuvimos que irnos, pues, tú sabes, de emergencia y nos fuimos de aquí al El Paso¹⁵ en el autobús, en el bus, y ya de Juárez para allá nos fuimos en el avión para enterrar a mi papá y ya de ahí fueron tres horas de camino nada más. Eso, sí, me salió pesado el, el pasaje. Pero últimamente, no, ya poquito que ya me he ido lejos ya les doy para que se ayuden en su camino, y me ayudan y — y se ayudan, verdad, porque yo lo poco que compro para mi familia lo que me regalan no lo llevo en el bus. No lo llevo porque allí en la pasada son muy ingratos; le cobran a uno mucho en la pasada; piensan que lleva uno contrabando, tú sabes, de ropa o alguna una cosita que llevan, y hecho de ver que iyendo en el bus no puedo llevar lo que puedo llevar con ellos, no mucho porque también lo poco que gano se lo mando a mi familia. Sí, sí, trabaje bastantito los tres meses pero le estaba mandando a mis hijos para allá, pues siempre, tú sabes, problemas de familia, verdad, porque mi esposo en su cosecha le fue un poco mal porque llovió mucho y le cayó una plaga a su algodón, y pues, tú sabes, perdieron lo que habían pedido prestado para su cosecha, perdieron un poco, y está un poquito atrasado ahí ahorita, que como te digo mi esposo trabaja de chofer; bueno no nos falta que comer pero, no, no, no tenemos posibilidad de dar todo lo que se necesita en la casa, pues el estudio de los chamacos es muy caro por allá, porque exigen uniformes (cough) y libros muy caros, tú sabes, lo en el

¹⁵ City (El Paso Co., Texas); settled (by Europeans) 1680; across from Ciudad Juárez (México).

- estudio los libros son lo que cuestan. (both voice agreement) Por ese problema, no, no se puede hacer un poco más.
- CV: Es como aquí nos dicen que podemos ganar educación gratis, pero son, son mentiras.
- HM: No, son mentiras.
- CV: Porque témenos que gastar dinero.
- HM: Son mentiras. El gobierno dice manden sus niños a estudiar que hay mejores posibilidades que les da el gobierno, pero si es que el maestro estira la mano para exigirle a un niño un libro, y si aquel niño no tiene un libro, no le dan su estudio lo sacan de la escuela. Sino lleva el aquel uniforme como es, es debido no lo dejan entrar a sus horas. Porque no va bien su uniforme o algo que les falte o que les falte un lápiz o algo no puede estudiar el. Y si aquel padre no tiene para darle que va hacer el sacrificio cuando se puede; pero no te creas, el estudio es muy caro.
- CV: ¿O es diferente en la primaria? Oh.
- HM: Pues como mi hijo es el que ya está estudiando en la secundaria.
- CV: Pero es – cuesta mucho para la universidad.
- HM: Sí, hm. Sí, yo pienso que, sí, mucho más.
- CV: Porque uno tiene que comprar sus libros y cuestan como unos setenta dólares.
- HM: ¡Uh!
- CV: Dos veces al año.
- HM: ¡Fíjate!
- CV: Y – (voices/background) es caro yo sé que es caro. (pauses)
- [00:30:28] *Spanish*
- HM: Así, fíjate, así, así está la cosa, acá la vida un poquito dura.
- CV: ¿Entonces usted no puede hablar inglés? (voices/background)
- HM: Ah-ah. Nada.
- CV: Porque mi mamá me pregunto si usted podía hablar inglés y le dije, “pues, no sé mamá, no sé.”
- HM: Nada, no. No yo – no hablo inglés. No, si hablara inglés yo no estaba tan tapada, no; no estuviera careciendo de trabajo porque con inglés, tú sabes donde quiera puede uno trabajar poquito ¿verdad? Pero yo no hablo nada inglés pues me fui muy chiquita y con que estudiar inglés no, no se podía – (inaudible; voices/background)
- CV: Ay. Pues yo ya no tengo preguntas. Le agradezco mucho la ayuda.
- HM: Pues ojalá que de eso te sirva, eso poquito que te contesto verdad porque, como te digo, yo era muy chica. No puedo describirte muchas cosas (voices/background) nada más lo poquito que, nada más lo poquito que me preguntes. Ojalá te sirva eso quisiera ayudarte más con mucha voluntad lo haría.
- CV: Yo sé, pero usted era chica.

- HM: Si muy chica por eso por la edad.
- CV: Mi mamá me podía hablar más porque ella vino a vivir aquí sola.
- HM: ¡Sí eso, uh-huh! Y luego ella se fue también mucho después que nosotros, y ella ya estudio ya pienso inglés poquito. Y Pancho, tu – tu tío, y ya después se vino y yo ya no me di cuenta quien con quien se vino no me di cuenta quien con quien se vino, ella otra vez que se quedó mi tío allá yo pienso ¿verdad? Se quedó mi tío, se vino ella solita ¿o con quien se vino ella?
- CV: Solita.
- HM: Hm. Para que veas, pues acá estaba la baby tu tía, hm, que yo me hubiera venido entonces que barbaridad otra hubiera sido. No me quejo, no me quejo, pero hubiera sido otra, otro ambiente.
- CV: ¡Oh! Yo tengo la pregunta. ¿Conocía usted a otros, uh, familias que es – que vinieron aquí en este país y en que se fueron a México como ustedes y como mi abuelo?
- HM: No, no. Yo nada más conocía a mi tía que era la hermana de mi papá que íbamos juntos. Conocí a unas personas que decían que habían vivido aquí que se habían ido también en ese tiempo, pero, sí, no nos juntábamos mucho que son de otro ranchito. Pero, no, casi esas personas no se mucho de su vida.
- CV: Hm, muchas familias hicieron la misma cosa.
- HM: Sí, hay – hay familias allá que se fueron de aquí, sí, hay – hay nada menos allá en el ranchito donde yo vivo esta una señora que dice que nació aquí, pero que tiene sus papeles extraviados nada más tiene creo su papel de fe de bautismo.¹⁶ Y ella, cada vez que van mis hermanos, va y les pregunta que como arreglaría sus papeles y todo, pero ya es señora grande ya, pero mas no sé yo de su vida de ella, si sufriría aquí o no, pero ella se la llevo primero su papá muy chica para allá también al ranchito, pero hay varias personas que (inaudible; voices/background) sabe uno que son de acá nacidas pero, a fundamento no, no los conocemos a fondo como, como vivirían, porque se irían; quizás a la mejor se fueron igual con nosotros en esa temporada o quizás después.
- CV: (inaudible; voices/background) terminar aquí.

[00:33:54] *Spanish*

END OF INTERVIEW

English Translation (O.H. 1298) by Andres Munoz-Ramirez

- CV: This is an interview with Hortencia Martínez de Benítez for the Mexican American community history project. The interview is taking place at the home of Pedro Gomez at La Habra,¹⁷ California. The time is five p.m. The

¹⁶ Certificate of Baptism.

¹⁷ City (northwest Orange Co., California); incorporated 1925.

day is December 20th, 1972. The interviewer is Christine Valenciana. Now we can start.

HM: To talk.

CV: Yes, talk. That is the idea. (voice/background: "You don't want anything to drink?") No, no, no. That's fine. (voice/background: "Hey, do you want strawberry shake? Do you like strawberry shake?") Okay. (voice/background: "Do you?") Yeah, okay. (voice/background: "No way.") (laughing)

CV: Okay. Where are you from?

HM: From—

CV: Where were you born?

HM: —from Casa Blanca,¹⁸ California.

CV: Uh-huh. In what year?

HM: In the year nineteen hundred twenty-six.

CV: Uh-huh.

HM: The eighth of April.

CV: Uh huh. And where are your parents from?

HM: From México.

CV: What part of México?

HM: My mom from Lerdo.¹⁹ Born in Lerdo.

CV: She was from Lerdo? Oh really—

HM: Uh-huh, she was from Lerdo. My dad [was born] in La Laguna.²⁰

CV: And do you know by any chance the year your mom and dad came?

HM: I don't think so. I don't know what year they came here.

CV: And what else? And what kind of work did your dad do?

HM: Well, he worked driving his truck, working with a boss named Penn Rob.²¹

CV: Eh, I heard of this man.

HM: Yes, no. I don't know what he worked on, but I know he worked with him. I don't know what kind of work. But I don't know. But I know he worked with him.

CV: Elisio told me that they went in a truck.

HM: Yes, uh-huh.

CV: With workers.

HM: Yes, uh-huh, yes. My dad was like an administrator, that's what they call it in México. Really, I don't know what they call it here.

CV: I think "foreman."²²

HM: Yes. (pauses)

¹⁸ Neighborhood/former unincorporated community (Riverside; Riverside Co., California).

¹⁹ City (northeastern state of Durango, México).

²⁰ Region; Comarca Lagunera (northern states of Durango and Coahuila, México).

²¹ Unidentified

²² A worker who supervises and directs other workers.

CV: Um, and how many kids in the family?

HM: We were – um – fifteen. Fifteen siblings.

CV: That's a lot!

HM: Hm, yes. (pauses) They brought – they brought my older brother here when he was young and – and the – the oldest died on the way when my mom came from there – from México. They brought two, and the oldest died on the way, and the other one stayed alive, that was the one that brought the little one here.

CV: So – (CV starts a new question but is interrupted by HM)

HM: The other was born in México.

CV: Oh, I didn't know.

HM: She was born there, and the baby girl was also born there. When my mom left she was waiting for the little girl that is the baby to be born. The year in which we left she was born – yes. There were two there and everyone else here. So, they would come, being here, we would come being fourteen, thirteen, um, here next to my dad before we went there.

CV: Ah – Was the family very poor before leaving? (speaking over each other)

HM: I think that we were not very well off, but, yes, we were a bit poor because my dad, he alone, supported so many children, really, and then we have to do without something. What we were not missing was food but, yes, I think we were poor.

CV: Hm.

HM: And my brother Eulogio, who came when he was young, was the one who helped my dad work a little because the family was so large, and my dad alone could not do it.

CV: And do you know what kind of work Eulogio did?

HM: No, because he was with my dad. I don't know. They left together in his truck to work, he would help him. Later I heard that he worked in the orange harvest, Eulogio, my other older brother. So, it was that I was just a young child, but I just know because I hear, I could hear my mom and my dad talk like that about the family. Hm.

CV: Hm. Do you remember or did you go to school?

HM: No, no. I still hadn't reached [the age] to go. The one who had reached [the age] was Celia, the oldest, who had just started school, I didn't because I was still too young as I was. I went at five years.

CV: In what year did you all go?

HM: In the thirties, when he [i.e., my dad] was repatriated.

CV: Yes.

HM: In thirty-one, it seems to me thirty or thirty-one, was when he was repatriated.

CV: Hm.

HM: But my dad did not leave like the repatriated; he went and paid the passage for everyone.

- CV: Can you explain to me the difference between one who was repatriated and one who just left – who just left?
- HM: Well no, no I can't explain how it was – (interrupted)
- CV: A lot of people give the impression that there was a difference.
- HM: No, I can't explain in what way it would be, with me being little, really, I don't know –
- CV: Hm.
- HM: All I heard was that he was patriated and that he was repatriated, and my dad decided that he needed to pay the passage of everyone in order for his children to return to California. (voices/background) And he left, but I don't know the reason why he went, but he took us all.
- CV: Hm. (voices/background)
- HM: And the one who stayed here was Carmen.
- CV: And why did she stay here?
- HM: Well, she stayed because she got married, because she got married; she had just married and was expecting her first baby when we left, and she couldn't go. Well, what she said was that she wanted to go, but she couldn't as she was already married, and my dad could very well leave her, but he could not do anything for the reason that she was already with someone else, really. That was the reason why she did not go there.
- CV: And do you remember anything about going to México the first time from Casa Blanca, like going – by train?
- HM: By train aha, by train. We left – we went by train.
- CV: Do you remember the details – the details?
- HM: Like details of what?
- CV: Well, how was the – the – the trip?
- HM: Well, they – they took us to the station right here in California, and then we left on the train, and from there we took the train from Juárez²³ to there. It was also the train that was, well, was the only thing that ran on the tracks, that is the "tracks" here, right? It's the tracks. There was no highway, all of that, there was no hope that there was anything; nothing but rocky, earthy all that, all that washed up. There were no roads like there are now. No. Now it is an important number, that highway route from Juárez to there, very passable and all. Almost all the tourism goes there, that's where we went by train – and to suffer. (laughs) We arrived at Torreón,²⁴ that's where we got to later.
- CV: And with whom did you all live?
- HM: With a little sister of my dad, one Antonia García, who was the mom of Román. And we arrived at a "mesón"²⁵ which is what they call it there. She

²³ Ciudad Juárez; city (state of Chihuahua, México); founded 1659; opposite El Paso, Texas.

²⁴ City (state of Coahuila; México); established 1893.

²⁵ A country inn.

- was in charge of taking care of that inn; there we were all with her. (pauses) Because my aunt Teresa, well, I don't know in what part she arrived; she arrived at another house, she didn't arrive with us. Also, she went together with my dad – his sister.
- CV: Oh.
- HM: My aunt Teresa was the one who insisted that they go to México.
- CV: Oh.
- HM: Because my dad didn't –
- CV: (inaudible) the idea –
- HM: Yes, she had the idea of taking him to México: this México and that México, this little brother and that little brother, and she took him away. And my dad didn't have that idea of leaving, due to my sister who was already married here but, well, she insisted, and since he was very obedient to her, she insisted, and he left.
- CV: (inaudible) Is she – is she older than him?
- HM: Yes, she was the oldest, my dad was the youngest in the family. And my uncle Chon, he stayed here, the other brother, who is the dad of the Christines [?] (inaudible) from here, from Casa Blanca – (pauses) well no more to go through life, well, than anything else, and from there my dad, well, I don't know how he would have passed on it, since Eliseo got sick and, well, we started to suffer a little more because he got a fever, and my dad had to do well – well, these, his little things of value that he owned, he began to waste them, to sell them to raise Eliseo from that fever; all the little that he owned, well – well, you know, he wasted; all was lost. And after that, my dad took us to a little ranch which had offered him a little house there, and he took us there because we had no way of living in the town, and he took us there and, well, again we suffered a little more – until my dad was given a piece of land: he began to sow corn, beans, and with a little bit we started not to suffer as much, but, yes, we suffered enough. Hunger, no, because we were not lacking, but, you know, there we passed it moderately because we were many children. The oldest was Eulogio, Eliseo, Enrique, Daniel, Teri²⁶ – Oscar I still count as young, right, because he was not yet a boy to work a lot, no, because they were still young, but the big ones like Eliseo, Eulogio, and Teri who ventured out to nearby little ranches to see where she could spend time to help us; we were young.
- CV: And you all weren't accustomed – (CV does not finish the question as HM answers it early)
- HM: No, not that you hope, no matter how poor we were in California I never (inaudible) and then I got sick, I got sick from a cough which now I agree is whooping cough: I was eating, I was coughing, I was not eating, I was coughing, I was sleeping, I was coughing all up and vomiting my food that

²⁶ Teresa.

my mom gave me. I think it was whooping cough. And I suffered because I did not know the climate, I think, because I was young; but, no, that hope is no longer the same. (pauses)

[00:10:24] *English*

HM: Because, well, here in California, however poor you are, someone always has a little more to live on and to sleep in and, in all truth, more comforts, and in México there are, too, but – (voices/background)

CV: What was, what were your first – first impressions when you arrived there? I know you were very young and –

HM: No, I was very young, I just didn't notice one. I think because of childhood, really, that one does not take into account whether one is going to suffer or not, but, yes, it was a very, well, sad thing – for one – because it all looked very different, because what little I remembered from here never seemed to be there in México, what little I saw here that I remember, right. There is very little that I can remember but, yes, it was a little more impressive but it was not the same, because we went to a peasant ranch, and then that little ranch was completely isolated from the city, it can be said, because not even the city was built like it is now, and then the little ranch, it was like a few homes, some six homes, nothing more. Eh. We were few there, living very poorly at the ranch, now you cannot say that the ranch is a town because it is already close to the town, right, there is already more movement and more people. Hm.

CV: Hm. (pauses; voices/background) Well, anyway, it is far from –

HM: Oh, yes.

CV: – the city.

HM: Oh, yes, yes, it's far.

CV: Hm.

HM: Yes, it has a little bit more problems than the city. Because, you know, the main thing the little ranch is lacking is water. Drinking water that, what does one say, water for food (inaudible) and there are no clothing stores, there are no stores, you know, of merchandise to eat until you go to town to buy it, to pay your fare, or find out where to go to get food to eat. The water, well, one needs to buy it to drink it clean. It is the main base of the ranch, the water – (pauses)

CV: Did you go to school in México?

HM: Eh, only until third, there at the same little ranch.

CV: (inaudible) third what –

HM: Right there, right there at the little ranch was the – the first school I had until the third year, nothing more, because I could no longer study because my dad no longer had [money] to give us to study.

CV: Oh! One needed to pay?

HM: Ah! Yes, one needed to pay to go to town, to the school, and I no longer could. My dad could not give us [money] to study because he did not have enough for the books or anything like that –

CV: Hm.

HM: Sometimes they gave us a notebook and that notebook would fill up, because a notebook – yes, we had to erase to do more because we no longer had the book.

CV: Hm.

HM: And right there in the little ranch there was my dad's house, right there was the teacher, and there my dad lent him a little piece of a room so that the children could have class in a house. Later, no later they started a school, and it already started, you know – the teacher began to approach teachers (inaudible) at the ranch, but he, he raised the school, but I, already in the school, just studied one more year, which was third. Hm. (pauses)

CV: Was it hard to exist?

HM: It was difficult, uh-huh.

CV: I can see that. (voices/background)

HM: Yes, yes, it was difficult because you could not have the opportunities that the government gives now; the schooling that we would have had would very different, and we did not have it, and my dad could do all that because he could not give us schooling, it was not possible, so it is because of this, his means did not help him. Hm. Because then, at that time, well, they sometimes earned fifty cents a day for as large a family as we were. Hm. And then there was not much possibility to study. Not now, not anymore, what an outrage. The whole school is very beautiful – very many – (15 seconds of silence, 00:14:35-00:14:50; voices/background)

CV: How did they treat, how did your (pauses), uh, relatives treat you all?

HM: Well –

CV: For example, hm, the siblings of – of your dad.

HM: Oh, no, very well.

CV: Hm.

HM: My aunt, very well, the little sister who was in México very well, she treated us, blessed be God, she treated us very well.

CV: Because, in reality, you're all "gringos."

HM: Uh-huh! Yes, we went to – well, yes, because we were born here, right, out of everyone only he was Mexican. But we got to my aunt's house, no, no, we didn't complain what we had there because my aunt treated us very well. And the reason we went to the little ranch was because the family was much of a burden, and my aunt couldn't support everyone there, that was when my dad took us to that little ranch. It's not far, it's twenty minutes from there. But anyway, uh, we started to travel there because you can't be there in town.

CV: Hm.

HM: And my dad started to plant that little bit of land for beans and corn; it was when we started to eat corn with salt and nopalitas²⁷ with salt and everything, true.

CV: Hm.

HM: Yes, I think we were not hungry because we are still alive (both laugh) we are still alive, from hunger we didn't die but, yes, yes, we suffered a little.

CV: Do you consider yourself a citizen of México or the United States?

HM: Eh! Well, I consider myself from the United States because I was born here, but Mexican because, well, my parents were Mexican so by chance I lean more toward México, right, because I just come here to visit, and then there is my whole family and my husband, that's how I consider myself more Mexican than from here. From here because I was born here, but growing up, well I grew up in México, and then there is my family and my husband and my other siblings. I come here because well, the majority of my siblings are here, right, to take my vacations, my trips, but I feel more Mexican than American, haha! Yes – (pauses)

CV: Have you thought about coming to live here?

HM: Ah-ah.

CV: One of these years, with your family?

HM: No, I don't like it here to live with my family,

CV: Why not?

HM: I don't like the atmosphere of living here for the family, because the main thing is that, in México, one has one's energy with one's children, and there the government is not protecting the youth that is already of legal age, [that] is the first point I see; I don't know if it will be fine or wrong, there the family has to be obedient to their parents whenever they can; and here, the generation of kids, well, until a certain age someone already corrects them, and later they already feel like they are of age, right, and they no longer want their parents to correct them (inaudible; background noise) the little I have seen, I don't know if in reality it will be all of them, but I think not all of them, right, but I think that children here can get more freedom than in México. To take it wherever they want, right? But it be can be a little more worth your energy according to me (inaudible) México. Because here, there are opportunities for many things, and in México everything is a little more different.

CV: Yes.

HM: Yes, and to live here, no. Yes, I would like my family to come to, well, to be on vacation, to meet, to pass the hour like this with their family here, we are relatives, but I think not to live (voices/background) nor could they, because they are already used to living there in México. Because for me, too, I also find life very hard here. Very agitated. (laughs)

²⁷ Dish made with diced nopales (pads of the prickly pear cactus).

CV: In what—in what way?

HM: For example, the work here is everything, the person who is here needs to work to be able to live, the main thing is that to have your home is very burdensome, very burdensome, your obligations, the food is very expensive, everything, everything costs one here, and I think that if we came we couldn't keep the obligations here because my husband and I could not save, my children are very young, we would have to put them into school because now the oldest is sixteen years old and the other is fifteen, of the eight I have.

CV: How many children do you all have?

HM: Eight, the youngest is three years, the other is six, the other seven, the other ten, the other twelve, and the other fourteen, the other fifteen, and the other sixteen. All of them kids.

CV: What kind of work does your, your—your husband do?

HM: My husband. Eh. He works as a driver in a line of trucks (voices/background) He's a driver.

CV: Yes, it is very hard.

HM: Yes, it is.

CV: Yes.

HM: Yes, it is.

CV: A lot of people think that—(talking over each other)

HM: —that, because they are in California, they are fine.

CV: —we are all rich.

HM: Uh-huh, there is more here—

CV: Yes, we have a lot, but we need to work for it. (talking over each other)

HM: Hm, but they are, but it's that, yes, they have a lot to live on but if they are on medication, bills, I realize that the bills arrive at least, I was with my brother now, with Celso, and, and then I see that, poor thing, he has many obligations because bills come for everything, for everything, and I start thinking, I say, there is, no, I think that here there is not a life for us, maybe (voices/background) it could be, but it would be very difficult for my husband, well, because, well, he is already of advanced age and, no, I think he was not going to spare us to have a good time (clears throat) and that there, well, poorly, fairly, we make it with what little he earns, we make a little, well, (pauses) and, no, that's why we would like to be a little better off, but no we can't, (voices/background) no we can't, because the family is very big. (pauses)

[00:20:39] *English*

CV: I had another question, but I forgot, uh. (inaudible; voices/background, 00:20:54-00:21:09)

CV: Oh! Do you think that it was a good thing then that the Martínez family went to live in México?

HM: Hm. Well, they were a little older than me when they went, they suffered a lot there, my older siblings suffered greatly, because they worked a lot, right, they also endured poverty, none more than my brother, the youngest one, that was Celso: my uncle Chon, my dad's brother, went and he invited him, and my dad, well, he said to him, "Well, brother, take him," right and — and later they already started, so here was Celso, and he told them to come and that, and they started to come, but they, and they were already married, and they started to come to work and maybe they liked the atmosphere a little here, because before, no, (voices/background) it was as it is now, right, so hard is life here in California. (voices/background) And they already came but — no, no, I can't explain the reason why they planned to come, but, yes, yes, they suffered there, too; maybe they thought that they weren't going to do well in México because of the jobs, right, they are also very scarce, and they pay little; and maybe they still thought of coming and they liked it better and they came, right, since, well, everyone has their family here. If they immigrated to their family and all because they were born here, right, they immigrated to their family, and they also came to suffer a little, because from here to what they did, their — their residence for their family and everything, they had to navigate. Like Oscar also, the poor thing, he suffered a lot when he came because he left his family over there, and it was very little that he was then making, so he earned sixty-five cents per hour to spend it here and to send it to his family in México; then he thought to immigrate them, right, arrange for them to immigrate, and so they came. Then later they went for Pancho who is the other one that is here, and then the four of us stayed there, four of us stayed there, since Eulogio was married over there, and he was not, as he was not, he was not born here, right, it was not easy for him to come. Enrique, well, he is over there, he sometimes comes on vacation, and I, too, well, it is three times that I come, but like this, every three months, each year I stay three months, like now, I have three months here. (pauses) But the greatest reason of theirs, of why to live here, I can't explain.

CV: Did you have a job when you were here for vacation?

HM: Eh, yes, yes, I was working, yes, in the nursery where Oscar was working. The first year I came, Oscar was there in the, in the — "Select;"²⁸ I was working there three — three months yes and, well, I said, "Well, now that I have come, why not do something for my family, right?" And I think I came with the aim of immigrating them but I couldn't, I couldn't because I needed to send them there to help each other. —

CV: Did you try to do it?

HM: I wanted to do it, but I didn't. I thought to do it, hey! But I did not do it because the fact now of seeing that it was going to bother my siblings a lot

²⁸ Unidentified; presumably the name of a business.

to take me to immigration and this and that, and it was very, very painful to bother them.

CV: No, it is difficult like that

HM: Yes, uh-huh. Or they say that it is not difficult, but for me it was, because I don't know English, that's why it is a little more difficult for me, because I can't go, neither I, nor do I recognize it very well here to walk around in Los Angeles and all that. And the following time, after last year, I came back with the same lady and I (voices/background) didn't do it again for that three months, too. And now I already saw the very different environment; now I was less encouraged to do it because I no longer saw a little more broken because, you know, you see some things between family that—

CV: Because I believe my mom once told me that, that you were trying to—to—

HM: Uh-huh.

CV: Bring your family.

HM: Yes, yes, I did have those thoughts to (inaudible; voices/background) yes, I, yes, did plan to fix this, I always wanted to because my husband has always wanted to come here, and he says, "Fix your papers, for your children." "Let it," he says, "because you are going to die, and we achieved that paper because, if you're dead your paper is not going to be useful to help emigrate your family," he says, "There are your brothers they stay alone they go with your uncle or something," but, Christine, I don't know, maybe God doesn't want me to fix it or it is impossible to do, I don't know, after all, I have not been encouraged to do it, right, and I do hope that my family will come to know and knows (cough/background) their relatives, their cousins, and all, but it's a lot of money for me alone, the fact of seeing that I can't, because my age no longer allows me to work very well anymore because I get tired a lot. (both voice agreement) And that's why I think that I can't, I can't fix them anymore because it's a lot of money, to fix one's papers, (pauses) and a lot of time and appointments, and appointments, and I could not from where I am working, I could not ask for permission because they would take away my work, right. That my husband would have been a little closer, even in Mexicali²⁹ or Tijuana,³⁰ it would be better there, but it is far away (voices/background) it's many hours.

CV: Hm. It's about three days.

HM: Uuy!

CV: From here to— (inaudible; background noise)

HM: Yes. It's been like three days, yeah, it's like three days on the road, seeing, well, it's three days, I think, complete, well, with the night, right.

CV: Hm.

²⁹ City (state of Baja California, México), founded 1903.

³⁰ City (state of Baja California, México); founded 1889; across from San Diego, California.

- HM: For example, I go out one night and think it's one day, yes, it's about three days. No, yes, it is selfish to give appointments for your family to be there that time, when, with what expense of money, it would be very easy on the airplane, but it costs a lot.
- CV: Yes, my family wanted to go but (inaudible; voices/background) my first case they don't have time.
- HM: Exactly.
- CV: And they also don't have money.
- HM: Money is the basis; money is the basis for moving one from one part to another.
- CV: Because my dad always says, "Why do we not go to México?" my mom tells him, "Well, because we don't have enough money." (voices/background)
- HM: Yes, look, I've been coming often, and I can say I came before the year because I went in October with Eliseo, and I had come with Celso, because when my brothers went I took advantage to come with them, not paying much money; I give them, you know, to help them on the way with a little bit, and then I have the luck that Eliseo went, and it wasn't a big deal what I paid for the ride because they, no matter how much in need they are, won't accept much money from me because I'm their sister, right. Now this last time Celso went, I came with him again, and now Oscar goes, and I go with him, eh, so it is a bit easy for me, hm, my travels have been very hard on me. The first year, yes. It was difficult because it was when my dad died, we had to go, you know as an emergency, and we went from here to El Paso³¹ on the bus, on the bus, and from Juárez to there we went on the plane to bury my dad, and from there it was only three hours, nothing more. Yes, that was hard, that travel. But lately not anymore, a little, I've already gone far, I already give them to help each other on their way, and they help me and – and they really help each other, right, because what little I buy for my family, what they give me, I don't take on the bus. I don't take it because there, at the [border] crossing, they are very ungrateful; they charge one a lot at the crossing; they think that one has contraband, you know, of clothes or whatever other little thing they wear, and, in fact, seeing that on the bus I can't take what I can take when I go with them, not much, because the little I earn I also send to my family. Yes, yes, I worked enough for the three months, but I was sending to my kids there, because always, you know, family problems, right, because my husband's harvest went a little bad because it didn't rain much and a plague fell on his cotton, and, well, you know, they lost what they had borrowed for their harvest, they lost a little, and he is a little behind there now, that, like I told you, my husband works as a driver; well, we don't starve but, no, no, we have no ability to give

³¹ City (El Paso Co., Texas); settled (by Europeans) 1680; across from Ciudad Juárez (México).

- everything that is needed in the house, well, the kids' schooling is very expensive there because they require uniforms (cough) and very expensive books, you know, in studying books are what they cost. (both voice agreement) For that problem, no, you can't do a little more.
- CV: It's like here, they say we can gain an education for free but they are – they are lies.
- HM: No, they are lies.
- CV: Because we have to spend money.
- HM: They are lies. The government says, "Send your children to school," that there are better possibilities that the government gives them, but if the teacher stretches out his hand to demand a book from a child, and if that child doesn't have the book, they don't let it have the class, they take it out of school. If it doesn't wear the uniform like it is, it has to be right or it [i.e., the child] is not allowed to start on time. Because its uniform is not right or something is missing or a pencil is missing or something, it [i.e., the child] cannot study. And if any father doesn't have to give to it [i.e., the child] he will make the sacrifice when he can; but don't believe it: schooling is very expensive.
- CV: Oh, it's different in the primary school? Oh.
- HM: Well, as my son is now studying in high school.
- CV: But it is – costs a lot for the university.
- HM: Yes, hm. Yes, I think that, yes, much more.
- CV: Because one has to buy one's books, and they cost about seventy dollars.
- HM: Uh!
- CV: Two times a year.
- HM: Imagine!
- CV: And – (voices/background) it is expensive. I know that it is expensive. (pauses)

[00:30:28] *English*

- HM: So, look, well, so that's the thing, life here is a little hard.
- CV: So, you can't speak English? (voices/background)
- HM: Ah-ah. Nothing.
- CV: Because my mom asked me if you could speak English, and I said, "Well, I don't know, Mom, I don't know."
- HM: Nothing, no. I don't – I don't speak English. No, if I spoke English I wouldn't be as ignorant, no; I would not be lacking work because with English, you know, you can work a little bit wherever, right? But I don't speak English at all because, well, I left very young, and I could not study English, it was not possible – (inaudible; voices/background)
- CV: Oh. Well, I don't have any more questions. I really appreciate the help.
- HM: Well, hopefully that will help you, that little that I answer truthfully because, as I say, I was very young. I cannot describe many things

- (voices/background) nothing more than that little that, nothing more than that little you asked me. Hopefully it will help you, I would like to help you more willingly.
- CV: I know, but you were young.
- HM: Yes, very young, that's why, because of age.
- CV: My mom could talk to me more because she came alone to live here alone.
- HM: Yes, that, uh-huh! And then she left too long after us, and she had already studied, I think, a little English. And Pancho, your—your uncle, and he came later then, and I no longer realized who he came with; I didn't realize who he came with; she, once my uncle stayed there, I think, right? My uncle stayed, and she came alone. Or who did she come with?
- CV: Alone.
- HM: Hm. So, you can see, because here your aunt was the baby, hm, that I would have come then what an awful lot that would have been. I won't complain, I won't complain but it would have been another, another environment.
- CV: Oh! I have the question. Did you know other, uh, families who are—who came here, to this country and that went to México, like you and my grandpa?
- HM: No, no. I just knew my aunt who was my dad's sister, that we went together. I met some people who said they had also lived here, who had also left at that time but, yes, we didn't get together a lot since they were from another little ranch. But, no, almost all those people don't know much about their lives.
- CV: Hm, many families did the same thing.
- HM: Yes, there are—there are families who left here, yes, there is—there's nothing, except there in the little ranch where I live, there is a lady who says she was born here, but that she has lost her papers; she only has, I think, her document of Faith of Baptism.³² And she, every time my brothers go, she goes and I asks them how she would fix her papers and everything, but she's already an older lady now, but I don't know more about her life, if she suffered here or not, but she was first taken by her dad [when she was] very young to the little ranch, but there are several people who (inaudible; voices/background) one knows that they are born here but, fundamentally, no, we don't know them thoroughly, how they lived, because they left. Maybe they went the way with us that season or maybe later.
- CV: (inaudible; voices/background)— finish here.

[00:33:54] *English*

END OF INTERVIEW

³² Certificate of Baptism.