

Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

Interview with Beulah Rocha

November 5, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

Miguel: Good morning. Can you tell me what your name is?

Beulah: My name is Beulah Rocha.

Miguel: And you are...?

Drexler: Drexler Nguyen.

Miguel: Drexler, I am going to interview your mom, I will be asking your mom some questions about her life, about how she came to the United States, what she likes here and what she does not like here, all right? Mrs. Rocha, can you tell me what is your date of birth?

Beulah: I was born August 23, 1963.

Miguel: And what is your place of birth?

Beulah: I was born in Managua, Nicaragua, Central America.

Miguel: And what is your race or ethnic group?

Beulah: I am Hispanic.

Miguel: How many brothers and sisters do you have and what are their ages?

Beulah: I have one sister who is 57, one brother who is 53 and have another brother who is 49.

Miguel: So, you have two brothers, one sister, and you are the youngest. Are your parents still alive?

Beulah: Only my mother, my father died.

Miguel: Can you tell me when he died?

Beulah: In 2001.

Miguel: Who among your family members continue to live in your native country?

Beulah: My mom, and my sister.

Miguel: And your brothers are where?

Beulah: I have a brother in Liberal and I have another brother in Canada.

Miguel: When you lived in your native country, what was your occupation?

Beulah: I was a student.

Miguel: What did you study?

Beulah: I was in the high school. I started in college but that was not what I really wanted...

Liberal Memorial Library received an \$8,000 Kansas Humanities Grant to record the immigration stories of immigrants to Southwest Kansas. The Grant titled "Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community" will record and preserve the stories of 40 individuals and/or families who immigrated to Southwest Kansas from a foreign country.

The grant dollars from the Kansas Humanities Council allowed the library to record the interviews with both video and audio equipment and disseminate the information obtained during the interviews through our website and DVD recordings. Preserving the stories of immigrants to Southwest Kansas is important for many reasons, and if we do not begin to record them soon, the stories will be lost as families move on or individuals pass away.

Miguel: Did you work in Nicaragua?

Beulah: No, I did not.

Miguel: Can you tell me a little about your living conditions in your native country, your life, what your life was like?

Beulah: My parents were teachers, so I almost had everything I wanted. My dad work for a catholic school, he taught English, that is why I learned how to speak English. I was not poor or we were not exactly rich, it was what they call over there as middle class.

Miguel: What language did you speak at home?

Beulah: Spanish most of the time, but my father liked it that we also spoke English because he was an English teacher at high school, so at home we had to speak in English.

Miguel: What is your religion?

Beulah: Catholic.

Miguel: When you lived in your country, were you ever subjected to harassment or physical or mental abuse by the authorities?

Beulah: We lived at war and I had some relatives...it was really bad back then

Miguel: Are you talking about the Sandinista Revolution?

Beulah: Yes, in 1979.

Miguel: Can you tell us about your experience with the revolution?

Beulah: Was very sad really because we would see a lot of deceased people and they could not be taken to the cemetery, so they just made a hole wherever they died and put them there and we were always worried about it.

Miguel: When did you come to the United States?

Beulah: I came on November 11 of 1984.

Miguel: How old were you when you first came?

Beulah: I was 21.

Miguel: I am going to ask you now about your immigrant experience. How did you first learn about the United States?

Beulah: At school, I had friend and we studied about it.

Miguel: And what brought you to move to Southwest Kansas? How is it that you ended up in Southwest Kansas?

Beulah: When I first came to this country I was living around New Orleans, Louisiana, and I had a brother here from Nicaragua and he told me come over here, he was making good money.

Miguel: When did you move to Liberal?

Beulah: In April, 1986.

Miguel: Two years after you came from Nicaragua.

Beulah: Two years.

Miguel: Do you remember your immigration trip when you came from Nicaragua?

Beulah: My mom and dad bought me a ticket, I went to Mexico and I stayed there for about two months. After that when I came to this country I applied for asylum.

Miguel: Because of the situation back in Nicaragua?

Beulah: Yes.

Miguel: Members of your family were harassed, or tortured, or persecuted because of their political views?

Beulah: I have family that were in the military and the Air Force, they worked for Somoza.

Miguel: What happened with them after the revolution?

Beulah: All of them escaped came to the United States and some of them went to Honduras.

Miguel: How did you first find work in this country?

Beulah: Was not really that hard. My first job was in a restaurant...

Miguel: Like many of us, I did that one time... and from there?

Beulah: I worked as a housekeeper...

Miguel: Do you mind if I ask you what do you do for a living?

Beulah: I work for the state, I work for SRS.

Miguel: How did you first find housing in this country?

Beulah: Like, most of the people, renting, but finally in 1997 I bought my house and I am still making payments.

Miguel Do you like your house?

*(to
Drexler):*

Drexler: Yes.

Miguel: Pretty much?

Drexler: (he nods his head) Yes.

Miguel: What have been some of the most difficult adjustments that you had to make living in the American society?

Beulah: (Inaudible)

Miguel: In the meantime you were in the United States as a political refugee?

Beulah: Well, they denied it. So I had to apply through another program called "NACARA."

Miguel: What NACARA means?

Beulah: That's something that Immigration has for people from Central America.

Miguel: What has been your experience with teachers and the schools?

Beulah: I did not go to school here, only because my boy and my girl go to school here.

Miguel: And what has been your experience?

Beulah: Pretty good...

Miguel: And what has been your experience as far as the police and other law enforcement agencies?

Beulah: I have not had any problems with that.

Miguel: Would you please describe any occurrences of racism on the part of the Americans towards you? Have you ever experienced racism?

Beulah: I have never experienced racism, people tell me about it but not me, never.

Miguel: During the time you have been in America, have returned to your native country?

Beulah: Yes, once, 17 years later, I went over there in May of 2001.

Miguel: What did you find? Was it different from when you left?

Beulah: A lot, a bigger city, a lot of new stores, new supermarkets, right now they even have casinos. When I was there they did not have any at all. They have a lot, they have Pizza Hut, they have few McDonalds and a lot of things we did not have when I was over there.

Miguel: So, you went after the revolution, what happened with the revolution?

Beulah: They had a lot of destruction, a lot of unemployment, not many jobs for people.

Miguel: So, the revolution is over, politically? The civil war ended but how, what is the situation there?

Beulah: People do not like the new president; they want another person to be in the government.

Miguel: Do you maintain contact with people in your native country?

Beulah: Yes, with my mom.

Miguel: In what ways?

Beulah: I call her.

Miguel: Do you send money back to your native country?

Beulah: Some times, when I have money left. You know, when you have a family and I am a single mother, it's kind of hard.

Miguel: Do you think that sometime in the future you will return to your native country?

Beulah: I don't think so. Just to visit but not to stay over there. I am used to life here.

Miguel: What were your ideals and dreams about America when you came?

Beulah: I wanted to come over here because it's a peaceful country and you have freedom here, and you have a lot of opportunities, to improve your life. If somebody doesn't improve is because they don't want it. Here you have a lot of chances, to move forward, to have a better life.

Miguel: What do you like and dislike about American society?

Beulah: I like the freedom, the peace. What I don't like is that over here a lot of teenagers are using drugs and doing whatever they want.

Miguel: In what way is America similar and different from your country?

Beulah: Similar? I think is totally different. The life style is different. Over there you can always live with your mom and dad, they take care of you, you can marry and you can still live in your mom's house. Over here is different because when you are 18 you can move out, you are on your own.

Miguel: What was the most difficult aspect from American society for you and how did you adjust to it?

Beulah: I did not have any trouble. For example, the language. When I came I already spoke English.

Miguel: Do you feel more safe or less safe in America?

Beulah: I feel more secure.

Miguel: Why is that?

Beulah: Because we don't have a war here.

Miguel: Do you think the quality of your life has improved?

Beulah: Yes, a lot.

Miguel: Can you tell me in what ways?

Beulah: For example, I got a wonderful job, and I work with the most wonderful people, yes. I am there doing my best, trying to help people with a lot of needs, in my office they go ask for food stamps, cash, medical card, child care.

Miguel: If you had the opportunity to talk to someone from your native country who was planning one to immigrate to America, what advice would you give them?

Beulah: I would tell them that, if they can, learn the language before they come, so that their lives would be much easier.

Miguel: If the president of the United States invited you to serve in an Immigration Committee, what suggestions would you give him to improve the immigration experience? What would you tell the president?

Beulah: I would tell him to speed up the process, why take so long, like for me to have a green card, 17 years.

Miguel: Any other suggestions you would give to the president?

Beulah: I don't know what else to say.

Miguel: OK. Let's talk about national identity. Do you see yourself as an America, or as a Nicaraguan, or both?

Beulah: Both. I have been living here half of my life.

Miguel: Do you think it is important to maintain your national identity?

Beulah: I think so.

Miguel: Why is that? Why do you think is important?

Beulah: Because I am a Hispanic and I feel proud of that.

Miguel: In what ways have you attempted to maintain that national identity? How do you maintain that?

Beulah: Keeping my culture, customs...

Miguel: As an immigrant living in the United States, what are your greatest challenges?

Beulah: Working for SRS, because before that I used to work here in Liberal at National Beef Packing Company. I worked there long time, for eleven years, now that I found this job...before I did not know how to use a computer, now I am learning how to use it. I am learning a lot of new skills. I am getting to know a lot of people from different countries. I am learning a lot from my coworkers.

Miguel: Do you think American education and society in general should foster bilingualism?

Beulah: That would help a lot, to have somebody who speak different languages.

Miguel: You are in favor?

Beulah: Yeah.

Miguel: Do you think that American law enforcement agencies should end the practice of racial profiling, if there is racial profiling? Should it end?

Beulah: Yes.

Miguel: In what ways, you think, American society could improve its treatment towards immigrants?

Beulah: I think that you treat us as equals, everybody here wants to improve their lives, have jobs, support the family, we are not any different.

Miguel: Do you think that American education and society has become more hospitable or less hospitable?

Beulah: I think more, little bit more than before.

Miguel: What makes you think that?

Beulah: For example...I don't know... at work I see they treat Hispanic people good, with respect, they treat everybody the same.

Miguel: Mrs. Rocha, is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience as an immigrant? Something that you like to add or say as an immigrant in Western Kansas?

Beulah: I am very happy to be over here. You come to this country you come to realize that you come to work and try to do your best, move forward, improve your life, respect every body, and respect your self.

Miguel: Anything else, Mrs. Rocha?

Beulah: That is what I need to say.

Miguel: Thank you very much.

Beulah: Thank you.