

# Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

## Interview with Esmeralda Gomez

\*(Name has been changed to protect identity.)

September 24, 2005

Interviewer Dora Ponce

*Dora: Good evening! Thank you for participating in this project of cultural diversity and immigration. We would like to know a little about yourself Esmeralda. What is your name?*

Esmeralda: My name is Esmeralda Mi nombre es Esmeralda Gomez

*Dora: What is your date of birth?*

Esmeralda: I born Nov. 28, 1966

*Dora: What is the place of your birth?*

Esmeralda: In Juan Aldama, Zacatecas. Mexico.

*Dora: What is your race or ethnicity?*

Esmeralda: I am Mexican

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

Esmeralda: I have nine brothers and sisters, like ten total.

*Dora: What are their age? Are they older or younger than you?*

Esmeralda: I have older and younger siblings

*Dora: Are your parents still alive?*

Esmeralda: Yes, they are still alive.

*Dora: What are their ages?*

Esmeralda: My father is 82 years old and my mother is 78 years old.

*Dora: Who among your family continues to live in your homeland?*

Esmeralda: Well...all my family lives there. I have a brother who is legal resident, and he is the one who comes here, but all my family lives there.

*Dora: What are the occupations of your family?*

Esmeralda: Most of the family studied.

*Dora: Most of them have a career?*

Esmeralda: Yes.

*Dora: What kind of careers do they have there?*

Esmeralda: My oldest sister is the principal of an elementary school. The sister that follows studied mathematics and she works at a technical school. The brother that follows is a teacher at an

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.

elementary school. Then, my brother who comes did not finish his studies. Two younger brothers; one recently got his bachelor's degree and the other one is almost graduating. And I also have a younger sister who began studying in college.

*Dora: Let's say that all in your family are professionals.*

Esmeralda: Yes.

*Dora: While living in your homeland, what was your occupation?*

Esmeralda: I always studied, and I always went to school.

*Dora: What did you study?*

Esmeralda: I went to Elementary and High School, and I went for one year to a technical school in Mexico.

*Dora: While living in your homeland, did you work in what you studied?*

Esmeralda: No.

*Dora: What were the living conditions like in your homeland?*

Esmeralda: A lot of poverty. There is a lot of poverty in Mexico and there are not many jobs.

*Dora: What was the socioeconomic status to which your family belong to?*

Esmeralda: No, my family was completely poor. My family has always studied through poverty.

*Dora: Meaning that a lot of sacrifices have been made to get ahead?*

Esmeralda: Yes.

*Dora: What is your religion?*

Esmeralda: Catholicism is the religion in which my parents raised me. All my family is Catholic.

*Dora: While living in your homeland, were you ever subjected to harassment physical and/or mental abuse, imprisonment, or torture by the authorities?*

Esmeralda: No.

*Dora: So, you didn't have any stressful experience?*

Esmeralda: No.

*Dora: Let's talk a little about your immigration trip? What was the first thing that you learned in the United States?*

Esmeralda: The first thing I learned in the United States was how to work.

*Dora: What led you to move to Southwest Kansas?*

Esmeralda: We realized that there were more job opportunities.

*Dora: So, you saw that there were more job opportunities. Would you please describe your immigration trip?*

Esmeralda: Well...that is indeed very sad. It is very sad to cross as an illegal.

*Dora: Did you struggle? Where did you cross...by the Rio Grande...? Through the desert?*

Esmeralda: My first trip was through a desert.

*Dora: How long did it take you?*

Esmeralda: It took us three days.

*Dora: Did you have enough food or water? How did you survive that time?*

Esmeralda: No well...we were thirsty and hungry for three days, and then we made it.

*Dora: Were you walking?*

Esmeralda: Yes...we were walking through the desert.

*Dora: From where did you cross?*

Esmeralda: I think it was through a desert of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico.

*Dora: How did you find employment in the United States?*

Esmeralda: Well...other people I knew helped me settle to work the first time I came in Fort Worth Texas, and the people I knew were the ones who guided me to a job.

*Dora: How did you find housing in America?*

Esmeralda: Well, it was a little hard, but I think that any other housing here is much better than in Mexico.

*Dora: What was the most difficult aspect of American society for you and how did adjust to it?*

Esmeralda: The most difficult aspect we have gone through is having the fear that we might be caught because it is not our country.

*Dora: What has been your experience with immigration and naturalization authorities?*

Esmeralda: Well no,...

*Dora: It has not been difficult?*

Esmeralda: No.

*Dora: What has been your experience with teachers and school officials in America?*

Esmeralda: I think that everything has been fine in that way. We like all the laws in here; the teacher's attention, I believe everything is fine....

*Dora: You have not had any problems with the teachers?*

Esmeralda: No.

*Dora: What has been your experience with police and other law enforcement agencies in America?*

Esmeralda: Well I think the police does everything right.

*Dora: Have you ever had a problem with the police?*

Esmeralda: No, I think everything has been OK.

*Dora: To what do you consider not having any problem with the police?*

Esmeralda: Well, that any police has ever arrested me.

*Dora: So, you have not committed any felonies? Is that what you mean?*

Esmeralda: Yes.

*Dora: Have you ever felt discriminated in some places by Americans? Have you ever experience occurrences of racism on the part of Americans toward you?*

Esmeralda: No.

*Dora: During the time that you have been in America, have you returned to your native land?*

Esmeralda: Yes.

*Dora: How often?*

Esmeralda: I do not remember exactly.

*Dora: How many times have you gone back to Mexico?*

Esmeralda: Just once.

*Dora: In what year did you come here in the United States?*

Esmeralda: I came here fifteen years ago, but I do not remember exactly the date.

*Dora: There is something that calls my attention, Esmeralda. You were candidates for the Amnesty, right.*

Esmeralda: We were here, but we were afraid to approach immigration.

*Dora: And that was the reason as to why you did not make the Amnesty to get legalized here in the United States?*

Esmeralda: My brother did apply. He was not afraid, and he did arrange his residence. We were afraid we did not want to get close.

*Dora: Well, I hope there will be another opportunity like the one we all had. Do you maintain contact with the people in your native land?*

Esmeralda: Yes.

*Dora: How did you stay in contact with them?*

Esmeralda: By phone.

*Dora: Do you send money back to your native country?*

Esmeralda: Only a little, sometimes.

*Dora: Do you think at some point in the future, you will return to your native land?*

Esmeralda: I would do everything as possible so that day would never arrive.

*Dora: Basically, you would not like to go back to Mexico? Why Esmeralda?*

Esmeralda: Because there are more possibilities here. There are more jobs, and in Mexico there is a lot of poverty, and above all, I already have my family here.

*Dora: How many children do you have Esmeralda?*

Esmeralda: I have four children, and two of these born here.

*Dora: What were your ideals and dreams about America?*

Esmeralda: My dream was, well...I think like everybody in Mexico, to obtain one day my residence and be able to work as to be able to give my children a better life.

*Dora: What do you like and dislike about American society?*

Esmeralda: Everything seems alright.

*Dora: What do you dislike? Is there anything you dislike?*

Esmeralda: No.

*Dora: What resources did you use to help you adjust to American Society?*

Esmeralda: I have tried to work, to get ahead, to not get in trouble with anybody, and to have a peaceful life.

*Dora: Do you feel more secure or less secure in America? Why?*

Esmeralda: I feel more insecure.

*Dora: Why Esmeralda?*

Esmeralda: With fear that they may find out that I am not a legal resident. That is my insecurity.

*Dora: Do you think the quality of life has improved? If so, in what ways?*

Esmeralda: Yes, a lot.

*Dora: In what aspects?*

Esmeralda: In all aspects. Economically in all its forms.

*Dora: Could you give more details? You mean...a house? Education? Are these the type of aspects you are referring to?*

Esmeralda: Yes, in our little house, there is better food and better dress.

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

Esmeralda: Yes.

*Dora: Why?*

Esmeralda: Because I think that a person, whether legal or illegal, should always know their reality of who the person is, and should always carry its identity. It is important to know where we came from and who we are.

*Dora: In what ways would you attempt to integrate into American society?*

Esmeralda: Learning how to speak English to be able to get along with Americans and also to learn their customs.

*Dora: Let say that in order to know the customs of Anglo-Saxons, in a given moment? Do you think you could change their customs a little, or do you think you could change your customs to theirs, and get used to?*

Esmeralda: Well, the customs of someone will always be carried out by principles, but I would try to get used to their customs and ideas.

*Dora: What has been your experience with language, religion, food, dress, and other customs in American society?*

Esmeralda: Well...

*Dora: What has been your experience with language?*

Esmeralda: It is sad not being able to communicate as I would like to.

*Dora: But, from what I know right now Esmeralda...you are going to school.*

Esmeralda: Yes, and I am working very hard.

*Dora: With religion?*

Esmeralda: Religion, I think it is the same everywhere, and I feel happy when I go to church which is Christian and Catholic. I believe it is the same God, and religions have nothing to do with it.

*Dora: What has been your experience with the food in the United States?*

Esmeralda: I even think the food is much better here, very different from the food in Mexico.

*Dora: The dress...that you mentioned...*

Esmeralda: We have received help and support from good people, and we have not struggle very much on that detail, which is the dress.

*Dora: As an immigrate living in the United States, what are your greatest challenges right now?*

Esmeralda: Now? From now and on my challenge is the illusion I've always had of becoming a legal resident and to be able to speak the language. This is the challenge I have right now.

*Dora: Why would you like that Esmeralda?*

Esmeralda: I think it would be the best and the nicest for my family.

*Dora: Do you think American society is becoming more hospitable or less hospitable to immigrants?*

Esmeralda: Yes.

*Dora: Esmeralda, I would like...it is not in the questionnaire, but I would like for you to talk to us a little about...I know that your husband is sick. I would like for you to talk to us about how the situation is right now with your husband.*

Esmeralda: Well, the situation with my husband is very sad, right now. Now, he has a job but he is not going very often. The illness of my husband is called Cirrhosis; a lot of people know this disease already. He is getting very thin. He has lost most of his hair, and he is getting sadder everyday, and very vile. He is completely getting thinner, and it is very sad to look how the person who has been my partner for many years is...

*Dora: And there has been more integration since the moment you were told that your husband had the illness.*

Esmeralda: Yes. We have been more united, more conscious, well...trying to deal with the situation.

*Dora: Well, we hope the best to you and your family, and we thank you for this interview. We should keep going and know that the opportunities will arrive.*

Esmeralda: First be God.