

Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

Interview with Fidencia Lambert

April 9, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

Miguel: Today we are going to interview Fide Lambert.

Fidencia: Correct.

Miguel: How do you spell your name?

Fidencia: F-I-D-E that's for my nickname and my legal name is Fidencia. F-I-D-E-N-C-I-A.

Miguel: Lambert?

Fidencia: Lambert. L-A-M-B-E-R-T.

Miguel: And Fide... People call you Fide?

Fidencia: Correct. The majority of the people have difficulty saying Fidencia so it's easier for them to call me Fide. Basically that's what they call me by.

Miguel: What is the date of your birth, Fide.

Fidencia: It is November 16, 1968.

Miguel: And what is your place of birth?

Fidencia: Paraguay South America. Paraguay.

Miguel: Paraguay. Where in Paraguay?

Fidencia: Asuncion

Miguel: Asuncion, the capital?

Fidencia: Correct.

Miguel: And what is your race or ethnicity Fide.

Fidencia: Well, pretty much if you are asking legally, I can call myself Heinz 57. A mix of everything, but other than that I consider myself Spanish or Latin American. One or the other it doesn't bother me either or.

Miguel: Latin American

Fidencia: Ah hum.

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

Fidencia: Well, we are six in my family with two brothers and four girls. Basically, hum, you want their ages?

Miguel: If you can.

Fidencia: My older sister is approximately 47 years old and then we can go down around a year and a half the second sister mine.

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: She'd be like forty-five?

Fidencia: Ya.

Miguel: Or something like that.

Fidencia: Forty-five and then (ask for clarification) Basically, I have the youngest sister named (inaudible information, ask for clarification)

Miguel: Second to the youngest.

Fidencia: The second to the youngest that is correct.

Miguel: Are your parents still alive?

Fidencia: No.

Miguel: No.

Fidencia: They deceased years ago.

Miguel: Both?

Fidencia: Both.

Miguel: Do you remember about what years they died?

Fidencia: Um. I believe let me figure it out. I guess if I was...my goodness if I was five years old that's probably what seventy...

Miguel: Around 1970?

Fidencia: Seventy some...

Miguel: Seventy-three

Fidencia: Seventy-three, or around there. They both got into a car wreck and they die immediately.

Miguel: Both at the same time?

Fidencia: Correct

Miguel: Um. Who among your family members continue to live in your home land Fide?

Fidencia: All of them.

Miguel: All of them?

Fidencia: All of them.

Miguel: Your brothers and sisters are still in Paraguay?

Fidencia: Yes.

Miguel: And when you lived in your country what was your occupation? Did you work?

Fidencia: Basically I guess you can call work I grew up with my uncle, which is also my Godfather. He basically adopted us, all of us after my parents passed away. And he is pretty well known in Paraguay. He worked for the government. He was the...pretty much the right hand of the president Stroessner and we grew up..

Miguel: Who was Stroessner?

Fidencia: Stroessner. He was the President. He was the right hand man, which is...um he was very close to him and we owned quite a good business and we go there basically to do...not really to work, but I guess you can call work.

Miguel: Um, okay. Did you work for a salary in Paraguay?

Fidencia: No.

Miguel: No?

Fidencia: No. Family Business.

Miguel: Family business.

Fidencia: Uh hu.

Miguel: And can you give us some kind of income your family had, pretty good or fair or

Fidencia: I would say because of the position of my uncle we .. I would say very high income.

Miguel: Okay. Would you tell me about your living conditions in your homeland? What was, what was your living conditions in Paraguay?

Fidencia: Well you are asking me to compare to the United States I would say much better. We had much more than we really needed, so we had swimming pools and hot tub and we call (inaudible) we have beautiful garden and a pretty good backyard, front yard and a patio and we have a (kinsho), which is were we would make (inaudible) for social purposes.

Miguel: Like a cook out.

Fidencia: Yes and if you ask me what was my lifestyle before leaving it was much better. Really.

Miguel: Okay. What is your religion Fide?

Fidencia: My religion is Catholic. As you notice in South America probably 80% is Catholic.

Miguel: While you were living in your native country were you ever subjected to harassment, or physical or mental abuse or imprisonment or torture by the authorities?

Fidencia: Um, no. Not really, threat perhaps to some other opponents to the government at that time due to my uncle relationship with the government perhaps threats, but other than that no, we pretty much had to watch out who we dealing with and where we go, basically.

Miguel: Let me get to the next set of questions. Uh, is there anything else you want to add about your life in Paraguay before you came.

Fidencia: I...

Miguel: You had a pretty good life.

Fidencia: I definitely, yes. I can't complain, very healthy lifestyle. Basically, If I'm going to describe I believe life was acceptable very much, like it is here.

Miguel: Okay, Let me ask you how did you first learn about the United States?

Fidencia: Good questions! My cousins were studying the swine breeder to become a veterinarian in my country and he decided to finish school in Paraguay and then do the internship in Kansas State University. And We..I at the time was a very young lady and I had the opportunity to travel along with them, using the opportunity. As soon as I graduated from high school they decided to do their continuing education with Kansas State and we were a few years and then they had to come to Liberal, which is to Kismet actually to do the physical internship, and that's basically how I ended up here.

Miguel: Okay. About how old were you when you first learned about the United States?

Fidencia: My goodness. Since the very first...ironically when I get upset with my family since the very first day of my life sine I have no mother or father like I would say, "Don't worry I will go to the United States and you will never have to deal with me any longer.

Miguel: But...

Fidencia: Very young, probably at the age of ten.

Miguel: Okay and you sorta told me why you moved to Southwest Kansas. It was because you were still with your cousins and they came to this part of the state.

Fidencia: Correct.

Miguel: When you first came to the United States, what can you tell us about your immigration trip?

Fidencia: Um. It was peaceful. We arrive in the International airport in Miami. From Miami to Kansas City from Kansas City a friend of ours which had been living in Kansas for a while pick us up and took us directly to Manhattan.

Miguel: When was that?

Fidencia: In 1986.

Miguel: 1986.

Fidencia: Yes.

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

Fidencia: Well, I didn't have to work right away because my uncle who is also my godfather support us all the way along. Basically he sent us amounts of money to survive with, and I beginning to go volunteering jobs. I beginning to wonder if English was my issue, because I was so much in anguish to learn English because I could not understand what people were saying. The fact of the truth is every time I go to a restaurant I have to ask for a hamburger and French fries because that's all I can say.

Miguel: That's all you can say.

Fidencia: For at least six months. So that's a very good question, and then I begin to volunteer in Manhattan, which is...there was a school, kinda like Kindergarten to Preschool which that call Montasary school and I begin to do volunteer works and also to the United Methodist...United...Mexican/America they offer groups, just group sessions to begin conversational English and that stuff and I was very active in it.

Miguel: But not necessarily there to work?

Fidencia: No.

Miguel: Okay. What were some of the most difficult adjustments that you had to make living in the American society?

Fidencia: Cultures. I was I feel very awful that you go to get to know a family, an American family and introducing you have to shake hands, not a kiss on the cheeks or hug as I was growing up. That's my culture and to me it was kinda like cold person. You know like, you know like most of yourself and you really want to hug them and give them the kiss on cheeks and you know nice to meet you, but you were prohibit from doing that.

Miguel: Ya.

Fidencia: So that was pretty shocking to me.

Miguel: What has been your experience with Immigration authorities?

Fidencia: Very good. Very good. Immigration has always I um...I travel with the kinda tourist visa and then every so often I have to renew, every six months and as long as I am not working anywhere so I'm making any incomes because of my uncle supporting us and they didn't really care to renew even though there was penalties or not that we have to pay to renew. They have always been very nice.

Miguel: You never had any problems?

Fidencia: No.

Miguel: What has been your experience with teachers and school officials in this country?

Fidencia: Whoa, good questions. That's a very appealing; some of them are very excellent. You can feel the energy right away good energy and emitting feeling and both the same way you can bump into some person that you don't really click it. It's some, some natural thing It's unexplainable really.

Miguel: Like a personality thing?

Fidencia: Yes. Attitudes and personalities.

Miguel: What has been your experience dealing with the police and other law enforcement agencies in this country?

Fidencia: Oh, good question. I work with them very close as an interpreter and translator, and often times I do not do that anymore do to my lack of time. I use to be called at three o'clock in the morning and interview suspects at the Liberal Police Station and that is a very touchy subject for me. What did you really want to know and I might have to be very careful what I say because I'm still involved with the Judicial system? So I can probably disclose some information not totally due to my job.

Miguel: So it could be compromised?

Fidencia: Exactly.

Miguel: And you work as the interpreter for the..

Fidencia: Ya. I work for the district court as an interpreter and translator. Often time we have to interview people suspect, for you know perhaps rapes, attempted murders or maybe even kidnapping and it is very, very touchy question of that. I mean I have a lot to say but I have to be very careful how I answer.

Miguel: Can you explain or describe any situations of racism towards you.

Fidencia: Towards me? Absolutely. Absolutely, I have...

Miguel: Absolutely yes or absolutely no.

Fidencia: Absolutely yes.

Miguel: Okay, can you tell me a little bit?

Fidencia: Yes. One day I was working at Wal-Mart I also work for Wal-Mart. And we have a little podium at the middle, front of the register and most of my work I do there. A customer approached me and d he say...we have behind the vest that we wear we put "how may I help you". Kinda like printed in big letter, so this man approached me personally perhaps middle age and he say "How may I help you", so of course I turn around and say "yes sir how can I help you", and he stated what do you have the magazines in this store and I say do you see the balloons down there or I can show the balloons. It's back under below the balloons and he replied back to me "let me have somebody who can really assist me in English. I think you just need to go back over the river to the "F"ing Mexico and that's really hurt. Really, really hurt. I mean they generalize, they treat you like dirt and they don't even know who you are, or what you do, or where you come from, they generalize so easy and it really hurt that's one of the incident. It happen many other time and co-workers as well. Co-workers as well. The comments and the energy, the attitudes, you can tell. Definitely.

Miguel: It happens.

Fidencia: Absolutely.

Miguel: Since the time you've been in the United States, have you been back to your native country?

Fidencia: Yes.

Miguel: Like how many times, how often have you been back?

Fidencia: Not very often because of my line of jobs. I really wish that I can go back every year, but because of the jury trial the judges are pretty much you know need my assistance. And compromising with my work, ethics is my issue. I would like to go back every year, but I have not been back home for three

years so it has been a while.

Miguel: And all of your brothers and sisters still live there right?

Fidencia: Absolutely. Ya, I am the only child who immigrated to a different country. In other words, (Spanish for black sheep). You know.

Miguel: Black Sheep.

Fidencia: Yes, black sheep.

Miguel: Do you keep in contact with people in your native country, and if so in what ways, how you keep in contact?

Fidencia: Yes. Since the internet is very handy and is no cost I contact my family a lot by email, basically communication is not really a problem cause the telephone is within fingertips so we correspond by phone call, emails, or even by the letters, also.

Miguel: By mail.

Fidencia: By mail. Correct.

Miguel: Do you send money back to your country?

Fidencia: Never have.

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

Fidencia: Yes, definite. As I get old and getting retired, absolutely.

Miguel: So you do think about going back eventually?

Fidencia: Yes. And there is some reason behind it. If you want me to explain it I would love to.

Miguel: I would like to hear that.

Fidencia: The reason why I say when I get older and retired I will go back home because I certainly do not believe in the senior citizens homes in America. In Paraguay, I do not know about other countries, in Paraguay we do not have (Spanish for nursing homes) which just means senior citizen...

Miguel: Nursing homes.

Fidencia: Nursing homes. A family always takes responsibility. Always there will be a family who will take responsibility of taking care of you whether you are sick or whether you are getting old and you are incapable of taking care of yourself. To us family is very important. In my culture, in anybody culture, I would, I would think I hope precisely in Paraguay you know, the majority of the people will take time and take care of their own family. And so that's why I say I will definitely go back to Paraguay because I will not like to be in the nursing.

Miguel: Thank you. We're going to move to the next set of questions in this and they are more open-ended questions. What do you like and dislike about American society

Fidencia: What do I like and what do I dislike?

Miguel: You... Yes, you already kinda told me a few samples but if you can expand a little bit more or add.

Fidencia: What I...let's go from the positive to the negatives because you know. I believe I like the American because the opportunity for anything if you want to strive for good there is a wide-open range for you; really there is endless opportunity. You don't have to be a politician; you don't have to be a person who is well known in the country. You have way more opportunity to get what you want to get or do what you want to do. So that's what I like about America. About dislike about America perhaps, my wish is that people...I wish people really take more...be more cautious of generalizing up to people who are immigrated from different country and the way they think about us. And I say us the international people you know. Including anybody

Miguel: Immigrants?

Fidencia: The immigrants, in general, in general it doesn't matter if you are Africa, South America, Central America I don't care where you are from. That would be my wish. That's what I dislike about it...the differences that people make.

Miguel: In what ways is this country similar or different from your country?

Fidencia: Similar, hum, good questions. Similar, technology is pretty much the same, lifestyle is the same, except culture is a different question. So, that's the similarities lifestyle is the same and education is pretty close, but differences I think is attitudes and culture wise like giving hugs and affection. It is I believe that American culture is more dry and cold toward each other in family. Family are kinda distance from one another.

Miguel: Well, in a way that answers the next question. What has been the most difficult aspect of American society for you and how have you adjusted to it?

Fidencia: Good question. I, I emphasized that people are kinda distant from people that's what I, it is hard for me to adjust, because as I stated earlier that to me I have to prohibit myself to hug a person because you know that's not part of their culture. And you kinda miss that and it's kinda hard for me. Foods, it is the one things I have to get slowly...I still have struggle when I go to a buffet and I see people serve up full their plate and they can no more. Those things are hard for me to adjust to.

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

Fidencia: Not really. Pretty much the same.

Miguel: You had a pretty good life in Paraguay.

Fidencia: I would think so, even though I grew up with out my parents. I'm very lucky.

Miguel: If you had the opportunity to talk someone from your culture planning to immigrant to America, what would you advise them?

Fidencia: I would certainly would advise them that they need to learn the language at least the basic knowledge of English. English is kinda hard to learn when you're already half way grown or just struggling here on a daily basis. So my advice to them is get to learn English.

Miguel: That's good advice. Let's move to the next set of questions about National identity, Fide. Do you think it is important to maintain your national identity?

Fidencia: Mix feeling on that. I would like to do that, but at the same token in my point of view is if this is where I'm going to be until the point I get retirement and I cannot vote, cannot run for any public position. I believe if you are, if your idea is to live here for a long time perhaps it would be important for you to become a US citizen. And I have candidate for many years, and I still thinking should I pass the coin, should I don't pass the coin you know I am here and I can work I can drive the car and all the stuff I get. It's the question of voting is important that people make that sure what you really want. That's my personal opinion.

Miguel: In what ways have you attempted to integrate into American society?

Fidencia: Good question. My husband is an American and I have no option to integrate with American society families and issues cultures wise. And I have to give in and he have to give in so it is interesting. It really is.

Miguel: What have you done?

Fidencia: What have I done? Changed my lifestyle basically. I mean be more blend. Give up my kissing and hugging on the cheeks. And when I go hello good morning, you know how's your day going I have to prohibit myself.

Miguel: No handshake or..

- Fidencia: No, not even handshake, not even a hug. When you are part of the family culture, American family it kinda prohibits you from doing that. I don't think they would be bothered by it but it's not their culture and I kinda feel like I'm doing this perhaps they are not really welcomed by them because it's not part of their culture so I have to, I have to give in quite a bit, Miguel. Believe me. Definitely.
- Miguel: What has been your experience with language, religion, food, dress and other customs in American society? I think we are a little bit redundant here but I'm wondering if we are missing something or if there's something you want to add about your experience with these topics: language, religion...*
- Fidencia: Language is definitely is quite interesting language, I do speak and writes five different languages and language is one of the most important things I have struggled with my accents because English is not my native language and I didn't speak any English up until I was almost 18 years of age so therefore English is....language is very tough for me because do to my accent people have to say What did you just say, I do not understand you. Like, for example I say "toyjoyta" and I'm thinking correctly and then say "Toyota" and they don't understand me so I have to be cautious about the language constantly.
- Miguel: Did you learn languages before you came?*
- Fidencia: No.
- Miguel: It wasn't till you came?*
- Fidencia: Not until I arrive here was interested in learning.
- Miguel: As an immigrant living in the United States what are your greatest challenges?*
- Fidencia: Greatest challenges...good deal. Telling daily business with people that perhaps will not accept you or accepting you. That would be my greatest challenge in learning the English Language. I still do until today.
- Miguel: Do you think that the American education and society in general should foster bilingualism?*
- Fidencia: No. Not precisely and I want to emphasize and let me clarify that for you. I believe that it will be okay for them to have available to them to learn the language they want to learn, whether it's Spanish, Portuguese, perhaps. Whatever language, but whether it should be mandatory I disagree cause I cannot believe and I cannot expect anyone walking in my country and saying you have to learn English because that's what we want to do. I, I totally disagree with that.
- Miguel: Okay, and do you think that American law enforcement agencies should end the practice of racial profiling?*
- Fidencia: Definitely. Absolutely they should end... they need to improve their work ethic and they really need to emphasize and treat people evenly and I have a lot of experience with that and I don't want to go by detail because I don't want to be compromised.
- Miguel: Do you think the American society is becoming more hospitable or less hospitable to immigrants?*
- Fidencia: Yes. The new generations, I believe perhaps they are more open to accepting international people, I mean immigrants. But you know again there is a mixed feeling about it. Up to in the legal fields perhaps since 9/11 they are pretty much tied and I have heard differing opinion. Like a lot of people who are in good position are making the wrong opinion in my point of view... so yes and no. Yes, is that the new generation are interacting more with the immigrants, but according to the old view point it's a different questions.
- Miguel: Okay. Is there anything else you want to add, to tell about your immigrant experience about your immigration, migration to Kansas, about your life in your native country? Anything you would like to add?*
- Fidencia: Not really. As I stated earlier there isn't very much differences in my lifestyle here or there, except the culture is totally different. I have to adjust to it and I'm still doing...trying to get use to it until today the day which is I believe is perhaps I never get use to it and totally to the American culture.

The kids asking...answering questions to their parents rude manner, perhaps using strong language, all that stuff. It really bother me. You know including cuss words they use to their parents....that really, really bothers me. Other than that I believe lifestyle is pretty much the same.

Miguel: Well, anything else?

Fidencia: Not really.

Miguel: Okay, thank you very much.

Fidencia: You are very welcome.