

# Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

## Interview with Fernanda Lujan

May 11, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

*Miguel: Good afternoon Fernanda.*

Fernanda: Good Afternoon.

*Miguel: We're going to go on with the interview and I'm going to start by asking you your name in the first place. What is your name?*

Fernanda: My name is Fernanda Lujan.

*Miguel: Fernanda Lujan and what is your date of birth, Fernanda?*

Fernanda: May 30, 1977

*Miguel: What is your place of birth?*

Fernanda: I was born in Durango Mexico.

*Miguel: Durango, Mexico; and what is your race or ethnicity?*

Fernanda: I am Mexican, Hispanic.

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

Fernanda: I have five sisters and one brother.

*Miguel: Yes.*

Fernanda: Ages I'm going to be bad on that.

*Miguel: That's OK.*

Fernanda: I'm the youngest one.

*Miguel: You're the youngest so it's a total of 7 siblings and you're the youngest?*

Fernanda: I'm the youngest.

*Miguel: OK. Are your parents still alive?*

Fernanda: They are still alive.

*Miguel: Both of them?*

Fernanda: Yes.

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

Fernanda: Aunts, uncles, cousins.

*Miguel: What about your siblings, brother and sisters?*

Fernanda: I have all my family here. I just have one sister in Dallas.

*Miguel: But the rest of your native family live here?*

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.

Fernanda: They live here in the United States.

*Miguel: In the United States back in Mexico is your aunts and uncles and cousins. Do you have any family, any relatives here in Liberal?*

Fernanda: Yes I have a lot of cousins.

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

Fernanda: I was a student I was very little when I came.

*Miguel: How old were you when you came to the United States?*

Fernanda: I was sixteen but we moved from our native country I mean I was living in Durango, Mexico for six years and I moved to Juarez when I was six. So we came here to the United States when I was sixteen.

*Miguel: From birth to six you lived in Durango, from six to sixteen you lived in Juarez, and after that you been in the United States. So you didn't get to work while you lived in Mexico?*

Fernanda: I was too little.

*Miguel: What were your living conditions like when you were back in Mexico? Can you tell us what your life was like, your living conditions?*

Fernanda: I was the youngest so probably to me I can say it was good, we had a very good conditions that now that I go back I realize that I was just spoiled, they were just getting me extra things that they shouldn't be giving me.

*Miguel: Do you want to say anything else about those times when you lived in Mexico?*

Fernanda: To me I mean I had everything I had everything that I could have we didn't have extra stuff but I have everything. I had food and clothing and I needed stuff my mom was working in Mexico and my father was here in the united states and my brother and sisters were also here in the United States. So I was living in Juarez and I had a good life.

*Miguel: Everything you needed.*

Fernanda: Everything I needed. I didn't have extra stuff. I didn't have stuff but I had everything I was needing.

*Miguel: What is your religion Fernanda?*

Fernanda: I am Catholic.

*Miguel: Catholic. Okay let me ask you this question. While you were living in your homeland back in Mexico were you ever subjected to harassment, or physical or mental abuse, or Imprisonment or torture by the authorities?*

Fernanda: Never.

*Miguel: You never suffered any persecution by the authorities or anything like that?*

Fernanda: No

*Miguel: Alright. Let's move to the next set of questions about the immigration experience. How did you first learn about America or the United States? What is your first memory about that?*

Fernanda: Well, my father, all my life that I can remember he was here in the United States. So I didn't know anything about the United States but I knew my father was away a long, long time. He was here since I remember. And the first time I can here it was just for vacations. I mean I came here when I was 13 and I wanted to stay but my mother won't let me I was too little and if you want to have a Quinceanera you have to come back cause I wanted to stay and go to school here and she wouldn't let me. But I wanted to have a Quinceanera since I was 13 and I went back to Mexico.

*Miguel: But since then you wanted to stay here in the United States?*

Fernanda: Yea. I wanted to stay and I say that one day I will go back I mean the stores were fascinating and I love stores and everything about it. I thought it was so much different. I just came for three months and I loved it.

*Miguel: You liked it?*

Fernanda: Yea.

*Miguel: What lead you to move to SW Kansas, Fernanda? Why...how did you end up in SW Kansas?*

Fernanda: Well, when I was 16 we were invited to a friend's Quinceañera that I met here when I was 13. We just came for a Quinceañera and it was a time that we didn't want to go back and my mom and my sister, we came also. I mean my father was here my brother and a sister I had living here in Liberal, Kansas and we just came for a Quinceañera, that's it. I mean we didn't plan, I mean we didn't plan it. My sister she didn't bring me many clothes because she was busy packing hers. So I had so little clothes but I didn't want to go back.

*Miguel: So you came because you and your family had friends here?*

Fernanda: Friends and family yes.

*Miguel: in Liberal? And relatives here?*

Fernanda: Yes.

*Miguel: Is this where your father lived when you still lived in Juarez?*

Fernanda: Yes.

*Miguel: He lived here in Liberal?*

Fernanda: He lived here.

*Miguel: What did he do? Where did he work?*

Fernanda: He was working at National Beef.

*Miguel: At National?*

Fernanda: He was working at National Beef.

*Miguel: Can you tell us or describe your immigration trip when you moved to Kansas. What do you remember about that trip? One thing you said is that your sister didn't pack any clothes for you, right?*

Fernanda: She didn't. She didn't.

*Miguel: Uh, huh.*

Fernanda: I mean it was... I was excited. I was excited my...we were coming to the United States and I was wanted to be here all the time after we went back to Mexico and we had a passport at that time and we just went in and asked permission...

*Miguel: Uh, hum.*

Fernanda: To come. We got a passport or permit to come here and my father he thought that he was going to Mexico to try to fix all that and we everything ready...everything packed, everything I mean the passport and everything ready and all that so he didn't have a way to say, "no, you guys are not going" because we had everything ready.

*Miguel: And, when you came at that time did you know that you were going to stay...did you know that you were coming to stay?*

Fernanda: No.

*Miguel: No?*

Fernanda: I mean I...that was my plan, not my mom's plan.

*Miguel: You wanted to stay?*

Fernanda: I wanted to stay but my mom was not all the time to us, because we kept telling my mom that we were going to stay and she kept telling us that we were leaving...we had to go.

*Miguel: She didn't want to stay.*

Fernanda: She didn't want to stay, I mean she still remembers and she gets mad at us. I mean we stayed and she didn't want to stay. I mean when we got here we used to live in an apartment and I mean it was like nine people in one tiny apartment and that apartment, I mean it was not very nice...it was not very nice. It was not nice having all the people living in one....

*Miguel: And that's when you came here?*

Fernanda: That's when I came here and we stayed there probably three months and then my father bought a house so it was a better place.

*Miguel: How did you find your first job here in America?*

Fernanda: How I found my job, my first job?

*Miguel: Yes.*

Fernanda: I was probably 17, I was working at Golden Corral.

*Miguel: At the Golden Corral?*

Fernanda: Yes and I was doing different...I started out as a dishwasher. I was a dishwasher for probably a year and I was going to school at that time and I didn't, I didn't think I knew enough English. I knew how to write but I didn't understand at the school they didn't let me talk. If you don't know how to speak English you need to stay quiet. That's what the teacher use to tell us.

*Miguel: Really?*

Fernanda: Yes. I mean I couldn't talk...if I talk the rest of kids would laugh so I just stayed quiet all of the time, and that's when I started to get to know a little bit how to speak and how to listen to the language.

*Miguel: But at school the teacher would tell you that if you didn't know English you better not talk?*

Fernanda: I mean it was a huge class, I mean it was the ESL class and we had a lot of students. It was big, they had a lot of students. They were just talking all the time and one way you could get away with it...you could speak English. Probably she was doing it just to get us to learn it, but I didn't take it that way. It hurt me because I couldn't learn anything.

*Miguel: And you said you came to live in a small apartment and shortly after that your father bought a house?*

Fernanda: Yes.

*Miguel: For your family. What were some of the most difficult adjustments you had to make living in the American society Fernanda?*

Fernanda: I think just the language...the language because everything else I love to be here and not much else to adjust to...

*Miguel: And what has been your experience with the immigration and naturalization authorities within the immigration department? What has been your experience with that?*

Fernanda: To me it's been good. When I came here I had a passport and after that my father fixed the papers so now we are here legally. But I mean, it has been good to us.

*Miguel: You never had any problems with immigration? Okay and what has been your experience with*

*teachers and school officials here in the United States?*

Fernanda: Um, it school it was not the same. I didn't have any friends because when you came here you are the new kid and you don't know how to speak English. It was just a little group, a little group that it was probably 7 to 12 people. But, but we started at the eight pace, that's what it was called the Pace program. I mean my teacher it was Mrs. Gardener and Mrs. Romero they were very good to us. It was one day class, I mean they helped us a lot and then after that they sent us to another class and that's the one were you couldn't talk.

*Miguel: You couldn't talk because you didn't speak English?*

Fernanda: Yes, I was learning, but you know it was a good class, but I don't think I learned everything from that class and then we start moving on to other classes and I wasn't getting everything that I was needing because I couldn't talk.

*Miguel: Okay, what has been your experience with police and other law enforcement agencies in this country?*

Fernanda: I have never had a problem with them.

*Miguel: Can you describe any occurrences of racism on the part of Americans towards you?*

Fernanda: I can see there is a lot, a lot of racism here in the United States. I haven't had any towards me but I have towards other people.

*Miguel: How? Can you describe one or two situations where you have seen it?*

Fernanda: Um, at a doctor's office. If they don't speak English they have to wait longer, they have to wait longer if they don't have an interpreter. I mean they just have to wait longer.

*Miguel: During the time that you have been here in the United States have to ever returned to your native country and if so when and how often?*

Fernanda: When I first came here, probably when I was 18 I use to go back to Juarez every, probably every other month. We went back every other month.

*Miguel: So you've been back several times.*

Fernanda: To Juarez yes, not to Durango. I haven't been back to Durango since I was 14, but after that we've been back to Juarez 20 times.

*Miguel: Do you maintain contact with people in your native country, family, and friends?*

Fernanda: Um, no. Whenever my aunts or cousins can we see each other but other than that no.

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

Fernanda: No.

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

Fernanda: No.

*Miguel: Why not?*

Fernanda: Um...

*Miguel: You wouldn't go back to Mexico in the future?*

Fernanda: In the future, I'm not thinking right now to move back, because right now I have my kids here and I don't think they would want to go back. We would like to visit sometimes but not to leave America. I wouldn't have any future in Mexico.

*Miguel: You would have any future there. Okay, let's go to expectations and reality. What do you like and dislike about American society? What is what you like and dislike about the society Fernanda?*

Fernanda: American society is very...you cannot adjust very easily to American society but I can see a lot of things wrong...of course other people came here.

*Miguel: You wrote here discrimination.*

Fernanda: Discrimination is one of the things I mean I can see where sometimes we are not treated equal.

*Miguel: So one of the things you like is that people can get adjusted very easily.*

Fernanda: Yes. We have a future here, if we wanted to live here, but I mean we can have a good future here, but discrimination is one of the things that I can see...

*Miguel: That you don't like about the society?*

Fernanda: I don't like it.

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

Fernanda: I feel free. I mean I feel free in Mexico and I feel free here.

*Miguel: That's similar. You feel free in both countries, and in what ways would both countries be different? In your own perception, in your own words.*

Fernanda: The law. I feel more secure in the United States than I would in Mexico because of the law.

*Miguel: Okay. What was the easiest aspect of American society to adjust to for you?*

Fernanda: The easiest.

*Miguel: The easiest way or the easiest aspect of American society to adjust? What has been easier for you adjust since you've been here?*

Fernanda: Well, I've always wanted to be here so it's been very easy for me.

*Miguel: In general why has it been easy?*

Fernanda: It has been so much better. I have more things like, um, probably money wise that I would not even have in Mexico.

*Miguel: There is a question here that you circled that you feel more secure or less secure in America and why. You've already answered this question you feel more secure here in this country. What makes it be more secure for you?*

Fernanda: What makes it more secure? Because of the law, I mean here in the United States I have the opportunity to feel more secure because they are not as corrupt as in Mexico. In Mexico right now there has been a lot of corruption that Mexico is suffering.

*Miguel: Alright. Do you think the quality of your life has improved since you came?*

Fernanda: Yes.

*Miguel: In what ways?*

Fernanda: Um, in Mexico probably I mean only went to the ninth grade. In Mexico probably that would be my end of my schooling. I mean here I had the opportunity to go to college and to do what I want to do, what I want to do.

*Miguel: To further your education?*

Fernanda: Towards my education.

*Miguel: Let's ask about national identity. Do you see yourself as an American or as a Mexican or both?*

Fernanda: I see myself as Mexican. I am Mexican one hundred percent and I feel Mexican and I love to be here but I'm still Mexican.

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

Fernanda: Yes. I think it is very important, um...

*Miguel: Why?*

Fernanda: My family we are all Mexican and I think it is very important just to continue being Mexicans. When my sons, I want my sons...my sons to be proud of us because we are Mexicans, even though they are Mexicans

*Miguel: They were not born in Mexico.*

Fernanda: They were not born in Mexico.

*Miguel: But they are your children?*

Fernanda: They are my children and they have to be proud of who we are.

*Miguel: And in what ways have you attempted to integrate into American society?*

Fernanda: Um, education I think is very important to get accomplishments and we should continue education.

*Miguel: Through education, that's how you tried to integrate? What has been your experience with language, religion, food, and other customs in American society?*

Fernanda: With religion. I think it is in Mexico most of the people are Catholics and here you can see a variety of religions. Language is the same. I mean. Books in Spanish and you come here and it's like hard languages it's different it's hard to understand a lot of them. And it wasn't fun when I came here because I could not speak. I didn't know a word in English. It was not fun, really I couldn't go out or anything because I couldn't talk not even to eat.

*Miguel: Is there anything else you want to say or anything else you want to add about your experience being an immigrant to SW Kansas? Is there something you would like to say?*

Fernanda: I'm just trying real hard to adjust to this country cause I'm here to stay in this country.

*Miguel: If you knew someone planning to immigrant to the United States, what advice would you give them? What would you tell them before they came?*

Fernanda: I would like them, it's harder here, whenever we are in Mexico we just think oh they are making big buck they are making the money over there. I mean every penny that we have right now we work hard. It's not easy, it's not easy and it's hard to adjust, but if they have a strong will...

*Miguel: They can.*

Fernanda: They can do it. We can do it. I mean if we can do it.

*Miguel: Life is not easy because you are in the United States doesn't mean you're going to get everything.*

Fernanda: Everything, no. No it is hard to be here and we just have it harder sometimes than others.

*Miguel: Okay, is there anything else you want to add Fernanda?*

Fernanda: No, I just want to thank you.

*Miguel: Thank you very much for your time and sharing for your experience.*