

# Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

## Interview with Jose Flores

November 19, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

*Miguel: Can you tell me what is your name?*

Jose: Jose Flores.

*Miguel: What is your date of birth?*

Jose: 12-10-52.

*Miguel: What is your place of birth?*

Jose: In Laguna Grande, Zacatecas, Mexico.

*Miguel: What is your race or ethnic group?*

Jose: Mestizo. Hispanic.

*Miguel: What does Mestizo mean?*

Jose: Mestizo is the breed between Europeans and the Indians from Mexico.

*Miguel: You consider yourself as a Mestizo?*

Jose: That's what my birth papers say.

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

Jose: I have two sisters of possibly 49 or 46 and five brothers, 63, 57, 51, 46, and 40.

*Miguel: Are your parents still alive?*

Jose: Yes, both of them.

*Miguel: Where do they live?*

Jose: In California.

*Miguel: Among your family members, who still continues to live in your country?*

Jose: Nobody.

*Miguel: Everybody is in the United States?*

Jose: Everybody is in the United States.

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

Jose: I was a student.

*Miguel: Did you ever work before immigrating to the United States?*

Jose: No.

*Miguel: Can you tell me about your living conditions in your country before you immigrated to the United*

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.

*States?*

Jose: Somehow better than the ones I have now.

*Miguel: Why is that, Mr. Flores?*

Jose: Because I didn't have to worry about anything. I didn't have to pay bills. I didn't have to pay taxes. Everything was provided by my parents.

*Miguel: Anything else you would like to say about your living conditions before immigrating?*

Jose: Everything was normal and good.

*Miguel: What is your religion?*

Jose: Catholic, supposedly.

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

Jose: None of that.

*Miguel: Let's talk about your experience as an immigrant. How did you first hear about the United States? What is your earliest memory about this country?*

Jose: What I remember is that my father used to come during the time of the braceros, and he would go back to Mexico, and every time the trip was always to the north.

*Miguel: Do you know to what regions of the United States he went to work?*

Jose: I know that he went to California, he went to Kansas because he was working on the railroad tracks. And he worked in California in the agriculture fields.

*Miguel: What years are we talking about?*

Jose: 1954, 55, or 56.

*Miguel: You learned about the United States because your father used to come as a migrant worker?*

Jose: Correct.

*Miguel: What motivated you to come to settle in Southwest Kansas?*

Jose: The reason was trying to find a small place similar to the one I grew up so that my family would be in a better condition. I am referring to education, away from gangs.

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

Jose: I was fourteen years old.

*Miguel: Where did you go to live?*

Jose: In east LA.

*Miguel: And later you came to Kansas?*

Jose: That's correct.

*Miguel: When did you come to Kansas?*

Jose: On 02-14-1987.

*Miguel: You were looking for a small place and trying to move away from the big city.*

Jose: Correct.

*Miguel: When you immigrated to the United States at age fourteen, do you remember that trip?*

Jose: Yes, I do.

*Miguel: What can you tell me about that trip?*

Jose: My experience was that after we crossed the border, the roads were wide. The grass on the gardens was very green. Everything was very clean.

*Miguel: How did you cross through Immigration? Did you have any problems? Did you come through Immigration inspection or not?*

Jose: Of course, yes. The first thing was to show our documents at the Immigration office.

*Miguel: Did you come to study or work when you immigrated?*

Jose: To study.

*Miguel: What language did you speak at home when you were a child?*

Jose: Spanish.

*Miguel: How did you find your first job in this country?*

Jose: I was a student at high school. I worked at a Mexican deli.

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

Jose: My parents were already living in East LA in a house much smaller than the one we were used to. Possibly four or five times smaller.

*Miguel: They immigrated first, and then you came later?*

Jose: That's correct.

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

Jose: In reality there has not been any difficult adjustments. Everything has been normal.

*Miguel: What has been your experience with Immigration and Naturalization Authorities?*

Jose: None.

*Miguel: What has been your experience as far as teachers and schools in this country?*

Jose: I may say that it has been good. The teachers do their jobs, and the schools provide more than they should.

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

Jose: Only in those times that I have made a report or when there have been situations in which it was necessary for the law to intervene.

*Miguel: That experience has been positive or negative?*

Jose: Up to this point I think that everything has been negative.

*Miguel: Can you explain more why it has been a negative experience?*

Jose: It has been negative because the people they have as police officers are people who are not trained to fill those positions. They only do it to get a salary. In reference to the system, it is a system of friends in which if you know somebody in the system you have a better possibility of getting ahead with your problem or if you have the money.

*Miguel: Have you ever suffered from discrimination or racism from the part of the Americans towards you?*

Jose: Not openly, but it does exist. For example, in work situations. When I first came to Kansas I took the test for the postal service, and the results of my test were good, plus in addition to that I got points for

being a Vietnam veteran, and they never called me. They gave the job to somebody else with less points. I think that is racism.

*Miguel: You served in the Armed Forces of the United States?*

Jose: That is correct.

*Miguel: How long did you serve in the Armed Forces?*

Jose: Three years.

*Miguel: And what was your experience as an immigrant or as a Hispanic with the army?*

Jose: The same as any other soldier. There is the opportunity to get a paycheck. There is the opportunity to see places. It is the same system in which the person who has the power is the one who has the control without regards to whether things are just or not.

*Miguel: During the time that you have been in the United States, have you had opportunity to go back to your native country? How often do you visit your country?*

Jose: It has been only a few times. Last time it was about four years ago.

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

Jose: No.

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

Jose: No.

*Miguel: Do you think that in the future you would go back permanently to your country?*

Jose: That has been always my dream, to go back to die. Since we were born, that has been always the dream.

*Miguel: We are going to talk about expectations and dreams. When you came to the United States, what were your ideals or your dreams about this country?*

Jose: I did not have any ideals. My family brought me. My idea was to come and see and go back to Mexico.

*Miguel: What do you like or dislike about American society?*

Jose: It is a society like any other with the only difference is we have more access to commodities, more money. The society depends totally from the media, and the advertisement, that has a lot of influence. They are the ones who control all the people of the United States to the point that people live beyond their means, and there is more poverty.

*Miguel: In what ways is the United States similar or different to your own country?*

Jose: It is very different in a way that here they forget about the meaning of family, and the family connections finish very quick. Looks like at eighteen the kids become totally independent. And the family connections are not as close as it is in Mexico. In Mexico the family is more united.

*Miguel: Is there any way in which your country is similar to the United States?*

Jose: I don't think so, and I hope not. Like Porfirio Diaz said, "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States."

*Miguel: What does that mean, Mr. Flores?*

Jose: That means that in reality Mexico cannot and is not free, never, because of the influence of North America, the United States. And in reality no country is free because they all are controlled by this country.

*Miguel: Do you feel more safe or less safe in this country?*

Jose: Depends on what place we are talking about. For example, talking about the place where I was born, I would feel much safer, but if we were in some cities of Mexico, I would feel unsafe.

*Miguel: How do you feel here in the United States?*

Jose: Right where I am now, I feel safe. If I travel to a big city I don't feel as safe.

*Miguel: Do you think that the quality of life improved since you immigrated to the United States?*

Jose: Definitely not. I think it has been the opposite.

*Miguel: Why do you say that, Mr. Flores?*

Jose: Well, I am going to repeat the same thing. We had a bigger home, much bigger than the one where we lived here in the United States. Back then there was no electricity, and we didn't have to pay that bill. We didn't have communication by telephone, and we didn't have that problem either. Our entertainment was not about spending money. It was about going to the countryside, set up a fire, and make barbecue. All the families together, and if somebody killed a pig or a cow everybody in town would eat out of that. Here it is to the contrary. Everybody to themselves. Here it is a life totally overwhelmed by bills, payments of everything.

*Miguel: If you had the opportunity to talk to someone from your country thinking about immigrating to the United States, what advice would you give them?*

Jose: It would depend on what condition they were. If they had no job or they had no food, I would tell them to come to the United States if there was no other way. But if they had a way of living or work, I would tell them to stay where they are.

*Miguel: If the President of the United States invited you to serve on an immigration committee, what suggestions would you give him to improve the immigrant experience?*

Jose: Probably I wouldn't tell him anything because most likely he would have to improve the conditions to everybody, not just the immigrants. The lower class in the United States, the ones who don't have health insurance, the ones who work to barely survive.

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

Jose: Since the very same moment in which I served in the Armed Forces of the United States I consider myself as both. There was a situation about three or four years ago in which a friend of mine invited me to watch a football game between Mexico and the United States. He was going to pay my expenses, my hotel, and he was going to buy my ticket, but I refused because I was not sure on what side I was going to sit.

*Miguel: Do you consider yourself from both nationalities? Do you think it is important to maintain your national identity in this case as a Mexican?*

Jose: I think we should not forget where we came from and who we are because if we lose our identity, we lose everything. We become a robot. We should not forget where we came from, but at the same time we should adapt ourselves to the environment and the society where we live now.

*Miguel: In what ways have you attempted to maintain your national identity?*

Jose: The question is a little bit confusing, but I continue being the same person that I have always been. I do not change my values. They remain the same.

*Miguel: As an immigrant living the United States, what are your challenges now?*

Jose: I don't think there is any challenge. I think that the situation is the same for an immigrant and for a person who does not have the means and is trying to survive day by day.

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

Jose: Definitely not.

*Miguel: Why?*

Jose: Because why would they have to do it? I am answering with another question. If we are here in the United States, what all the immigrants should do is learn the language, and that would prevent racism and that kind of feeling and/or resentment.

*Miguel: But if people drop their native language they would be giving up some of their identity?*

Jose: They would not lose it because I have not lost it.

*Miguel: Do you think police should end the practice of racial profiling?*

Jose: Yes, it should. But that is not going to happen. It is a practice not because it is about the police but because we are human beings.

*Miguel: What do you mean by that?*

Jose: I mean that human beings have tendencies and are afraid of the unknown. We fear what we don't know.

*Miguel: In what ways do you think that American society should improve its treatment towards immigrants?*

Jose: The only way this can happen is that immigrants adapt themselves to the American society.

*Miguel: Do you think that American society has become more hospitable or less hospitable towards immigrants?*

Jose: There is a little bit of everything depending on what region you are.

*Miguel: Is there anything else, Mr. Flores, that you would like to mention or add in your experience as an immigrant to Southwest Kansas?*

Jose: I think that is all.

*Miguel: Thank you very much.*