

Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

Interview with Manuela Rosales

September 25, 2005

Interviewer Dora Ponce

Dora: Good afternoon! Thank you for being here this afternoon with us.

Manuela: You're welcome.

Dora: We would like to know a little about yourself and the points of view that you may have. What is your name?

Manuela: Manuela Rosales

Dora: What is your date of birth?

Manuela: March 13, 1966

Dora: What is the place of your birth?

Manuela: I was born in Rancho El Cura, in Zacatecas, Mexico.

Dora: What is your race/ethnicity?

Manuela: Mexican

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

Manuela: We are eight in total; four sisters and four brothers.

Dora: Are they older or younger than you?

Manuela: Younger. I am the oldest

Dora: Are your parents still alive?

Manuela: Yes

Dora: What are their names?

Manuela: My father's name is Guadalupe Camacho and my mother's name is Ofelia Herrera.

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

Manuela: My parents.

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

Manuela: Just at home.

Dora: So, you didn't have a salary?

Manuela: No.

Dora: What was your living conditions like in your homeland?

Manuela: Well, very different.

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.

Dora: How so?

Manuela: Well cause there aren't any jobs over there. There's only house work and farm work. If we had crops it was fine, but if not, we had to adjust to what we had.

Dora: What is your religion?

Manuela: Catholic

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

Manuela: No...no

Dora: What did your first learn in America?

Manuela: I learned to work and to economically support myself

Dora: What led you to move to Southwest Kansas? Did you have any relatives here who may have invited you? Or, did you come to try luck?

Manuela: We came to try luck

Dora: Would you please describe your immigration trip?

Manuela: Well it was very hard because we cross the river, my husband, my daughter Erica and me. We cross the river and it reached us until our necks. It was very hard.

Dora: Would you like to add something more to your experience?

Manuela: Well..., It took eight days for us to get here. We would walk some miles and then, we would stay...and then start walking again.

Dora: It was hard.

Manuela: Yes. We were hungry and tired, it was really hard.

Dora: How did you find employment in America?

Manuela: I didn't work in the beginning, my husband did. I had three children, and then I got a work at the National (Beef, Inc.).

Dora: How did you find housing here in the United States?

Manuela: Well...fine

Dora: It wasn't hard for you?

Manuela: Yes, it was difficult at the beginning, since we couldn't get credit loans. We were renting.

Dora: And now, you own your house and your credit has been established?

Manuela: Yes. Thanks to God.

Dora: What were some of the most difficult adjustments you had to make living in American society?

Manuela: To adjust? Well, it is not very difficult to adjust here, when one has everything...a house...etc. .

Dora: Was it difficult at the beginning?

Manuela: Yes, it was...as one has to work for everything.

Dora: I am going to add something else.

Manuela: Yes

Dora: Did you have any relatives when you first came here?

Manuela: Yes, we had. My husband had some brothers.

Dora: So, you had some secure place when you came?

Manuela: Yes

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

Manuela: Well our experience..I think we did not have any problems as we arranged our papers through the amnesty.

Dora: So, you have not had any problems with immigration?

Manuela: No

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

Manuela: Fine until now. We have not had any problems..

Dora: Your kids behave...

Manuela: (Laughs) Yes!

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

Manuela: Until now, also fine, thanks to God..

Dora: Would you describe occurrences of racism on the part of Americans toward you?

Manuela: Yes, some times, there occasions in that yes, it happens...

Dora: What do you do in those occasions?

Manuela: I ignore those racist attitudes...I know that we are in a country that is not ours. Right?

Dora: During the time that you have been in America, have you returned to your native land? If so, when and how often?

Manuela: Yes

Dora: How frequently?

Manuela: We would go once a year at the beginning after becoming residents. But now, it has been five years since our last visit.

Dora: Do you maintain contact with people in your native land?

Manuela: Yes

Dora: Who are they?

Manuela: Mmm, my parents and relatives. My grandmother lives there and my husband has a brother living there too, and also other relatives in general.

Dora: So, all the extended family?

Manuela: Yes

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

Manuela: I send money to my parents sometimes.

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

Manuela: Well, I think we are going to go back when we get old.

Dora: What were some of the most difficult adjustments you had to make living in American society?

Manuela: The hardest has been not being able to speak English.

Dora: It is the most difficult?

Manuela: Yes

Dora: What was the easiest aspect of American society to adjust to for you?

Manuela: That there is a lot of work, and one can support the family and oneself.

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

Manuela: I feel more secured in one hand. First, I feel more secure with the doctors and at the hospitals. We would live in a ranch and having to get to a hospital was very difficult. If a serious illness would occur, maybe we would not get on time.

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

Manuela: Yes, it has improved.

Dora: In what way?

Manuela: I get what I need by having a job and working.

Dora: If you had the opportunity to talk to someone from your homeland who was planning to immigrate to America, what advise would you give them?

Manuela: I would tell them to come. My brothers and sisters are here because I would see them with necessity and they would call me and ask me I if there was an opportunity to come, and yes..there was. We have helped all of them, and here they are.

Dora: Is the majority of your siblings legal?

Manuela: Yes, the majority is legal.

Dora: We were commenting about you wanting to become a US citizen.

Manuela: Yes, first I want to be able to speak English, this has been the most while living in the US.

Dora: Do you see yourself as an American or the nationality of your country of origin or both?

Manuela: Well...I feel Mexican.

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

Manuela: Well...I would need to speak English to integrate to it.

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

Manuela: First, the language is very difficult.

Dora: Religion?

Manuela: Well...no because there are people with my same religion.

Dora: And the food?

Manuela: Yes, at the beginning the food. It also took time for me to adapt to the food, to the milk, everything...the flavors are very different.

Dora: Dress?

Manuela: No

Dora: Other customs in this society?

Manuela: No

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

Manuela: To pay my house, to not have any debts, to become a US citizen.

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

Manuela: Yes in some places.

Dora: In what places?

Manuela: Well in some occupations. For instance, we go to some doctors, and there isn't anyone who speaks Spanish.

Dora: And that is a barrier...

Manuela: Yes, but there are some other places where one does not struggle. .

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

Manuela: When I arrived here to the United States twenty years ago, it was more difficult, and now I see that they are more hospitable.

Dora: In what way was it more difficult for you as people were less hospitable?

Manuela: Well...when I came most Americans would not talk to us and they ignored us. When we would go shopping, we would have to take a dirt road as if we were seen, many times they reported us, and they would also call the police. But now, I see that there are many Mexicans, and the Americans are more used to us.

Dora: Do you think is becoming more beneficial that Hispanics are coming here?

Manuela: Yes, I think so because I have seen people coming here, and they have not suffered as we did at the beginning.

Dora: Thank you very much for sharing your experience with us. We wish you the best.

Manuela: Ok then...thank you.