

# Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

## Interview with Maria Goretti Salazar

November 19, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

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

Maria: My name is Maria Goretti Salazar.

*Miguel: And what is your date of birth?*

Maria: March 6, 1965.

*Miguel: What is your place of birth, Maria?*

Maria: The little town of Tepetongo, Zacatecas, Mexico.

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

Maria: Hispanic, Mexican.

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

Maria: I have one brother, he is 39, and my little sister is 17.

*Miguel: Are your parents still alive?*

Maria: Yes.

*Miguel: Where do they live?*

Maria: In Mexico, in Jerez, Zacatecas.

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

Maria: Right now my parents, my brother, and my little sister.

*Miguel: When you lived in your country, did you have an occupation? Did you work?*

Maria: I was born there. When I was eight years old we came to the United States. At fourteen, before I turned fifteen, we went back, and I had to repeat secondary school. Then I got married. I went to high school and then I got married. Then we came back to the United States right away. And after I got married, five years later, we went back [to Mexico]. And we started a business.

*Miguel: You were born in Mexico, immigrated to the United States at age eight, then at fourteen you went back to Mexico, and you came back to the United States. How old were you then?*

Maria: 21-years-old.

*Miguel: Since you turned twenty-one, have you been back to live in Mexico, or you stayed permanently in the United States?*

Maria: At age around twenty-five, we went back to Mexico. My children were born here, and we went back to work and for my children to grow up close to our family.

*Miguel: From those times when you lived in Mexico, you worked there?*

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.

Maria: Yes.

*Miguel: And what was your salary, weekly or monthly? What type of income did you have?*

Maria: We started a small business, and our salary was very variable. We started from the beginning from zero. Our salary was close to nothing. Let's say that talking in dollars probably about \$100 a week.

*Miguel: When you lived in your country or those times when you lived in your country, what was your living conditions? For example, if you can tell me before the first time you came to the United States, what were your living conditions?*

Maria: We lived stable but what happened was that my father was in charge of all his siblings, and the crisis hit so hard, and he was like the head of the family, and he started acquiring debt and more debt.

*Miguel: What was your father's occupation?*

Maria: He was a merchant and a cattleman.

*Miguel: What is your religion, Maria?*

Maria: Catholic.

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

Maria: No.

*Miguel: Let's talk about your experience as an immigrant. How did you learn for the first time about the United States?*

Maria: Since I was little I always said that I wanted to come to the United States, and I would speak thinking that I was speaking in English because I saw my friends that they were all nicely dressed, and I would say that I wanted to talk like them. I wanted to dress like them.

*Miguel: What brought you to reside in Southwest Kansas?*

Maria: The earnings we were getting when we lived in Mexico were so little, and we saw the possibility of coming over, and we had a friend who told us that in less than a week we would be able to be working. And that is how it happened. We came here because of the job.

*Miguel: When you immigrated for the first time at age eight, where did your family live? Where did you go to?*

Maria: In California.

*Miguel: Then at fourteen you went back to Mexico. When you came back the next time, where did you go?*

Maria: We went to a little town called Jerez, Zacatecas in Mexico, and I went to school there. I had finished middle school already here, but because supposedly they were ahead in school over there [in Mexico], they sent me back to sixth grade. I had to finish sixth grade in middle school. When I finished middle school and my father was looking at the situation, and he opened a business for me. I was about sixteen, and I was in charge of this business.

*Miguel: When did you come to Southwest Kansas?*

Maria: 1995.

*Miguel: The reason was because there was work here at the packing plant. You came with your husband and your children?*

Maria: Yes.

*Miguel: Do you remember your first trip at age eight when you immigrated for the first time to the United States? Do you remember that trip?*

Maria: Yes.

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

Maria: We came on the bus. I remember that we only had very few things. My mother had a plate for each one of us, a spoon for each one. It was a very long trip by bus. What I saw during that trip was that at every stop we made everything was very dirty, very sad, bathrooms were very depressing. As soon as we crossed to the United States, everything was totally different. It was totally the opposite to what we were seeing.

*Miguel: May I ask you about how you crossed the border? I don't know if you want to tell me under what circumstances you went through immigration.*

Maria: My father fixed our papers, and we came as legal residents.

*Miguel: How did your family find housing for the first time in this country? Who made the arrangements or what type of house did you have when you first came?*

Maria: It was very hard because when we came a friend of my father was the one who gave us a hand. He was the one who helped us. I remember that it was very hard because where we stayed we had no beds. We had a little mattress where we all slept, and at first we were cold and hungry.

*Miguel: Throughout the years when you have lived in the United States, what have been some of the most difficult adjustments that you had to make living here?*

Maria: One of the things I have noticed is that here we are subjected to a routine or a work schedule, and that has been a difficult adjustment for me.

*Miguel: As far as your experience with teachers and schools in this country, what can you tell me?*

Maria: My experience has been good. There have been details where I see that they have not been fair with everybody.

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

Maria: I don't have any comment.

*Miguel: Can you describe any occurrences or situations of racism or discrimination from the part of the Americans towards you?*

Maria: Not with me but towards other people.

*Miguel: Can you give me an example?*

Maria: A person is judged according to how he or she dresses and he or she is treated differently when they don't really know the person. I think there is some discrimination on that.

*Miguel: So you continue going back to Mexico? You continue to visit since you came back?*

Maria: Yes.

*Miguel: How often do you go to Mexico?*

Maria: More or less once a year.

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

Maria: Yes.

*Miguel: In what ways?*

Maria: Every time we go to their homes, we visit, and we call now and then.

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

Maria: Yes.

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

Maria: Probably yes because the way I see life here, when we get old here they put old people in nursing homes, and I think that is sad. In our culture we have these family roots in which the children take care of their parents. There is a possibility, but I cannot tell you now.

*Miguel: Are you currently working, Maria?*

Maria: Yes.

*Miguel: What do you do? Where do you work?*

Maria: I work for Bright Beginnings. I am a family advocate in the program 0-3.

*Miguel: Let's talk about expectations and reality. Every time you came back, and taking into consideration the first time you came to the United States and every time you came back, what have been your ideals or your dreams about this country?*

Maria: Every time I come, to me this is the country of opportunity where you, despite the schedules and the routines, it is \_\_\_\_\_ every day the same, but there are many opportunities. Like in my case on top of being a mom, I am working, and I am going to school. I don't think that In Mexico that I would be able to do it.

*Miguel: Are you studying then?*

Maria: Yes.

*Miguel: What are you studying?*

Maria: I am studying to be an educator.

*Miguel: Maria, what do you like or dislike about American society?*

Maria: For me it has been difficult to define the American society because here almost everybody is equal because in my home state in my native country there is more discretion about that. Here being poor I eat like a rich person but not in Mexico.

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

Maria: Similar or different?

*Miguel: You probably don't find a lot of similarity between both countries. What about difference between both countries?*

Maria: There is a lot of difference.

*Miguel: For example?*

Maria: In regards to the family or about work or in what aspect?

*Miguel: Any aspect you want to define.*

Maria: In regards to the family, I think that down there [in Mexico] we maintain our family values very close, and here they get blurred.

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

Maria: I feel more safe.

*Miguel: Why?*

Maria: I see that there is more attention to just anything like if I call the police they get here right away. Or if we call the fire department we know that they respond immediately.

*Miguel: Do you think that the quality to your life has improved in this country?*

Maria: Of course, yes.

*Miguel: In what ways?*

Maria: It has given me the opportunity to have a stable job and go to study, and with my effort I have got my own house that I have made for my children and my family.

*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?*

Maria: First of all I would tell them that the United States is a country with a lot of discipline. We have to be very responsible if we want to maintain a good record. We have to be very responsible like with our house payments or any other type of payments and no excuses like "I'll pay next month" or anything like that if we want to have a good quality of life.

*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?*

Maria: I would tell them to please open more opportunities for our people because there are a lot of people here in the United States, and they don't have their documents, and I see day by day how those people work, and they are helping, and they are contributing to the United States, and it would be fair that they had access to live legally and be treated legally.

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

Maria: Both.

*Miguel: Can you explain to me why?*

Maria: Mexican because I respect my roots and my family links. I remember the festivities down there because it was very nice. And I consider myself as an American as well because the quality of life here is better.

*Miguel: Do you think that it is important to maintain your national identity? Let's say like Mexican? In what ways have you attempted to maintain your national identity?*

Maria: When people ask me if I am Mexican or Hispanic I respond with pride.

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

Maria: To be a productive person for society and for the United States and not to be a burden.

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

Maria: Yes, but we are in their land, and we should learn English. But I also want that they give us a hand and respect our people that come as immigrants. For example, to the undocumented people, to also give them an opportunity.

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

Maria: Definitely, yes.

*Miguel: Why?*

Maria: I don't think it is fair. We all are humans.

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

Maria: Being more considerate and paying attention to how they identify people who are responsible because they know who can be a productive person and who won't. Maybe that could be an option.

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

Maria: Less hospitable.

*Miguel: Why, Maria?*

Maria: Because every time there are less resources for the people that come from other places. We know that they come from other places, and they don't get any benefits. I have heard a lot of people saying that they are illegals and they have no right, and that hurts me because they don't come to take away anything. They come to \_\_\_\_\_.

*Miguel: Maria, before we finish this interview, is there anything else you would like to add? Anything else you would like to say as an immigrant in Southwest Kansas?*

Maria: That's all what I can say for now. I hope that we can help our immigrant people that want to come or the ones who are already here and hopefully help them so that they can be here with permits because these are people that come to work. They are not trouble people. And take every opportunity to help them.

*Miguel: Anything else, Maria?*

Maria: No.

*Miguel: Thank you.*