

Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

Interview with Maria Ibañez

September 25, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

Miguel: Can you tell me what your name is?

Maria: Maria de Jesus Quiñonez Ibañez.

Miguel: And what is your date of birth?

Maria: April 14, 1948.

Miguel: Where were you born at?

Maria: Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua.

Miguel: And what is your race or ethnicity?

Maria: Mexican.

Miguel: Or Hispanic?

Maria: Yes, Hispanic.

Miguel: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Maria: I have two sisters and one brother.

Miguel: What are their ages?

Maria: You got me to think on that one because I wouldn't be able to tell you, but there are two under me, and one is older. My brother is the oldest and then my two sisters under me.

Miguel: Are your parents still alive?

Maria: No, they both passed away.

Miguel: When did they pass away?

Maria: My father died on February 27, 1991, and my mother died about five or six years ago.

Miguel: Who among your family members continues living in your native country?

Maria: My brother, the oldest. Well, he was the second to the oldest because my very oldest died and the next after him is the one who still lives in Juarez. My youngest sister lives in Pratt, Kansas, and the two of us live here (Liberal).

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

Maria: In a molduradora (factory making wood trim).

Miguel: What is that?

Maria: That's a plant where they process the wood from Durango, and they make the moldura to export to the United States.

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: How long did you work there?

Maria: Eight years.

Miguel: Do you remember how much you earned?

Maria: No, I won't be able to tell. It has been a long time, and based on my story it is difficult to remember so many things.

Miguel: Can you tell us about the living conditions in your country?

Maria: I lived well, thank God. We didn't lack anything. We had our own house, jobs.

Miguel: What is your religion?

Maria: Catholic.

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

Maria: No, none of those.

Miguel: How did you first hear? What do you remember the very first time about the United States, or what was your first experience?

Maria: The learning about the United States was that my husband was brought to work here which was the same reason I came. Now he is my ex-husband. That is the reason why we are here.

Miguel: But, do you remember when you were a child? Do you remember when you first heard about the United States?

Maria: When I was about nine or ten years old, we used to come to El Paso with my mother to buy ice cream or to visit around the Plaza de los Lagartos.

Miguel: And what brought you to settle in Southwest Kansas?

Maria: That my husband came. He came to work here.

Miguel: What did he do?

Maria: He worked on a pig farm. After the pig farm, we moved out of Pratt, Kansas, to Dodge City and it was in Dodge City where we got stuck because he could not find work. That is where things turned bad, like people say. A year later we were ready to go back to our country, but we were stopped in Liberal, and we have been here since.

Miguel: What year was it when you came to live in Kansas?

Maria: Around 1982 or 1983.

Miguel: What do you remember about that trip when you migrated to Kansas?

Maria: It was a very sad trip not only because we left and I was not alone. I had two children with me, a boy about one year old, and my daughter was like six or eight months old. We spent fifteen days lost because of the "coyote." We got lost for fifteen days during the wintertime. The reason was that the tires kept blowing one after the other until after the checkpoint. Then we had to return until we made it to Mezquite, and we had no money, no tires, nothing. And from there we were transported to El Paso. In El Paso we stayed at the house of my sister-in-law, and once there some neighbors of my sister-in-law's sister helped us to make it this far.

Miguel: So you were traveling with your two children?

Maria: It was only me with my two little ones.

Miguel: Where was your husband then?

Maria: He was already in Pratt.

Miguel: It was not a very pleasant trip.

Maria: Of course not, especially in the winter. It was very hard for me and for my children because we had no coats. We were brought like if we were going to be exploited because in the end we ended up taking the bus. And thank God we finally made it through even when we came illegally.

Miguel: How did you find work for the first time in the United States?

Maria: I found work for the first time in 1990 or around 1989, something like that. I saw myself in need of finding work because that is when I got my first divorce.

Miguel: Where did you go to work?

Maria: At the Liberal Inn Motel. I worked there for almost two years and from there I went to work at the high school with USD 480. So far, it is like fourteen or fifteen years working there.

Miguel: So, when you came you went to live in Pratt. Then you moved to Dodge, and then you ended up in Liberal.

Maria: We arrived in Pratt. From Pratt we moved to Dodge, and from Dodge we went to Pratt again. Defeated, with no money, without food for the children, without clothing, from there in a loaned truck. But the vehicle did not make it to Pratt, so we were brought back to, no, we were heading back to Juarez, but here in Liberal lived my niece who was the daughter of my youngest sister. She is the person that we met since we were young. We grew up together, and when she heard that we were around, she told us that we didn't have any business going to Juarez, that we needed to stay, and that God would help us and would make the way for us, that all the suffering we were going through was because God had something prepared for us. So, we decided to stay, and up to this date here we are in Liberal.

Miguel: So you didn't go back to Juarez.

Maria: Yes, we were heading back. My husband had already said that we were going to stay only for two weeks here in Liberal, that if in two weeks he didn't find work, we were going to go back. He had all his papers legally, but he couldn't find work. For the whole year we were carrying a very heavy cross, and in the end God opened the way for us, and here we are. My husband found work in the oilfields. He worked in the oilfield for about three or four months. And from there he was able to get a permit from Immigration, and he went to work at the plant. Up to this date, he is still there.

Miguel: What have been some of the most difficult adjustments that you had to make living here? How have you adjusted living in the United States or what changes have you made?

Maria: Well, that is sort of difficult. It has been difficult for me to live here in Liberal. I like it because it is a small town and very nice. I like it because for me I don't go out to dances or places like that. In my case, since I was young, it was always from home to work and from work to home. When I grew up we used to go out. We were young, but after we got married my life changed.

Miguel: What has been your experience with the immigration authorities?

Maria: Not really because I didn't have any difficulties. God opened the way for me very nice which was what I was expecting the least after so many obstacles and so many falls. I was able to get ahead.

Miguel: What has been your experience with teachers and the schools here in the United States?

Maria: Well, with teachers or with everybody it has been a very nice experience because I don't have no problems with anyone. I feel that they like me. I feel appreciated, so I don't have any problems or any bad motives.

Miguel: What has been your experience with police in this country?

Maria: It is something about my oldest son because they got him very badly. The reason I am angry at them

was that he was on his skateboard, and half a block away from home he fell from the skateboard. There was the police coming. They saw him, and they got out of the car and handcuffed him. They took the skateboard away from him. They pushed him inside the car and they locked him up. Do you understand? This is some wrongdoing that they did to him. I don't know what caused that because I was never able to investigate.

Miguel: Have you ever suffered from racism or have you ever experienced racism from the Americans towards you?

Maria: No. I have received it from the part of ourselves, the Mexicans. I have even told them so many times at work and any other place that what we gain with or by that kind of racism because I think it is something very sad because what we should be doing instead is lend ourselves a hand one to another because there are times when one has but others don't, and we need to help the ones that don't have. We need to lend them a hand because we not always are going to have the baskets full. There are times when things get difficult, and maybe tomorrow or the day after we are going to need that person or another one or another one. We cannot know.

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

Maria: Yes, with my brother.

Miguel: In what way?

Maria: I talk to him over the phone.

Miguel: Do you send money to your country?

Maria: No.

Miguel: Do you think that sometime in the future you will return to your native country definitely?

Maria: Well, if that is the way it happens, it will be nice. As far as my concerned, I would be in my country already.

Miguel: So you think that in the future you are going to go back.

Maria: There is one thing now that in the first place the children are in between. To me it would be difficult to say I want to go back to Mexico. I live happier in Mexico. But now at this point I cannot say that. Especially to Juarez because it is completely full. If there is peace and tranquility here, I am happy here anyway because, like I told you, my children are grownups, and to move them to another place would be difficult for me because they already adapted to this town.

Miguel: And at some point you already adapted yourself to live here as well.

Maria: Like I told you before I am one of the people that mind's her own business, and I don't like anyone messing with me or my family. If there is any problem with my children, I try to talk to people, and I try to find a solution with words. I don't like being one of those people that are loud. I like talking and try to understand and get along.

Miguel: When you came to the United States, what were your ideals and dreams? What did you have in mind?

Maria: I was dead alive back then. I didn't have any plans or like other people that come with the idea of progressing, but not me. I honestly, up to this date, my life is dead completely. I live, I work, I know that I have my children. I have just had a new little flower (grandchild). But so far I don't know what it is to enjoy life.

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

Maria: I like everything because, like I said, I have never received any assistance as citizen but I have got help and support from other people. They gave me a hand when I needed it, and so far nobody has shut the doors on me. So far nobody has told me not to knock or that there is nobody there. I thank God for that, for people.

Miguel: Something you dislike about this country?

Maria: About this country or this town?

Miguel: In general, about the American society either way.

Maria: I don't dislike nothing.

Miguel: In what ways do you think that this country is similar or different from your native country?

Maria: The only difference is that others complain that they cannot control their families, that they cannot refrain or correct their children. On that matter, I am happy because, like I say, I don't have any problems with my children. They are not on drugs or this or that. Maybe they get a cigarette now and then and I don't know about it, but not in my house. So far they respect me the same way I respect them.

Miguel: Do you feel more safe or less safe in the United States?

Maria: I feel more safe.

Miguel: Why?

Maria: Because I don't have to keep watching from anyone. I am not a person that goes here and there. I am a person that goes from home to work unless I have to go to the store, but that is it.

Miguel: Do you think the quality of your life has improved? Do you think that your living conditions that you have now would be the same as in Mexico or better?

Maria: About the quality of life, I think that I live the same because they still bother me here. They don't leave me alone. I gave him to them, and it is still the same thing. But I don't pay a lot of attention to that.

Miguel: What are you referring to?

Maria: My old man. I had problems because of him, and I said, "There he is, take him away." "I don't want any problems." "If he is not mine, he is not mine." Mine are my children.

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

Maria: I would tell them to stay in their country.

Miguel: Why?

Maria: Because there is nothing like your own country. Here in the United States, honestly, we are on loan. If you are illegally or legally, it is the same thing, because whenever Immigration decides that that is the end of the papers, that's it. To me, that's my criteria. According to all the many things that we are seeing, like all the illegal people caught during the natural disasters, are going to be reported. I wonder why they are going to deport those people. When they came suffering, barefoot, and get through this disaster, only to have Immigration say that they are being deported. Don't you think that it is a very hard injustice? So, I wonder, what are we doing here? Maybe out of need, I don't understand.

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

Maria: None. He would not accept it.

Miguel: Regardless of whether he accepts or not, what would you tell him in order to advise the President in matters of immigration, regardless of whether he takes it into account or not?

Maria: Nothing.

Miguel: Let's get to the next set of questions. Do you see yourself as an American or Mexican or both?

Maria: Mexican.

Miguel: Why?

Maria: Because it is like, as you said, what value do the papers have? You can become a citizen, but you are not going to be an American. You will always be a Mexican. Yes or no?

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

Maria: A lot.

Miguel: In what ways do you try to maintain that identity as Mexican?

Maria: By not humiliating others. Like I have said to many. Not because they got residency, or they got a permit, or because they got a piece of paper from Immigration they are going to humiliate others. That is not right because papers, like I just said, the day Immigration decides Immigration will take it away to all the people, and what is going to happen to that pride and that vanity?

Miguel: Have you tried to integrate into American society?

Maria: Well, unfortunately, because I became a citizen, but that was not my main interest.

Miguel: As an immigrant living in the United States, as a person living in this country, what do you consider to be your greatest challenges?

Maria: I don't understand your question.

Miguel: A challenge is, for example, learn more English or find a better job. A challenge would be find the way to go back to your country. A challenge is like an obstacle. What kind of obstacles do you face as an immigrant right now?

Maria: None.

Miguel: Do you think that the schools and society should adopt a bilingual model?

Maria: Supposedly yes.

Miguel: Why?

Maria: Because now the majority are Hispanics, in the first place, and in second place, the majority do not speak English. That is why we need a lot of help from bilinguals, a lot.

Miguel: In what ways do you think the American society could improve its treatment towards immigrants?

Maria: By stopping to humiliating them. That would be the only solution. Like I said before, we should give the hand to one another. That would be the best solution.

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

Maria: Less hospitable.

Miguel: Why is that?

Maria: Because of what we are seeing, a lot of people don't have their papers. They are completely illegally, and they cannot go to the doctor, they cannot go to the hospital. Why? For that reason.

Miguel: Is there anything you would like to add as an immigrant or anything you would like to say?

Maria: What I would like to say in regards to every person who has the plan or the thought to move to the United States that it is better to suffer in their country and stay in their own country. How many poor people have come? They spend twenty or twenty-five or forty years here, and what is happening with all this we are seeing lately? Where is all the profit going? And in the end they are going back the same way they came. There is no solution for those families? No help for those families? Only because they are illegal? That is when the government and the President should support all those people because mostly of what has been done in the United States has not been done because of the black people or the Anglo or the American people? It is because of the Mexicans because the

Mexicans are the ones who get all the work done. They all live at the expense of us, the fool Mexicans, because we don't know how to say, "I don't know how to do that," yes or no? Who goes head on first? We, the Mexicans. That is what the President should be paying attention to. That's what Immigration should be looking at, to give the opportunity to those people that deserve it. Why Immigration does not want to admit all of this? Because there is a lot of people from around that only come to steal or they only come to make mistakes and it is because of that people that others are paying the consequences, and this is not right, it's not legal, like Cantinflas said.