

# Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

## Interview with Oscar Palacios

November 12, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

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

Oscar: Oscar Palacios.

*Miguel: Oscar, what is your date of birth?*

Oscar: 04-24-1960.

*Miguel: Where were you born at?*

Oscar: Namiquipa, Chihuahua, Mexico.

*Miguel: And what is your race?*

Oscar: Mexican.

*Miguel: Or Hispanic?*

Oscar: Hispanic.

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

Oscar: I have three brothers and three sisters.

*Miguel: So it is a total of seven siblings?*

Oscar: Yes, it is seven. Their ages I'm not going to know it.

*Miguel: Out of the seven are you the oldest or the youngest or the middle one?*

Oscar: I'm the fourth to oldest.

*Miguel: Are your parents still alive?*

Oscar: My mother.

*Miguel: When did your father die?*

Oscar: 1993.

*Miguel: Among your family members, who still lives in your native country?*

Oscar: I have two brothers and one sister living over there and my mother. She lives there, and she lives here, too, because she has her papers.

*Miguel: Are your other siblings here in the United States?*

Oscar: Yes, sir.

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

Oscar: Agriculture.

*Miguel: For how long did you work in agriculture?*

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.

Oscar: Since I can remember until I came here. Since I was a child to the age of seventeen.

*Miguel: Is this when you came to the United States?*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: When you worked in agriculture, how much did you earn? Do you remember more or less?*

Oscar: We did not have a salary because we were self employed. We picked up the harvest at the end of the year and then that is when we have the benefit.

*Miguel: So you came to the United States at the age of seventeen. Was that the first time that you came?*

Oscar: Uh huh.

*Miguel: When you lived in your country, how did you live? What were your living conditions?*

Oscar: My living conditions in my country were not good or bad. It was regular.

*Miguel: What is your religion?*

Oscar: Catholic.

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

Oscar: No, never.

*Miguel: How did you first learn about the United States or since when you heard about the United States for the first time?*

Oscar: My father used to come to work since the time of the "braceros" and after that he would come illegally.

*Miguel: What moved you to come to settle in Southwest Kansas? What brought you to this region of Kansas?*

Oscar: The job and the family, that is why we settled here, and having a stable job.

*Miguel: Where did you find work when you came to this region?*

Oscar: At National Beef.

*Miguel: Do you remember what year you came to Liberal?*

Oscar: I came on December 23, 1995.

*Miguel: And since then you started working at National?*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: How did you know about National?*

Oscar: My brother in law, when I came here he had been working here for three years. That is how I learned about it.

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

Oscar: Through my brother in law as well. At first we got to stay with him, and later we bought a trailer home.

*Miguel: When you came at 17, do you remember that trip?*

Oscar: Oh, yes.

*Miguel: That was the first time you came. Would you like to tell me about that trip, how was it that you came, how you crossed?*

Oscar: Yes. I remember that we crossed the river at night by Ciudad, Juarez, and we got in our car that we

had waiting on the other side, and we kept our heads down like for ten hours because it was six of us. I remember it was six of us in one car and another guy in the front seat and we all were with our heads down. It was a very hard trip.

*Miguel: The other people coming with you, where were they from?*

Oscar: Two from my hometown and the others I don't know.

*Miguel: What happened when you passed through the checkpoint of the border patrol? What did you do?*

Oscar: It was closed. The checkpoint was closed, and we passed.

*Miguel: What would have happened if they had been checking?*

Oscar: They would have stopped us.

*Miguel: You would have been returned?*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: Where you ended up in that occasion?*

Oscar: In Center, Colorado.

*Miguel: Did you find work there? What did you do?*

Oscar: We worked there in agriculture for four years that I stayed in that town.

*Miguel: During that time did you go back to Mexico? Or you only stayed here?*

Oscar: We went down every year.

*Miguel: How did you come back?*

Oscar: The same way, by train or once we were at the border in any means of transportation we had an opportunity.

*Miguel: Did you ever take any risks for crossing the border that way?*

Oscar: Always. I remember that by train two or three times, and I remember one time that I will never forget that we got locked up in the boxcar for fourteen hours until we were let out by Immigration in Socorro, New Mexico. That's where it happened. I will never forget that. It was like fifty of us in one boxcar.

*Miguel: Where were you going or where were you supposed to get out?*

Oscar: In Belen, New Mexico, supposedly.

*Miguel: And what happened?*

Oscar: I think the train got lost or stopped because it didn't go very far that night. Thank God that the train stopped in Socorro, and we started banging on the gates when Immigration was going by. We all were arrested, but at least we're alive, thank God.

*Miguel: There have been so many cases that there was nobody there to open the gates. What have been some of the most difficult adjustments that you had to make living here in the United States? What has been the hardest for you?*

Oscar: The hardest is that there are times when there is not enough work because you know how we live here. We need the paycheck week by week because there are bills to pay, and when the family starts to get bigger we need to adjust our budgets, and that is what is more difficult when the work slows down.

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

*tell me about that?*

Oscar: In my particular case with the Immigration authorities when I did all my requirements, they treated me right back then, and that has been a long time since, but I cannot tell you that I was treated badly. They treated me I think well.

*Miguel: What has been your experience with teachers and the schools in this country?*

Oscar: Well, teachers here in Liberal, I think they are good teachers. In Texas I had a problem with one teacher about my daughter, the oldest, when she was little. She was in one grade level and moved down to the next lower level because she wanted her to learn how to read English in three days. And then she asked me if she could move her to a lower grade or separate her from the rest of the children, and I told her to move her to a lower grade. That is the only problem I had with teachers.

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

Oscar: I have never had any problems with the police. I only have this case that is happening to me now with the lawyer and the judge, but that is apart from the police.

*Miguel: During the time that you have been in this country, have you ever suffered from racism or discrimination?*

Oscar: Sometimes.

*Miguel: Can you tell us a little bit more? In what way or what happened?*

Oscar: Racism has always existed. Many times when you go to a place and you don't know how to speak English, they prefer to the ones who speak English. Now, in the situation in which the judge authorizes someone to take my wallet and my money, I think it is racism.

*Miguel: Can you tell me a little bit more what happened?*

Oscar: I had court on Wednesday, the 9th of November, and the attorney who is suing me was asking me for some information. He wanted my social security number, my driver's license number, and I refused. And the judge ordered me to answer all his questions, and I refused again. When the lawyer asked me how much money I had in my wallet, I told him that I was not going to tell him. And the judge ordered me to put my wallet on the table. Because the judge ordered me, I put it on the table. When I put my wallet on the table, the attorney opened my wallet and takes eighty dollars that I had. I asked the judge if that was legal, and she told me yes. After that, I told them that I have a child and that I needed to buy his diapers and milk and that I could not allow that the lawyer kept my money. She told me, "Have a good day."

*Miguel: Do you speak English?*

Oscar: Some.

*Miguel: For what reason did you go to court on Wednesday? Why did you have to be in court that day?*

Oscar: For something that happened to me a year and a half ago with a dentist where I took my daughter, and the first time she charged me \$600 for the job, and she told me that that is what I was going to pay. This happened on a Saturday. The following Wednesday I took my daughter so that the work would be finished, and she told me that I needed to give her another \$600.

*Miguel: Apart from what you had already paid?*

Oscar: Yes. Then when I asked her why I had to give her another \$600, she told me that that was going to be the cost, and I refused and told my daughter to leave. She did not do anything. She did not do absolutely nothing, and we got out, and the doctor told me that even when she did not do the work, I had to pay \$600 more. I refused completely and since then she has brought me to court, and I lost the court, and the judge ordered me to pay. And I have been paying because the judge ordered what I could, \$20 or \$30, and my last payment was in the month of July, and I went back to the lawyer's office in August, and the secretary did not accept \$20 that I was giving her because she said that the

lawyer said it was too little.

*Miguel: The first consultation with the dentist, how much did that cost?*

Oscar: \$588 exactly.

*Miguel: And you paid that amount?*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: Did you pay with check or cash?*

Oscar: Cash.

*Miguel: Do you have the receipt?*

Oscar: Yes, sir.

*Miguel: On that day did the doctor do any work to your daughter?*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: And you returned the following week with your daughter?*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: What work did the doctor do at the next visit? What happened at the next consultation?*

Oscar: She did not do any work because before that she told me that I needed to pay \$600 more.

*Miguel: And you decided that it was better that she would do nothing.*

Oscar: I told her not to do nothing.

*Miguel: Because during the first consultation she told you that everything was going to cost you \$588, and you had already paid that.*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: And when you went back to the second consultation, she charges you another \$600.*

Oscar: \$612 or so.

*Miguel: And you told her that better not. So you are being charged the \$600 for the second visit?*

Oscar: For the second visit.

*Miguel: But what is it what the doctor did in the second visit?*

Oscar: Nothing. Did not even touch her. Before that she told me that I needed to pay \$600. And we left the office.

*Miguel: And the dentist is suing you to have you pay the \$600 from the visit in which she did not do nothing to your daughter?*

Oscar: That is right.

*Miguel: So you went to court, you lost the case, you have been paying every month. When was that court when you lost and you had to pay anyway?*

Oscar: In May. I don't remember what day.

*Miguel: May of this year?*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: So why did you have to go back to court last week?*

Oscar: For the same reason that the attorney did not want to take the little money that I was able to pay. Like

I said, the last payment of \$20 was in the month of July. And they did not take it in the month of August because they said it was too little. And the attorney decided to take me to court again.

*Miguel: In May when you went to court, did you have an attorney?*

Oscar: No.

*Miguel: Why didn't you have an attorney?*

Oscar: Because I don't have the means to pay one.

*Miguel: And what happened at the second court? Did you have an attorney?*

Oscar: No.

*Miguel: Do you believe this is a situation of racism or discrimination?*

Oscar: I think it is a situation of unfair racism and taking advantage from the part of the judge and the lawyer; that is what I think.

*Miguel: In what sense do you think they would be taking advantage?*

Oscar: Simply because I don't speak English well, and the lady judge, you cannot tell her a lot. Only the lawyer can say whatever he wants. And you don't have a say in there.

*Miguel: So the judge ordered you to put your wallet on the table.*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: And you did that?*

Oscar: I did.

*Miguel: And what happened then?*

Oscar: The attorney took from my wallet the money that I had in the amount of \$80.

*Miguel: Why did the attorney take the \$80? In honor to what? Did they tell you why he was going to take it?*

Oscar: At the moment he took them, he did not tell me why. After that he took a piece of paper from a notebook and gave me a receipt. I have a receipt, but it is not on stationary. It is just from a notebook.

*Miguel: Have you suffered racism on any other occasion or something that you may consider as racism or discrimination?*

Oscar: No.

*Miguel: How long have you lived here in Liberal?*

Oscar: Exactly Liberal nine years and eleven months.

*Miguel: Since you came to work at National. Did you have any problems with the law or the authorities?*

Oscar: No, never.

*Miguel: What is your status now? Are you a citizen?*

Oscar: Yes, I am a naturalized American citizen.

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

Oscar: Regularly we go every year.

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

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: In what way?*

Oscar: By telephone.

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

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: Do you think that some point in the future you will return to your native country like to live permanently and stay there?*

Oscar: No, I don't believe so.

*Miguel: Why not?*

Oscar: My children do not agree. I have talked to them many times. They were born here, and when we go on vacation I tell them. They don't agree. Maybe in the future my wife and I, maybe.

*Miguel: But your children would not be interested in going and living in Mexico?*

Oscar: No, my children, I don't think so. I have lived and I feel from both countries because I came here very young and since always I have worked and I have contributed to this country in whatever is within the law. I have contributed, and I love the United States.

*Miguel: Let me ask you, what were your ideals and your dreams about this country? What did you expect?*

Oscar: Well, when I came the first time my dream was just to work for a time and go back to my country. That was my dream because over there people told us that money could be made here very easy. But the reality is different. It is different when people tell you and when you come here.

*Miguel: What is the reality?*

Oscar: The reality is that this is a country of opportunities, but these are work opportunities. Many times you have good opportunities. Sometimes more or less, and sometimes it is bad.

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

Oscar: I like how you live here, and I dislike that sometimes the Americans look down on you. I dislike that. But I like the opportunity to live here in the United States, thank God. We have work, and we live good.

*Miguel: Do you feel there are times when people look down on you?*

Oscar: Yes, always. There are Americans that look down on you.

*Miguel: All the Americans? Some Americans? Or just very few?*

Oscar: Some. Some or just few because there is like everything because there are Americans that don't look down on you.

*Miguel: In what way is the United States similar or different from your country?*

Oscar: Let's move to the next question.

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

Oscar: I feel more safe.

*Miguel: Why, Mr. Palacios?*

Oscar: Well, I have trust or simply when I travel I feel safe here because you see about things that you hear unfortunately.

*Miguel: Like what?*

Oscar: Many abuses of the Immigration offices in Mexico and a lot of distortion. I'm not telling you that it happened to me, but I keep hearing that. Even now the President keeps saying that that needs to be improved. But how many of our countrymen get extorted?

*Miguel: Do you think the quality of your life has improved since you came to the United States?*

Oscar: Yes.

*Miguel: In what way?*

Oscar: In many aspects. Like I said, we have the opportunity to work. We spend our lives working, but in Mexico I did not have a car, and here I have one by working, and I think that is a privilege having something to drive.

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

Oscar: I would tell them to think twice because here people suffer. Since they come they don't know where to go, and the people who come like that, they struggle, they suffer.

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

Oscar: I would tell him to open the border so that everybody would have the opportunity.

*Miguel: Do you consider yourself as an American, a Mexican, or both?*

Oscar: Both.

*Miguel: Do you think it is important to maintain your nationality as your identity or your character as Mexican?*

Oscar: One hundred percent.

*Miguel: And in what way do you try to maintain your national identity?*

Oscar: Many times even by the way I dress. That way we never forget our roots.

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

Oscar: My greatest challenge is to get my family ahead.

*Miguel: Do you think that American society and education in this society should adopt a bilingual model?*

Oscar: I think it would be magnificent because we need in many places bilingual people who understand us.

*Miguel: Do you think that the police should end the practice of racial profiling? For example, stop somebody because he is a minority or stop somebody because he is Hispanic, that is what we call racial profiling, when police stop someone just because of his physical aspect or race. Do you think that should end?*

Oscar: That should end because it is wrong. Only because they see that you don't look like an American, I don't think that is legal.

*Miguel: In what ways could American society improve its treatment towards immigrants?*

Oscar: By giving opportunities to immigrants and not to treat them bad because even the Americans are immigrants. They had their opportunity. Why not to give the same opportunity to the ones who just immigrated?

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

Oscar: I think it is less.

*Miguel: Why is that?*

Oscar: Because racism has always existed, but in the past we heard less about it, and now even the authorities like the governor of California who wants to close the border.

*Miguel: That experience that you just went through here with the judicial system makes you think that society is less hospitable and that treatment to immigrants has not improved?*

Oscar: No, that makes me think it is bad.

*Miguel: Is there anything else, Mr. Palacios, that you would like to mention or anything you would like to add about your experience as an immigrant? Something you would like to tell the people?*

Oscar: The only thing I want to recommend to people is to unite always because things happen like this thing that happened to me, and we remain silent. This already happened to me, but I don't want this to keep happening to people. But for that purpose we need to be united.

*Miguel: Anything else, Mr. Palacio?*

Oscar: That's all for now.

*Miguel: Thank you.*