

Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

Interview with Sara Peters

November 23, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

This interview was done with the help of Helen Wiebe. Sara speaks Low German. At times Sara speaks some English and at times the interpreter speaks for her.

Miguel: Can you tell me what your name is?

Sara: Sara Peters.

Miguel: Sara, what is your date of birth?

Sara: (through interpreter) July 17, 1967.

Miguel: What is your place of birth, Sara?

Sara: In Mexico.

Miguel: What part of Mexico?

Sara: Cuauhtemoc.

Miguel: In Cuauhtemoc. And what is your race or ethnicity?

Sara: (After talking to the interpreter) White.

Miguel: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Sara: One brother, three sisters.

Miguel: Do they live in Mexico?

Sara: One brother in Dallas; my sister Nancy in Paris, Texas, and my sisters Tina and Anna in Mexico.

Miguel: Are your parents still alive?

Sara: Just my dad.

Miguel: Just your father. When did your mother die?

Sara: Ten years ago.

Miguel: So, your brother lives in Dallas, and one of your sisters lives in Texas, and two sisters in Mexico.

Sara: Yes.

Miguel: And your father is still in Mexico.

Sara: Yeah.

Miguel: When you lived in Mexico, Sara, did you work?

Sara: Yes.

Miguel: What did you do?

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.

Sara: (through interpreter) Home maker and in the fields.

Miguel: *Like in farming?*

Interpreter: Yes.

Miguel: *How long did you work like in farming or in the fields?*

Sara: May be eight years.

Miguel: *Do you remember how much money you earned working in farming?*

Sara: Not too sure.

Miguel: *Sara, can you tell me about your living conditions in Mexico? Tell me about what your life was like before you came to the United States.*

Sara: (through interpreter) Poor.

Interpreter: ...and because her husband knew that he could make more money than in Mexico.

Miguel: *What is your religion, Sara?*

Sara: Old Mennonite.

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

Interpreter: They abused her...

Miguel: *But, the abuse came from the police?*

Interpreter: No.

Miguel: *Sara, how did you first learn about America? About the United States?*

Sara: (talks to the interpreter, they talk)

Interpreter: She learned that she could get a better living, and better money in the United States, that everything would be easier than in Mexico here in the United States.

Miguel: *How old was she when she first heard about the United States?*

Sara: About eight years old.

Miguel: *What happened? Who told you or how you...?*

Sara: (through interpreter) When they could listen to the radio and they catch the English songs from the United States and they were playing the music...and they have always people going to the United States and back to Mexico.

Miguel: *Other Mennonites? When did you first come to the United States for the first time?*

Sara: 1996.

Miguel: *That was the first time that you came?*

Sara: Yeah.

Miguel: *Do you remember that trip, the first time that you came?*

Sara: Yeah.

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

Sara: (through interpreter) They all came with a visa, passport, visa and permit.

Miguel: *Is there anything else you remember about that trip? Were you happy? Were you sad?*

Sara: (through interpreter) That was pretty much fun and when her husband, some times he wanted to go in the store and he wanted to learn English.

Miguel: What language did you speak at home when you were little?

Sara: Low German, Plätttddeutsch.

Miguel: How did you first find housing in this country? How did you find your first house when you came? Can you tell me about that?

Sara: Yeah, here, in Liberal.

Miguel: Have you ever worked in the United States? Have you ever worked here?

Sara: Yeah, at a dairy, I cleaned the dairy's office. Not now...

Miguel: What have been some of the most difficult adjustments that you had to make living in this country? How have you had to adjust to life here?

Sara: (through interpreter) from the first day home she was feeling that she was home and she was feeling better also.

Miguel: You have not had any problems living in Kansas...? Has been easy for you to live in Kansas...?

Sara: Oh, yes.

Miguel: Sara, what has been your experience with the Immigration authorities, what can you tell me about Immigration?

Sara: (through interpreter) The worst part was about papers, because she was with oxygen, she had things behind her and she had to go back and they did not care about it. She got all blue. Because she had the oxygen they thought that she wanted to see the doctor in the United States.

Miguel: So, it was difficult when you were coming.

Sara: Oh, yeah...

Miguel: ...because you had the oxygen.

Sara: Yeah, yes...

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

Sara: Very good. (through the interpreter) She is going to school to learn English, she is going to high school also to get her diploma and everything.

Miguel: You are going to the learning center here in Liberal?

Sara: In Meade.

Miguel: And you are taking classes.

Sara: Yes.

Miguel: Have you had any experience with the police in this country? What can you tell me about the police in this country?

Sara: (through interpreter) Everything is very good.

Miguel: Can you describe if you ever experienced racism or discrimination, like, discrimination from the Americans to you, do you feel discriminated?

Sara: Some times. Especially at the high school, they are looking at her because they are Mennonites. They are screaming, or saying good bye. Most people are very good but there are some that are there...

Miguel: Since the time you have been in the United States, have returned back to Mexico, since you came in

1996?

Sara: Yeah.

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

Sara: Oh, yeah.

Miguel: How?

Sara: by telephone, calling.

Miguel: Do you send money back to Mexico?

Sara: (Through interpreter) They did, long time ago.

Miguel: Do you think that sometime in the future you will return to your Mexico to stay, to retire there? Do you think you will go back to Mexico some day?

Sara: No.

Miguel: Why us that?

Sara: It is easy for me to live here, my husband and I are together, and it is good for me

Interpreter: She is feeling better over here, with her work and everything she is doing here. She does not want to move there.

Miguel: Sara, when you came to the United States, what were your ideals, and your dreams about this country?

Sara: (Through interpreter) She was thinking that the United States was rich and she was thinking that is very, very different from Mexico, in here.

Miguel: What did you want to accomplish when you came? What was your dream? What did you want to accomplish?

Sara: (Through interpreter) She wanted to come here to get her books (published) like she is doing it now.

Miguel: What do you like and what do you dislike about this country?

Sara: (Through interpreter) She says that some times it's a little better in here.

Miguel: In what sense?

Sara: (Through the interpreter) If she has to go to the doctor, that is better than over Mexico. She says that here they have to make the appointments again, and again, and again, and never help her.

Miguel: In what way is the United States similar, or different from Mexico? How is Mexico different, or similar to the United States?

Sara: Different, very. (Through interpreter) She says that the air is very, very clean, in the United States.

Miguel: What else? What other differences?

Sara: (Through interpreter) Some times the clothes are better in Mexico. The law, is pretty much better here in the United States...if she goes out at night here she is not scared, but in Mexico she is very scared because you never know what will happen.

Miguel: Do you feel more secure in this country? You feel safe in this country?

Sara: Oh yeah. I feel safer. (Through interpreter). If there is an emergency or (need to) go to the doctor, the ambulances and everything, they have more experience how to treat people.

Miguel: Sara, since you came to the United States, do you think the quality of your life has improved? Is

your life better now?

Sara: Oh yeah, lots better.

Miguel: How? How is better?

Sara: I have money to go to the doctor and buy the medicine. (Through interpreter) The air is so much cleaner here and there are many, many things that she likes.

Miguel: Sara, if you had the opportunity to talk to someone from your country who was planning one to immigrate to America, what advice would you give them?

Sara: (Through interpreter) (To get) the passport, the visa.

Miguel: You think they should get their passports, and their visas.

Sara: Ha ha.

Miguel: If the President of the United States invited you to serve in an Immigration Committee, what suggestions would you give to the President to improve the immigration experience? What would you tell the president of the United States?

Sara: (Through interpreter) If the people want to work...it is very very important to have some papers, and they have the right to have the papers...first, investigate them what they want to do.

Miguel: Sara, do you see yourself as an America, or Mexican, or Mennonite, what is your identity? What do you consider your national identity? Do you see yourself as German, or American, or Mexican or...?

Sara: (Through interpreter) She is kind of German Mennonite.

Miguel: Not exactly like Mexican? You were born in Mexico, but you do not see yourself as Mexican

Sara: No.

Miguel: Do you think it is important to maintain your identity as a Mennonite?

Sara: (Through interpreter) She cannot do anything to switch it to something (else), she is a Mennonite anyway.

Miguel: How do you maintain that identity? What do you do to continue being a Mennonite here in the United States?

Sara: (Through interpreter) She has grown up to be like her, her parents were teaching her, they have to stay sober and they always have to (observe) the religion, doing supper stuff, or do what the white people or the Spanish people do, like going to a house where prostitutes were.

Miguel: What has been your experience with language in this country, or with religion, or food, or dress, or other customs in American society? What can you tell me about that?

Sara: (Through interpreter) She would like to speak English. (The interpreter asks her something in her dialect. Sara answers). She has experienced that...she needs the English language or she cannot do it.

Miguel: Do you think American society and education should foster bilingualism? For example, at schools should school teach two languages, or just one. Should people use two language in this country?

Sara: (Through interpreter) She says that English and Spanish is ok.

Miguel: You are ok with bilingualism; if they teach both, English and German, or English and French?

Sara: (Through interpreter) That's ok if they can learn many, many languages but one or two are ok also.

Miguel: As an immigrant living in the United States, what do you consider to be your challenges now? Like problems or obstacles, what obstacles do you have now? Or barriers?

Sara: Helping people. (Interpreter). She would like to help people to have a better life.

Miguel: What would be the obstacle to do that?

Sara: (Interpreter) She has a hard time and she cannot do it right now but. That there are so many people who need help, talk to them and do something different from drinking, and get them to the doctor. By law they have to go to the doctor to get some help. There are all kinds of people: White people, Spanish people, German people who are treating their children so bad and they really, really...(inaudible).

Miguel: I what ways, do you think that American society could improve its treatment towards immigrants? How can American society treat immigrants better?

Sara: (Interpreter). She thinks that the papers are very important (she refers to immigration documents).

Miguel: Do you think that American society has become more hospitable, more friendly or less friendly to immigrants?

Sara: There are some they do, and there are some that not. And some they are treated bad, she had an experience (Sara interrupts and says something else). Actually, them people...they came from Canada, like they went from Canada to Mexico, some people stopped at the United States, and she says that some Mennonite people they are lots more hateful to the immigrants than the white people. She has a teacher that is trying to help her but behind her she is going against her, talking bad stuff about her. May be not exactly from her but from different people at the gas station, they are sitting there, something like that.

Miguel: Sara, is there anything else you want to say? Something else you want to mention from your experience as an immigrant?

Sara: Like she said, they are people coming from Mexico as immigrants. There are so many poor people coming to the Unite States, some have problems of depression and it is very helpful that they are treated very, very good but yet they are more depressed when they are not treated.

Miguel: Anything else?

Sara: No.

Miguel: Thank you.

Sara: You are welcome.