

Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

Interview with Silvio Cruz

March 18, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

Miguel: Good afternoon. We're going to start by asking your name.

Silvio: My name is Silvio.

Miguel: Silvio.

Silvio: Cruz.

Miguel: Silvio Cruz. Silvio what is your date of birth?

Silvio: I was born on August 2, 1969.

Miguel: 1969 and what is your place of birth?

Silvio: I was born in Managua, Nicaragua.

Miguel: What is your race or your ethnicity, Silvio?

Silvio: I'm Hispanic.

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

Silvio: I have 3 brothers and 2 sisters. I have a brother who is 37, I have brother who's 33 and older brother I believe is 39. I have two sisters. One of them is...she's 36 and one of them is 22.

Miguel: Alright and you are 37, 38?

Silvio: I am 35.

Miguel: 35, I'm sorry. Are your parents still alive?

Silvio: Yes. My mom is alive and she lives in California.

Miguel: She lives in California.

Silvio: My dad is alive and he lives in Minnesota.

Miguel: In Minnesota. All right, among your family members, who continues to live in your native land?

Silvio: None of the immediate family members, except my oldest brother, he is a half brother, he lives over there and then I have my grandparents in Nicaragua, and aunts and uncles.

Miguel: We're going to pause just a minute I'm going to disconnect this phone. None of your immediate family continue in Nicaragua, they're here in the United States. But you have extensive family...

Silvio: Extensive family in Nicaragua, yes.

Miguel: Um, while you were living in your native country what was your occupation?

Silvio: I was a student.

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: You were a student? All right, and did you ever work in Nicaragua?

Silvio: No.

Miguel: No, okay. Can you tell us about your living conditions in your native country before you came to the United States? What were your living conditions like?

Silvio: We had a home that was fairly well conditioned compared to other people. My dad worked for the military, so we had a home with windows, it had glass windows and doors and we had normal necessities compare to other people.

Miguel: What's your religion, Silvio?

Silvio: I'm Christian.

Miguel: Christian. While you were living in your homeland were you ever subjected to harassment, or physical or mental abuse, imprisonment or torture by the authorities?

Silvio: I was not, but I had family members who were.

Miguel: Why did that happen? Can you, would you like to explain that a little bit of that?

Silvio: I'll speak a little about it. Communism back in the early, late, late 1970s and early 1980s came into our country after a revolution back in 1979 and the communist regime tried to indoctrinate our country into communism so we had people from Cuba and people from Russia and all the different places that had communist ideas and you were forced to do some things that you, that you really are not suppose to.

Miguel: All right, Let's get to the second set of questions about your immigration experience. How did you first learn about America about the United States? What's your first memory about this country?

Silvio: I have family here in the United States, they lived in California and they told us the United States was a nice country and there was a lot of opportunities, but as a child I really don't have a whole lot other than just what I was told by my parents or other family members. .

Miguel: How old do you think you were when you first heard about the United States?

Silvio: Probably eight, eight years old.

Miguel: Eight years old. Do you want to expand on anything about that first time you heard about this country, anything else you...

Silvio: I don't really remember. I think I was too young.

Miguel: Let me ask you what lead you to move to Southwest Kansas, Silvio. Why this part of the country?

Silvio: We lived in California and California the place we lived in was a populated city and I wanted to go to a town that was smaller and since I had relatives here, my wife's side of the family, we had visited here before and we thought it was a good place to move to raise our kids.

Miguel: So before you came to Southwest Kansas you lived in California?

Silvio: Correct.

Miguel: How long did you live there?

Silvio: I lived there for about eight years.

Miguel: Eight years? Is that right after you came from Nicaragua?

Silvio: Correct. Yes.

Miguel: All right. Let me ask you about your immigration trip. When you came from Nicaragua, you emigrated from Nicaragua, what was your experience, what was the trip like, what can you tell us about that?

Silvio: Our trip was a unique trip because immigrated to this country illegally. We were fleeing our country because of the political agenda over there. Therefore we can here, and my parents decided to bring us here through the California border.

Miguel: So you escaped Nicaragua basically?

Silvio: Yes.

Miguel: Did you come through Mexico, or...?

Silvio: We flew to Mexico and from Mexico we came to the United States.

Miguel: Probably you will want to spend more on that trip later?

Silvio: Yes.

Miguel: So, how old were you when you came to the United States?

Silvio: I was fourteen.

Miguel: Fourteen. What was your first job when you came, after you came to the United States? What was your first gainful employment?

Silvio: I worked at Pioneer Chicken as a cook.

Miguel: When your family came how did they find housing, was it difficult was that arranged. How did your family find their first place?

Silvio: My mom came first and she had already had an apartment. Where she lived before we came. We came a year later. So it was my younger brother, my dad and I came later. She had already a job and so when we arrived here she already had a place, an apartment, a small apartment.

Miguel: For the rest of the family?

Silvio: For the rest to join.

Miguel: What do you think has been the most difficult adjustment that you had make living in the American society. What has been the most difficult adjustments for you?

Silvio: At first, I would have to say the language. Language barrier. Learning the language was a little bit frustrating because it was important and without knowing the language it kept you a step back from everyone else.

Miguel: And what was your experience with immigration authorities when you eventually had to go to immigration. What was your experience with them?

Silvio: It wasn't, it wasn't a good experience. We had, we applied for political asylum when we first came and they said that they were going to review our application and eventually they lost our paperwork and we had to fill it all out again and apply again. And eventually they let us stay under, under a certain status for one year and we had to renew our application every year.

Miguel: So can I say your family was facing some kind a persecution....

Silvio: At that time yes.

Miguel: Or threats to their integrity because of the political changes in Nicaragua?

Silvio: Since my dad worked for the air force he had (inaudible) if he went back.

Miguel: About the school system and teachers in America, what has been your experience with that, with teachers, with schools, with school officials?

Silvio: With the school officials it has been real good. Every good people work with, every good people to be under, their tutorialship and they helped a lot in our family's development in learning the English language and learning a lot of the American society.

Miguel: Silvio, what has been your experience with the police and other law enforcement agencies in this country?

Silvio: I haven't had any experience with them, thank God, as far as that side of the system, but the areas I have encountered with them I hadn't had any problem. They've always tried to help with any problem we might have.

Miguel: Your experiences have been positive?

Silvio: Yes.

Miguel: Not a bad one. Can you describe if there has been any situation or any type of racism towards you? Something that you may consider racism.

Silvio: There has been. I think that there probably always will because people have different ideas about different people. So I have encountered some and I try not to take them too seriously because people don't know me. So I just to ignore it.

Miguel: Since the time you've been in this country have you had a chance to go back to your native land?

Silvio: Yes. I went back to my country and a lot has changed since the time that I left. So now it's different it's more Americanized. People have computers, Internet and satellites. It seems like it, like you're in America with all the conveniences.

Miguel: Just warmer, right.

Silvio: Yes, just warmer right.

Miguel: How often do you go to Nicaragua? How often do you travel there?

Silvio: I try to go and visit my grandparents and my family every two years.

Miguel: And you just went recently, right.

Silvio: Yes. I went in January of this year.

Miguel: Do you keep in contact with your family, extended family in your country?

Silvio: Yes, yes I do keep in contact.

Miguel: How, what ways?

Silvio: I call some family member and one particular family member we have email contact just about daily.

Miguel: All right.

Silvio: She lets me know what's going on with the family...

Miguel: She keeps you up-to-date.

Silvio: She keeps me up-to-date. My parents are ninety years old, over ninety years old so she pretty much keeps us up-to-date on their health condition.

Miguel: Another question we have here is do you send money back to your country?

Silvio: Yes I do.

Miguel: You do. Okay, we won't ask how much or how often. It's just a question. Do you think at some point in the future you will return to your native country and why?

Silvio: If I do decide to return to my native country when I am older if there is no social security for me I might need to go somewhere else, where I can live with less money necessary to live at that age.

Miguel: So you have a good reasoning behind that?

Silvio: Yes.

Miguel: But if you could would you go... do you plan to retire there?

Silvio: Maybe, like I said it all depends on that time when retirement gets here. If I do have a retirement from, from social security and it's sufficient plus whatever investments that I can make to have that retirement then, I might stay here but if not then I might go over there where...

Miguel: You might consider it then?

Silvio: Yes.

Miguel: All right. Silvio, we have five open-ended questions. What do you like and dislike about the American society?

Silvio: I like the freedom of the American society and there isn't much that I dislike about America. And in the Hispanic culture we are very family oriented and if one thing I would say that I dislike about America is that there doesn't seem to be the contact with family members as there is in the Hispanic culture. Maybe it's big of how big the country is and people move around more than in my country, but here seems like people, kids grow up not knowing their grandparents, or not knowing their uncles or aunts or cousins so in the Hispanic culture we seem to know them if we don't live in the same town. We still know who they are and we keep that in contact and that's one area that I like about our culture and dislike about the American culture.

Miguel: All right. What resources do you use to help you adjust to American society?

Silvio: The number one resource that I think I use was learning the English language. And then adjusting to the way of doing things in America, doing things the way the American system is, you just can't go. Like in other countries you just do things...you want to do things your way, in America there is a set way there are laws and if you follow them you get along just fine.

Miguel: That's a very smart way of adjusting. Do you feel more secure or less secure in this country?

Silvio: I feel more secure in this country.

Miguel: Why is that?

Silvio: America is, it's a great country. It's the most powerful country in the world, I believe. And in my country there didn't seem to be that security as far economical, economic conditions or as far as political conditions. In America it seems to be more secure in that area.

Miguel: If you had the opportunity to talk to someone from your native country who was about to immigrate to America, what advise would you give them? What would you advise this person?

Silvio: I would advise them to learn as much English as they can in their country. Learn it, study it, get use to speaking it, practicing it. So when they come here they don't have such a hard time.

Miguel: And we have one more question. In what ways have you attempted or you have got integrated into the American society?

Silvio: I think the way I have integrated is by, by talking and getting familiar with other citizens of this country. How, how things are done. Education has a lot to do with it to. The more know about the system, the more you know about the people just getting adjusted to the culture of America. Getting use to how things are done I think is a good way to familiarize with the system.

Miguel: Silvio is there anything else you want to add?

Silvio: Um, I love America.

Miguel: God bless America, right