

TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW.

WITH

GUADALUPE CRUZ

JULY 7, 1975

INTERVIEWER: VICTOR F. BARELA

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Guadalupe Cruz was born to Braulio Jimenez and Silvina Gutierrez, in Tepatlitan, Jalisco, Mexico, in 1894. She was married in 1914 to Francisco Cruz. Their first child was born in Mexico, and they entered the United States in 1921 through El Paso, Texas. Before coming to Minnesota, she and her husband traveled and worked in California, Arizona, and Colorado. They arrived in Minnesota in April, 1929. She immediately became involved in the activities of the community and in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church.

In this interview, Mrs. Cruz discusses life in Mexico, the Mexican Revolution, life in the beet fields, the life, leaders, and activities of the early Mexican American Community of St. Paul. She remembers the first activities of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. She discusses the specific way in which many activities were conducted. She also shares some of her family problems and much of her personal life philosophy. This is an interesting lady!

This is an English translation of the original interview tape-recorded in Spanish. The original cassette recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH GUADALUPE CRUZ

July 7, 1975

INTERVIEWER: VICTOR F. BARELA

Barela: This is Victor F. Barela, interviewing Mrs. Guadalupe Cruz on July 7, 1975 at 469 Ada Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55107. This oral interview is being conducted for the Mexican American History Project under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society. Do I have your permission to interview you so that this interview will become the property of the Minnesota Historical Society?

Cruz: Yes.

Barela: What was your maiden name?

Cruz: Jimenez, Guadalupe Jimenez.

Barela: What was your father's name?

Cruz: Braulio Jimenez.

Barela: And your mother?

Cruz: Silvina Gutierrez.

Barela: Do you remember when they were born?

Cruz: No, I don't.

Barela: When were you born?

Cruz: I am 81 years old. I was born December 12, 1894.

Barela: Where were you born?

Cruz: In Tepatlitan, Jalisco at 5 in the afternoon. I remember because my grandparents used to tell me about it.

Barela: How long did you lived in Mexico?

Cruz: Until I got married. Twenty years. I got married when I was 20 and we came to California when I was 21.

Barela: Where did you cross the border?

Cruz: El Paso, Texas. Then there were no documents needed. All you had to do was put a nickel in the box and that was it. It was around 1921 when "Villa" attacked us, because of some men that were burned outside Mexico City.

Barela: Do you recall any other details about the Revolution?

Cruz: Yes, especially of that date. All those that wanted to come across the border were bathed because they had lice and had to be disinfected. They did not bathe us but we did have a lot of lice. That is when the Immigration was started. But first they bathed them and examined them. The Immigration would return them

- Cruz: to Juarez, where they would put them in little rooms that were designed especially for that purpose. But then someone poured petroleum and started the rooms on fire. They were all burned to death. And this is when "Villa" attacked. It was an atrocious revolution.
- Barela: What year was this?
- Cruz: 1915. I was 21 when I had my daughter Lupe, it was March 12th and I turned 21 the 12th of December. Then we came to the United States.
- Barela: How did you get to the border?
- Cruz: In the cars where all the revolutionaries traveled. We were all full of lice.
- Barela: Was this a train?
- Cruz: Yes, we came in a train which brought all the revolutionaries.
- Barela: Did you ever get to see "Villa" or any or the other revolutionary leaders?
- Cruz: No. They said that it was "Pancho Villa" who had attacked, I don't know if it was or not. We had gone to visit a lady and we went by the bridge to see where people crossed. We were ignorant. On the way to the bridge we met a man that knew my husband, he was going the opposite way and he was very surprised to see us. He asked where we were staying, which was at a big corral where people slept. He insisted that we get out of there and move our things to the house where he was living. We did. Three days later, after we were all cleaned we crossed the border to El Paso, Texas. From there we went to California. We were happy in California. But, then, we have always been happy no matter where we were, even in Arizona. We used to traveled a lot, but we don't do it any more. We still go to Mexico quite often to see my brothers.
- Barela: Why did you leave Mexico?
- Cruz: To be adventurous. My husband's friends had nothing but praise for the United States. I told my husband that if he came, I would have to come with him, otherwise he could not come. We didn't have much money, but I would not let him come alone. We went to a lady and she lent us the money. She was the one that persuaded my husband to bring me.
- Barela: Where did you live in California?
- Cruz: We lived in California for six years. During the six years we were in Browley, Los Angeles, and in Baja California, it was very much the same thing, wherever we could find work we would stay.
- Barela: What kind of work did you do?
- Cruz: I never worked. My husband didn't want me to work. He worked in the fields helping plant the crops or in the beets. I wasn't used to working and my husband knew it.
- Barela: Did you go to California by train and did you have many difficulties in the train?
- Cruz: We never had any difficulties, we never had any problems. It was here in the

Cruz: United States that an Italian lady helped me get my passport (Alien Card) that's about 25 years ago, she said that if we didn't get it, we couldn't get back to the United States from Mexico. First she helped me get mine and then my husband's. We never had any problem with either the immigration or the government.

Barela: Six years after you lived in California did you decide to come to Minnesota?

Cruz: No, from California we went to Arizona and then to Colorado.

Barela: Why did you go to Colorado?

Cruz: Because they told us that that part of the country was good for the beets. And it was very good. WE made a lot of money!

Barela: You went from beet job to beet job?

Cruz: Not me. Lupe was a little older and she could help her father, but I never worked.

Barela: Did you then go directly to Brush, Colorado?

Cruz: Yes. We went by train. The company took us from Arizona to Colorado. Before this my husband had worked for the railroad but he didn't like it, so we went to look for other work. Everyone that came here would first work in the railroad.

Barela: Were there a lot of Mexican people in California? Were they very poor?

Cruz: Yes, there were a lot more Mexicans, almost everyone was Mexican. At that time things were not like they are now. It was a painful sight to see all the poor people. My husband would remind me of the mosquitos and flies and other things of when we were in California, but I don't even like to remember that time. I did not like California. From Colorado we went to Mexico and after that we came here.

Barela: Did you like Colorado?

Cruz: Yes, I loved Colorado with all my heart. The climate is beautiful there.

Barela: How did you like the cold weather?

Cruz: We liked it there. We lived about five blocks from the sugar refinery. We never had any problems with the farmers. We worked for good farmers that gave us good housing. They gave us homes with furniture here and in Colorado, too. They even gave us a cow in Colorado. We were very lucky. The farmer wanted all his cattle to be the same color, but he had one that was a different color so he told my husband that he could have the cow and also gave him the hay to feed it. From that cow we got plenty of milk. We never went hungry or had any difficulties with anyone. But others did tell us that they suffered a lot.

Barela: Did you get to see many of those who suffered?

Cruz: Yes. Many.

Barela: From Colorado where did you go?

Barela: From Colorado where did you go?

Cruz: We went to see my mother. We lived in Colorado for six years. It was beautiful. From Colorado we went to Mexico and we stayed there for eight months. After my mother died we came back.

Barela: What did your mother die of?

Cruz: I don't know. She was sick for a long time. My father took her to see many doctors but they never knew what was wrong with her. My mother would tell me to ask Doctor Gonzalez what was wrong with her. She was under treatment for a long time and they still did not know what was wrong with her. She thought she had TB and she did not want any of the children to get close to her because it might be contagious. The doctor told me it was her liver. Guadalajara would be the only place that they could have cured her, but since her disease was so advanced, she would not make it. So, she died. My mother didn't want us to leave until she died. Francisco, my husband, was very agreeable. I never suffered with him. He was a good husband. We usually agreed to everything. I went to Mexico often. I don't go as often any more because I suffer from heart trouble. When I do go, I tell my sons not to worry because I have a burial plot there, too, in Guadalajara.

Barela: Where were your daughters born?

Cruz: Guadalupe was born in Mexico, Andrea in California, Petra was born in Colorado. I only had three daughters. Andrea died in a fire here in St. Paul when we lived by the church. I can still remember.

Barela: From Colorado did you go to Arizona?

Cruz: No, Arizona was before we went to Colorado.

Barela: So after you came back from Mexico, did you come to Minnesota?

Cruz: Yes, by train. We had no problems.

Barela: When did you arrive here in Minnesota?

Cruz: It was in April, but I don't remember the date. The company brought us here. We had good accommodations. We would get good meals. We would stop at different restaurants. It was in 1929. Ramon was six months old. We didn't come to St. Paul we went to the fields. After we finished the work we came to St. Paul. One of the towns was Lafayette, there were other towns, but I don't remember the names. After the work was finished we went to Chaska. This is where they took us. It was up to us where we wanted to go. We could have gone back to Mexico, but if we stayed they offered to help us. They would give us a home to live in and we would get a raise of \$5 per family member. We lived in Chaska for 3 years. Our "compadres" were already here and kept telling us to move to St. Paul because the schools were much closer here. In Chaska we lived in the company hotel and the children had to walk into town to go to school in the cold and snow. We came to St. Paul and we never went back.

Barela: Were there a lot of poor people in Chaska?

Cruz: Yes, there were some that did not have anything to eat. Our family always had plenty. That was when a lot of other people from Chicago and other states came to Minnesota because they were dying of hunger.

Barela: Did you have to budget your money to make ends meet?

Cruz: Yes, I was in charge of the money and we were careful how we spent it. We always had enough to eat even if it was only beans and potatoes. It was sad to see the many families that came with 5 and 6 children and not having anything to eat. Thanks to God I never had any problems with my children.

Barela: Did you cook a lot?

Cruz: Yes, that was my only job. I spent most of my time in the kitchen.

Barela: Did you make things with corn or flour?

Cruz: Only with flour not with corn.

Barela: Did you make "tortillas" out of corn or flour?

Cruz: Everybody likes both. I only made flour "tortillas". It wasn't until my daughters were older that we made the others. I wasn't brought up to do housework. I was the oldest in my family and I never had to do anything. After I was married I learned how to mend clothes because we could not afford to buy new ones. I taught myself. My mother told Francisco that I did not know how to do anything, but he said it was OK. It was like it is today because regardless of how useless you are, you can always go and buy things.

Barela: Did you ever have problems with the language?

Cruz: No, I still don't speak English. What I do is copy the names from the cans and make a list which I give to the clerk. That was the advantage in California that everyone spoke Spanish. I don't know how it is now, but that's how it was then. My children, too, learned to speak Spanish. I told them they could learn English but in the home they had to speak Spanish. My grandchildren come and they call me "grandma", and I tell them, "not grandma", it's "abuela", they just laugh.

Barela: When you first came, did you teach the children how to sing?

Cruz: Yes, I finished school in Mexico at the age of 18. My glory was to sing to the music. I didn't like to do it alone because I would be embarrassed, but when I'd get together with people I knew, I enjoyed singing. Just ask Ramedo. Ramedo, his sister Celia, and his brother Lico they were really good at debates, greeting people, and singing. I used to play the piano and teach all the neighbor's children songs. I loved it! We used to sing for patriotic holidays and other things but later we broke up because of the inconvenience for the people and also my husband Francisco thought it was too much trouble and he was tired of babysitting, so I quit. We had a lot of intellegent children. Ramedo and his father, Federico, were very smart. Ramedo's mother, Maria, and I went to the same school. I only knew her for 4 or 5 months before she died.

Barela: When you came to St. Paul, were there many Mexican families here?

Cruz: Yes, there were many because the field workers would come and stay. They paid 25 cents an hour at the packing houses. There were many people who needed jobs. About two years after we were here, Father Gilmet from Our Lady of Guadalupe had me give out food and clothing to the poor needy families. They suffered a lot. He was the first priest to open the church. He was very young and he gave out a lot of charity.

Barela: Where did he get the food to give out?

Cruz: From the rich people. There are a lot of rich people in this state. They would come with baskets of food to give out at Christmas, Thanksgiving, and other holidays. Ramedo was one of the boys who would sing daily with me. We didn't have the Guadalupe Society then. When I first got here I thought everything was so sad. The church used to be a bar that they bought and cleaned up and made it into the church. Later they bought out the whole building. I asked Father Gilmet if we could start a society, that I would direct it but I couldn't afford to pay the expenses. Two weeks later he gave us a ribbon with the Mexican colors and the medal of the Virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and his blessings. This is how the society was started.

Barela: What are some of the activities the society did?

Cruz: We started to cook dinners to sell to get money for the church. We had some good dinners and dances. Some of the people would come and help us. We made tacos, enchiladas, tamales, and sopas. Other people made all this, I didn't. I cook at home but that's about it.

Barela: Did you also have some programs with the dinners?

Cruz: Yes, for Holy Week we had the Passion Play. Men would re-lived the stations of the cross. My "compadre" Nacho would be Christ and carry a cross. The Sacred Heart and St. Joseph's Societies would put on the plays and the Guadalupe Society would make the dinners. We would also have processions in the streets.

Barela: Did you have other festivities for Holy Week?

Cruz: Yes, everybody participated. Mr. Guerra, Francisco Rangel, who was the president of the Sacred Heart Society, his daughters would sing and dance. We united all our efforts for the festivities. In Chaska, also, we celebrated all holidays. My whole family was very outgoing. Lupe Serrano, the oldest of my girls, did not want to go to school. She would rather stay home and do housework. She would say that the boys were rowdy and she didn't like that. She is a hard worker. I dropped out of the society because my husband wanted me to spend more time at home. Lola Rodriguez took my place in the society, and Monita helped her. It was a lot of work being the president of the society. Often times someone would be sick and I would have to go over and help her out.

Barela: Did you only get together for holidays?

Cruz: No, for everything. At the meetings we had people in charge of different things. For example, if someone was on the committee for the sick, they would have to visit the sick, someone else would be in charge of the needy and others would be in charge of collecting funds to help the church.

Barela: What kind of festivities did you have for Our Lady of Guadalupe Day?

Cruz: We celebrated the best way we knew how. We would carry the Virgin through the streets, carrying candles at night, like "Posadas". It was very beautiful. We would take her from house to house. But now we are all very old and limping so we don't do it anymore.

Barela: How did you celebrate Christmas night? Did you have a midnight mass?

Cruz: Yes, we sang. The pianist would always want me to sing with them. I loved to sing.

Barela: When did you organized the chorus?

Cruz: This was just for the patriotic holidays. We recited, sang hymns, the Mexican National Anthem and the National hymn of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I was "number one" when it came to singing. The Rangel girls were also "number one" they would help me a lot, they sang beautifully.

Barela: Was this also for Independence Day? Did you celebrate "El Dia de la Raza"?

Cruz: Yes. We sang the National Hymn of Our Lady of Guadalupe for the 12th of December. The way they sing this song in Mexico with the orchestra and the violins is so beautiful. It seems as though the violins are speaking to the Virgin. I wish my grandchildren could go to Mexico to see this. She is the patron saint of Mexico and all over.

Barela: Did you have to work very hard to organize the community?

Cruz: Yes, some of the people were very ignorant or they didn't want to be bothered, also they were very poor. Two of our members that helped me get the society started have died. Anita Chavez, she was German, but was married to a Mexican and the other, Maria Castaneda, went back to Mexico. Her husband wrote that she had died. Some of them ended up in a nursing home. The snow was so high but that did not stop us from going around recruiting members. After that the men began to organize into men's clubs, like the Sacred Heart, Saint Vincent, and Saint Joseph. There were a lot of men in these organizations. but not anymore now.

Barela: Did you ever have any programs at the Neighborhood House?

Cruz: Yes, when we went to the Neighborhood House, we usually presented the Passion Play or the "Posadas".

Barela: At that time where did you live?

Cruz: At Fillmore, close to the church.

Barela: What year did you organize the Society of Guadalupe?

Cruz: Around 1932.

Barela: Did people get excited about this?

Cruz: Yes, it was beautiful. Everyone was united. The people at the Neighborhood House were upset because of the competition. Mr. Federico Saucedo was always working with us. Also Francisco Rangel and another man named Pedro who would come all the way from Minneapolis. He was very old. He was the one that played "Hidalgo". Everyone put on events for the benefit of the church. Ramedo, Cruzita, Federico, Celia all were good at reciting and singing. We were always together.

Barela: In talking with Mrs. Rangel, she told me that you helped each other a lot, that sometimes someone needed to have a letter written and that Mr. Francisco Rangel would help them. Were there many other people who were like him?

Cruz: No, not really because "Don Francisco" was a very kind, generous, and very intelligent man who knew so much. That is why his oldest daughters are singers, he encouraged them to play guitar, accordion, piano, and violin. His son Francisco Rangel (KIKO) is the perfect example. He is a well known person. His father taught him. "Don Francisco" was a hard working man and loved music. All his daughters are good singers, and musicians, they are good at everything

Barela: Was your husband very involved in any of the societies?

Cruz: No, he would say he was not a woman, he couldn't be involved in things like that. But this didn't stop me from being involved with church affairs. Later, before he died, he would go to church very often.

Barela: Do you remember those hard winters?

Cruz: Yes, now it is nothing. At that time it was very hard, especially for the needy.

Barela: What kind of stove did you have?

Cruz: A coal stove and later a petroleum and now an electric one. We are coming along!

Barela: Were there many people involved in politics at that time?

Cruz: Yes.

Barela: Did the Anglos go to the "barrio" to participate?

Cruz: Yes, they were very humanitarian.

Barela: Did any of the people involve themselves directly with politics?

Cruz: Yes, Ramedo was one of them who studied. There are many who are educated but who do not take advantage of the opportunities. Those who love work can find it. If not, you starve.

Barela: Does your family still maintain their Mexican traditions, such as foods?

Cruz: Yes, they all like Mexican food. I have three Anglo daughters-in-law, two Mexican. They all love Mexican food and they also know how to cook it.

Barela: Do they still celebrate the holidays?

Cruz: Yes.

Barela: Do you still participate in festivities, like for Independence Day?

Cruz: Not anymore. I am afraid because of my heart. I have had two strokes and my children keep an eye on me. I was always very active. Even now the Society of Guadalupe is still going. People come from all over to the church for help.

Barela: Has the Mexican community gone through a lot of hardships to raise itself up?

Cruz: No, I don't think it is hard. It is a matter of encouraging the people to unite rather than splitting their opinions. That way the Mexican is never going to get anywhere. We all have to be partial and care about our neighbor like we care about ourselves. That is what is written in the scriptures. We are to see each other as brothers, not animals. Well, each person to their own. Now days you can't say anything because the younger generation is very critical. I don't say anything. A long time ago it was not like that. But now my children are married, so thank goodness for that.

Barela: Where do your family members live? Do they live in St. Paul? Who did they marry?

Cruz: Lolo's wife is Mexican born and raised in the United States. Ramon's wife is Anglo. All my sons own their own property. Bobby lives by here but I rarely visit them. I prefer that they visit me. Bobby's wife is German. Both Ramon's wife and Bobby's are named Gloria. Ramon's wife is Norwegian. Jose's wife is Swedish. I have 3 Anglos and 2 Mexican. They are all very nice.

Barela: Do you still give advice to your sons?

Cruz: Yes, especially when I hear that they have been drinking. It is a bad example for their children. I don't want them to end like their father.

Barela: Did your husband drink a lot?

Cruz: When the children were young he didn't drink. But later when he was older, he did. It caused his death. He had gotten drunk the night before. My husband wanted to attend a Mass for his mother, who died when he was seven years old. This was the first time he was having a mass said for his mother in all those years. This was the reason why I was separated from him because of his drinking. He was always drunk. The priest told me that I was living in sin because I would tolerate his whims. So he told me to get a separation, that, that was the only solution. I could not do it until 3 or 4 years ago, I got a separation. A drunk man is not worth anything, especially if he has a family, because no one respects him. I felt badly but I did what the priest told me to do. I wasn't doing him any good. I went to live with my son Ramon. At Ramon's I got tired of him yelling at his wife. I don't like that, so I left. I started to look for an apartment close to the church. I didn't like it because there were too many children running around. Three months later they found this place for me. I like it here because we are up here like the birds and can't hear what is going on anyplace else.

Life is history and I have always liked history. Even now, wherever I go I meet friends. We are happy to see each other and we hug and they usually invite me to go here and there with them. I depend on no one. I live by myself. I eat when I want. When I get sleepy I go to bed without having to explain anything to anyone. My children would like me to move in with them but I like living by myself. Ramon was here today and I told him that you were coming. One has to think of everything in order to have a good life. In a home one has to correct the children and set a good example. The mother and father should know how to discourage bad things. I was very strict with all of them.

Barela: You have a nice family.

Cruz: Thanks to God. Once in a while I hear that one of my sons has been drinking but they don't come around here like that. They always come to visit me. I reprimand them about their drinking. I know one has to take into account that they are men but they also have to take into consideration that they have a family. They have to set a good example, otherwise when their children do the same, the parents become upset. I don't shut my mouth even though they say, "Oh mother". But I tell them I am still alive, and when have they seen me drunk? I taught them how to sing and dance. They used to participate in all the events. Just ask Ramedo. All the young people participated. We had a pianist, may she rest in peace, she was so good to us. We sang and danced for everything. She made the piano sing. The Anglos are good people. Ask Ramedo, the only one that was a little wild in his family was Fred. My children did not like to be like that.

Barela: Mrs. Cruz, I appreciate your comments. Thank you very much.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society