

Marta Castañon
Narrator

Abner Arauza
Interviewer

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Marta Castañon - **MC**
Abner Arauza - **AA**

AA: I thought that I had a form that I need for you to sign to give the Minnesota Historical Society permission to use this information, the oral and printed, for projects that they are working on. So, if you don't mind, when I see you again to finish the interview, I'll bring it. I don't have it with me. I thought I did.

MC: Okay. That's fine.

AA: I am going to ask some questions that, obviously, I already know the answer to, but for the interview, I'll ask them anyway as if I didn't know. I know that I already said that we won't finish at this session, so don't rush. Some answers will be really short and some of them will be long and that's okay. As long as you think you need to talk to us on any question, that's fine. Let's start with your name.

MC: Marta Castañon.

AA: Your age and date of birth? I can cover my ears if you want me to.

MC: I'm fifty years old, and I was born September 6, 1959.

AA: Where?

MC: In Moorhead, Minnesota.

AA: Oh, okay. What is your educational level?

MC: I graduated from Moorhead High School in 1978 and I had two years of vocational technical school.

AA: What in?

MC: I started in accounting and finished as an accounting clerk.

AA: Good. Name and ethnic origin of spouse?

MC: Well, I've been married twice, divorced twice. My first husband was Juan Manuel Guerrero, and my second husband was Marcelo Cavazos.

AA: Number of children?

MC: I have two children, and one daughter who passed away.

AA: The names of the children?

MC: Juan Alberto Guerrero, Víctor Andres Guerrero, and Sarah Lisa Guerrero.

AA: Tell me about your parents and how they chose Minnesota as a place to come work.

MC: My parents' names are Pedro and Armandina Castañon. My mother's maiden name is Morales Rodriguez. My parents met up here between Comstock and Wolverton, Minnesota. My mom came up with a cousin of hers who was also a crew leader Ramiro Rodriguez. She had worked with him. She had come up with them several times to Minnesota in the mid to late 1950s. My dad came with the brother of the crew leader, Raul Rodriguez. My father was born in Arizona and grew up in Mexico. The story that I've heard is that my grandparents were shepherders, and back then the borders were very open. So he grew up in Mexico and as a young man decided to come *el norte* and ended up in Crystal City, Texas. In Crystal City, Texas, he met Raul Rodriguez and the Balboas and became friends with them and came to Minnesota to work. That's how he and my mom met - through the two brothers.

My father fell in love with this land. He had never seen the dirt as black as it was. Where he was from, it was very deserty, red dirt, and you couldn't grow much on it. In Mexico. He loved this land.

To him, he was amazed at all of the technology with the farming, like the tractors, because where he grew up in Mexico, he and his father and his brother would plant by a horse pulling a plow, or by hand, just throwing the seeds into the ground. It wasn't a very good living. The crops were really poor.

He and my mother met up here and they married at Saint Francis Church.

AA: Saint Francis de Sales?

MC: Yes.

For some reason, my father decided he wanted to stay here all year round. He wanted to experience things. My father was very much an adventurer, even if you might not think he was. He loved to go driving around exploring new places, seeing things. He wanted to try a winter here, so he and my mother married and they stayed. My mother said that she

would look out of the farmhouse, because they lived on a farm, and to her, it was like the end of the world - seeing all that snow.

AA: [Chuckles]

MC: My parents initially started working for a grower by the name of Ted [Theodore] Peet, who had a lot of farm workers near Wolverton. The story that I heard about Ted Peet hiring my dad was that my dad had kind of made the decision to stay here, and didn't go back to Texas with the other workers. He showed up at the Ted Peet farm and that's the farm my mom was working at with the Rodriguez's. It was sugar beet harvest time. Dad asked for work and Ted Peet said, "Well, no, I don't have any work. I've already hired on my drivers," that kind of thing.

Dad, I guess, was very insistent that he wanted a job. He wanted a job. So Ted Peet said, "Well, let me tell you this. If you can get all those beets out of the piles of dirt..." Back then, they didn't have the technology they have now, so there were a lot of beets and dirt getting thrown back into the trucks. "If you can pull the beets out of that pile within an hour, I'll give you a job. I want to see how many you pull out." Dad, within an hour, managed to fill up the truck with sugar beets because he went from pile to pile to pile and he did it really fast. Ted Peet was so impressed with him that he gave him a job driving a truck. He managed to find another truck and let him drive the truck. My dad earned enough that the following year that he came with his own hauling truck.

AA: Wow. He liked it?

MC: Yes, he liked it.

That year that Mom and Dad stayed, they stayed on the [D. Hal] Sellers' farm.

AA: Were they married by this time?

MC: They married in October 1958.

Sellers' had his own farm worker family that would come. Dad would stay in the winter time. Back then, the Sellers' had sheep, so Dad would help out with the sheep and, then, during the summertime, Mom and Dad would move back to the Ted Peet farm and stay there. That's where Mom and Dad worked in the sugar beets and Dad worked with Ted Peet planting the crops. He also, with the Sellers' planting the crops. So that's the first year that they stayed here.

Now, Mom could never figure out why Dad was very insistent that all of us six kids be born up here. We used to joke around and say, "Well, maybe Dad thought Mexico was going to reclaim Texas," that kind of thing.

AA: [Chuckles]

MC: We never knew why Dad was very, very insistent that all his six kids be born up here.

Mom said that it was really hard, and she would get tears in her eyes when she would tell the story that when she was expecting my brother Daniel. He was born November 15. By that time, all the relatives had gone back to Texas. A blizzard came up and she went into labor. She said, "I'll never forget your Dad... We had to make the decision what to do with you and your sister, Amelia."

So they left us there at the farm, out in that little farmhouse. Dad drove like crazy all the way over to Moorhead, dropped her off at the front door. He just turned around and came back. She said that when Dad got back to the farm, we were still sleeping like nothing had happened. She said that was very hard for her because she didn't know any English. It was very hard to communicate with the doctors and nurses what was going on. I'm sure they must have figured out she was in labor. But she said that was really hard on her not having family around or somebody to help her translate what was going on.

We all grew up here. Each year, they worked the sugar beet fields. When we were kids, they would take us to the beet fields with them until Saint Joseph's [Catholic Church] said that me and my sister and brother were old enough to go to what they called the boarding school back then. That's what we did every year when they worked in the fields.

There were several years when we stayed up here all year round and several years that we'd go back to Crystal City, Texas, and stay for the winter.

AA: How old were you then?

MC: I remember when Head Start started in Crystal City and it was only on Saturdays. I remember that. I remember second grade at Airport School, fourth and fifth grade at the Grammar School, and my last year of school in Crystal City was seventh grade at the Airport Junior High.

AA: So the grammar school was still up?

MC: Yes, and that was right after the walkout of sixty-nine in Crystal City. I remember—I was in fourth grade—and we arrived in Crystal City and the walkout was going on. I didn't know what was going on. I just know that we went to Zacatecas. We were there for quite a while, longer than what we normally stay and, then, we came back.

When we came back to Piedras Negras, we found out that my mom's brother-in-law had died in a car accident, so we were helping with funeral. We stayed for an extended time in Piedras Negras, and in Guerrero, where my aunt lived.

When we went back to Crystal City, school had already started. I remember we went to the [Lorenzo de] Zavala School to register. It made sense, since we lived close by there,

so that's where we should go. They told my mom, "No, they have to go to the migrant school." The Grammar School was considered the migrant school back then, so that's where we ended up going to school. I was in fourth grade.

AA: Wow. Did you consider yourself a resettled migrant or did you consider yourself a native of Moorhead who happened to be going back and forth later?

MC: Oh... That was something that I struggled with growing up. I always considered myself from Moorhead, Minnesota. When the local community would ask me where I was from, I would say, "From here." There would be like these raised eyebrows because they thought..."Aren't you from Mexico?" I'm like, "No, I was born here." I guess I consider myself a native of Moorhead. That's why I tell people, "I lived off and on in Texas as a kid, but I wasn't born there. I wasn't really raised there."

AA: You were now settled here when you married?

MC: Yes.

AA: So there was not a decision as to where do we settle?

MC: No.

AA: It was a home for both?

MC: [Pauses] Yes, because I was going to school at that time. We just ended up staying here. We had always talked about going back to Texas and we just never did. We just ended up staying here and all the kids were born here.

AA: Why?

MC: What?

AA: Why did you not move to Texas?

MC: Because, for one thing, I was already working. It was a steady job. Both of us were working. For some reason, we just ended up staying here. Now, later on, way back in the mid to late 1990s, I did consider moving back to Texas. By that time, I was with my second husband. It was my father who talked me out of it.

He said, "All the years that you have working at Moorhead Legal Services aren't going to mean anything once you leave. If you decide to move to San Antonio or Eagle Pass ... It's not going to mean anything, *m'ija*." It's *who* you know and not what you know. In reality, do you know people in the legal system down there?" I said, "No." And he said, "You're too used to how life is up here. It's very different down in Texas. Yes, I'm sure you like it when we go and visit. It's nice to go and visit, but once you start living down

there, it's going to be hard. Why do you think we come back to Minnesota every year? Because your mom and I miss it. You're going to find yourself doing the same thing."

So another thing that played in the decision was the school. The schools were a lot better up here than down in Texas. In fact, my brother once told me... He moved back to Texas and got married and all his three kids were born in Texas. He said that when he first registered his old son in Kindergarten, the teacher right away asked him where he had learned his English. He said, "I grew up in Minnesota." She said, "Yes, I can tell that. You speak it differently from other people down here." But I had never picked up on that. I had never noticed that.

That's one of the other reasons that Mom and Dad stayed here also was because the schools are so much better, and the schools were free. Down in Mexico, my dad only went up to school to sixth grade, and, beyond that, you have to pay. My grandfather, who worked as a *bracero*, my mom's dad, paid for her education to go to school to ninth grade. Mom, of all her siblings, she's the only one who went up to ninth grade. Because of that, because of that education she had, she was hired to be the local school teacher around the *ranchitos* she grew up in.

AA: Was that in Texas?

MC: In Mexico.

AA: Oh.

MC: So she would ride on horseback and hit a different little area and stay there for a week with a family and then go on the next week. She did that for a couple of years before coming up to the north to work.

AA: Wow, that's interesting.

MC: Yes. I didn't know that... I didn't know that until my aunt mentioned it to me. She did that. I knew that she had worked like as a teacher's aide, but I didn't know that she actually rode horseback and taught kids.

AA: When they came up here and settled, what kind of adjustments did they make?

MC: What kind of adjustments? Besides trying learning English?

AA: Any you can think of.

MC: [Pauses] I'm not really sure. We lived on a farm when we would come up here, worked in the fields, and me and my siblings went to migrant school. I think part of the adjustment was not seeing the relatives or having much contact with the relatives. I remember Mom would bring up a lot of like the spices that she would use. She would bring a very large amount, because, back in those days, they couldn't find the spices

around here. I remember when we lived in Texas, we didn't have a television, and my mom was hooked on her *novelas* so she would listen on the radio. That's one thing she had to get used to, was not being able to listen to her *novelas* on the radio. It was getting used to winter driving if we didn't go back to Texas again. I really can't remember a lot of adjustments.

One thing I do remember is that Mom would go to our parent/teacher conferences down in Texas, but she would not go to the ones here, because she couldn't communicate. She couldn't communicate in English to the teachers.

AA: It would be pretty hard, knowing that she wanted to go and know what Marta was up to, but she couldn't.

MC: Right.

What I do remember, Dad, one year... When I was in third grade, we stayed here all year round. Dad took a welding class at the Hanson Mechanical School in Fargo [North Dakota] and got a welding degree. He, also, took some adult ed. [education] classes trying to learn English. They didn't do that stuff down in Texas. I don't know if there were no classes or there weren't the resources to do that. But he did do that up here.

AA: How about like with neighbors or church or community services?

MC: The neighbors... We lived on the farm, so there wasn't really a lot of neighbors. Mom would on occasion go to the farmer's house to clean or iron or wash. They would hire her to do some of that stuff.

I remember at church, we pretty much kind of kept to ourselves. Mom didn't really talk to anybody. It was more like, "Hello" and that was it. Sometimes, people would ask her things, and we'd have to translate for her. At church, we'd pretty much be by ourselves. As us kids grew older, we would see our friends and chat with them and stuff, but Mom and Dad never hung around for coffee hour afterwards. After we moved to Sabin, after Dad got sick and we moved into Sabin, we would go to church in Sabin.

Dad, he was pretty well known. He had a knack for making friends. He would walk down to the local bar, and, even though he didn't drink, he would just sit there and just talk with the locals there, so they got to know him pretty well. But Mom didn't do that. Mom, she just kind of kept to herself. She would say, "Hello," to the neighbors and the neighbor across the street. My relatives, when they would come up in the summer time, they often brought a lot of onions and *repollo* [cabbage] and some other vegetables. I remember she would bag them up and, then, send my brothers out to sell them for a buck a bag for the onions. But she kind of kept to herself out in Sabin.

AA: How about you? After you went back and forth, but, then, you stayed here permanently? There must have been some adjustment, something different.

MC: Yes. It was very hard for me. The last year that we stayed in Crystal that was in seventh grade in 1973. What I remember about going to school in Texas is I loved school down there. Even though I remember the schools were poor—they didn't have the nice gym equipment or the books and all that kind of stuff—I felt like I fit in.

AA: So what was it that you liked so much?

MC: Because everyone was (pause) brown like me, spoke Spanish like me. They were poor like me. I could relate to that because my parents were the same way and their parents were the same way. When I went back to Crystal when I was in fourth grade, I saw that my teacher, Mister Talamantez, was a Mexicano, had been a migrant farm worker. I was so in awe of him, because he was the first Hispanic teacher that I had seen in my life; the first one. He was somebody who had worked the fields as a kid, went to college, and got his teaching license. I was very in awe of him. I was so impressed with him.

It was hard for me to adjust back up here because the school was so advanced up here, I would fall behind. But I managed to pass the classes. Trying to learn English when I was just a little kid was really hard. I started first grade knowing hi, bye, and okay, and that was it. It was hard for me to adjust, getting used to all whites around me. Knowing that I had fallen behind and trying to catch up was a struggle for me - trying to switch into speaking *all* English every day instead of the English and Spanish that my friends in Texas would go back and forth on.

The eighth grade year that I was here, that, supposedly, was to be the last year we were going to stay here year round. My mom and dad had finally made this agreement that it would be the last year. After that, we were only going to come and work in the beet fields in the summer and go back and do our high school years down in Texas. Well, that year Dad got sick.

I remember in eighth grade when Dad gave us the news, I was really down, really depressed about it, and my grades went down. The only teacher that took notice was my English teacher in the eighth grade here. His name was Mr. Mark Joraanstad. He's the only one who noticed that my grades went down. I remember at the junior high having to look down the hallway in between classes and I saw my dad and I'm like why is Dad here? When I got home and Dad got home from work, he said, "I got a call from your teacher and he wanted me to go in and talk to him. He was wondering why your grades had gone down." I had gone from an A down to a C-. He told Dad, "Is there something that I should be concerned about because Martha's grades have gone way down?" He was the only teacher that cared enough to call Mom and Dad. He noticed the same with my brother two years later —my brother was two years behind me—that my brother's grades had also gone down. I just thought if my grades went down in a good class and I had some other good classes... None of those teachers cared enough to call. He was the only teacher. I really appreciated that from him.

AA: Is he still around?

MC: I don't know if he's still around or not. I knew he had gone Shanley High School [in Fargo, North Dakota], and I don't know if he's still there.

That really left an impression on me that he cared enough to call Mom and Dad and ask, "What's going on, because Martha's grades have gone way down?"

That year was a hard year, but, somehow, we adjusted. It wasn't like it hadn't been done before. We were expecting to, you know, go back to Texas in August and start going to school down there. That's when Dad got sick. Then, it became really hard. It just changed our lives forever.

For us growing [up] on the farm, it was really hard, because one of the things I had always looked forward to was being able to participate in after school activities and I couldn't because Mom didn't want to drive. Dad was always working. So we couldn't participate in after school activities. If we had lived in Texas, the schools were within walking distance. It was easy for us to participate in stuff.

When I was in ninth grade, just on a whim, I just decided to run for student council and I made it. I couldn't believe it.

AA: [Chuckles]

MC: It was easy for me to participate in student council because our student council meetings were held during school hours. There was very little in the way of activities. By then, I had developed a circle of friends that would give me a ride if I needed a ride out to the farm or, sometimes, Dad would pick me up. By then, Dad was already on dialysis. His schedule was such that he could pick us up from stuff. Even then, it was hard to participate in activities, because there were fees. Sometimes, things required fees or special uniforms. Mom and Dad couldn't afford them. They couldn't afford some of those activities. I never looked into if there were scholarships. I didn't know if there were scholarships..

I, being the oldest, I had to go home and help Mom and Dad with a lot of stuff. Mom, after Dad got sick, she started working with beet pilers every fall. I was expected to go home and make supper and help out with the younger siblings. Somehow, I kind of adjusted to the fact that we weren't going back for a long time.

I know that in high school, I was kind of a loner. I had friends but I still felt like a loner. I always felt like somehow there was a part of me that just didn't fit in here, because back then, there were very, very few Hispanics going to school. The few that there were, we would kind of latch onto each other. We'd just kind of hang out. It was unfortunate... There was a friend of mine who went to junior high here and we would always talk about, "Oh, we can't wait to get to the high school and we can at least hang out." Well, it turned out that we didn't have any classes together. [laughter] Then, her locker was on third floor and mine was way down on the bottom, so... It just happened that way. Then, they

moved away, so I only saw her during my sophomore year. We would talk about that. She says the same thing - that she often felt like a loner. She had friends, but there was just something. She always felt a little bit on the outside looking in.

[Pause]

AA: Then you graduated from high school. You went to college. You met your husband. By then, you weren't going back and forth to Texas anymore?

MC: No.

AA: How was it settling over here in Moorhead, at that point?

MC: I think it was easier for me because I spoke both languages. I think growing up here, I just kind of got accustomed to things, and I would not let it bother me. I just did what I wanted to do. I would hear other Latinos talk about... "Oh, everybody is so racist up here," and that kind of thing. I think there was some, but I couldn't say it was everywhere—although, it depends, I think, on the attitude sometimes. If you give attitude, you can get attitude. But there were some instances. I think the general population was having a harder time trying to get used to the fact that the Hispanic population was growing in this area. I don't know; it's kind of hard to describe. I only know my own perspective. It's hard for me to say how others felt. But, being a person who grew up here, I grew up in both worlds. I think it was easier for me than for some other people. I know I would hear other couples say, "We're going back to Texas as soon as we're done. I can't stand it here." For me, it was okay, I guess.

AA: And did they return?

MC: Yes, some people did return and have not been back.

AA: I wonder. I know sometimes, they'll say, "I want to go back to Texas. I don't want to be here anymore," but, then, after the end of the year, "It's not so bad. Maybe I'll stay." But they went back?

MC: Yes.

AA: So your dad had family in Mexico?

MC: Yes.

AA: Have you maintained contact with them?

MC: Yes. Every year that we went to Texas, we would always go to Zacatecas for at least two weeks and spend some time down n there. After Dad passed away, Mom always kept in contact. I'm on Facebook, so a couple of my cousins from Zacatecas are also on

Facebook, so we've been able to keep contact. You know, show pictures and that kind of stuff, so that's been kind of nice.

AA: That's interesting.

MC: Yes.

AA: So technology brought you together—or kept you together.

MC: Right.

AA: Before Facebook, about how often and how did you connect?

MC: Probably about twice a year we would call each other up on the phone just to see how everybody else was doing. I've only got two cousins that have the technology. The rest of the family doesn't have that at home. They're very poor. So I just have updates from the cousin and that's it. Otherwise, it's usually once or twice on telephone that we would call and talk.

AA: How about family in Texas?

MC: Most of them have phones. There's a few of them that have email, and they are also on Facebook, so we've been able to connect that way. It's kind of nice catching up with each other after all these years.

Some of my cousins, they happen to be daughters of Ramiro Rodriguez, who was the crew leader that my mom came up with. There was one day that I found all these old pictures, and I posted them on there, and they were just... They really liked that. There was an old picture of their grandmother, who was my grandfather's sister, that they had never seen before. They told me how much their dad loved Mom so much and always saw her as his sister, and spoke really highly of Mom, thought the world of her. So it was nice to hear some of that.

AA: You said, "catching up," so that means there were some years there that maybe you didn't connect?

MC: Yes, there were several years that I didn't see a number of them. I would hear. I had my aunt's phone numbers. I would call her on occasion and say, "How are the girls? *Las Primas?*" [My cousins?] She would tell me, "Oh, Rita's here," and things like that.

On Facebook, they have a cousin on the other side of the family that lives in Minneapolis. Do you know Noemi Treviño?

AA: Sure.

MC: Okay. Noemi is *prima hermana de ellas* [their first cousin]. They're on Mom's side, and I am on the dad's side.

AA: I know Raul and Ramiro.

MC: Oh, yes. They're *primos hermanos* of my mom and dad.

AA: I know Ramiro Chico and Rita.

MC: Oh! Okay. Well, yes, they're on Facebook, so we've been able to connect that way. I found their names. I said, "*Mira las primas*" [Look, my cousins]. I requested them and we have been keeping up with each other, and I have seen pictures of their kids. It's kind of nice that way. Then, I have a cousin in Piedras Negras, and I saw her on my other cousin's list and I asked her, "*¿De quién eres hija?*" [Whose daughter are you?] And then she said, "Moises" I said, "Oh, okay. *Entonces, somos primos.*" [Then we are cousins]." I've connected with her. It's kind of nice seeing the picture and hearing stories about each other's families, some that I didn't know.

AA: Wow, that's good.

MC: Yes. Did you know them, Ramiro and Rita, though school?

AA: When I came here to MSUM [Minnesota State University of Moorhead], first I came here in 1968, and they were still living here.

MC: Oh, yes, they used to live here year round.

AA: Yes, they were living here. In fact, they were living, I remember, right on Fourth Avenue and... Gee, I don't remember what the cross street was, but it must have been like Fourteenth or Fifteenth, Sixteenth, somewhere around there.

MC: *Más pa' alla.* [Farther down].

AA: I think it was Fourth Avenue.

MC: I think Ramiro and their sister, Lupe, graduated from Moorhead High [School]. I can't remember if Raul did. The younger ones graduated in Texas.

AA: You're in a unique situation because you were born here. You've spent probably more time of your childhood here than a lot of the other Latinos; although, you did go back and forth and kept your contact with family and friends. But how about the culture? Do you feel connected to the south Texas Mexicano culture or do you feel connected to the Minnesota Mexicano culture? [Chuckles]

MC: That's a good question, Abner. [Pauses] I call myself a Minnesota *Norteña*, you know.

Some of my thinking is more Minnesota based than Texas based. I think it is more Minnesota Mexicano culture; yet, when I go back to Texas, I feel like I fit in. Okay? There's just some things that I still have a little hard time kind of getting used to, like conveniences that are so available here that are not down there. The one thing that I miss about Texas is being able to get the local news in Spanish, see the local news, turning on the radio and hearing Tejano music playing. Now, I get that from my computer, which is kind of nice. And I miss having a good *taqueria* [taco restaurant].

I was just in Minneapolis this past weekend. I didn't have much of a chance to get together with my son, Victor. Victor caught me right when I was leaving the other son's house. He said, "Well, Mom, can we just meet for a quick early lunch, or a late breakfast? He said, "There's a taqueria called Taco Riendo, on Central Avenue.

AA: [Chuckles]

MC: So we met there. I keep saying, "We need something like this in Fargo/Moorhead, just a little place where you can run in and get your tacos.

AA: Yes.

MC: I've been told by some of my friends in Texas that my way of thinking is different. "You're different. You don't think like we do." My sisters and I, we've had discussions on how would we have turned out if we had grown up in Texas? Would we have been different? Our way of thinking is a much more open mind, more accepting of other cultures and people. We're probably more liberal in how we grew up, and we got this also from my mom and dad.

I'll never forget years ago when I was in high school, we had some relatives from Texas. My cousin's wife, she was very traditional, very, very traditional. She would serve her husband first and, then, the kids. It surprised her that we would serve ourselves our own plate of food. She would serve her kids. She commented this to my mom. My mom said, "You know, they're old enough to serve themselves. They need to learn how to serve themselves. Why should I serve them when I'm not sure how much they want to eat? That way, they know how much they want to eat." We were all taught when we eat, we pick up our plate and our fork and our glass and take it to the sink. That was because there's somebody else who wants to sit down and eat. The table wasn't big enough for all of us.

AA: So you would take turns sitting at the table?

MC: Yes. That was something that we were taught.

Another thing, too, is that—some of my cousins are very, very traditional—they wouldn't go anywhere without asking permission first. My sisters and I, we don't do that. "I've got to go to the store. See ya!" [Laughter] We're not going to ask permission, you know. Maybe we would have done that if we were still at home with Mom and Dad and were

still teenagers. Yes, we would ask Dad and Mom for permission, but, all of us in our relationships, we didn't do that. For our kids, they need to be fed first, so we would feed them first. It surprises me sometimes when I hear some women say, "*Tengo que pedirle permiso a mi esposo*" I've got to ask for permission." I'm like, why do you ask for permission? [Laughter]

I see that we're a little bit more liberal, more open-minded about things. It's just something, I guess, from how we grew up.

AA: Is part of you connected to the cultura (culture) in South Texas, and if that is the case, what is it?

MC: [Pauses] I don't know if I am or not. That's kind of a little hard question because... The last time I lived there was in seventh grade, and things have changed so much. When I've gone back, I mean I respect how people live. That's how they live. The only connection I have is with my family. I like eating the food and listening to the music, but that's about it.

AA: Okay.

What language do you use at home?

MC: Spanish.

AA: And outside the home?

MC: English.

AA: When you see other Mexicanos?

MC: When I see a Mexicanos, it's usually in Spanish.

AA: So if you see somebody at the grocery store, a Mexicano, do you speak to them in English or Spanish?

MC: Spanish.

AA: Okay. So English because that's what's spoken around here, but you have a preference for Spanish?

MC: Yes.

AA: I think I'm going to stop here, because some of the other questions, I think, may take some time to answer. I don't want to keep you too long.

[Break in the interview]

[Interview resumes on February 22 at Abner Arauza's office]

AA: This is a continuation of the interview with Martha Castañon.

First question, Martha... We'll just pick up where we left off.

MC: Okay.

AA: What do you consider Latino cultural traditions? When we say what's our culture or what our traditions, what do you think about? How do you define them?

MC: Aside from the food and the music, I think the Latino culture tends to be... the families seem to be more united. They seem to help each other out more in any way that they can, whether it's financial or emotional support. I know that one thing that I've kind of heard from some of the general Anglo population is, say for example... Okay, grandma gets sick down in Texas. The whole family goes because you just don't know if that's going to be the last time. I know that for the general Anglo population, it's like, well, she's just sick and in the hospital. We don't see it like that. It's like, "We've got to go see grandma. She's grandma; we've got to go see her, because we don't know if that's going to be the last time, and we want to see her alive one more time before she goes." That's one thing that I see in the Latino culture that I don't see in a lot of other places.

When I was growing up, we worked in the beet fields every summer. When I would go back to school in the fall, I couldn't relate to what the other kids were talking about. They were talking about camping and vacations and, "What did you do, Martha?" "Oh, me and my family were out in the beet fields." They couldn't comprehend that. To them, it was like, "How could you stand it? Oh, I wouldn't want to work," and that kind of stuff. To us, we just did it because we knew we had to. We had to help out the family. We had to help out Mom and Dad. We didn't even think about saying, "You know what Dad? I don't think I'm going today. I don't want to go." That thought didn't cross our minds. It was just something that we did and we knew that we had to do. I knew that I being the oldest, it was expected of me to help Mom and Dad and I did—not that I liked it. But I knew that it was something that I had to do. It was one of my duties as the oldest one.

Other things that I see in the Latino culture is when a child turns one year old, it's a big deal. When there's graduation, it's a big deal, a high school graduation. I know I've heard comments from the general Anglo population - Why do Hispanics hold these *huge* graduation parties? I try to explain to them that because the high school dropout rate is so high that when a child graduates from high school, it's a big deal. It's an achievement. When a child turns one year old, that is an accomplishment, considering the high death rate, mortality rate, that there are with babies from Mexico, especially Mexico. When a child turns one year old that's a big deal. It's one more year of life that maybe the parents thought wasn't going to happen. I know that when we were in school, my mom, *pobremente* (*with scarce resources*), would make us each a graduation party, even if it was just an open house at home. If there was one thing that Mom and Dad were so proud

of, it was that all their six kids graduated from a very, very white high school. They were really proud of that fact. She made parties for all of us, you know. It was a big deal to her and to Dad. They were really proud of the fact that most of us, except for one brother, went on to post-secondary school. Whether it was a four-year college or two-year technical college, most of us continued our education. They were really proud of that fact. I thank her so much for being real strict with me and telling me to finish high school. Those are some of the things that I've seen that are differences between the Latino culture and the general culture here.

For our family, we grew up listening to two kinds of music. I have friends that will only listen to *tejano* music and that's it. But we grew up listening to rock 'n' roll and country and blues, because Mom and Dad would have the radio on out at the farm. I can remember Dad liked songs of Elvis Presley and the Bee Gees and the Beatles. [Laughter]

AA: Multicultural taste.

MC: Yes. When I was a kid growing up, there was no Spanish radio here. There was no Spanish television. There weren't the options that there are today. When my uncles would come up from Texas, they always had their 8-tracks with their Spanish music, and that's the exposure we got to Spanish music, during the summer times.

I've had friends who have asked me, "How could you stand it living up there all those years?" I say, "Well, it was hard. I know that I really wanted to go back to Texas, but, somehow, we survived and we pulled through." I can feel just as comfortable going to a friend who is Anglo, going into her home, and visiting with her family, just as I would going into your home and visiting with your family. I don't feel awkward, like I did back in junior high and high school. I guess that's one of the advantages of living up here, that we can step into both arenas and feel comfortable.

AA: You have a choice.

MC: Yes. Yes. Other things aside from music and the cultural stuff, which is the arts and the dance and the food, the language... The language is a huge part of our culture. I try to retain that as much as I can without losing it. Also, the family unity.

AA: Did you have a *quinceañera*? (Coming out celebration for fifteen-year-old Latinas)

MC: I did not have a *quinceañera*. I did not have a *quinceañera*, but I remember my mom made me a party at home. We were very poor growing up. Mom couldn't afford some of those things. My birthday is in September, so by that time, there was no one around to make *quinceañeras*, and, at that time, in the mid 1970s, there were very, very few Hispanic families living in this area. So the thought of a *quinceañera* didn't even cross my mind. But I know that growing up here, we missed out on all those *quinceañeras* and weddings that my cousins and relatives had down in Texas and Mexico. We missed out on a lot of them. So none of my sisters had a *quinceañera*, none of us did. But Mom would make a very small party for us at home. That's what we had.

AA: You still celebrated, though?

MC: Yes.

AA: The event was still special.

MC: Yes.

AA: That's good. Have you retained some of these cultural traditions?

MC: Yes, I still go to quinceañeras. I still sponsor people when I'm asked to. When I got married to Juan, I had a traditional wedding and I had *el lazo* and the *cojines* (the wedding lasso and the cushions) and all that kind of stuff you see in Mexican traditional weddings. You know, the baptism...baptisms are a big deal. I still go to the dances every so often. I try to go to events that are culturally specific. Food is always there. [laughter] I still listen to the music. I like reading about Mexican American history and I like reading history about the migrant farmer workers up in this area. I have satellite TV at home now. There's a Mexican channel that shows cultural and historical things from Mexico that I like to watch. Sometimes, it might be music. There's this guy who travels to different towns and he will show different traditions for that town, the foods that they eat. I like watching the Mexican rodeo or *charreada* on TV. So I try to retain and see as much as I possibly can.

Now, one thing that I've noticed is I can read in Spanish, but sometimes, I can't understand what I'm reading. I can read it. I can read the words, but I can't understand what I'm reading. It's easier for me to read an English version of that instead of the Spanish version. That's something that I'd like to improve - my comprehension of some of these Spanish words. Oftentimes, I've got an English/Spanish dictionary so I can decipher and understand what I'm reading. [Chuckles]

AA: Was retaining or holding onto these cultural traditions a deliberate effort or did it just happen naturally?

MC: It just happened naturally. When I was a kid, it would just happen naturally, but growing up and as I've become older, it's more deliberate, because I want to be able to pass on those traditions to my granddaughter and to my sons. As a child growing up, well, Mom and Dad didn't know any English, so they always spoke Spanish to us and we always spoke Spanish back to them, you know. Whenever we would go down to Zacatecas to see my dad's folks, that's where we went to *Posadas* (nine-day re-enactment of Joseph and Mary's journey to Jerusalem) and we went to *fiestas*. Some of the Catholic church traditions, we attended those when we could. So I had a lot of exposure to that. I've tried to keep that.

In fact, on Thanksgiving, I made *tamales* with my daughter-in-law and my granddaughter. I told Brianna it's good for her to learn these traditions, because there are

kids growing up that are not learning any of this. This is a memory that she's going to have when she's growing up that she remembers making *tamales* with her mom and her grandma. Some day, she'll make them on her own. It's really sad when you see kids that are not being exposed to those traditions.

I know that when we were growing up, there were some other Hispanic families here in this area where my mom said, "*Son muy orgullosos.*" [They are very proud] They were families where the kids didn't speak any Spanish, and they were taught not to speak any Spanish.

My mom didn't like that. She said, "You should always be proud of who you are, where you came from, and not lose the language." So, all of us, even though we grew up here, we know how to read Spanish. We don't read it perfectly, but we can read it. We can speak it. It hasn't been lost by on us. My youngest sister, who has a baby who just turned a year old, she'll speak Spanish to him. She's been able to retain some of those traditions even though she was the youngest one.

But I think now, it's more deliberate, because I don't want to forget those traditions. I want to be able to sit down and talk to my granddaughter about those, about the *Posadas*. She's never been exposed to a *Posada*. I want to tell her what those are like.

AA: Do they still hold them here?

MC: No, they haven't in a while.

AA: I remember when I first moved here, they did. Mario and Genoveva Zamarron would organize them.

MC: Yes.

AA: So you are making a deliberate effort to pass it on to your children?

MC: Yes.

AA: That's good.

A two-part question: What type of relationship did your family have back then and now with the neighbors?

MC: Well, when we were growing up, up to the time that I was sixteen, we lived on the farm, so the only neighbors were the farmer and his wife and his married son and daughter-in-law. As for other neighbors that were nearby, there were a couple of other farmers that were real nice to Mom and Dad. Mom would sometimes be hired to do like cleaning and ironing and that kind of stuff. Mom said that she remembers she didn't know any English, so it was all sign language. The farmer's wife would pick up the iron

and go like this and tell Mom, “You do this.” And Mom would pick up...okay, I’ve got to do the ironing.

Dad, he was very well respected. Mom and Dad were very well liked and very well respected even though they couldn’t communicate. They were just seen as people who were really hard working and very proud. Dad had a knack of making friends with the farmers. There were farmers that would bring him fish. The ones that would go duck hunting would bring him geese or duck or whatever you call it...venison. There was a butcher shop in Wolverton, Minnesota, that every time he had a head, whether it was pork or a beef head, he would call Dad and say, “You know what? I’ve got a head here that you can have.” I always knew when they came home with a pig head, we were going to be making *tamales*. [Chuckles] That guy wouldn’t charge him. He would just give it to Dad.

Then there was another farmer that had an apple grove just a half mile out of Wolverton by the river, and he would call Dad and say, “You know apples are ready for picking,” and we would go get apples.

There was another farmer that would give Dad pinto beans. There was another farmer that would tell Dad, “You know what? Potato harvest is done. There’s a lot of potatoes left in the field. Go get your potatoes,” and we would go get potatoes.

AA: Cool.

MC: Even though we were very poor growing up, Mom and Dad always made sure that we were fed, even though sometimes, it was just *papas* and *frijoles*...*papas* and *frijoles*. [potatoes and beans]

AA: That’s all you need. [Chuckles]

MC: And tortillas. There was a couple farmers that had fresh eggs and they would sell the cartons of eggs really cheap to Mom and Dad. So my Mom and Dad were very resourceful. They had a garden. They always had *chile* and *tomate*. Mom would can tomatoes and can salsa. So they were very resourceful.

We kept to ourselves. We’d go to Mass, and I remember we’d always sit way in the back. We would always come to Saint Joseph’s and we would sit back in the kid room. There was a section that was kind of sectioned off, a room that was sectioned off for kids. We always sat back there. All it took was a look from Dad in order for us not to be mischievous. [Laughter] Then, during the summer time, we’d always go to Spanish Mass. At Saint Joseph’s back then, every year, they would have this big *fiesta* at the end of July, and we would always go to that.

AA: I remember it.

MC: Dad had a way of making friendships with people wherever he went. He was just one of those that had that charisma to talk to people. When Dad passed away, there were a number of nurses there who went to Dad's funeral and they said, "You know, we remember he was just always just so talkative."

Mom was more quiet. She didn't say much. She kind of kept to her own. A lot of that was because of her lack of English. When we moved to Sabin, she would chat with the neighbor next door and she chatted more with the lady across the street, and that was about it. She would go to Mass and she never stayed around for coffee hour, would usually go home right away. But a lot of people remembered her. My brother said that when Mom passed and people read her obituary, they were amazed at the things that she had done in her life, like being a teacher and becoming an American citizen—not being a teacher, but what she did in Mexico teaching kids. They said, "Your Mom had a lot of pride." She never indicated to anybody those things. Mom was a real hard worker and took pride in her work, even though it was just field work or working in the pilers. She worked real hard.

She was telling me there was one day at the pilers that, normally she would go into the break room to take a break. There was one night that was really, really cold, so she decided to go wait in the break room, so she went in there. There was a farmer that pulled up in a truck, and he happened to look inside and said, "Armandina? Is that you? I can't believe you're taking a break."

AA: [Chuckles]

MC: He said, "Of all the people I have seen here working, she's the one who works the hardest." Mom said you could hear a pin drop because the other women were so quiet. But it was a compliment to Mom, you know.

AA: Sure.

MC: Yes. She knew that the last year she worked...she kind of realized they weren't going to hire her back, because that last year, they wanted her to climb up on top of the machines and she said, "No, I can't do that anymore. I can't climb up. Have the young ones go up." So when she applied again the following year, they didn't give her a job, and she figured, well, they don't want that liability of me falling and stuff.

AA: Yes.

MC: But she worked there for over twenty years.

With the neighbors, when Mom was down in Texas, she would chat. She had her friends around the neighborhood. They all spoke Spanish, but, here, it was a little bit harder for her.

AA: How were community services and health care? Or were there any?

MC: Well, see, I grew up in a time when I don't remember a lot of community services. Hmm... I seem to remember the Salvation Army giving us toys a few Christmases when we were kids. We would go to the church... Back then, I think there was a League of United Latin American Citizens, LULAC.

AA: LULAC.

MC: I think there was a chapter here that Dad was part of. I don't know what happened. I think after he got sick, he stopped attending the meetings. So I don't know what ever happened with that.

When I was in eighth grade, all of us got sick with the mumps, so we were quarantined. A public health nurse came over and said, "You guys are quarantined." It was either the mumps or the measles. [Laughter] I remember I was the last one to get the measles.

AA: Your poor mom.

MC: One by one, you know, there was one less Castañon on the school bus. I got a lot of teasing for that. I remember getting off the bus and somebody saying something to the effect that Martha probably won't be waiting for the bus tomorrow. She's going to get sick like her siblings. Yes, we were quarantined, I think for about a week or two weeks with the measles. That's when we lived on the farm.

As a kid, I don't remember a lot of services. Mom and Dad took care of that. I remember the boarding school that Saint Joseph's had. I remember when migrant school started in 1968. As a kid, you know, I didn't get regular medical checkups. I didn't get regular dental checkups.

I remember there was one year—I must have been like five or six years old and we lived on the farm—my brother was walking around barefoot and stepped on a rusty nail and it got infected.

AA: Wow.

MC: Yes. I remember a friend of my Dad coming over and telling Mom and Dad they had to get Daniel to a doctor, that his foot was infected. Mom and Dad were like, "We can't afford to go to the doctor. We can't. We can't." What they did... I remember my Dad shooing me and my sisters back to the other room and my brother was crying. They boiled water. I peeked around the corner. Well, Mom and Dad had Daniel down, and my dad's friend took a knife and put a flame over it, and he cut my brother's foot, and he squeezed out all the pus that was in his foot and then bandaged it up. I still remember the pus and the blood pouring out and that bowl of hot water just turning red, and, then, Mom and Dad finding old t-shirts and bandaging up my brother's leg.

I think I had my first dental appointment after I started migrant school. That started in 1968. I still remember it was at Probstfield [Center for Education] first, and that's when all the programs came in for migrant education, and I think also health services for migrants. So that's the first time I ever started going to a dentist.

After Dad got sick, I think Mom and Dad were on MA and food stamps. I remember food stamps. In fact, I remember the first time that Mom and Dad applied for food stamps. For some reason, we weren't working on the Sillers' farm.

AA: MA is medical assistance?

MC: Medical assistance, yes.

We were working for a different farmer near Wolverton, Minnesota. I think the food stamp program had just started in this area here. Mom and Dad applied, and we were left home on the farm. Mom and Dad came back with *all* this food. Right? I was just like... It didn't click in, but when I think back, it must have been the food stamps, because Mom bought food that she had *never* bought before, you know.

She bought sodas. It was such a treat for us. She bought... What was it? It was a sweet cereal. It wasn't Cornflakes. Frosted Flakes. She never bought that. There was food that was such a treat for us that we would never ever buy. So I think it was the food stamps during that time. Then, after that, when we were growing up, that's what we got.

We rarely went to the doctor and we rarely went to the dentist unless there was some emergency.

AA: That's interesting.

MC: Yes. [Chuckles] I don't know if I mentioned this...the first year that we went to Wisconsin?

AA: I don't know.

MC: The first year that we went to Wisconsin, I was just ten years old.

AA: What part of Wisconsin?

MC: The first year we went, we were near this little town called Hancock and Coloma, something like that. There was this old camp, and I remember some nuns came to the camp. They had brought these boxes of Dinty Moore beef stew and Van Camps pork and beans. At that camp, we had a two-bedroom shack, and there was only a two-burner stove thing that was sitting on top of a table. There was a propane tank hooked up to it. Well, my dad was very traditional. I mean, he had to have his *frijoles*, a meat dish, and tortillas. So Mom, because there were six young kids that were hungry, she would open up cans of

Dinty Moore beef stew and Van Camps pork and beans to eat. To this day, I can hardly eat that stuff. Just about *every* day, we had that.

AA: [Chuckles]

MC: It was interesting when we were on a trip this past fall. We had gone to the Twin Cities with my brother and my sister, and we started talking about those times, and I mentioned that. My sister, Irene—Irene was maybe seven years old, six years old at the time—said, “*That’s* why I can’t eat that stuff. It never clicked on me, but that’s why.” She said that she has a hard time eating that. David mentioned the same thing, too, and David was younger. I said, “Yes, Mom would open up a can or two cans every day, every day. She had to get us fed. She had to make food for Dad and there were only two burners that she could cook on. Once she would start making tortillas—I still remember this—Mom would let us have one tortilla with butter and that was it. There are things that just... Now, I don’t have an aversion to eating *frijoles* and *tacos*. *Frijoles* was usually every day, but there were always *tortillas*. *Papas* (potatoes) was on occasion. I don’t have an aversion to them. It was just the canned stuff that...*yuck*, you know. I can’t eat it now.

AA: I will take beans and papas anytime. [Laughter] How do you see the ethnic composition of the community now?

MC: The ethnic composition?

AA: Is it changing?

MC: It’s changing.

AA: How?

MC: It’s changing because, back then when I was growing up, it was mainly Mexican American families that were here. I would hardly ever hear of any other group that would be from either from South America or Central America. That is changing in this area, because it’s growing. There are other ethnic Latino community groups coming to this area. What I have found really sad is now I see that there are some Latinos who were born in the U.S., grew up in the U.S. who, now, put down the people that are recently arrived from Mexico or a Central American country. That is really sad. I see more of an acceptance of blending in with other cultures. Hispanics marrying Anglos or Native Americans or Blacks or Asians. There seems to be more of an acceptance of that than what there used to be. It’s changing. I see more different immigrant groups up here now than what there used to be, even when I was in high school.

AA: What issues did you see in the past that affected the Latino community?

MC: [Pauses] I think the Anglos reaction to migrant farm workers... There are those stereotypes.

AA: Give me an example.

MC: For example, that migrant farm workers drain the public benefit system in this area, and that's not necessarily true; or that migrant workers always buy a brand new truck every year. Well, that's not true. I think migrant farm workers have had to kind of play down those stereotypes and say, "Look, if I qualify for food stamps, I qualify. You can go in and apply, too, and you may or may not qualify." If you had a job that you had to travel from area to area, you would want to make sure that you got a decent running vehicle. Most of the Anglo community doesn't realize how hard these families work. They don't realize that, yes, they may make \$12,000 at the end of the season—that used to be in the past; it's no longer true—but they don't realize that that income is spread out over twelve months or that there's bills back home waiting to get paid. Once they get back, they're going to pay those and, then, they are left with nothing. I think most of the Latino community that were migrant farm workers or seasonal farm workers have worked very hard to overcome that stereotype. I think the Anglo community is starting to be more accepting of that. Once families started settling here, that was kind of hard at the beginning first, and, now, I guess I don't hear as many issues as there used to be back then.

I think the school system was starting to realize that we've got all these Hispanics kids that are attending our schools. It's an increase from several years ago, and they're staying year round. What are we going to do? I think there were problems that came out, for example, discrimination, I think a lot more so than when I was growing up, because when I was growing up, there were very, very few of us. Most of the time, they were just kind of ignored. When I was growing up, there was no ESL [English as a Second Language] program. When I started learning English, we would be put in a special class called Special Ed and me and my sisters and brothers, we would have to attend that class for about an hour or two hours every day out in Sabin. It was just reading and writing, comprehension of words.

I think the fact that the sugar beet industry has changed, that there's less and less work, the local communities are seeing less and less farm workers. Because of those numbers, it's affecting the services that were being provided for migrant farm workers. I get calls at the office from people who are angry that, you know, migrant farm workers get free legal aid. I'm like, "Well, you can go and apply at the local legal aid program. Migrant families have to apply for services, and not everybody qualifies. Sometimes, they have problems that we can't assist them with. But, you can go to your legal aid office and see if you qualify for their services. Then, you, too, would also get a free attorney." A lot of people in the general community sometimes have this idea that the migrants come up and they get everything free and that's not necessarily true. A lot of services have been cut back. Back in the day when the Minnesota Migrant Council was around, they provided a *lot* of services, a lot of supportive services, and you don't see that anymore. It's sad, but that's how it is.

AA: Of the migrants that still come here, what do they do?

MC: The migrants that still come here... There are families that arrive early and they work with farmers getting ready to plant the fields or they're working at the potato seed warehouses. There are farm workers, once the season starts...some have been able to find work in weeding. Some are rock picking. Some are cleaning bean fields. Some are working in nurseries, nurseries like for flower beds and vegetable crops and that kind of stuff. They're finding odd work here and there until they get frustrated enough and go move on to a different area or they just have to wait for the potato harvest.

AA: You talked about some of the issues that are changing. What other issues are changing that are different now and which ones continue to exist -- that were the same?

MC: I think one of the things that I've seen is that some of the youth today don't prioritize education as much as my generation did. I think my generation knew the importance of going to school and finishing high school. I think some of that has changed. I think some of today's youth have this perception that they're *entitled* to things, and they don't realize that they need to start from the bottom. You need to work for it. That's sad. I don't know where that thinking comes from, if it's because the parents taught them that way or it's because of peer pressure. I don't know what it is. It's really sad that there's not a lot more high school graduates in the local high school. It's increasing, but there could be more. It's sad that there are high school graduates that are not continuing their education.

One thing that hasn't changed is the high rate of pregnancies with the Latino girls.

In this day and age, there's no reason for a young girl to get pregnant. There's so much available, and they're still getting pregnant. Some of them are still, you know, very young...kids raising kids. That's sad. That's really sad.

One other thing that I see is there are some people out there who seem to think that the local community is out to get them. They have all these problems that they have in their lives, and they always say, "Oh, it's because of racism. It's because of racism." Sometimes, they don't stop and think that, well, maybe it's my attitude, and that's why I'm getting treated the way I am. I've always said, "When you give attitude, you're going to get attitude back." Yes, I can't say that discrimination isn't out there. I can't say that racism isn't out there, but I don't think it happens all the time. Sometimes, it happens just because of fear or ignorance. There are people here who have it so ingrained in them, they don't realize they are doing it.

AA: So have relationships changed among individuals or the neighbors?

MC: [Pauses] Yes, I mean... I know that whenever I run into the old neighbor that lived across the street from Mom and Dad, she always gives me a hug and "Hi. How are you doing?" It's just kind of a friendship that's continued.

I know that in 2008, I had my high school reunion for Moorhead High. I had gotten this message. It was an email sent out to all the classmates saying, "We're going to have a

high school reunion committee. Who wants to be part of this?" I thought, hmmm. You know, I was a nobody in high school. I thought, okay, I'm going to give it a whirl. I'm going to give it a shot. So I went. I said, "Okay, I'm going to attend this meeting." When they looked at me, they remembered who I was.

They said, "You know, we couldn't remember. We kept thinking, Martha. Martha, Martha." And when they saw me. They said, "Oh, yes! Okay, I remember you walking the halls of the high school." If it was the 1970s, if this time was the 1970s, I probably wouldn't have volunteered, because, back then, I was really shy and didn't have any confidence in myself. So I went and I attended several meetings.

There was a task of putting together a memory table for the all classmates that had passed away, and I said, "Okay, just give me the names, and I'll get it done. I'll take care of it." They were all surprised and they said they got a lot of compliments because I was able to get obituaries and pictures of all the classmates, and I did a real nice set up, and I put pictures on the table and a candle and all that kind of stuff. Then, I made a list of all the classmates that had passed away and made a bunch of copies for people to have for their own scrapbooks or whatever. One of the women who was on the committee, she said, "You know, you did a really nice job. All I was thinking was just having a candle and just a list of the people and that was it." I said, "No. It means so much to people, for those who have lost somebody...and, for me, it's personal. I've gone through that loss. It means so much to the families that their son or daughter was remembered for a class reunion."

In fact, when I called one of the moms... She lived down the street from me in Sabin. Her son had died I think about four years ago. When I called her, I said, "Hi, Mrs. Sellin. I need to speak with you." She hung up on me. She said, "I'm sorry, I can't speak with you right now." I'm like... [gasp] [Chuckles] I told her my name, but it didn't click for her. So she hung up on me. So I called my brother David. My brother David, he'll go and mow her lawn for her and snow blow their driveway. I asked him, "Is something going on with Mrs. Sellin?" He said, "Not that I know of." So I wrote her a note and asked her... I said, "I called you but you hung up on me." She called me and she said, "I'm so sorry, Martha. I thought you were a salesperson." [Laughter] So I told her what I needed and she got that to me then.

People really liked that. I felt good to be part of that, and I felt like, after all these years, my classmates were more accepting of me.

AA: So in time, it changed?

MC: Yes.

AA: How about with colleagues, whether it's in your own job or colleagues at other agencies that you work with and interact with? Has anything changed there?

MC: No. I think I've always had a real good relationship with all my colleagues.

AA: Nothing that has changed because you're Latino and/or a migrant?

MC: No. In fact, some of my classmates that I've gotten to know better through Facebook were surprised that I worked the fields every summer, because they didn't know. They just tell me, "You know, you've come a long ways." "Oh, yes," I said, "I've come a long ways."

But with all of my peers, my colleagues, with most of them I have a really good relationship. The colleagues that I have that are Anglo tell me that they're really impressed with how long I've worked with the program and that I worked in the fields every summer with Mom and Dad. When I tell about some of the struggles in my family's history, of Dad being sick and all of kind of stuff, they just say, "You know, your dad really showed a lot of courage being on dialysis for over twenty years and continuing." I said, "Yes, he didn't let that get him down, even though he had his good days and bad days. It was what life gave him, and he just had to keep going forward." That's something that Mom and Dad always taught us, that even though there's going to be some rough times in your life, you've got to pick yourself up and just keep going forward and not let it hold you back. If you let it hold you back, you're not going to make any progress. You just have to deal with it the best you can and just keep doing what you have to keep doing to continue on.

AA: Describe the relationship of the Latino community with the rest of the community in the Fargo/Moorhead area.

MC: I think it's better than what it used to be years ago. I think that Latinos are hanging on to their traditions but also embracing what is here locally. There are times that I think some of the Latino community tend to keep to themselves.

In particular, I've seen this at church, when Saint Francis does their annual fundraiser in the fall. There were a couple times that I would go and volunteer to help in the kitchen, and I would get these surprised looks. I thought, well, I'm part of the community and part of this church. Something that got mentioned to me is that the families that go to Spanish Mass don't participate on a lot of these fundraisers that the church has, but, yet, when Saint Francis does their annual feast of the Virgin de Guadalupe, you will see a lot of the Anglo church goers in that.

AA: Wow.

MC: That's something where the Latino community kind of tends to keep to themselves as they participate in a lot of these activities.

I would like to see more of the Latino youth get involved with Trollwood Performing Arts School, get involved with band, orchestra, and all those kinds of things, and you don't see it. When my daughter was little, she was in Just for Kids. Of her group, she was

the only Mexicana. When my boys were young, I had them involved with T-ball and softball and karate. They were the only Mexicanos there in Sabin.

AA: Why do you think that is?

MC: I don't know. I don't think it's the kids themselves. I think the kids do want to participate, but it's the parents who don't have the resources. Sometimes, there are scholarships available. Or, they don't know about those scholarships or they don't want to take them. I don't know if timing is an issue, that they can't provide rides for their children to participate. I wish I could see more of that. I wish I could see more Latino youth get involved. There's some great programs out there, like the Trollwood Performing Arts, that kind of thing, because it opens up their minds to other options out there.

I remember my sister when she was going to college, she had like an art major. She really liked art. She was really into that and to my mom and dad, it was like, okay, so what kind of job can you get with that? [Laughter] To them, it was more appropriate to study to be a teacher or to be a doctor or to be a lawyer or a carpenter, that kind of stuff, because you could make money off that. But, art? Okay, what do you do with that? [Laughter] It's sad to see that more families aren't involved with some of the local activities that are here.

I, myself, when I lost Sarah to suicide, I heard about two local support groups and finally decided to go. I have found that it helps me a lot. I'm the only Latina, Mexicana, that goes to these. That's why I started this Spanish support group [Survivors of Suicide Support Group for Spanish Speakers], because I figured, okay, you people don't go... I know there's other families that are affected by suicide. To me, it helps a lot to talk about the feelings that I have. If I'm feeling this, I'm sure there are other families that are feeling this. Why don't they go? I don't know if it's because they don't feel comfortable among a group of Anglo people, or it's the language. That's why I started this group. I have found that it's a first for North Dakota and Minnesota, the first Spanish-speaking support group for survivors of suicide. I'm going to see how it goes.

Even in the Twin Cities, I did not find any support groups there for Spanish speakers. I think that's an idea, sharing things like that, that's very new to the Latino culture. You keep it within the family, keep it among yourselves. You just don't talk about it. To me, that's not right. To me, a support group is a comfort zone where you can talk about things, the feelings that you have, and you know that it's going to be kept there and not going to be talked about elsewhere. I think that kind of stuff is very unusual in the Latino culture, to get together and just talk about these feelings. Some people won't talk about it at all, and keep it pent up, and it's not good. It's not really good.

I had a cousin who died of suicide when I was about twelve years old. His younger brother is about a year older than me. My cousin never, ever, ever talked about his brother. Never.

But when Sarah died, that's the first it me that he opened up about his brother.

AA: Wow.

MC: He had *never*, ever mentioned his brother, never talked about his feelings, nothing. Now, when he sees that I've gotten involved with the walks [Out of the Darkness Walks] and all this kind of stuff, it's made him realize that he needs to do something. I said, "Primo (cousin), maybe it didn't affect you then because you were just a kid, but, sooner or later, it hits you. Sooner or later, it affects you." So, now, he's gotten involved in Austin, Texas, with the local American Foundation for Suicide Prevention group there, a chapter there.

It's something that, like I said before, the support group is something that's really new to our Latino culture. It's going to take time to get people to embrace that and realize that it's a good area just to unload some things that you have.

AA: You touched briefly about education. But what is the condition or the state of Latino education in the area? How do you see it?

MC: You know, it's hard to say, because I don't have kids in the schools anymore. From what I remember, oftentimes, kids are being pushed to the ESL (English as a Second Language) program and they shouldn't be. I think teachers are not recognizing their potential and, now, they're referring them to non-academic classes, the easy classes as we used to call them in high school. I think sometimes the parents aren't holding their kids accountable to their schoolwork and kind of blame the teacher or the school district that their kids aren't passing a class. It's a hard issue. The school district, the parents, and the child, they all have to make an effort. All three of them have to kind of make an effort, and I think there are parents that let their kids slack off, but, yet, get mad if the child doesn't pass to a certain class or was not promoted to the next grade. I don't know; it's a hard issue.

AA: Okay, we'll go on to another one. Do you see more Latino-owned businesses in the area and how are they doing?

MC: In the Fargo/Moorhead area, I have not seen an increase. The one business that was there, that got sold. The new owners, they seem to be doing okay. I think there could be room for more businesses in this area. I think there's a roofing company that's Latino-owned, but I don't know who he is or how he's doing. It's hard to say. I haven't seen any here, not like other communities. In Willmar, Minnesota, there's a *lot* of Latino-owned businesses, and that's great. Some of the smaller towns have Latino-owned businesses. But for this area, it's really sad to say there isn't. I know there have been little restaurants in the past and, sooner or later, they close down. The only ones that seem to be thriving are the new Mexican restaurants, which are Acapulco, Casa Ramos, and El Jalapeño. They seem to be doing all right. I'm still waiting for a good *taqueria* (taco shop) – that's what I'm waiting for! [Laughter]

AA: Taco Cabana?

MC: Yes.

AA: Are there situations that call attention to how public services are delivered or accepted? In other words, how effective are they?

MC: Well, for example, at the utility company where I go in and pay my light bill... It'd be nice to see people of color there and there aren't any. I often wonder, okay, how do they communicate? I mean if somebody goes in who can hardly speak English and needs to get their utility turned on, how do they communicate? Is that person going to have to go and find an interpreter to come back and say whatever he or she needs? Or do they have somebody there? It's an unknown. Or do they use Language Line?

I don't know if the fire department has anybody Latino. I think the police department does. I know that, oftentimes, when something happens, a crime happens, the police get a description, and it comes out on the news and I will hear the comments, "Well, why do they have to say he was Hispanic?" or "Why do they have to say he was black?" Well, the police, they have to give a description, you know. It's hard to get around that, I think. Anytime it seems like a crime happens, then all of us are affected by it. If there's a drug raid and the people arrested happen to be Hispanic, well, "See, it's always Hispanic that are bringing in these drugs." That's not necessarily true. I guess what concerns me is when the police department is calling immigration and the border patrol to find out if somebody is legal or not. That concerns me, because I've seen the families that have been affected by that.

I think, for the most part...my own personal thing with the public services, I've been okay with that.

AA: How about community organizations? Tell me about those organizations that in any way, and how, they touch the lives of Latinos.

MC: Okay. The community organizations, there's MET [Motivation Education & Training, Inc.] and Migrant Health [Services, Inc.], who provide services to migrant farm workers. At MET, their focus is on training people to get out of the fields. It's not like it used to be. Migrant Health is a great resource. It's a great resource for migrant farm workers because they can go in and get at least some basic care, a basic check up or preventative care. Some of the other organizations, depending on what their guidelines are, have been really good resources, like the Salvation Army, for example, or The Food Pantry, also. The food shelves, they're a good resource for the clients when they need a certain service, but it also depends on the guidelines. For example, the food shelf that's in Wahpeton, North Dakota, says "Residents of Wilkin County and Richland County."

AA: Oh.

MC: But you have to have an ID from either one of those counties. Now, most of the clients are not eligible for that food shelf because they do not have an ID from that

county. That's kind of been an issue that we really can't do much about, because they're not regulated by the Federal Government. It's all donations.

The churches also have been a really good resource for our clients, because they provide that ministry whether it be a Catholic or Baptist or whatever other kind of church. It provides Spanish services to clients. That is really good. I think our clients need that. They need that break from the usual work routine to go to services as they need them.

Other places with social services... Public benefits have changed so much that about the only kind of assistance that most migrant farm workers are getting are food stamps. That's about the only thing.

JOBS service – the Workforce Center doesn't hire as many bilingual staff as they did in the past. Most clients now, they'll go in to register, and they'll get job orders when there is work. Otherwise, those are the only organizations I can think of right now.

AA: What role does Mujeres Unidas and Centro Cultural play?

MC: Mujeres Unidas really doesn't focus on the migrant farm worker families at all. Their focus is mainly working with the families that are already settled down in this community. And, Centro Cultural, there have been so many changes there just with staff that I think it's now trying to focus on being the place where migrant farm workers can probably get referrals to get food.

The Food Pantry part is I think the best part I know for Centro and migrant farm workers. Families can go in without having a referral, without having been turned down at several places before they can get a food basket. Years ago, it used to be a place where farm workers could go in and cook a meal for their family, a hot meal for their family. It'd be nice to start something up like that again, but that will take time.

I think Centro can also do a lot of education to the local community about migrant farmer workers.

AA: Do you feel like you're a part of the larger community, not just the Latino community, but the larger community?

MC: Yes, I do.

AA: In what ways?

MC: Because I go vote, because I will go to events that are for the whole community. If they're doing, for example, an art show down by the river, I'll take a walk and go browse through and walk around. I'll go to English Mass every so often if I miss Spanish Mass. It's taken me many years, but I finally feel like, yes, I'm part of this community. I can walk in anywhere and I'm okay with that. I feel okay with that.

AA: Good.

MC: I was thinking about some of the questions that you asked me the other day. One was about Mom and Dad adjusting to this area. I kept thinking about it and, you know, I think it was hard for Mom and Dad, and I guess because I see it now with some of the new immigrant groups. The older generation is trying to adjust to this area and the younger generation is trying to acclimate to this area. I remember for Mom and Dad, it was a little hard. I remember that's why Mom kept wanting to go back to Texas, because we were getting these *gringa* (female anglo) ideas. [Laughter] For example, when I was a senior in high school, I applied to several colleges. Moorhead State was my only Minnesota school. All the rest were down in Texas, and I got accepted by all of them in Texas. Well, that's when I met Juan and that whole thing changed. But, to my mom, it was like, “¿*Que vas a hacer allá?*” What are you going to do there?” What are you going to do by yourself? Who are you going to stay with?”

AA: [Laughter]

MC: To me, just from hearing my high school friends, classmates, talk...”Yes, you go to college and you live in the dorms.” That's what I pictured myself doing. I married soon right after high school and started going to Vo-Tech. Then, my sister, Amelia, was a senior in high school, and my sister applied to go to Moorhead State, and she decided to move to the dorms. Oh, my god! Mom was like, “¿*Que es eso?*” [What is that?]

To her, it was just like no proper, young Latina girl leaves home unless she's getting married or she's going to go stay with her relatives to go to college. That was real hard for my mom and my dad.

AA: Wow, things are changing?

MC: When my youngest sister, Margarita, decided to go to Moorhead State, she decided to live on her own. She lived in the dorms for a while, and, then, she lived in her own apartment. Okay, Mom had a hard time with that, but she adjusted. Right? But when my little sister decided to move to Minneapolis on her own, oh, my goodness, Mom had a *very* hard time with that because, to her, no proper young Latina goes off and lives by herself in a big, strange city. She had a very hard time with that. Now, when my sister Irene moved—she went to Saint Edward's University [in Austin, Texas] for about a semester—Mom had a hard time with that, too. My sisters and I, we talked about that and they tell me, “Well, it was okay when you left, because you got married.” [Laughter]

It was hard for Mom and Dad, I think, for my brothers and my sisters... Mom and Dad had problems with some of us. My brother, Daniel, he got into some trouble. It's because he wanted to fit in, and he did a couple things that got him into trouble with the law. He was on probation. He said, “You know, I did it just to fit in. Now, when I look back, it was so stupid.” He's the one who got into trouble and he's the one who paid the price. He left. He left to go back to Texas in his early twenties. He says that on occasion, he thinks

about moving back here, because everything is just so peaceful. He said, "You know, I think I would have a hard time getting used to it again."

AA: You touched on an interesting topic, though, and that is the arrival of new Latinos from Texas, but specifically, also, from Mexico. What situation does that create? What are the realities?

MC: You can see it not only in the accent that's spoken... The immigrants from Mexico have a different accent from the people from Texas. But you can also hear it in the variations of the music. My son, Juan, commented on this, because he lived in Dallas, Texas for a while. He says, "You know those *Texicans*, they think they're better than anybody else." That's what he said. [Chuckles] There are people in Texas who call themselves *Texicans*. He says, "They're no better than anybody else. Yes, they may know English and stuff, but that doesn't make them better than anyone else." There's this air that they think they're superior, because they've lived here for a long time, and have acclimated and can speak English well. That kind of reminds me of what Mom would say about the families that had lived here for a long time and they don't know any English. *¿Que se creen muy orgullosos?* [They think they are 'all that?']

AA: They think they're all that...?

MC: Yes, that same parallel.

AA: Actually, I have another question. See what you started? [chuckles] How about the Latinos in the political processes here in the community? Are the Latinos being involved? How?

MC: There are very few Latinos who are involved in the political process. There are people who have run for office and they have not been successful, except for Sonia. Now, Sonia, she's got an Anglo or a German name that people don't know she's Sonia Mayo Hohnadel. It's something that [pause] I think it is going to take a while before we finally see somebody on the city council or county commissioners.

What really saddens me is a lack of Latino voters going out and voting. Oftentimes, they think that, oh, my vote's not going to count. I'm like, "Look, you need to go out and vote, because the politicians, they're looking at these numbers. They're starting to say, 'We're not going to need Latino voters, so who cares about what they think?' But if they start seeing that there's higher numbers of Latinos voting, they're going to start saying, 'Hey, I need to know what is affecting them? What are their interests? Maybe I can get some of their votes.'" It's just really sad, and I'm not sure why that is, because it's something that Mom and Dad always taught us, to go and vote. Dad would always go and vote. Mom, when she became a citizen, she would always go and vote. That's something that me and my siblings have always done. We've always gone and voted. You know, when I would go and vote, I would always see these people running the tables at elections and I thought, I want to do that. So I went and applied.

AA: [Chuckles]

MC: Yes, I became an election judge. I thought, I don't want to run for office, but I want to be part of that system and just get people to go in and register. I know that when I did the election—my first election was the presidential one that I worked at—I had Hispanic friends come in and they were surprised to see me sitting behind the table. They said, "How did you get to do this?" I said, "I just applied. That was it. I just applied."

AA: Yes. Good. Now maybe there will be more.

MC: Yes, I hope so.

AA: What do you see in the future for our community, specifically Latinos?

MC: I see more Latino-owned businesses. I would like to see a bilingual newspaper that has articles in English and Spanish. I picked up newspapers in the Twin Cities that are about Latino culture. They're all in Spanish and, sometimes, I can't understand what I'm reading. I can read the words but I can't comprehend what they're trying to say. In Melrose [Minnesota], there's a little bilingual newspaper [*El Vecino*] that has each article in English and in Spanish. They do highlights, like student of the week or student of the month, and they'll have a Latino student. I picked up an issue, I think like in June, and they showed all pictures of the Latino graduates of the high school there.

AA: Is that a weekly or monthly?

MC: I think it's a monthly paper or bi-monthly. You know, this area is bigger than Melrose, and we need something like that in this area.

What I would like to see is one of the TV stations allowing a half hour news show that shows the local news in Spanish with topics that affect the Latino community. That's what I'd like to see. Maybe in the future a Univision station up here. It's just going to be a while. There's one in the Twin Cities [TPT - Twin Cities Public Television]. They show the regular programming from Univision but local ads from local businesses. I think there is a local news show also. A radio station that is on all the time. More students graduating from school and attending college, more Latino city councilmen, county commissioners, more Latinos working in the county offices and the state, that's what I'd like to see.

AA: More integration into the community?

MC: Yes.

AA: That's a good dream.