

**Amy Cerna
Narrator**

**Abner Arauza
Interviewer**

**February 25, 2013
Fargo Public Library
Fargo, North Dakota**

Amy Cena -AC
Abner Arauza -AA

AA: This is Abner Arauza in Moorhead, Minnesota. I am interviewing Amy Cerna, and we are in the Public Library in Fargo for this interview. The interview is for the Minnesota Historical Society Oral History Project, and it is February 25, 2013. To establish some background information, Amy, if you'll state your name and ethnicity please?

AC: Okay. My name is Amy Cerna Espinosa is my married name but my maiden name is Cerna. I am a Latina and twenty-nine years old. I currently live in Fargo. Born and raised in Big Wells, Texas. Migrated to Moorhead, Minnesota well, actually migrated to East Grand Forks in 1996, and then we migrated back to Texas that winter, and then in 1997 we migrated to Moorhead, and we settled out at that point. My family settled out. So I think I was like eleven or twelve years old at that time.

AA: Okay. Good. And most of your time here in this area though has been on the Moorhead side although you now live in Fargo?

AC: Correct.

AA: Yes. How about your parents' names?

AC: My dad is David Ramiro Cerna, who married my mom Diana Perez. My dad was originally from Chicago, Illinois. Of course, his family was from Texas as well, but then I don't know at what generation migrated at that point, and I don't know how far that generation went back. But my dad was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, Cook County. And then I think he would go and visit his grandma every summer.

AA: In Texas?

AC: Yes. He'd migrate to Texas, I guess for the summer, to spend time with his grandma. I'm not sure.

AA: Yes.

AC: But then he met my mom, Diana Cerna, there in Big Wells, Texas, and they married. And I believe they lived in Chicago for a while, but then my mom became pregnant and they moved back to Texas. She was closer to her family there, I think, you know. Being closer to her family there. And wanted to raise, I guess, us in a smaller town.

AA: So you actually lived in Big Wells?

AC: Yes, I've never lived in Chicago. I have always lived in Big Wells.

AA: Oh, okay.

AC: When I was younger, yes. I always lived in Big Wells, Texas, since, well, 1996-97.

AA: Sure.

AC: 1996 was our first time out of, well, not *really*. I know my dad would always go, we'd always take vacation to Chicago so he could see his sisters and his family.

AA: Yes.

AC: And at a very young age I do remember going out to Chicago. But not anything that I can recall a hundred percent, until 1996, when everything was actually new to me that I said, oh, this is a new home, this is a new place, it's a new environment; it's exciting, interesting, and different. So I never really encountered anything other than East Grand Forks, at that point. It was always mainly in Big Wells, Texas. It was that small town . . .

AA: Oh, Big Wells. Yes, Big Wells still is a little bitty town! [Chuckles]

AC: *Very* small town. I think, what is it?

AA: Yes.

AC: Maybe like six, seven hundred people maybe.

AA: Yes.

AC: Yes, so it's a very, very small town. I remember being like in first, second grade and I'd be able to walk to my grandma's house, which she probably lived like maybe ten blocks away. And I was that young and I know my mom was able to trust me to walk down to my grandma's. If she wasn't home, then I'd go to my grandma's. I remember being little, too, and being able to walk to a store to buy a pop or whatever.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: I think now like, wow, you know, I don't know if I would really want my daughters to [chuckling] walk to the store to go and buy something.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: But very small town that I grew up in.

AA: Different times.

AC: Different times as well, yes. Yes, that has a big part to do with it, too.

AA: So okay, so your mom was born in Texas in Big Wells. Your dad was in Chicago. Was he born there?

AC: Yes, he was born in Cook County.

AA: And raised there.

AC: Born and raised in Cook County.

AA: Okay. Now when I've talked to migrants, they come up here during the summer and spend winters in Texas.

AC: Yes.

AA: Your dad did it the other way around.

AC: He did it the opposite around, yes. Well, I guess it's because his dad would migrate back and forth. His dad owned I think, it was a landscaping company. So he would come down south and get workers, basically.

AA: Okay.

AC: And then migrate them back. So when he would come south to get workers—and my dad and his brother, they were young, obviously—when he'd come down south, he'd bring my dad and my uncle and they'd stay with, I think it was his mom, for the summer. Then, when he would bring those workers back, the, he'd pick up my dad and his brother and then go back.

AA: Oh, okay.

AC: So I guess basically it just you know, this spending the summer with his grandparents that way. My dad really didn't migrate south to *work*, but he would migrate south to spend the summers with his grandma. My mom was born and raised and never really left.

AA: Yes.

AC: I think she said, a couple of times, she did migrate to Illinois to work the field with her grandma, I think like one summer or two summers. But she was too little. She realized she didn't like it.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: So then she just stayed behind.

AA: Yes.

AC: And then when she met my dad, she realized my dad lived in the same town not too far, then, where she would go migrate where my great-grandma would go migrate. Then, she wanted to go and work the fields again to kind of meet up with my dad.

AA: Yes.

AC: And I think that's when she ran away and they got married! [Laughs]

AA: [Laughs] Wow! That's an interesting story.

AC: Yes. Yes.

AA: But down in Big Wells, how did they meet? Do you know?

AC: Well, I guess because my dad, Big Wells is a very, very small town, as we said.

AA: Sure.

AC: And enclosed their own little community. So my dad, obviously from Chicago, was kind of the rebellious kid that came into town and brought The Beatles and all that kind of stuff.

AA: Oh. [Chuckles]

AC: So he was a guy or the kid or the boy or whatever that, you know, he was different, he was a city boy. He came in with the long *hair*. I guess that long hair was obviously a bad thing at that point.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: So he came with the long hair and the different music.

AA: Yes.

AC: So, he was the outsider that everybody thought was interesting, and so that's how they met. Because, obviously, my dad was the one that everybody wanted to know who that kid was. And

it was kind of funny because my mom said that they were friends at first and he would tell my mom, “Oh, go and tell her I like her!”

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: And so my mom was kind of his messenger! She tried to get close to him, and then in the end she won.

AA: Well, she had all the inside information!

AC: Yes! [Laughs]

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: She would say, “Yes, I’ll go pass her the note.” And she would never give the note! [Laughing]

AA: [Laughs] How old were they when they got married?

AC: I believe they were married when they were sixteen, my mom was sixteen.

AA: Okay.

AC: And she had my oldest brother when she was eighteen, so I think she lived in Chicago for like two years.

AA: Okay. So she was sixteen and he was?

AC: He was seventeen.

AA: Seventeen.

AC: Yes.

AA: Okay.

AC: She ran away. She told my grandma that she was going to go with my great-grandma to work the fields. And then she ran away at that point. She was sixteen. She met up with my dad because I guess my dad is from a suburb right outside of Chicago, and she worked in the fields kind of a little bit further. But my dad got a car, went and picked her up, and they ran away and got married! [Chuckles]

AA: [Chuckles] Oh, the adventures of . . .

AC: Being young.

AA: Do they have brothers? I mean, do you have brothers and sisters?

AC: I have three brothers.

AA: Give me their names and ages while we're at it.

AC: The oldest of the family is David Ramiro Cerna, Junior.

AA: Okay.

AC: And then after him it's Michael Scott Cerna. He passed away in 2005? Yes, 2005 he passed away. And then I have a younger brother. And then it's me, and then I have a younger brother, Juan Cerna.

AA: Okay.

AC: And my oldest and my youngest are still alive. Yes.

AA: Okay. And how old is your younger brother?

AC: My youngest brother is [chuckles] maybe twenty-three. [Chuckles] Twenty-three, I think!

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: My oldest is probably, geez, I want to say in his mid-thirties maybe. No. Because I'm going to be thirty soon. Maybe he is getting close to his forties already. [Chuckles]

AA: Wow. Okay.

AC: I think! [Chuckles] I don't know. He was born like in 1970-something.

AA: Okay, so how old are you? And your birthdate?

AC: I am twenty-nine. Ah, September 19, 1983.

AA: Okay.

AC: You know, I'm twenty-nine years old.

AA: Now and you were born in Big Wells?

AC: No, I was born in Carrizo Springs, Texas.

AA: Oh, okay.

AC: Raised in Big Wells.

AA: Okay. What is your education level, Amy?

AC: I graduated in 2002 from Moorhead Senior High.

AA: Okay.

AC: Shortly after, I became pregnant of my oldest daughter. She was born in November 2002. So I didn't go to college right away.

AA: I see.

AC: I started working with MET, Incorporated. Motivation, Education and Training. And then in 2010 after my mom passed away. My mom passed away in 2009, September 2009. So in 2010 I needed to get my mind occupied and going, so I'm *currently* a student at MState [Minnesota State Community and Technical College] part time.

AA: Yes.

AC: So going back.

AA: And your major?

AC: Ah, business management, sales and marketing.

AA: Oh, okay.

AC: So, yes. Yes.

AA: Business.

AC: Business runs in my blood. My mom's mom ran, a *cantina*, I guess it's like a bar.

AA: Okay. A bar.

AC: A bar and grill type place. And then my dad's mom and dad, they had a bar in Chicago as well as landscaping, so business kind of runs in my blood and I'm pretty good at managing and pretty good with numbers. I like the customer service. I enjoyed making people happy. So helping people is what I enjoy doing.

AA: Yes.

AC: I enjoy helping. And with MET that's what I did for a very long time. I helped them find jobs, I helped them go to school, and I helped manage, you know, whether it was becoming self-sufficient, or what kind of career they wanted to go into, or whatever like that. And I've just always enjoyed helping people find what it is that they like.

AA: Sure, sure.

AC: And before MET I did sales. Fashion Bug is retail.

AA: Oh, okay. Sure.

AC: So I did that. I was a sales associate with them for like four or five years. And I don't know, I've always enjoyed helping people and being in the retail part.

AA: I see.

AC: Managing and all of that, I guess, I've enjoyed.

AA: And now I heard that MET is no longer here?

AC: Yes, they currently closed their office. Ah, February 20th they shut down due to budget cuts.

AA: Of 2013?

AC: Yes, February 20, 2013, they shut down due to budget cuts. So unfortunately, me and another woman that was working there with me were laid off.

AA: Well, that's too bad.

AC: Hopefully, they figure out what they have to do and open, because that's a very good agency for the migrant seasonal farmworker population in the area. So, hopefully. We'll see.

AA: Yes, and they've been around for a very long, long time.

AC: I worked with them for a little over ten years and I don't know, six months, maybe. Ten and a half and I know that they were there, obviously, before me. So I don't know I think they opened in 1997 or 1996, I'm not sure.

AA: Here?

AC: Yes.

AA: Okay.

AC: So they've been around for a long time.

AA: I remember when they opened but I don't remember what the date was.

AC: Yes, I obviously don't remember, but I want to say it was probably 1997 or 1996. One of those years.

AA: What is the name and ethnicity of your spouse?

AC: Ah, my husband's name is Juan Carlos Espinosa. He's a Mexican-American. He was born in Mexico. He migrated to Rio Grande City when he was about nine years old, I think.

AA: Okay.

AC: Yes, his mom and his dad brought him over he had another brother and sister at that time. And then he was raised in Rio Grande City. Went to school there, high school. And then we met in Indiana in the fields.

AA: Oh.

AC: [Laughs]

AA: [Laughs]

AC: We met in Indiana. I went with a close friend of mine. We went to go and work the fields in Lafayette, Indiana. I was trying to remember the name.

AA: Okay.

AC: We went to go work the fields in Lafayette, Indiana. And my husband, well, obviously, his family would migrate every summer. This was my first year *ever* working in the fields. And I told my mom, "Let me try it, I want to go and experience something different, get out of here."

AA: Sure.

AC: So my mom and dad, they let me go. And then I met him there. And then we fell in love. . .

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: And he went back to Rio Grande City for like a month and then he came up here and he stayed with a friend that he knew of because that same friend of mine, well their families knew each other, so he came and stayed here.

AA: Okay.

AC: And then we went back.

AA: Here being Moorhead?

AC: Yes in Moorhead. He moved to Moorhead with a friend of the family, and then he graduated here, and I graduated here, and we settled out. Well, we became pregnant shortly after.

And, well, we decided to keep our family here. And we bought a trailer in Moorhead and we lived in Moorhead for quite a while until 2009 when we moved to Fargo.

AA: So his family was a migrant family. They went to work in Indiana.

AC: His family. . .

AA: What kind of work did they do?

AC: Ah, de-tasseling corn. His family migrated every summer to Lafayette, Indiana to de-tassel corn. Shortly after we met, his family started to migrate here.

AA: Oh. Okay.

AC: Because, obviously, they came here with him. Well, they came to visit him and meet our baby, which is Dezstiny, they came here to meet her. And then it was summertime when they came so she found, here in the Fargo-Moorhead in this area, it's sugar beets, so they found work in a sugar beet field and it went very well for them, so then they returned every summer after that to do the sugar beet fields.

AA: Okay. Okay, tell me about your children. How many you have, their names, ages.

AC: Okay. I have three kids. My oldest, her name is Dezstiny Rae Espinosa. She's just turned ten in November.

AA: Rae. R-A- . . . E?

AC: R-A-E. Dezstiny is D-E-Z-S-T-I-N-Y.

AA: Oh.

AC: *Yes!*

AA: Okay. [Chuckles]

AC: I don't know, I just wanted to make it difficult. And I regret doing it now. It's kind of funny.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: But Dezstiny Rae Espinosa. She's ten. She is my oldest.

AA: Okay.

AC: She was recently diagnosed with ADHD, so she's *very* fun, like light-spirited. She's fun to be with, so polite and well-mannered. I would have never have thought that she would have had

ADHD but I guess it comes in different forms. There are so many different kinds and forms of ADHD, so that's been a difficult thing that I've been dealing with recently. She was diagnosed like a couple weeks ago, and then I have Jennifer. Jennifer Jade Espinosa. She is eight. She is my middle child. She's funny. She is so funny.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: She is the clown of the family. She is funny, but, you know, she's got a feisty side to her and I don't know if it's because she was the baby for such a long time it was when I just had them two. And she's kind of feisty but she is very funny. She's a clown. We can all be just sitting at the table eating dinner and she'll say something that everybody will just start laughing.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: And then my youngest, I recently had a little boy. He's a year and a half. His name is Juan Carlos Espinosa, Junior, of course! I couldn't get away with that. . .

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: We had to have a junior. He's funny, too. He has brightened up the house a lot.

AA: Sure.

AC: He does so many little things that we all just think is funny and cute. Yes, those are my three kids.

AA: Good. Now okay, so your family came to East Grand Forks first.

AC: Yes.

AA: And to work for the summer as migrants?

AC: Yes, my parents decided to go to East Grand Forks because I had an uncle who was there. My dad's, well, only brother. He had two brothers but one passed away very young so my dad's only brother was in East Grand Forks.

AA: Okay.

AC: So when my dad had always worked the oil fields, and at that point I think work was getting less in Big Wells. It was no work at all. And obviously, it's a small town. You know, when the work started to die down there, it just became harder, so my dad called his brother.

AA: Sure.

AC: And then he told him that there was a lot of work up north and, you know, to come up here and he could get him some work. And so then my dad followed my uncle up here. [Sighs]

Honest, and truly, I really don't remember what they did, but I know that they worked on a farm. What they were doing, I don't know, because my dad he was a master of many skills. He knew how to do everything. But I remember them always coming home full of paint. But then they always had a lot of potatoes. So I don't know what they did, actually. I just know that they worked on a farm and I think I recall my mom saying that I think they would paint the farmhouses, I think, is what they were doing.

AA: Okay.

AC: I'm not sure what they were doing. But we migrated up to East Grand Forks first. My dad worked there the entire summer. I think we went back, maybe, the ending of September or beginning of October is when we went back to Texas.

AA: So school had already started.

AC: School started. It was *hard* on me, I remember, just because back home I was very athletic, very popular. And then going into a new school and no one knowing me, and feeling like the outcast, and wanting to do something with sports, but obviously, you know, was being looked at differently. It just intimidated me so much that I just stayed in my own little shell. And at recess I remember just going out and walking around and [Sighs] *right* before we left, I ended up making a friend.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: I was just so happy to leave that I didn't care anyways. [Chuckles] But I had started right when I had started to feel a little bit more at ease, I made a friend. And then we left and I just remember the feeling of going back home was I remember getting off the car. We pull up to my grandma's house, we got off the car, and my cousin who I was so close with I considered her like my sister, she was at my grandma's house waiting for me to get there. I get off the car and I go running, and the first person I hug is her. And we're *crying* and she's like, "I'm so happy you're back!" And I am so ready to be back, you know, and then I go to my grandma, and my grandma says, "Next time tell your mom to leave you here with *me!*"

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: And so it was a *warm* feeling that I'll never forget that feeling.

AA: Yes.

AC: I remember going back home. I just I felt *right*. I felt like I was where I was supposed to be. I was in place. It was a feeling that I'll never forget.

AA: And then next year, it came.

AC: Then the following year, yes. Then the following year . . .

AA: What year was that?

AC: We went back in 1996, the fall of 1996.

AA: Okay.

AC: So then the summer of 1997, we came to Moorhead.

AA: Okay.

AC: I know it was before 4th of July. I know it was before 4th of July, but I don't remember how early it was. I think I finished the school year in Texas.

AA: Okay.

AC: So somewhere in between maybe May and ending of June we came in 1997.

AA: And what kind of work did your parents do then?

AC: At that point when we came up here to Moorhead, my mom's brother had already settled out here, too.

AA: Oh.

AC: I think he had lived here for about a year already.

AA: Sure.

AC: And my uncle was getting recalled to a construction company. They had called him back to a construction company. And he was able to get my dad into that construction company.

AA: Oh. Here in town?

AC: In Moorhead, yes. Ah, I think it was K & L Construction Company is who he worked with. And so my dad got here to Moorhead right away, started working. I remember having my parents having a difficult time trying to find a place to live. I think lived with family for pretty much the whole summer. Right before it started to get cold is when my parents finally found an apartment. They struggled quite a bit to find an apartment. Because my mom, at that point, didn't really want to go back anymore. I think she wanted to settle out. I think my mom had already made the decision that, you know, this is a better place to be at. I remember she was very, very sad. She'd be on the phone all the time talking to my grandma, crying, telling her how much she missed her, and how different it was, and the *food*, how she couldn't find certain things here.

AA: [Chuckles] Yes.

AC: And she would ask my grandma to mail her something, whether it would be spices or whatever it was. But I remember she would always complain about how they didn't have certain foods here. I remember around the holidays, too, complaining to my grandma saying, you know, it's *lonely*. You know, we can't go out. There is none of our, you know, like Mexican music going out for whether it be, I don't remember if it was Thanksgiving or whatever, but normally like in November they had the Spinach Fest in Crystal City.

AA: Oh, yes.

AC: So my mom would cook.

AA: That's a big thing.

AC: Yes. My mom was, you know, complaining about not being able to go out and do stuff like that that was in *her* nature, something that she was so used to doing. So I remember the first winter being very difficult for my mom. Calling my grandma all the time. But I think she had made the decision, she made that decision that, you know, even as difficult as it was, she wanted here. She wanted something better for us.

AA: And when you arrived, now you mentioned that you stayed with family.

AC: Family.

AA: All of the whole summer, and obviously, then you found a house or an apartment to live in. How about a support network for other things like school, health services? And your dad found a job. Now was your mom working?

AC: Well, my mom never worked.

AA: Okay.

AC: My mom was always a housewife. My dad always supported us. Then, so in 1997, we stayed, and then in 1998, that spring when he got called back to start working in construction again, he was on a job and he fell off the roof.

AA: Oh.

AC: He fell off the roof and broke all different kinds, three stories. He fell three stories down, broke all kinds of bones. So he couldn't go back to work. My mom was forced to, you know, work because my dad wasn't making it off of workman's comp. So my mom was forced to go out and find a job, which I think at that point she felt, you know, empowered. I think she liked that feeling of, you know, work.

AA: I see.

AC: Getting out of the house, and doing something different, and having her own paycheck, and helping out. So I think she got that feeling and she liked it. I think it was at that point when my mom began to have so many more job duties. You know, she had to be the mom, she had to be the caretaker of everything, and then she also had to work. She kind of lost track of what was going on at school, and I remember her going through a *very* difficult time with Social Services.

Because my dad was laid in bed for a very long time. So my mom had to get us, me and my little brother to the bus stop. And we lived in Dilworth but we attended the school district in Moorhead.

AA: Oh, okay.

AC: So my mom had to drive my brothers to school. We were able to catch the bus, but I think my brothers had to get the bus to the high school. So my dad's on bed rest, my mom gets us to the bus, gets my brothers to school, to high school, and then she would go and work. Well, my second oldest, Michael, he was the more rebellious one out of all of us. Ah, he decided not to go to school. I guess he didn't like it. He wanted to go back. He wanted to finish high school in Texas. He didn't like being there. And then I think he met a girl.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: Whatever reason, he didn't like being in class, and he started to ditch school. So Social Services, I don't know, like they sanctioned or they did whatever it's called, they did that to my mom. Because my mom was receiving services for my brother and he was not going to school. And I guess that's a rule that, you know, if you're going to be receiving services, the child must be attending school.

AA: Yes.

AC: To my mom's knowledge, he was attending school, because she would drop him off. But then he'd leave. So she got to the point where, you know, she'd drop him off, make sure he'd go in. And then so, of course, she had to get to work, so she would just leave.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: Anyways, boiled down to where I think they were arguing with her that he wasn't and she was arguing, "Yes, he is, I drop him off myself." And she got my brother got in trouble with *probation*, and like all these things were just tumbling on my mom, and Social Services was asking her to pay all this money back because that, you know, she was getting services for him and he wasn't attending school.

AA: Okay.

AC: So a lot of things started to fall on top of her, I think, at that point, she really didn't have much of a network to fall back and say, "Hey, you know, I'm getting in trouble for this, what can I do? You know, I'm *sending* him to school. He's just not going into the classroom."

AA: Sure.

AC: So I think my mom had to pay all that money back that well, what it was that she received for him; she had to pay that money back. And then, we got behind on bills. I know she got behind on bills. And so then my dad felt like he wasn't doing enough because he was just in bed. So then I think he got that's when he got up and started to look, well, what can I do? And at that point that's when he outreached I think it was Legal Services in Moorhead. And they helped him file I think it was like a lawsuit pretty much, because workman's comp wasn't wanting to pay him anymore, that's why my mom had to start working more.

AA: Sure.

AC: [Sighs] I think that was the first time that we really were able to outreach to an agency that actually gave support.

AA: I see.

AC: But family-wise, we didn't have anyone else. My mom had her brother, my dad had a couple of cousins, for a support system, I don't think they had anybody to help them out until finally my dad reached out to Legal Services. And then Legal Services did a couple more referrals for here and there, and then they were able to get back on their feet.

AA: So at that point, Legal Services was part of whatever was left of a support network.

AC: Yes, yes.

AA: Were there other agencies?

AC: I'm assuming there was. Whether my mom knew of them, my parents knew of them or not, I don't know. I know I remember going back a little bit now it just came into my mind. Going back a little bit, I remember when we were having a difficult time finding a place to live. I remember a migrant agency stepped in and we stayed in a hotel probably for about a whole week. We stayed in a hotel for a whole week.

AA: Yes.

AC: That *they* paid for. I remember they gave my parents a voucher to go and get some groceries, too, because I remember having my mom coming with a bunch of stuff for sandwiches. So that was a bit of a support.

AA: Was that the Minnesota Migrant Council?

AC: I don't know if it was Migrant Council. Because, like I said, at that point, I was just too young to know who it was that they were going to.

AA: Yes.

AC: But I know that it was a migrant service, I know that.

AA: Because on and off I know that some of the churches were doing some services.

AC: Yes, no, I know it was a migrant service because I remember sitting at the table and them saying, yes, so and so, they're from, you know, they come up here every year and they're migrants, they told me about this service. I know it was a migrant service. Whether it was Migrant Council, or MET had just recently opened and it was a big thing that everybody was going to or what. Because I remember when we got the hotel voucher, and we stayed at that hotel, it was *full* of migrant families I remember.

All kinds of kids outside. And I remember they had a basketball hoop outside and all these teenagers hanging out there, I know that it was a migrant agency because everybody was trying to get in to get that help. And when we stayed there, it was full of migrants.

AA: Wow.

AC: But that was I think that was the first encounter with the support from an actual agency in the Moorhead area.

AA: Sure.

AC: And then the second encounter was when my dad ran into that incident. And then they started to do more referrals and stuff and then that's when my parents became more aware of what Moorhead had to offer, but I don't know if they used anything else besides Legal Services. And Social Services, of course, I know that they were on food stamps and stuff. But anything else, I don't think so.

AA: Especially with the fact that they had some struggles right when they got here after they got here.

AC: Yes.

AA: What factors made them decide to stay?

AC: Well, like I said, Big Wells is a small town. I know definitely it was because of, you know, lack of work there for my dad. The other reason is I was a daddy's girl, I'm the only girl.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: So I had my mom telling me, "Tell your dad you don't want to live here anymore, you don't want to live here anymore."

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: So my mom would tell me, “Go and tell your dad that.” And I remember begging my dad, “Please, Daddy, I don’t want to stay here no more! Let’s go out, let’s go live somewhere else. I don’t like it here no more.” And I don’t remember why I was saying that, because I didn’t want to leave! Like my mom told me to go and do that and I did it. And I don’t remember ever recalling, hearing anything at the dinner table or anything from my mom of why *she* didn’t want to be there anymore. I think she was just ready for something different for *us*, her kids. I think she wanted something different for us.

AA: Yes.

AC: So because she didn’t like being here either. [Chuckles] She didn’t. I remember her always being on the phone crying to my grandmother. Wanting to go home because she missed the food, she missed the music, she missed the people. She missed her *family*, most importantly. But yet she stayed. And I think it was mostly because of us. She wanted something different for us. That’s what I think.

AA: And how old were you at that time?

AC: At that time, when she asked me to tell my dad, that was when we went to East Grand Forks first, so I want to say I was like ten or eleven.

AA: Okay. Okay.

AC: I was ten or eleven when she first told me, [half-whispers] “Go and tell your dad that you want to go to Minnesota. Tell him you want to tell him you want to go to Minnesota.” So I went in and I’d laid next to him and I’m like, “Daddy, let’s go to Minnesota.”

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: And so he was like, “What do you want to go for?” And I said, “Well, I want to go. I want to get out of here.” And I remember, I kept begging him, “Let’s go to Minnesota.” And then one morning I just remember waking up to my mom telling me, “Get a pillow.”

AA: Yes.

AC: And she got me in the back of, dad had a Chevy pickup. And he had the camper on top of it. She told me, “Wake up, get a pillow.” And I got my pillow and I remember climbing into the back of the truck. My dad had a mattress in there. And fell asleep and then woke up and we were probably like, I don’t know, maybe Kansas or something. Where I was like, [gasps] “Where are we at!?!?”

AA: [Laughs]

AC: [Chuckles] And then my older brothers says, “Well, we’re here, we’re going to Minnesota already.” And I’m like, “What!?! Really?” And I was sad at that point. I remember being sad because I had made plans with my cousin saying, “Yes, tomorrow we’re going to go to the

store.” And I was sad because I knew I wasn’t going to see her for a long time. So I remember being sad. But excited, I think, too. I remember being excited and nervous and scared it was all kinds of emotions, I think.

AA: Sure.

AC: Being in that back of the truck lying down on a mattress. And my little brother, I remember telling him just to stay under the covers. It was me and my little brother back there. Telling him to stay under the covers. [Sighs] I don’t know. I had a fear of that the camper was going to fly off [chuckles] and then we were going to go flying with it!

AA: So it was kind of a scary thing?

AC: It was a scary thing. Mixed emotions, I guess, scary, mad, sad, *excited* because I was seeing new things. It was different.

AA: I see.

AC: I was like I said, that was the first point in my life that I can recall where I was seeing new things, seeing different people. I think in the town well, I know in Big Wells, in my class, which I don’t know, maybe twenty-two students were in my class, there was only one Caucasian person in my class. The rest of us were Latinos in the class. So going into a convenience store where my dad’s paying gas and seeing nothing but Caucasians and no Latinos around me, the cashier is speaking English not Spanish, it was *very* different. And like I said, it was exciting but scary the way we traveled. And nervous about where we were going live who was I going to play with? Was I going to have to go to school over there? Who was I going to sit next to in class? All those little things. I guess, you know.

AA: Yes.

AC: In the smaller picture, stress, usually the normal stress of what kids go through, you know, like friends and, you know. And I think I worried a little bit about my mom and dad. Thinking, you know, like are they going you know, did they know what they’re doing? Are they going to find?

AA: Yes.

AC: You know, find us a place to live is probably the only worry I had, are they going to find us a place to live? But other than that, it was mostly worries like, am I going to find someone to sit next to, who am I going to play with?

AA: Sure.

AC: And stuff like that.

AA: And you left so suddenly that you didn't have time to process all of that. So when you got here, there were some adjustments to be made. Not only for your mom and dad as adults and heads of the family, but for you as a really, a pre-teen.

AC: As a kid, yes.

AA: So . . .

AC: Yes. Yes, especially as a pre-teen because [Sighs] I mean, I'm going through all of these changes. And, you know, girls are going through all that, you know, best friend type stuff, and all that was you know, I was starting to feel like the world was caving in on me because I didn't have my best friend, in other words.

AA: Yes.

AC: And yes, it was a time in my life that I remember it was a mix of emotions.

AA: So what . . . ?

AC: Because I *knew*. I knew at some point we were going I was thinking of it as a vacation when they were telling me, "Tell Dad you want to go to Minnesota!"

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: And then, just all of a sudden, you know, my mom's waking me up early, early, early in the morning. Telling me to grab a pillow and get in back of the truck.

AA: So at some point do you remember having thought, "Gee, I'm glad I told my dad let's come to Minnesota?" Or, "Why did I tell my dad that?"

AC: [Sighs] Hmmm. A point of regret saying why did I tell him, you mean?

AA: Yes.

AC: I see.

AA: Or glad that you suggested it.

AC: No, I think I was just so overwhelmed with all the emotions.

AA: Okay.

AC: That I guess I never had time to regret it or . . .

AA: Yes.

AC: Yes, I don't think I ever said, "Man, I should tell him . . ." No. Because when I was young, and I was the only girl, I never wanted to disappoint my parents or hurt my parents.

AA: Okay.

AC: And since I had already told him, "Dad, let's go." And then to say, "Let's not go?" Like I know that would have put a pressure on them.

AA: I see.

AC: And I would have felt bad. And that's what I'm saying. They told me to tell him that and to *please* them. You know, for whatever reason that everybody wanted to go, I just said, "Okay, let's go. Yes, Dad, let's go, let's go." Because I never wanted to see my parents hurt or disappointed.

AA: Okay.

AC: I always tried everything that I could do. I always did everything I could possibly do to help them. So if my mom said, "Tell your dad you want to go to Minnesota," for whatever reason, I never questioned it. But I was helping my mom, and so that's why if I did have a thought of regret, if I did, I'd never have said it, just because I, you know, I hated doing that to my parents, making them worry, or disappointed, or whatever.

AA: Do you have specific memories of some things that you had to adjust, either school, church, shopping, how you spent your time at home?

AC: The biggest adjustment that hurt me the most, I think, was I was very outgoing, like I said. I was very athletic. I would say I was a popular student in class. Very smart. So coming into a bigger school, a bigger area, but being the minority, I was angry, in a way. Because I wanted to try out for volleyball, basketball, dance. I wanted to try out for all these things. But I was a minority and I felt, you know, all these girls, you know, grew up together, they went to school throughout all these years, and so they had their own little clique of "we are the volleyball team," "we are the basketball team," "we are the whatever."

AA: Okay.

AC: So I felt as an outsider trying to invade their space and I didn't ever like the sense of not belonging.

AA: Yes.

AC: So I wouldn't put myself in that situation. So that was my biggest disappointment, is that I never got the courage to say, "Yes, I am an outsider, and it's okay." I just said, "I'm an outsider and I won't try out."

AA: Sure.

AC: Or like trying to get into all these other things, you know, like in Texas, fourth grade over there, they had UIL, they were like tournaments where you can go into calculus or whatever.

AA: Was that what you said, UIL, University Interscholastic League.

AC: [Sighs] I think I can't even remember what it stood for right now.

AA: Yes, okay. I think it is University Interscholastic League.

AC: I don't remember what it stood for, but I was in fourth grade when I was able to try out, and I *did*. And hmmm, my mom let me go, of course, because my older brother was in it.

AA: Yes.

AC: So she trusted me to go because you travel the state.

AA: Oh, okay.

AC: And you travel the state and enter these competitions. So I entered in calculus. And that was an experience. It was fun. I remember enjoying it and studying. Staying after school and studying with everybody. And preparing, and working on your speed and stuff like that, and so when I came here, you know, I tried to look for stuff like that to do as well. But then when [sighs] when the opportunity came to do something, I always chickened out because I didn't like to be the outcast. I *never* liked to be the outcast.

AA: I see.

AC: I didn't want to be the minority. I wanted to be present. I want it to say, "Oh, Amy's coming," or, I don't know, it was just a feeling that I remember having.

AA: Okay.

AC: And I didn't like.

AA: And did you?

AC: It prevented me from doing a lot of things that I wanted to do.

AA: Sure.

AC: That feeling did.

AA: And did you have that feeling because you were new or because you were Latina?

AC: Both. Because I was new and because obviously I didn't know any of the kids, because, you know, these kids went to school since kindergarten with each other. And I didn't. You know, I came in to the Moorhead school district in sixth grade. So that's six years of my peers knowing each other. And I didn't know any of them. And it was hard to fit in because that's about the age that kids start to form their little cliques, you know. You know, they went to school with this student or that student. They were in the same class last year or whatever it might be. So it was very hard for me to find a spot to fit in, and then it made it even harder that I was Latina.

AA: Sure.

AC: It made it even harder. And I don't know why, because I guess, you know, it shouldn't have. Because and the kids didn't really treat me different because of that. I don't remember them treating me different, or anything like saying comments or anything. I don't remember them *treating* me different, *knowing* that I was different. I felt like I couldn't participate.

AA: Was there a time when you sensed that your parents? Or maybe they came right out and said, "You know, we like Moorhead. We're staying here." Or is it something that they still dream about, going back home?

AC: They did. They planned to go back home. Right after I entered high school. And at *that* point, I said, "Well, I'm in high school already. You know, I have credits that count. You know, I can't go back now." You know. At that point I already had, let's say, a boyfriend, I had a group of friends already. That was what, say [sighs] five years later. And I didn't want to go back at that point. I said, "Well, I'm in high school now, you know, I'm working on my credits. Let me finish school first and then we'll go back." And of course that didn't happen because then I became pregnant. And my parents said, "Okay, well, Amy's out of the house." They were ready to go back. But then my younger brother got into some trouble here, so he really couldn't go back.

AA: I see.

AC: He had to. I think he had like probation or something, I don't know. My younger brother got into some trouble when early in age. And so then they really couldn't, they had to stay here and deal with all of that with him. I think Michael the second oldest of the family, he was in prison, so they didn't want to leave, and then leave him in prison here, incarcerated here in Minnesota, and you know, leave him behind. So they were kind of on hold because, obviously, my brother, being incarcerated, my little brother being in trouble, me becoming pregnant, and so they couldn't.

AA: Sure.

AC: They were kind of stuck. So they always wanted to go back. They just never got the opportunity because something always around. But they always wanted to go back. My dad passed away in 2010. And, he did go back. Once my mom passed away, he left. He didn't want to be here anymore. He left with his mom, and then he passed away like six months exactly to

the day after my mom passed away. But it was always a want to go back, but never a possibility because something was always going on.

AA: And how about you?

AC: Do I want to go back?

AA: Do you think, “Moorhead is my home,” or do you still think in terms of, “Gee, I have family in Texas. Big Wells is calling me”?

AC: No. Moorhead’s my home.

AA: Okay.

AC: This is my community. My kids love the school. They have friends and they do good here. And I like the community. I do.

AA: Sure.

AC: It’s grown quite a bit. It’s changed tremendously. I’ve adjusted and I like it.

AA: Yes.

AC: Winters are kind of rough.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: It’s just the same as in Texas. Just as cold as it is here, it’s hot over there.

AA: [Chuckles] Yes, it’s true. It’s just flip-flopped.

AC: Yes.

AA: Have you maintained a contact and a relationship with family?

AC: Oh, yes.

AA: In Chicago or Big Wells, wherever your family is now?

AC: We try to go at least once a year. Although since my parents passed away, I haven’t made time to go visit my grandparents, which is hard. But I think it’s a combination of, you know, going back knowing that’s my roots, and I miss my mom, I miss my dad, you know.

AA: Yes.

AC: But then also it's harder because now my kids are in school, so I have to go around their school schedule. [Sighs] But I have my mom's two sisters; one lives in Houston, one lives in Beaumont [Texas]. My mom's brother lives in Corpus Christi. And my grandma, my mom's mom still lives in Big Wells. My dad's mom and my mom's dad passed away a long time, he passed away quite a bit, so my maternal grandfather is no longer living. My dad's mom is currently living in Illinois, I believe, with my aunt, my dad's sister. All of my dad's sisters live in Illinois. And my dad's brother lives in East Grand Forks still.

AA: Do you visit?

AC: My dad's uncle? No. He reminds me too much of my dad that I just haven't really, I've kind of, I don't know. I guess I've shut down a little bit since my parents passed away.

AA: I see.

AC: I call them. Calls are frequent. I just haven't made time to go and see them. I'm closer to my mom's family, too. I'm a lot closer to my mom's family.

AA: Okay.

AC: Because my dad's family was always in Illinois or somewhere else. My mom's family was in Big Wells, Texas, and since I grew up there, I was closer to them. And that's who I remain in contact mostly with is my mom's side of the family. But my brother moved back to Texas. He did. He didn't like it here because, I guess, how would you? Like the police, since my brother [Chuckles] My brother Michael was always in trouble. Every time they ran a plate and it said "Cerna" they'd stop him. So they started to harass my older brother, always trying to get him for something. And my brother just didn't like the cops in this area, in the Moorhead area.

AA: Okay.

AC: He was getting tired of being harassed for no reason. The first opportunity he got to move back to Texas he did. So *he* did move back. My younger brother, the same thing. First opportunity he got to move, he had to move back, he did. Although my younger brother's you know, he comes to Moorhead quite frequently because he's really close to me.

AA: Well, that's good.

AC: So he'll come and stay with me for a couple of months, then he'll go stay with my brother. But if he had the opportunity, he'd stay in Texas, too. I think I'm the only one [chuckles] that has chosen to stay here.

AA: [Chuckles] Yes. When you were at home with your parents, what language did you speak at home with family?

AC: I would say it was half and half. Half English, half Spanish.

AA: Okay.

AC: I got used to using my English, so my mom would mostly speak to me in Spanish and I would reply to her in English, so that's why I would say it was a good majority of half and half. I think I stopped using it because I felt as an outsider, and I think that was my way to feel better. I don't know. Just leave my language at home and use English a hundred percent. And, I don't know, I think that's the one thing that I left.

AA: So you spoke well, a mixture of English and Spanish at home, but strictly English outside of the home?

AC: Outside of the home.

AA: How about now? What do you speak at home?

AC: English. My girls only speak English. My mother-in-law—who only speaks Spanish, doesn't understand a word of English—will speak to them in Spanish, so they understand, but they can't communicate back to her. And my husband, yes, now at home and in my home, it's ninety percent English, except when my in-laws come.

AA: I see.

AC: When they migrate here, then it's Spanish, but my girls, my kids don't speak Spanish.

AA: Is that a conscious choice?

AC: [Sighs] Well, I'm disappointed, I wish that we would have started it off differently, you know. I think I would, no, I *know* I would want them to know Spanish. I *want* them to know Spanish, I do. They understand it, and I'm sure at some point if they really want to they could probably pick it up, you know. It's in their blood.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: They have it on their tongue. Whether they choose to or not, it's going to be their choice, which I would have rather I had, you know, made it a dominant language for them.

AA: Sure.

AC: And then they could, you know, decide. Right now they don't have a choice, it's just English.

AA: Let's talk about Latino cultural traditions. Is that something that you had to deal with when you moved here or you kind of kept them?

AC: The cultural difference?

AA: Were they observed in your family?

AC: [Pauses] Yes. I remember when I was little, you know, going to the city park and having a big celebration for Cinco de Mayo. [The fifth of May -- commemorates the Mexican army's 1862 victory over France at the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican War (1861-1867). Just about every holiday I remember it always; there was a parade, a fiesta, something going on.

AA: Sure.

AC: And being around Mexican music and all of that.

AA: This was in Big Wells?

AC: Yes, in Big Wells.

AA: I see.

AC: That culture was my normal. That was, you know, that was my fun time. You know, oh, that it's going to be something going on in the park, and I knew there was going to be Mexican music, Mexican *food*. My friends, all the families getting together, and which is something very big in our culture, you know.

AA: Sure.

AC: Families get together and we have a good time.

AA: Yes.

AC: And so moving here, that was a big shock for me that, you know, it was very different, you know, you want to put some music on and dance and you can't. Or you've got to get what do they call it? Like a permit or a noise ordinance or something like that.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: That was very different. You know, you can't do stuff like that. Just go and put music on a park and then everybody gather and have a nice time.

AA: Sure.

AC: Not celebrating Cinco de Mayo was a big thing. I remember that was a big thing for me. It was like, in school we're learning about Cinco de Mayo, and then you go home well, there's nothing being done!

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: Versus in Texas.

AA: Yes.

AC: You'd learn about Cinco de Mayo, and then you'd go home, and everybody is getting ready to go and celebrate, have a parade. And it was *big*. And then, you know, yes, we learned Cinco de Mayo, but you never celebrated it really, you know. Or the Sixteenth of September. [Mexico declares independence from Spain on September 16, 1810.]

AA: Okay.

AC: Traditions within my own family, I guess that was hard, too. Because, you know used to being around your family and doing certain things. And celebrating certain things with your family and then coming here and being alone. And it's just your immediate family, just your mom, and your brothers, and sisters, or whatever. That was hard, too. Because like you know, like I said, and in our culture, we're so used to *being* with [your] family.

AA: Yes.

AC: And then being away from your family, it's a shock in itself, I guess. It was something to adjust to.

AA: The family, that was tough on you.

AC: Yes. The family. Yes, that was very hard to adjust to. Because still to this day, when, you know, the holidays come around or something's coming around that you are used to doing with family. Well, you grow up doing with family, right. Well, with *my* kids, I want that for them. I want them to experience that, you know, that families get together, and they're playing with their cousins or, you know, what Cinco de Mayo is. And they learn it in school. Like I say, they learn it in school, but whether they celebrate it themselves, you know, or within the family, like we come home and we do something fun.

AA: Yes.

AC: And so I still to this day when stuff like that happens, you know, I'm disappointed for my kids. I wish that they could have experienced what I experienced as a child, the things like that.

AA: So are there some other cultural traditions that you've retained and maybe passing on to your girls?

AC: Not really.

AA: Oh.

AC: Yes, no, this is disappointing.

AA: As your family adjusted to living in Moorhead, did. And I bring this up because you said that being accepted and that it may be simply your perception or actual, but did acceptance have a role in your family deciding to stay here? Or they just stayed here regardless of what it was like?

AC: [Sighs]

AA: Because your brothers left.

AC: Yes.

AA: So obviously some of those questions floated around in the consciousness of your family.

AC: I guess, regardless of that, *I* learned to adjust, I guess, is what it was.

AA: I see.

AC: I learned to adjust but also the community grew.

AA: Sure.

AC: It grew quite a bit. You know, I found friends that were Latinos, Latinas.

AA: Okay.

AC: The Latino population grew, so more things started to come around, whether it be Spanish dances, probably really that's it, Spanish dances. [Chuckles] But there were other organizations that I started to become a part of, for example, *Mujeres Unidas* [Women United].

AA: Sure.

AC: It was an organization in Moorhead that I became a part of, and we did a lot there. We did a lot of work with young girls and talked about traditions of *quinceañeras*. [*Quineceañera* is the celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday. It marks the transition from childhood to young womanhood. The celebration varies significantly across Latin American countries; in some countries taking on, for example, more religious overtones.] And being a part of that, and incorporating that in the community, I guess, I felt a sense of belonging with them. And it no longer bothered me that, you know, I was out of my element, because I was creating my own.

AA: Okay.

AC: I guess. So at that point, whether the feeling of it, being accepted or not was no longer an issue, because I was creating my own community of acceptance, I guess is how I can put it.

AA: Do you feel part of the larger community now?

AC: [Sighs] I do.

AA: Or do you still have your own?

AC: No, no. I do. I do just because having that opportunity with working with MET, Incorporated and having the opportunity of networking with other agencies, other people, other companies. And then, you know, like I said, I graduated here in Moorhead, so then, whether it was stopping at a grocery store or gas station and saying, “Oh, yes, I remember you. I went to high school.” And I would think, “Wow. Really?”

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: I would have never had thought, you know, you’d remember me.

AA: Yes.

AC: And I guess just the whole part of growing up and making this my home now, and now seeing more familiar faces and stuff like that made it easier, I guess.

AA: Sure.

AC: Because the generation that I was in is now out in the community. You know, the kids that I went to school with, they’re working in the community now. So I know them, they know me, obviously. And it’s not about, we’re going to sit next together in lunch or not.

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: But, hey, you know, I remember you. And it being a different, I guess a different belonging, I guess, I don’t know.

AA: Okay.

AC: I don’t know.

AA: In the community, when you arrived, you had been aware of this, although you were kind of young, but also through your work in MET, you would have a sense of the kinds of jobs that Latinos have gravitated to. Can you tell me about that?

AC: Well, I guess we can start with MET and then whatever triggers my memory from there. We’ll go from there. Working with MET for the ten years, the majority of the migrants that would come, obviously, gravitated to the farm work.

AA: I see.

AC: Out of the migrant population, I want to say there was maybe about ten to fifteen percent that would do construction. They left the fields, the seasonal field work, and farm work, for a seasonal construction job.

AA: Okay.

AC: So they still had the opportunity to come and go with that flexibility of it being a seasonal job.

AA: Sure.

AC: But that was a small percentage. That was about, like I said, ten to fifteen percent. When I first started working with MET, that was what I'd seen. The women working and some women working in the fields, but majority staying at home. But then we also had a portion that worked the seasonal jobs like Migrant Health, in Migrant Legal Services, Head Start, and the Tri-Valley the women would go and take care of children while other families were working in the fields.

AA: During the summer.

AC: These past let's say, these past five years, I've seen it change quite a bit. I've seen women and children working the fields and maintaining that relationship with the farmer, coming and still doing the job for them, but the men work in construction. So now the men are coming to do their construction job, but to keep the employment or the contractor, the relationship with the farmer, they're putting their wives to work, or their children to work.

AA: Sure.

AC: So that's the shift I'm seeing in the migrant area. The seasonal farmworkers I've seen like the ones that decided to settle out, I've seen a lot of women getting jobs as CNAs. [Certified Nursing Assistants] I've seen a lot of them getting jobs as CNAs.

AA: I see.

AC: Also production companies. Like there's a lot of production companies here in the Fargo area. I've seen a lot of them go into like The Forum [newspaper], Knight's Printing, there is an egg plant in Moorhead that a lot of women could would go work there.

AA: Egg, eggplant?

AC: An egg carton plant.

AA: Oh, okay. Sure.

AC: Yes. So I have seen a lot of them go into production areas, too. And the men, mostly, like I said those construction jobs. But also like truck drivers, CDL [commercial driver's license] drivers, they go and get their CDL license and get jobs as a CDL, with their CDL. Then I've seen

a lot families push their children to do something different. And a lot their children are attending the community colleges and doing bigger and better things than what their parents initially started at.

AA: Okay.

AC: So I have seen a big growth of this generation is, you know, expected to go to college, versus college being an opportunity, being, you know, a dream. Now it's more, you know, families are starting to push their kids to college, which is really nice.

AA: So more Latino students, youngsters now, youth are now going to college.

AC: I think so, yes. *I would say so.*

AA: Sure.

AC: I have seen that being a goal for a lot of families saying, "I want my kid to go. They're going to go." And *making* that effort and finding them financial support. How do you register, where can you register, and what kinds of fields should they go into? Going to career seminars and stuff like that. Yes, I have seen that shift to where before it used to be, you know, "I would *like* my kid to go to college," to now, "I *want* my kid to go to college." So I have seen that shift.

AA: And this is among migrants or those who have settled out?

AC: For those who have settled out. Because the migrants, I think, they're still with that going back and forth. So their priorities are different, I think. In the sense that they *need* to work, because the money that they come here to make needs to last them for the other six months in Texas. And so work *is* their priority.

AA: Yes.

AC: Working and making money is their priority. Because the money that they make here needs to last them for the rest of the year over there. So but there's a lot of migrant families. I want to say there's maybe about thirty percent of the migrant families that you know, they do have that, and they want that opportunity for their kids, too.

AA: I see.

AC: It's just, right now; we need to concentrate on now. We need to think about now right now.

AA: The living expenses.

AC: Yes, living expenses. Because not only are they having to come to this area and pay for housing, but they need to pay for the housing in Texas or wherever they come from. So then not only do they need to pay for their bills here and there, but they also need to save money for the

next six months. So it becomes pressure for them that they need to worry about working, and that's their priority now is working.

AA: Sure.

AC: And then once they go back, then they'll think about maybe going to school. When they have the time, they'll think about going to school.

AA: I see.

AC: Because they want to go to school, it's just not a thought for them right now. It's about seventy percent of the population.

AA: Okay. Now are the families that are settling here? Years ago, I mean, practically everybody was from South Texas, either the Valley or the Crystal City area.

AC: Yes.

AA: You know. And Mexican-American.

AC: Sure.

AA: Is that changing?

AC: Yes.

AA: How?

AC: I think the biggest change happened when we went through that recession. And a lot of jobs were ... a lot of people were looking for jobs. I've seen a big switch from like people, families from California. And a lot of the California people migrated and settled out like in the Pelican Rapids-Perham area. A lot of them were from California. I've seen Arizona. I've seen families come from Arizona. And the biggest reason was because we went through that recession, and Fargo was on ... Fargo was nationally recognized for *having* jobs. That's when we saw a big switch of people coming this way.

AA: Yes.

AC: And migrants of all cultures, not just the typical migrant that we think of, of a Hispanic, Latino, or a Mexican. It was of all cultures that were coming here.

AA: Like?

AC: And I've seen Hmong, I think is what they're called.

AA: Okay.

AC: Hmong. Somalian. And a lot of Caucasian families, too. They didn't have any more work, so they migrated here and they worked the fields. They actually did work the fields. So it was a bigger change in that recession of what a typical migrant was then to the new migrant now.

AA: Did MET provide services to all of those groups that you mentioned?

AC: Yes.

AA: Including Somalian?

AC: As long as they qualified, yes.

AA: Okay.

AC: As long as they qualified, they did. For those that didn't qualify, we would try to refer them to wherever we could, whether it would be like Lutheran Social Services, food pantries, homeless shelters. We would try and refer them to wherever we possibly could.

AA: Were there issues or were there difficulties encountered in that era that you're talking about with the housing, providing food, getting into school, health services?

AC: Yes, there was. Mostly budget. Because at that same time, obviously, we were going through budget cuts.

AA: I see.

AC: Everybody was going through budget cuts. So we were trying our best to tap into other agencies that could possibly help. And there are not a lot of agencies in the area anymore that do help with housing. Or food, or gas, or whatever, career counseling, whatever it might be. So we started to utilize as many resources that we possibly could. And it would be difficult because some agencies needed them to qualify, their qualification. Everybody's qualifications were different. And it was hard to get them to meet certain qualifications. Because normally, our typical migrant seasonal farmworker that did come up from Texas, you know, had migrated, had had farm work, were low income, and stuff like that. The new migrant worker, well, at that time, were not low of income.

AA: Okay.

AC: They were self-employed persons that made, you know, a hundred thousand dollars a year.

AA: Sure.

AC: But obviously [sighs] were low income at that point, you know. But the previous six months, they were not low income. So we ran into a lot of difficulty of them having assets, are

they really low income? Then, we came into when we were dealing with different cultures, you know, language barriers.

AA: Yes.

AC: You know that, well, they're really not going to understand the class. We only provide it in English or whatever it might be. Then there was *that* barrier that we had to come across, and so it was an interesting time at that point working with MET, because we were encountering different challenges at that point.

AA: You said that there's not as many organizations now providing support in that area. So how are they dealing with that now?

AC: [Sighs] Support with like food?

AA: Finding jobs, food.

AC: Yes.

AA: Housing, utilities.

AC: I guess they're starting to utilize as much as they can, so if it was housing that they're looking for they would get the help and get themselves prepared ahead of time. I think they're getting smarter, is what I'm trying to say.

AA: Okay.

AC: They're doing as much as they can to be okay later.

AA: Okay.

AC: Career counseling, I think there's been a lot of agencies that have started tapping into those other short-term trainings. They're starting to customize trainings. Schools are adjusting to getting people in and out. So they're customizing classes or courses to get somebody into a classroom and out on the job market from as little as ten to twelve weeks. They're trying to get them in and out fast now. And I think that's what's helping a lot of the families, is that they're going in and learning a skill and getting on the job, versus going in and putting some time in with a college or community college or university.

AA: Okay.

AC: And then coming out with a degree in something. They're looking more for things that are going to get them in and out so they're not struggling for a long time. You know, they might be without a job for a month, but then be on a job right after. So I think that's what's happening right now as for career, anyways.

AA: Sure.

AC: They're getting training that's getting them in and out. The regular services, like the housing and the food and the gas, Moorhead has grown so much that the network of that, it's an easier one, I guess. You know, the agencies communicate with each other. They'll call. For example, MET will call and say, you know, "Well, I can help them with their rent, but I can't help them with their deposit. Can you help them with their deposit?" "Oh, sure." Or, for example, "I'm going to help them with their gas so they can be able to get to work the next couple of weeks, but they're low on food. Can you guys help them out with the food?" So things like that, I guess. The agencies are starting to communicate quite a bit more.

AA: Okay.

AC: Versus before, I guess it was just come in and get and go. [Chuckles]

AA: With, you know, people moving here from different areas, different countries, different states than in past years, and they continue to resettle here, how is the relationship between the new arrivals and the ones who have been here for ten, fifteen, twenty years?

AC: [Sighs] I think there's a lot of families. So, for example, I go to Wal-Mart, and I see a Hispanic family.

AA: Sure.

AC: I say, "Wow." Look and you know the population is growing. It's a warm feeling, you know.

AA: Yes.

AC: You go into Wal-Mart and you see someone else of your nationality. So I would assume that it's a good adjustment, you know, like families are saying, "Oh, well you just moved here from there? Oh, well if you go over here you'll find some help for this; you'll find some help for that." So they're more apt to giving information out and making sure that they're going to be okay.

AA: Yes.

AC: Because when we came, we struggled, and we got help through there, so why don't you go out over and find out, you know. I think that's the way it is right now.

AA: So it is a welcoming spirit.

AC: I think it is. I think it's welcoming and it is seen quite a bit more acceptable? No. It is seen more.

AA: Okay.

AC: So obviously, you're excited to see somebody new, so you want to help that new person, I guess.

AA: If a family member or a friend from let's say Big Wells or Chicago called and said, "You know, I'm thinking of moving out of here, and I'm considering going up north. What is Moorhead like?" What would you tell them? About the people, jobs, health, schools?

AC: I would tell them that the community is very peaceful.

AA: Okay.

AC: The crime is very low, so it's a nice place to live. It's a calm place to be, but with a lot of opportunities to offer.

AA: Sure.

AC: It's growing, so there are lots of jobs out here. There's always new restaurants or new stores that are being brought to the area now, so it's exciting to see the community grow. Come be a part of it, I guess is what I would say, you know. Whether you find an opportunity to work at a grocery store or a restaurant, or you get the opportunity to build it, and like with a construction company you'll be a part of that history of helping Fargo-Moorhead grow.

AA: Yes.

AC: And on top of that, I mean, it's a calm, peaceful community to be a part of, you know.

AA: Through MET, you helped place people in jobs, right?

AC: Yes.

AA: That was part of it.

AC: Yes.

AA: Did you have difficulty finding jobs due to job availabilities? That's part one of the question. Part two is, did you have difficulty placing Latinos? Or did the fact that it was a Latino, for example, a Latino bricklayer, they'd say, "Oh yes, I want him"?

AC: Yes, I think. Well, when I came into working for MET, the Latino population kind of had the reputation of being hard working.

AA: Sure.

AC: So often there were times that I had people calling, saying, "Hey, do you have?"

AA: [Chuckles]

AC: [Chuckles] And it would be that, “Hey, do you have any Mexican workers? We’re looking for Mexican workers.”

AA: Yes.

AC: And of course I’d tell them, well, how many, and of course, our Latino population is a family of, you know, seven, eight, sometimes, so I would be able to get a father and his sons into, I remember one, and it was a plaster company. You know, he was looking for men to plaster walls, and he was looking for Mexicans. So I said, “Okay, I’ll do my best. I’ll see what I can find, you know. I’ll find you somebody who is willing to work for you.” And contacted a family, and him and his three sons were looking for work. So that was one crew for him. The gentleman was excited and I think to this day those guys are still working with him.

AA: Oh. [Chuckles] Interesting.

AC: So our population already had that sense of being hard workers. They knew we came up here to work in the fields. And working in the fields is not an easy job, so they knew that we could get a job done. I guess where I struggled a little bit more was the pay, you know. I don’t think the migrants worried much about being paid, it was more *me*. That I knew, hey, you know, it’s a different job, this is what *other* people are getting, and so you should be getting that, too.

AA: Okay.

AC: So that was a little bit of a fight for me. Yes, they don’t have the experience, but they’re bringing a skill that I’m sure you can value, you know, the hard working, loyal, quick learners.

AA: Yes.

AC: And that was a little bit of a struggle. Getting them jobs was a struggle when it came to it being a language barrier. That was the struggle most of the time. Because, you know, they need to be able to be safe on the job. And a lot of the jobs that I was helping them get were like production jobs.

AA: Sure.

AC: Or jobs where they needed to be able to understand English mostly for safety. And that’s where it was kind of hard for them to get jobs. Occasionally, I would run into where, you know, they qualified for the job, and they should have been able to get it, and there was a position open. And it was still open, why didn’t they get it? I don’t know. Maybe the person didn’t really want to hire a Latino at that time. That was an occasional struggle sometimes, too. But for the most part, I think our population established that reputation of being hard workers, and it was fairly easy to get them jobs, especially because this area had so many jobs to offer.

AA: Okay.

AC: So it was fairly easy.

AA: Is there anything else that you have been thinking of that you would want to talk about?

AC: I can't think of anything right now.

AA: Well, one final question then. [Rustles papers] If you're taking a class at MState, and in one of your classes they ask you to write a paper. If you're in business, you're probably not taking a history class, but they say, "Okay, briefly tell us about the history of Latinos and the contribution of Latinos in Fargo-Moorhead."

AC: Okay. Briefly! [Chuckles]

AA: Well, no. Actually, take as long as you want.

AC: [Chuckles] [Pauses] I guess I would write about the struggle, the beginning struggle of us feeling as the outsiders.

AA: Okay.

AC: As struggling as the minority in this community, but being able to prove that we are just as good as them in anything that they can do, you know.

AA: Sure.

AC: Whether it be a construction worker, you know, whether it would be a nurse, or a business person, whether it would be in sports.

AA: Okay.

AC: Especially sports, because I have seen a lot of young Latino kids starting to play football here, and that's very exciting to see. So being able to say how in the beginning, feeling like a minority, and then, over time, showing that we are here to stay, we want to be a part of your community. Showing them that we are a part of their community, and then them accepting us. I guess that's what I would talk about. Them accepting us and recognizing us in the community is a nice feeling.

AA: Yes.

AC: And that is what Fargo-Moorhead is about, you know, those friendly faces that you get now. That inviting neighbor that you have now.

AA: Okay.

AC: Because it was a struggle. But it's grown so much that I think their attitude about other cultures has grown as well. And it is no longer new and scary anymore.

AA: Right.

AC: It's something new and exciting.

AA: Yes. Very good. Amy, thank you very much for this long interview.

AC: [Chuckles]

AA: [Chuckles] I appreciate it.

AC: Well, thank you for giving me the opportunity, like I said.

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