

Transcript

Name of interviewee: **José Carmona**

In the transcript presented below, the name of the interviewer and the date of the interview were not provided.

E: Entrevistadora

JC: José Carmona

I: To start, where and when were you born?

JC: What I can say is that I was born in a little ranch in the municipality of Silao, Guanajuato. The ranch name is called Las Garzas Ranch. I was born on March 20th, 1925. But possibly my parents did not register me after five years later.

E: What do your parents do?

JC: They were farmers.

E: Did you have a big family?

JC: No, there were four of us. Two sisters and two brothers. I am the first born. My brother passed away long time ago and one of my sisters passed away last December.

E: Was your brother in the same program?

JC: No.

E: Only you?

JC: Yes, I just wanted to come.

E: How did you hear about the bracero program?

JC: I heard of it from a friend by the name of Salvador. He was in the program and he talked about a meeting at the school. But today I heard rumors about some thirty-four and

thirty six thousand Mexican pesos that were given to braceros that can prove that they are real bracero.

E: How old were you?

JC: Well, I don't remember. I was born on March 20, 1925 and I believe it was in December during the 50's when I came. I arrived at the Estur Ranch, next to Frenside. I was supposed to be there for 45 days and lasted a year and a half. I went there knowing that they may have jobs available. I do not know, I'm not a bad person neither a good person. The first eight or ten had completed their contracts. When my contract expired they gave me a letter which it said that we can be rehired. I was in charge to notify the rest of coworkers. I was hired first at Irapuato, Guanajuato, near to my home town. They asked me to be at San Pedro, Tlaquepaque in Guadalajara. I did get the job, but not sure about the others, they were near that location. I do not know if they returned or not. I came back, I didn't recognize anyone.

E: Were you married when you came the first time?

JC: Yes.

E: When did you get married?

JC: I don't talk about that often, my mind is falling apart.

E: At what age did you get married?

JC: I was about sixteen or seventeen.

E: How long was you married?

JC: Not long but I had some time.

E: Did you have family when you first came?

JC: Yes.

E: Who many children?

B. Three.

E: Was your whole family in Mexico?

B. Yes, the jobs were for men only.

E: Why you decided to come to United States?

B. I came looking for a better life. Because in the past I had cross the border illegally on the Texas territory. The salary that we received was three times better than the one in my home town, that is why I came back. My wife was born here, but she didn't have a birth certificate. We tried to get her documents in Mexico City and Guadalajara, but the doors were shut on our face.

E: Was there any physical exams?

B. Nobody escaped. With your permission, when they gave us our documents we entered naked into a room and they examined us and then we left the room.

E: Did you bring any personal things?

B. What did a bring?

E: What did you bring with you?

B. From my homeland to here? Only one or two changes of clothing.

E: Did you bring any pictures?

B. Uuunnn. I did not know they existed. The only one I had was the I.D. they gave us.

I'm from Silao, Guanajuato and we got hired at Irapuato, Guanajuato, which is 45 minutes from my hometown. We entered with all our documents in order.

E: Ok, now let's talk about the work you did. What were your options? It said here that you can work on a tractor or doing cultivation. Did you had options at work or did they

tell what to do?

B. What do you mean in other words?

A. I mean work options

E: Yes, when we arrived we started working with a small hoe. Then, we picked celery, lettuce, green beans, tomatoes, we did all this work by hand. One day, those who drive the machines didn't show up. They had been working there longer and had some money saved so they went to Tijuana. While filling the trailer, I asked them "Do you want me to move the machine that way you don't have to get down?" "Do you know how?," they asked. I moved the tractor making sure that the boss didn't see because I believed I could get fired. One day my boss calls me, and I thought to myself he caught me driving. Then he said: Joe Carmona, then said to me some words in English and some in Spanish. Come in, (venir you moved tractor) who knows what he said but I did it. And, from that point on, I started taking vegetables to the packaging plant. When land was free and ready to be softened he asked me: do you know how to do it? I told him I did it in my country and I don't know if you would like it. He send me to Jose Fuentes, "he will be your teacher." He was the mechanic and had a big tractor there. He told me start the tractor, and I did it, let's go here, go there. He took me to a work site and asked me some questions related to the work. Do you know what this is about? Yes, I have it done in the past with few foremen. Let's go get a dragger, (a dragger is metal disc that softens the land). He said: Where would you start? I responded: I will enter here and then will turn on the end and leave ten feet distance. "There is nothing us to teach you" he said, "you know how. I just want you not to forget about the injector when you came to this end." Yes, I understand. I know how to do it. And I started working there and then. I believed they liked my job

because the task got hard at one point and I had to drive a big caterpillar, those which have no steering wheels, only levers. "You know how to do everything, no need to teach you" is what he said. And every day I ended covered with dirt from head to toe. But I felt good because I got paid more for doing that job.

E: Do you remember how much they paid you?

B. I do not remember exactly. When we got hired we got a contract for seventy cents an hour, and after they gave us a raise and I earn extra money for driving.

E: That was the first time you came?

B. Yes, contracted as I mentioned to you before, I was here illegally in Texas.

E: Your first time as a bracero?

B. Yes.

E: And the other times, what did you do?

B. Every time I came to work it was as a bracer. Every job was different. On the second time, I came for 45 days but I stayed for year and a half until they sent me to renew my contract at Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. A list of those who needed to be rehired was given to me but at the time of the renew, I was ignored. I was sent to a different a location in San Antonio where I was picking grapes. I spend 45 days there and after that there was no rehiring. And the third time I don't remember where I was sent, I only remember that I had to pick tomatoes, we had to walk for an hour, cross some rivers to get to the plantation. And the time there was no tractors or machines. And the other times I don't remember what call is? What is call? I just know that we enter trough Mexicali, Mexico.

E: That is ok.

B. We ended up on a remote location picking up cotton. We didn't make much money

there where I was send twice. And another time I was send to Aguasiri to pick fruit.

E: Can you describe your experience going back to Mexico?

B. Who?

E: You?

B. Myself?

E: Yes, when your contract was expired and you went back? For example, the first time when you went back to Mexico, was your contract was expired?

B. Forgive my answer, what kind of experience, the one I had here in the United States?

E: When you got back from United States, did you regret it?

B.I was sent back after the contract expired, not like the Estur Farm. They helped us renew our contract.

E: That was my question.

E: How fast did you get back? Did you get a new contract? Or did you stay in Mexico for a while?

B.I don't know if you don't understand me or I don't make myself clear. The first time when I came, I was here for 45 days and got rehired. The second time was for about 3 months then another rehire. That was the reason I lasted a year and a half. Each time a contract was ended, we needed another one.

E: Hahaha. I understand you more.

B. Oh thats good! Thanks.

E: I'm to going ask you about the time in your life when you were bracero. How many days a week did you work here as a bracero?

B. As well as in Mexico, I worked six days a week. We took Sundays off, if my memory

is not mistaking me.

E: How many hours per day?

B. When I was transfer a to Estur Ranch, close to San Francisco, I worked all day long, seven days a week. There was always something to do in the fields. I was there all by myself.

E: Tell me about your food. What and where did you eat?

B. We ate well at the farm. There was an excellent cook. At one time I became his helper setting up the tables and chairs, brewing coffee, making oat meal and flipping the tortillas. When it was time to serve the braceros, I give each one 2 or 3 tortillas. If they wanted more, they had to get them themselves.

E: Did you ever eat at the town or did you always eat at the ranch?

B. Yes, sometimes I eat at the town that was close to Asunsai. When I had Saturday and Sundays off, we always went to the town and walked around and those who wanted to swim could do so. I liked to go and watch those who were fishing at the pier. They also sold fried fish; those who wanted to eat there could do so.

E: Describe how you lived at the ranch, did you have a beds, chairs, stoves?

B. Mmmm.

E: Did you have pillows?

B. At the place where I was at for the last year and a half, there were no beds. Sorry, there were beds but not single beds. There were bunk beds. When the time came to go to bed, we all did.

E: Were there any bathrooms?

B. Yes, well, what is known as a bathroom, no. There was a bathroom a block away

where you can go and do your needs.

E: How did you wash your clothes?

B. Wash our clothes?

E: A. Yes, did you do it?

B. Yes, everyone did their own. There was a place that you can go and wash your clothes. First we let the clothes soak and then we washed them by hand.

E: Did you buy a toothbrush, soap and towels? Or it was provided by the employer?

B. No, we had to buy it.

E: Ok.

E: Another question is about work problems. Did you have any problems while working as a bracero?

B. The last few times I did, but not with my boss. When I went to work at the farm by myself, I didn't like to be lazy. My job was to irrigate the pear trees it would take the water the whole day to go from one end to the other. Everything was pre-fixed on a 12 hours cycle. I had to start a small water pump. I was shown who to do it. I always had to carry a pair of garden clippers and scissors to make sure that no trees had any sprouts. Nobody told me to do what I did. There was a pile of rocks and trash and I thought to myself something has to be done and I started cleaning it up. After two days my foremen arrived, his name was Francisco. I was still cleaning and I said "hi Mr. Frank" but I called him Pancho Villa. I ask the foremen "Do you like Pancho Villa?" he said "Hey!", and then he said "Pancho Villa no good no good". I had short sleeved shirt on and he grabbed my hand and said "not good, not good". And next day I woke up with small skin rash. Have ever heard of a plant that is so poisonous that I got sick for almost a month? I

had swelling in my feet and a skin rash all over my body. And I felt sorry for myself because nobody told me to clean up. He was happy with me and vice versa. He used to take me to the children's rodeo where he would buy me one or two beers and to enjoy. He trusted me and I always knew what to do and where to do it. He never complained about my work.

E: What about the other times, did you have any problems with the foremen or co workers?

B. No, I was there by myself and at different locations I never had any problems. We all got along, we were like brothers, we talked, joked around, laughed and made deals with each other. Most of us were younger men in our mid twenties, there were few over thirty and in the program, men over fifty were not allowed.

E: Did you have any hobbies?

B. Yes, I did.

E: What did you do in your days off?

B. As I said before there was nothing to do, we just went to the town and joked around. Some liked to go fishing but I didn't.

E: Did you see any movies or had a radio or something to use?

B. No, we didn't see any movies like today. Back then we just went from bed to breakfast, breakfast to work and joked around and played cards. We didn't bet much, it was only to entertain us.

E: Do you remember any holidays, like Christmas or celebrations when you were in United States? Did you remember celebrating something about Mexican culture?

B. No.

E: Huh?

B. No.

E: What about Easter or something else?

B. We knew the dates but nothing else.

E: You mentioned that you don't remember how much you got paid, but how did you spend the money? Was the money for yourself, your family or you sent it back to your home?

B. Well! I had three children, one son and two daughters. I send most of the money to them and to build my house, but to be honest with you, sometimes I abused alcohol. Sometimes I earned extra money by working extra hours. We were tired to work the extra hours after dinner, delivering the new vegetables boxes, but we did it me and five more workers.

E: Life after work. How was your life after your last payment or contract?

B. After my last contract I was sad, very sad. In my native country you don't get paid well. When I came to work here, I was making five to six pesos per day, from seven in the morning to two in the afternoon at the time. When we got here we got a contract for seventy cents an hour, and after two weeks we got a five cents raise. And then, we get another ten cents. They didn't pay us well but still I was making twice compared to the pay in México.

E: Final thoughts. What does bracero means to you?

B. Sadness, because in Mexico there is always work, but money doesn't stretch. If I wouldn't have come to the United States, I couldn't have had a house in Mexico. When you have family of three or four and the low salaries you barely make ends meet.

E: How do you feel being called a bracero?

B. I'm happy, I feel comfortable. Brings me memories ¡little girls! Let see if the thing is here.

B. ¡Telephone!

B. Where were we?

E: How do you feel being called a bracero?

B. I'm happy, feel special, in a great situation. Thank God I was able to build my house in Mexico from working as a bracero, over time I made some adjustments. And today I am American citizen.

E: How many years after being a bracero did you come to live in United States?

B. Uuuumm. I'm not able to tell you, I don't remember. I was here nine times as a bracero and seen the differences in pay and lifestyle.

E: Are your memories positive or negative working as a bracero?

B. For myself, positive. Thank God for this country and those who need our help. We are not rich neither millionaires, but thank God we have it all. We have a home in Mexico and we have one here, this country has given us all.

E: You mention that the program helped you buy your property in Mexico?

B. Not exactly. My grandparents gave me the land where I build my house.

E: What is your personal opinion about the program; did it change your life?

B. Yes, it did.

E: How did it help you?

B. It helped me to understand that always renting out is not life. It's hard to feed your family and they grow up with hunger, but in this nation if you a job there is food on your

table.

E: These are all my questions is there anything else that you want to add?

B. I believe I answer all your questions. There is nothing all in my mind. All your questions were fine.

E: Thank you for telling us your story and if you have any questions let us know. Would you like a copy?

B. No, isn't necessary.