

## Porfirio García by Nelva Centeno

### Traducción

Nombre del entrevistado: Porfirio García

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Nombre del entrevistador(a): Susan Zamudio

This is an interview Porfirio García on July 1<sup>st</sup> in Oxnard, California. The interviewer is Susan Zamudio this interview is part of the Bracero Oral History Project.

SZ: Mr. Porfirio, can you tell me where and when you were born?

PG: I was born in Michoacán, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

SZ: Tell me about you family and where you were born.

PG: My family, my wife is Belen and I can in about 1945 as a Bracero to Santa Ana, Anaheim. My family lived in Mexico while I was a Bracero, I came about eight tunesmith in a fifteen year time span, not all at once. And while I was there, I picked oranges, that was about 63 years ago. During that time we earned 50 cents an hour. We worked four hours a day and per contract you get a different amount but everything was cheap then. And then everything got pricier and then I came back like in 1951 to Chula Vista, near Tijuana. I worked there for about one more year, I picked lemons and we earner little but it helped. And from there they took some money, ten percent. That's what they say we should get back but maybe we won't get anything.

SZ: What did your parents do, did they have some kind of business?

PG: My parents were field workers and when I came my parents had already died. They died about 55 year ago or less. They taught me how to make *teja* (roof tiles) for houses. Do you know what *teja* is? I did this for thirty years in my ranch, with my brothers, making *teja*. That was when we sold it for one cent a piece and that was after baking it, imagine that. Ten pieces in a bunch, it was a time when people were poor, but we would help each other out. Then I came here, I got a contract for a year and emigrated and I worked in the same business here, 20 years picking lemons. Well let's be thankful I'm still alive.

SZ: This was after the Bracero Program, correct?

PG: But before that we would come for a few months. One would help himself and would get a new contract over and over but one survived with what we earned.

SZ: So, you came to live permanently to the U.S. in the 60's?

PG: Yes, permanently, in '67.

SZ: OK

PG: One of my daughters got me my residency and then I brought my children, during that time one could bring their family with no problem. Over the years I brought seven, because I have nine children here. They are all grown up and we are lucky they are all here. Can you believe it?

SZ: They were born in Mexico?

PG: In Mexico, only the younger was born here and he's going to be 35 years old and it seem as if it was yesterday. (SZ: laughs) When my wife came and we were all here from 35, 40 I've been here from 1967 and my family, I began to bring them in 1970. And they are all here.

SZ: Was your born from the same town?

PG: Yes, we're from an area called Tende paracuaro, Michoacán.

SZ: Did you children have problems with school or were they able to adjust with no problem?

PG: yes, I have two daughters that studied in a school in our ranch, called *Colegio de Mares* or something like that, later them I brought them over. One of them work for the Government in Ventura and the other one works for the Welfare office, she is in charge of making the checks. My son, thank God, studied to be a Computer Engineer. He was able to study with the pocket change I mad and the oldest children in the family. And all of my children have had good lives because they are all here and they have their homes and some of them are paid off and other are working on it.

SZ: Good.

PG: And here we are, I've been here with my wife for 34 years and one of my daughters who is not all there, we had so many kids and look we are alone.

SZ: (she giggles) You feel empty, right?

PG: Yes

SZ: What a difference?

PG: Yes, different.

SZ: Going back to the Bracero Program. How did you learn or did you first hear about this program?

PG: As a Bracero?

SZ: Yes

PG: Look, our ranch was very small and our town council was give these cards, the governor of Morelia gave out these cards to ranches and towns and for our area he gave 25 cards so people could come here. Out of those 25 cards, out of 300 about five town council men would take them for their families and I got one. After that we went to *Uruapan* and in *Uruapan* is where they would pick who they would offered a contract to and from there we would go to *Irapuato*, from *Irapuato* they would send to El Paso then we would arrive in Pomona. There they would distribute us and they chose what field we would go to, you know. And that's how I came as a *Bracero*, the governor gave us the cards. And lately when one would come, the ones that would come towards the end would have to pay to get a contract. (SZ: oh, hum) And many would work near the border and they would be able to begin their legal residency paper work. I got to work in Arkansas, Sacramento, Washington and I got to see different placeless and well, just working because that's all we did, work.

SZ: I think my dad got to work near Santa Ana area, he stayed in Long Beach.

PG: There was war going on that I remember about, it ended like in august 28<sup>th</sup>. When we came back everything was rationed, they would give us shoes but only if you had a stamp, close, only one set because everything was so rationed. In 1945 the war ended, it was like in August of 1945. They send some people back in November after finishing the orange season, and many people stayed here because many had no money to go back.

SZ: So, when your contract would come to an end, would they force you to go back or would you return on your own?

PG: No, you could renew but other would leave because they wanted to leave.

SZ: What did you decide, did you go see your family or would you stay?

PG: I would go back and see my family once year or sometimes every nine months or something like that, because you know raising a family, you have to see them sometime, it's the number one thing and you need time with your family.

SZ: Did you send them money?

PG: Yes, what little one earned.

SZ: Did you mail it?

PG: Yes, the foreman would send it because we were ignorant about everything, everything was inexpensive, look a stamp use to cost us three cents, and we were cynical (he laughs) we would tell the foreman, here's a dollar and send my check, well what little

we earned, because they would feed us there, they would give use a place to live, we didn't have to pay. They would give use food for one forty and four daily. But we had a contract we would get paid a different amount per hour, in eight hours it was fur dollars. I earned more because I had a contract and I earned about ten dollars, but you had to run to be able to earn more.

SZ: Were you satisfied with the food you were given?

PG: Yes.

SZ: The room or placed you stayed in?

PG: Yes, they had about 500 of use in a school in Placentia. During that time the students were practicing, they would take them to study because there was a war going on and there they would feed us. Early in the morning they would ring a bell so we would go have breakfast, after that they would take us to work in a truck and they would bring us back in the evening, then we would shower and we would go to bed, there was nothing else to do but work and eat.

SZ: Where you in the classrooms or in the auditorium or where?

PG: No, in the school and they had fields and they made tents for us to live in, (SZ: oh, tents, ok) three or four or two depending how many there were (SZ: outside in the field, ok) yes, like field were you would work.

SZ: Did you have problems with your wages (PG: No) did they ever cheat you for it?

PG: One would be happy with what we earned because it was when people started coming to the U.S. from Mexico as Braceros like in 1942 and it lasted about twenty years and the contracts ended around 1964 and after that there wasn't an opportunity because the Bracero program ended but there was still an opportunity for those who worked here illegally and later emigrated.

SZ: Were you able to pick the type of work you did or were you got to work?

PG: No, during that time you didn't have the option to choose where to work because you had a contract and you were free, you were free to work else were on Sundays and Turing the week you had to work with the company who had given you a contract with. We had to be there early in the morning and all day, working.

SZ: Did you have TV's, radios or books?

PG: No, footing. I never saw a television or radios or anything like that. As time went by people stated selling radios, not a lot but a little to each person. Three to five years after the Bracero program began, that's when a lot started to change, and that's when people began building their homes or buy one. That's the way it was.

SZ: When if finished, for example, when your last contract ended, what was your plan, what did you decide to do?

PG: Look, during that time there were people who sold card used to emigrate so I decided to see if it worth emigrating and that's when one of my daughters, who has now passed away, God bless her soul, came here and was able to obtain her residency and was able to obtain mine as well. That's how I was able to bring my family, and here we are. But before there was a lot more help with the contracts, somewhere for one month depending on the season. There were some men who would be here for years or would extend their contract.

SZ: Did you have a favorite, like my dad didn't like picking watermelon because he said it was too much work having to pick up the watermelon, did you have a favorite or no so favorite one?

PG: There were times where one would just tough it out because the job was really tough. I got use to it, one time I had to pick melon, it was so much work. Later I picked cucumber, we had to do it to earn our money, but a lot of the men would send all of the money had earned in a second and we earned very little, and we wanted to rest but we had to do what the contract said and it was hard work but we had to work the fields. A lot of people would leave the field and would go looking for other jobs, I never left because I felt safe, and we had our little paper.

SZ: People who would go out and look for jobs in other places, did they run the risk of getting caught by immigration?

PG: Yes, if they would get you they would send you back and you would lose your contract. Some of them would go to a different ranch and they would get a job there and they wouldn't get deported but some would. They would leave because they wanted to earn more and at the end they wouldn't even get paid, you would find a little of everything.

SZ: Did you work here locally?

PG: No, when I came as a Bracero I worked in Placentia and in San Diego County and then Chula Vista in San Diego. I also worked in Santa Ana then I would work in Sacramento later in Davis. In Arkansas I worked about three times, out there we picked cotton, ones the season was over they would send you back because they would contract people from *Irapuato*, *Monterey* and in down town Mexicali, thousands of people would gather to try and emigrate, after time went by, getting a contract got difficult because so many people would go.

SZ: Did they give you medical exams?

PG: Yes, everyone did, you even got bath with a powder. Sometimes it was hard to deal with the people. At the border, when one would come in one would have to put up with what they did to us.

SZ: The foremen and the managers, did they treat you right, did you have any problems with them?

PG: In my opinion no, I never felt like i was fired from a job or that they ever treated me bad. We would suck it up because we were in need and those who couldn't handle it sometimes would get into fights with the foremen, but it wasn't worth it, no, that wasn't for me.

SZ: Did the men, all get along or did they frequently have problems?

PG: Sometimes there were ranches with a large quantity of people, you would have a variety of people. Some would argue a lot, because during this time people started drinking and you know, there were problems sometimes.

SZ: Where there any laws or rule on what you could or couldn't do or what you could or couldn't bring in?

PG: No, we were able to go out as long as we had our cards with us, we were allowed to go and buy what we wanted but I didn't like drinking (alcohol) much. (SZ: ok) I would send my earnings to my family, many would abandon their families in Mexico, and you would find all sorts people in those jobs.

SZ: Let me wait until the young man leaves so we don't hear him in the background. Ok, he left. Where you lived, where they buildings or in tents, how do you say tents in Spanish? (PG: Apartments?) Were the buildings made for groups of men, did you live together in buildings or how was it?

PG: I lived in the farms there were fields were all of the Braceros would gather, the farmers would go pick us up and take us to work. Towards the end some people would pay rent for a place to live but I never rented and I lived wherever they would have me live.

SZ: What did you do with your time off, did you have weekends off or what did you do?

PG: That day who ever wanted would go to down town because the farms were in the out skirts of town. You got to go wherever you wanted around town, if not they would do laundry or cook for the group we lived with, we did everything during all those years.

SZ: Did you have sports team or did you do group activities?

PG: Well I really didn't see any while I lived here, one time when I lived in Anaheim we went to a field called "La Joya" , one day we went to watch baseball, that was over sixty

years ago. There was a park with no field and one day we went to play a little, like I used to when I was young in my country. We would work and play a little.

SZ: That was in La Joya near San Diego?

PG: Near Fullerton, there was a field but now I think it's a field where they play.

Other woman: Good after noon.

SZ: Good after noon, nice to meet you, my name is Susana

PG: So what do you have to say (laughs)?

Other woman: I have nothing to say.

PG: Sit down brother (you can hear a man and a woman talking in the background)

SZ: what did you do for Christmas, Easter, did you celebrate?

PG: I don't remember spending Christmas here and if it came I wouldn't even think about it. The only holiday I spent in Placentia was October 31<sup>st</sup>, I was going to go back to Mexico on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Here they call it Halloween, well they call it that everywhere; I left Placentia with another guy that was going to leave with me. I saw that people were wearing ripped cloths and with painted faces all over the streets and I thought to myself, what is that? We went back to the ranch and they told us it was the day people went out and asked for candy and I don't know what else (SZ: Halloween (both laugh). That's what I saw on my last day before leaving to Mexico on November 1<sup>st</sup>, I didn't know what it was until now, we didn't know much.

SZ: They must have looked very funny (laugh).

PG: Yes, they had on torn dresses.

SZ: Where there any churches nearby or did the men look for any (woman's voice in the background) or where they no interested in that?

PG: Yes, I would always go to mass all the time but here I never went because where we lived I don't think there was a church or because we were at the school and we slept and ate there and never found out if there was a church, there could have been one during that time.

SZ: In general, your memories of the Bracero program and the time you spent here are good?

PG: They were good for me because what I earned helped my family.

SZ: Was it more than what you would had made in Mexico?

PG: It's like I told you, I would work all the time the sun was our clock. To earn, I would have to make 500 *tejas* a day to earn five *pesos*, and we had to bake it and clean it so it was like making one *peso* (Mexican currency) each (SZ: really) we had to pay rent for the location because we didn't have a business place of our own, but we survived. I also cultivated corn and food for the rest of the year. But here in the United States, I'm not saying it's great but there are very few countries like this one, where people help you and having a job.

SZ: What does the word Bracero mean to you?

PG: I think it comes from the word *brazos* (arms) because our arms would come to help a different country, because with our arms we would help people here and in our country as well. There were so many Braceros that were my age but now there are only a few, one who is 90 years old, there aren't many. Thanks to God I am still able to walk on my own and many of them have to use a cane or they are dead. But I can say it was a lot of help for México as well as it was here.

SZ: Did you ever have problems with Americans, the *gringos*, did they get upset at you for taking their jobs, in some cities?

PG: No, not during that time. Now a day they talk about it, not I, many that emigrated would get upset because many of them came to take their jobs but sense they had to come and work because they were Braceros or legal's and had already emigrated would start having problems. That's what they say but I was never faced with that.

SZ: Yea, I think just recently is an issue that some men faced. Well, the American are trying to say that the immigrants are taking away their jobs, but the time of the Bracero Program they needed help because the men were at war so it was needed.

PG: The country was at war and needed help, needed workers. Because during that time, in Los Angeles there were no cars or anything, the only thing there was a tram there in *Placita Olvera*, we would go frequently and they sold *Charamuscas* (Mexican dessert), can you believe it and *Placita Olvera* is still there. When we would come, the train would cost us one *toston*, from where we lived, there and back, only fifty cents.

SZ: From Santa Ana?

PG: We would travel through Anaheim, Fullerton and to neighboring towns in Santa Ana in a little train that would take us for only a *tostón* (fifty cent U.S. coin), it was only one quarter one way, now you need like, twenty dollars (SZ: laughs) with a *tostón* (fifty cent coin), yea buddy, I'm telling her about back in the day.

SZ: When you would go to *Placita Olvera*, did it feel authentic or (PG: Yes) did you think, this is something the *gringos* created that was not authentic.



PG: There weren't many *gringos*, most were Mexican.

SZ: So in during that time there was Mexicans.

PG: Mexicans

SZ: I think now it's more of a business or tourist area.

PG: People make anything part of tourism but not during those years. Like I told you, us Braceros, did work on Sundays so we would go for a little then we would come back and slept and there were little restaurants that were called *fondas* (cheap little restaurants), like we had in México. Have you seen a *fonda*, that's where you have dinner (SZ: no). Can't remember the name but everything has changed.

SZ: No, I'm not familiar with that word, I used to visit my grandparents in Mexico but it has been many years' since I've visited, but I would go every summer when I was younger.

PG: Yes, now it is.

SZ: The questions are done, that was it and if you remember anything you might think is interesting or important that you might remember.

PG: The most important thing is that my family had good luck and we are all here. I didn't have problems, my wife raised her family and I earned little money but I would send her what I could to help.

SZ: Yes, it came out alright.

PG: Yes

SZ: Thank you very much, I appreciate it and this is the end of the interview.

PG: Tell her, *cuña 'o* (brother-in-law) tell her about your life.