

Translation

* Interviewer- bold font

** interviewee- regular font

Okay, this is, um, Melissa Raya. I'm interviewing Mary Guevara in Piru. Today is December 14, 2010 and we are going to start the interview. Okay, for starters, where and when were you born?

I was born on August 15, 1936 in Los Angeles.

5 **And, can you tell me a little bit about your family and where... where you were born?**

Well, I was born in Los Angeles, but for about nine years I went... I went to Texas and didn't come back until about the age of 10; because my mom lived here in Los Angeles, and so I came back here; and then after being in Los Angeles in Rancho Cucamonga,
10 then we came to Piru, uh, in 1946... and I've been here ever since.

Okay, so you've been here in... in Piru since then?

That's right; and I went to school and everything here in Piru.

Okay; and, can you tell me a little bit about your parents? What did they do for a living?

15 Uh, my dad and my mom, they... they left when I was one year old. So my grandma came and got me, and I was raised by her in Texas. So my mom stayed here in... in California and worked and everything until I came back at the age of ten when my grandma brought me back to her.

At ten years old?

20 Uh-huh. And my dad, well I never got over the fact that I never knew him.

After... ?

Yes, in my whole life, I never saw him more than three times.

Oh, wow! And... and your family... was it big? Did you have siblings?

I don't have any brothers or sisters.

25 **Oh, okay. And can you tell me a little about, um, where you studied or what school you went to?**

I only went to Fillmore... uh... Fillmore until seventh grade because in the eighth grade I met my husband and then, that was it. (Hahaha!)

Up until... until eight, eighth grade?

30 Uh-huh.

Okay, and did you learn to read and write in... in school?

No, because during that time, they punished us in school if we spoke Spanish; it was English only.

But you learned to read and write in English?

35 Yes. Well, we spoke English... and; because when I married my husband, I didn't know very much Spanish.

Spanish. Oh, okay. But English and Spanish... oh sorry... but you learned to read and write in English but not in Spanish, right?

No.

40 **Okay... and did you work while you were in school, or did you just go to school?**

Who?

You.

No, because I was very young.

So, you just went to school?

45 Yes.

Okay, and how old were you, um, when you got married?

Fifteen.

Fifteen years old. Okay... and your husband's name?

Ignacio Guevara.

50 **And where was Ignacio from?**

From San Luis Potosí.

And you got married at 15 years old, right?

Uh-huh.

And how old was he?

55 He was twenty-two.

And where did you live after you got married?

We lived here for a few months because it was over... he was... he was contracted with the braceros; and during that time, they gave you no more than an... an eighteen-month contract. His contract was almost up. Then, we went to... to Sacramento because my
60 mom had moved up there with my stepfather; and then, we moved up there... and my first child was born up there.

How many children do you have?

Seven.

Seven children. And, were they all born in Sacramento?

65 No.

No?

No. Just one was born there, and the rest were born in Santa Paula and Oxnard.

Okay. So... some in Sacramento and others in different cities?

Yes.

70 **Okay, and how many... girls and how many boys did you have?**

Four girls and three boys.

Okay, could you give me your children's names?

The oldest, Roberto; the second, Diana; the third, Miguel; the fourth, Julia; ... uh...

Julie... Diana... Julie... oh, let me see... let me see... Miguel and then Julie... then it's,

75 uh... Rey... it's Reyn... no! It's Angélica, Reynaldo and Patricia.

Okay, and what do your children do for a living?

Uh... the oldest one was... is... he was working... he was a fashion designer...

Designer?

... Designer in Los Angeles.

80 **Okay, and Diana?**

And, Diana, she... she worked for some uh... oh, some company that did billing in Sacramento. I really don't know.

So, just for a company.

Uh-huh.

85 **And Miguel, what did he do?**

Miguel worked at General Motors.

And Julia?

For the County, Ventura County, even to this day.

And Angélica?

90 Angélica works for uh... oh, computer... it's a computer company in Westlake. I don't remember the name. It's called Compulink! Compulink. (Hahaha!)

Okay, and Reynaldo?

Reynaldo is disabled but he works a little, a few hours and taking care of dogs and whatever, grooming dogs.

95 **And Patricia?**

She works as administration in a hospital in San Fernando.

And where do they all live? Do they all live in Piru?

My daughter (Patricia) lives here; Reynaldo lives here; Julie lives in Fillmore; Angélica lives in Moorpark; and well, Miguel... Miguel died four years ago; and well... and Diana
100 lives in Sacramento.

And how did you learn about the bracero program?

Well, I only... because I saw them talking about that on television, about... about the bracero program... but, well, it was already, rather, my husband had already died ten years before. That's why, well, for me it was already too late for us to say that we could
105 do something or talk about it; as far as that, it's the only, the only way that I...

By watching television?

Yes.

And do you remember how old you were when you first heard about the bracero program?

110 Like... like what...?

What was your age? How old were you when... when you began to hear about the program?

About what's going on right now, or about when my husband entered... ?

When your husband, when he started the program?

115 Well, it's when he was a bracero... it's when he entered in '51.

When and how did you first meet a bracero? Was it your husband or another bracero?

As far as... as far as friends before meeting my husband, I already knew someone because my stepfather, he had already been a bracero.

120 **You had relatives in your family that were also a part of the program, aside from your husband?**

Well... well, yes. Yes.

And when was the first time that your husband decided... uh... to go and become a bracero?

125 He went to be a bracero because he had a brother here in Piru in the labor camp and... and he was the one who told him to come and work here as a bracero, to leave and get a contract. He worked for a mining company over there in San Luis in a town called Whatley; it's a mining town; and he worked for a company in the... the... the mining office. But, his dad, since his dad had died, since his dad wasn't with him any longer, he
130 told him it was best if he came here to work, and it was his brother who told him to come.

To come here as a bracero?

Yes.

**Was it part of the bracero program or did he get a job where his brother worked at
135 the mine?**

No. He... he... well he knew the county contractor here; and then, he told him that he wanted to see if his brother could get the permit to come and work because my brother-in-law, he had already been working at a railroad... railroad somewhere else; he was definitely one of the first braceros that had come.

140 **He had already been part of the program?**

Yes. He had already become legal when he told my husband to come.

To come and be a bracero?

Yes.

145 **During that time, did you think it was a good idea or a bad idea for your husband to be a part of the program?**

Well, for me, during that... during that time the only thing that got to me was that... in the bracero program there were many restrictions because they were contracted and... and they couldn't leave the county. They were prohibited from leaving from one county to another because they were contracted, and that was the only thing. But other than that, well, they were free; I saw many... there were so many braceros here and they were free, they came here to... here to town, there were more businesses. Now, this town is dead compared to what it was like when the braceros were here; there were more stores, and so, well I'll just say, there were more bars... (Hahaha!)

150 **There were more bars?**

155 Yes, yes. That's right. But, there was already a church there and well, yes, the people came together and they made, how do you say it, *quermeses* (outdoor festivals) or *jamaicas* (hibiscus drinks), and that's how it was... living.

Oh, okay. So aside from going to the bars, you all went to church and attended other functions?

160 Yes.

When you say that they were limited on the county that... of where they could go, what do you mean? Like, they could only be in certain cities? If your contract was in Piru, you had to remain in Piru?

165 It's that....I say this because, because my mom... um... she was....she had... um, before she married my stepfather, she'd been married...well not married, living with another man that was in the bracero program, and they contracted him in the county of....he...over in Rancho Cucamonga, over there, to come to Ventura... Ventura County. But, then, it was very easy for him to visit there; and then, there was an altercation... a fight, and well, they called the police, the cops threw him in jail, and no
170 one could do anything because he was a bracero and he'd gone outside of the county in which he was contracted, and they deported him.

Because he'd gone to another county, they deported him?

Yes.

**Oh, wow. Okay, and do you remember the day in which your... your husband left
175 for the first time as a bracero?**

No, because he came and he was here and then he left to go and work....I know that he came in '50 because in the contract that they show on the video, it has the year '51 and "passed" stamped on it and they gave him 18 months; and... uh... and that was when we got together because, I'll say we got together because I left the house
180 (Hahaha!) and I was underage; and, so we went... a friend took us to the county

(courthouse) so we could get married but we couldn't get married because I was underage.

Underage?

But, my mom already lived in Sacramento, and well, we didn't need her signature.

185 **Your mom's signature in order to live in the same house together?**

Uh-huh! And so we waited, and since his 18-month contract was almost up and he was going to have to return to Mexico. So we decided it was best to defect as a Bracero, and we went to Sacramento.

So, he didn't finish his contract so that he could stay with you?

190 No, because they were going to....at 18 months, they deported them.

So, he didn't finish the contract and...?

And, so right before his contract was up, we left.

And where was it that you went?

We went over there to Roseville, next to Sacramento. We went over there and what
195 happened is that in 1953, a law was passed against giving work to those who were here illegally. Look, so my husband and I went, and I was expecting my first child, and so we went from ranch to ranch asking for work, but they didn't want to give him work because...

He was undocumented.

200 He was undocumented; and there's... uh... um, the railroad over there and he was going there, because they provided jobs for people putting ice in the freight cars for fruit or food and everything, and so he was going there. And they always picked him out and said, "You", because, well, he was young and fair-skinned and really looked

European and so they always chose him, but then they'd ask for his papers and he
205 didn't have them. That's why he didn't have any work and we struggled a lot, but no.
My son was born in the County Hospital because, well, up until the day he was born I
hadn't even seen a doctor.

Until the day your son was born?

My son, yes.

210 **Do you remember where....where your husband registered in the program?**

He... it was in, uh... in Empalme (Sonora, Mexico), that's where he got contracted.

Where was it that he worked for the first time?

He worked here in Piru in the orange orchards, and then from here he went to the
lemon orchards, and then they brought him here to Piru again, and then once here the
215 lady offered him a job...they wanted someone to work in the kitchen and they asked if
he wanted to work in the kitchen, and he told them yes.

He didn't just work in the fields, but in other...

So he worked....he started working in the kitchen and she taught him how to cook, the
lady who owned the labor camp, and he stayed on as the cook.

220 **And how long was... was he working in the fields before they gave him that
position as a cook?**

Oh! I think....because, well, we were dating when he was working in the kitchen.

This was before you had your first child?

Yes.

225 Okay.

Yes.

Do you remember any other jobs that he had after working in the kitchen, or was that...?

230 That was it because the same boss that owned the labor camp, he owned labor camps all around in Oxnard, in Ventura, in Somis in, um... close to Portersville. They had him cook all over for the workers. That's how he went to many labor camps working.

And when he went to different labor camps working, would you go with him?

No.

No?

235 No. I stayed.

You stayed here in Piru?

I stayed here at home. Yes.

Did you have any form of communication, telephone or letters?

Telephone.

240 **Telephone?**

Uh-huh.

How often did you communicate by telephone?

Well, he called me once a week and if he had the chance, well, he'd come and spend the... the weekend with me; if the boss gave him a chance, he came to see me.

245 **To visit you?**

Yes.

Okay, and while he was working in other counties, did he send you money?

Well, he kept the money until he would come and then...

He gave it to you personally?

250 Uh-huh.

And how much money did he give you when he came?

Oh, no. It's just, yeah. I don't even remember because, well, under the bracero contract that he had when he was picking fruit that was... it was something like 75 cents (hahaha!) that they paid them per hour. For that...

255 **Seventy-five cents per hour?**

Uh-huh. That's what the contract says because they had to do that. They had to pick that much. If they didn't do it in a certain amount of time, then they'd be out of a job because they had to make their quota, so to speak, of money.

To get their money.

260 Uh-huh.

And... but, the 75 cents was only when he was working...?

...When he worked as... as a bracero, uh-huh.

When he worked in the kitchen, do you remember if they paid him differently?

They paid him by... by check. The same in Palme (Empalme).

265 **Do you remember how much he earned?**

No, no. I can't remember right now.

Did your husband take on other jobs to earn extra money?

Well, he learned a lot doing his job because he worked with a man from the same company that... that had... a man who did construction for a living, fixing things

270 because they had apartments that they rented out, and they had some over in Fillmore too called Lemon Way; the company apartments were over there. That's how he hooked up with that guy and the man also taught him a little bit of electricity,

construction and all of that because this house... he made this house... he made it bigger. We bought it... no, we didn't buy it, but they had us buy the land, and then a
275 contractor built the house for us and the door came to right here (Mrs. Guevara gestures to show the original floor plan); and then later, he made the kitchen bigger and everything; and he's the one... who did all this.

He did what he learned?

Yes, he learned all of that: plumbing, anyone who needed it, he put in their hot water or
280 whatever, and he didn't charge them. He helped them because, well, he'd learned that and, well, he knew that... yes. He learned a lot of everything.

So, it was while he was a bracero that he learned about construction and electricity?

No... before... after he had already gotten his immigration in order because he took
285 care of that and he went to Mexico... because the baby was born, my son, in June, and then... it was a blessing from God because as much as we went looking for work at the ranches and wherever, they didn't give him a job. So... my son was born and after about a week being at home, there was a knock on the door and a man came in looking for someone who wanted to work and he (Ignacio) said, well, yes, he wanted to work
290 but he was undocumented; and (the man) said, "I'll give you work."; and he was the owner of an auction yard, an...an auction yard, and it's a big auction yard in Roseville, and he was the owner and he gave him (Ignacio) a job; he was to keep the stands and everything clean for the weekends when the people came from San Francisco and wherever to sell their stuff and furniture and everything. So, he offered him the job and
295 we went, and he really liked working for him. So, he (the boss) said that he was going

to go with him (Ignacio) to the immigration office to get him documented. After three months I went... it was him, he went to Sacramento, went with him to immigration office, and told them that he (Ignacio) worked for him and that he wanted to get him documented and they gave him a permit. They told him, "You have to go back to Mexico in December. We're giving you a three month permit to make some money and then you need to leave." So he left in December of '53, and then got documented in '54; he came back in... in March; he got documented.

So, he left in December, came back in March, and during that time was able to get everything taken care of?

305 Yes. I remember because until... I wrote a letter to the Consulate saying that I was underage and I had a little boy, that I wasn't asking for welfare, I wasn't getting help for anything, but that I wanted them to please help my son... my husband so that he could come back with me and my son. Yes.

And how long was he working for this man before he was able to become legal?

310 Well, no more than like... it would be... would be like about four... four months... he worked with this man for about four months.

Do you remember what his salary was when he worked for that man?

Oh, no. No.

No?

315 No. I know this though... he drove without even having a license because, well, he was undocumented. But the boss let him drive the truck because he had to empty all of the trash that he collected at the dump and,... and praying to God and crossing his heart... (hahaha!) we'd get in the truck, we'd get in the back and throw it in...; and on Sundays

we'd go to the movies, I'd tell him so that he could learn English, so that he could pick
320 up a word or two, learn a little bit of English...

Oh! He didn't know English?

No, because... oh, it's good that he learned and I taught him, and he'd tell me that he
had me as an interpreter there at his job to explain things to them.

Were you there sometimes when he was working?

325 Yes... because over there where he worked, we had a trailer. We lived there on the
premises. We lived there and had to watch over the place so that nobody trespassed.

So, you were both over there?

Yes. It's like I'd go with him, well, everywhere and help him with everything so that he'd
pick up more English.

330 **After he completely finished his contract, how much time elapsed before he got
another job that didn't have anything to do with the Bracero program? Did he go
a long time without working after he completed his last contract?**

Let's see... '53... like six months because... because for that, after we left here, we
went over to... looking for work, and he found work, went to the immigration office and
335 they deported him; they deported him to Tijuana. And then, since his brother was
already here, I called him, he sent me money and, well, I wanted to see if he would
come; and so we said, you know, if we're lucky, he won't end up in... in, uh... in jail.
And that was, imagine, that was at the beginning of June because my son was born in
June. He (Ignacio) came, and three days after he got here, my son was born; and he
340 came by foot and he even rode the train with a man that already knew the way because
he'd never gone that way, and the man taught him how, how to get there, and he got a

ride with a guy from Los Angeles that was going that way; he had just gotten out of...
uh... of the service (military) and... and he asked them where they were going and they
asked him if they could get a... ride; and he said, "I'll take you"; and he took them over
345 there, he dropped them off in Hanford, and then from there he called me, well, to pick
him up; and I went and called my mom and stepfather and we went and picked him up,
and when he got here, as I told you, three days later my son was born; and then... then,
well, a week later that man came and knocked on the door.

And so he got back, the baby was born, and that's when...?

350 Uh-huh.

And how old were you when you had your first child?

Sixteen years old.

**Sixteen. Okay... and... uh... you mentioned that your stepfather was part... of...
that he was in the Bracero program.**

355 He was in it before, and before he... got married to my mom.

Do you have other family members...?

No.

No one else in your family that was in the program?

360 No. No one else, like I said, just my brother-in-law, my husband's older brother, who
had been in Chicago and was a Bracero over there. That was it.

**Okay, and so, when he was working and you weren't because you were underage,
was there anyone else who helped with the finances, with the household bills?**

No, just my husband.

Just him; and, did you have any contact with other families that had... that had
365 **husbands or children in the bracero program?**

Well, no. I have to say, no.

You never got to chat with other families.

No. It's like... just no. It's just that my husband almost never let me... never let me go out. He was very (hahaha!) ... you can say, very chauvinistic.

370 **Very chauvinistic? Okay.**

Yes.

Okay, and what was your expectation of the Bracero program in general? What is it that you hoped... um... to get out of... out of the program when your husband was a Bracero?

375 Well, I couldn't... I can't clearly say because as I told you, I was very young and I didn't much of anything except that, well, I met him and he was a Bracero, but any more than that, well, I don't know.

You didn't have any other (expectation)?

That's right.

380 **Did you ever go to the registration center to visit him, or...?**

No.

No.

I only... when they renewed his contract... instead of going to Santa Paula... I don't know why the contractor was going to Santa Paula, and they stamped his contract and
385 it was an extension and that was it. They didn't go anywhere else.

Okay, and... oh sorry... do you remember how many times he got a contract?

It seems to me like he was contracted... it seems like it was six months at a time. I think that's what it was.

And how many times?

390 Well, to me, it seems like the first time was in Empalme, and then twice here in... Santa Paula.

And each time it was for six months?

Uh-huh.

Do you remember how many times he went back to Mexico after his contract was
395 **finished?**

Never.

He never went back?

Never.

The only time he went back was when...?

400 ...when they deported him.

Yes. Okay, and do you have any memories in particular about when your husband was in the program? Anything special?

Well, no. Nothing special, to be honest. Just that, I saw, well, he... he got together with his friends all the time and... and they had their fun times and, like I said, the weekends
405 they played soccer and all that and, as I said, well, I almost never... I was young and my mom wasn't here and, like I said, I don't have brothers or sisters, so I was by myself. It's just that, well, no. I couldn't say too much about that.

What they did for fun was play?

Play soccer, uh-huh. Soccer and stuff because they would even play with workers from
410 other labor camps in, like, teams and everything, and they'd go play.

Did you ever go to see one of the games?

No.

And what did you do for fun?

Well, no... well, I was always at home; since the day after my son was born, well, I was
415 always in the house. Yes, actually, I was more... I was more in the mix of things when
he had that job before... with the man who had the auction yard; I communicated more
with the people to interpret for him for his job. That's when he... he started to put in
more of an effort to learn more English because he saw the need to do it. But one time
he came and they offered him a job because, while he was getting his immigration
420 status fixed, he came here to see his brother and the boss was here, and he offered him
a job in the kitchen again. So, he didn't come for me to interpret anymore, and we went
back.

And he went back to the kitchen again?

Yes, at the same worksite again.

425 **Oh, okay.**

We've been here since.

**Interesting. Okay, and do you have anything else... some other piece of
information you'd like to give us about the time when your husband was a
Bracero?**

430 Well, no. What could I say? That I remember that...? No, nothing. I can't.

Your husband never... he never told you about his experience when filling out his contract and how... how it was that he...?

Well, the thing is that it was very funny to me because what he told me was this: he said, listen to this, "Well, I worked in an office and when they went over there to
435 Empalme, they looked at your hands to see if they were fit to do the job, if they were hard workers and so I remember how I rubbed my hands like this on the rocks so that they could see" (hahaha!) "that they were rough", he said, "so that they wouldn't think that my hands were smooth", he said, "so that they would give me a contract." That's what he said. Its' just that...

440 **That's something that he did?**

Yes, uh-huh. That's what he said & then, well, there was... those that also took watches from them or things like that as bribes in order to get a contract. They took his (Ignacio's) watch, and then the contractor that was here in Santa Paula found out and asked him about it. He said, "Did you pay a bribe?" Well, he told him... well, a watch;
445 and the contractor told him, no. Well, they gave his watch back to him...

Oh, they gave him back the watch?

Yes, he went and they gave it back to him. But that's what used to happen, that they took things from them in order to get a contract.

But, he was fortunate that they gave him back his watch.

450 Ah, yes. Yes, his watch, yes.

Anything about his experience that you remember your husband... uh, him... him telling you or...?

Well, uh... no. Think about it, that when he was also... he was... he still had a Bracero contract... he worked at the packing plant. He left the kitchen position and they gave
455 him the job at the plant and he was working at the plant, and well, he didn't know how to handle the boxes on the belt, how to put them on the conveyor belt. He said... he came home dead tired... but the people who lived here didn't tell him... didn't want to teach him how to do it so that it wasn't such hard work. And I remember that he came home; he could hardly walk home at night! I had to take off his boots and everything but... he
460 couldn't bear the pain. And I told him, "Well, you're not going anymore." "No", he said, "I'm not backing out. I have to go." And so he went. He said that after a few days working over there, he said that he hooked up with another worker there; he gave him a hand and taught him how to do it. He said, no. Well, right after (hahaha!)... it was easy, he said. But when someone starts that kind of job, well, there are people born
465 here that think that those from México don't want to help them out very much... so they let them... they let them suffer a little and then later on they always give in... they say, "Okay." (Hahaha!) But, that was the only thing that I... that I really remember.

Do you remember what kind of... of fruit or vegetable packing plant it was?

It's orange.

470 **Orange.**

Orange, uh-huh. And the packing plant burned down; the one there now is the new one. Back then, it was the old one.

And how long did he work at... at the packing plant for?

Well, the packing plant, later on it was since I don't know when. We left because they
475 were already going to end his contract and he didn't have the kitchen job anymore. So

then, he went and they gave him a job over there and well, they were about to terminate his contract and we left... I'm almost sure that it was in the beginning of May because it seems to me that they were going to terminate his contract at the end of May.

And do you remember what year that was?

480 In '53.

53'; at the end of 1953?

Uh-huh. He was about to complete his contract and go back to Mexico. So that's why we left like three weeks before they deported him back to Mexico; we went to Sacramento. He defected.

485 **Okay, anything else? Would you like to tell us about anything else?**

Well, no. No, nothing; just that he became legal. That was almost year after year. Just the years right after the kids were born, well, we couldn't go or do anything, but he always... (thought of Mexico). He didn't want (to see) any part of the United States like Chicago, or here or there; he always (thought of) Mexico, always Mexico. All of the...

490 the free time we had, a week or two, we always took the kids, we took them on vacations in December and we'd go (to Mexico).

So, he didn't leave behind any family in Mexico?

Oh no, no. His mom died and then when he (his dad) died... first his mom died and then he still had his dad. Then when his dad died, he came (back to California) but he

495 still had three sisters that he had (in Mexico) and one brother; and so, later on they became documented and came (to California), but that's how it was. Like I said, he came here at 22... at 21 years old, well the year that he spent before...

At the age of 21 was when he got his first Bracero contract?

Yes.

500 **Okay.**

Okay.

Well, thank you so much!

Oh! Don't mention it. Don't mention it.

505