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Coming to the Plains

Leslie García, Interviewee
Dr. Michelle Warren, Interviewer
Jacob Rosdail, Videographer

Child of immigrants from Mexico; born in Lexington, NE

Interview date: 4/6/2018

WARREN: Okay, so, the first thing I'm going to have you do is state your complete name and your place of origin.

GARCÍA: As in, where I was born?

WARREN: Mm-hmm.

[0:10]

GARCÍA: Okay [laughs]. Leslie Garcia, Lexington, Nebraska.

WARREN: You were born in Lexington, Nebraska, okay. This is where it's going to get tricky because I don't have different questions for children of immigrants.

ROSDAIL: Oh. Well, now, now we learn!

WARREN: Can you tell me about why your family decided to leave Mexico?

GARCÍA: My family decided to leave Mexico...it was actually a visit to the United States, and we ended up liking it here and staying here. And so, it's been twenty-one years since then.

WARREN: How long was your family here before you came along?

GARCÍA: My mom was pregnant, and it was April of '96, I think, and I was born July of '96. So....

[1:05]

[2:01]

GARCÍA: I really don't know why we came, honestly, I think it was a visit [laugh].

ROSDAIL: That's fine.

WARREN: That's alright because part of it's all family mythology too, you know, it, what people think.

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GARCÍA: Mm-hmm, yeah.

WARREN: Yeah? I'm just going to pick up from that last question, could you make a little comparison, I know you visit family in Mexico frequently, so could you tell me what you notice about life with your family there compared to life here?

[2:29]

GARCÍA: Life in Mexico is more laid-back; there's not much of a routine, as there is here. I feel like people have less over there, but they're happier than people are here. That's how I see it. And I could see myself living over there just because I feel like, here, there's lots of materialism. How do I explain that? I don't know... People are just more stuck on things, and items, and materials here than they are over there. Over there, it's more of an orientation towards your values, and family, and... it's more enjoyable, I think. Better lifestyle, in my opinion.

WARREN: What sort of livelihood does your family have that stayed in Mexico?

GARCÍA: As in, like...?

WARREN: Work.

GARCÍA: Oh, okay.

WARREN: How they earn their living?

[3:24]

GARCÍA: Before my family migrated, they sold everything. So, there's not much left that we go back to, besides some pieces of land that are used to cultivate corn. But there... before we immigrated, we had a meat plant.

WARREN: Oh, that's it. Okay, yeah. Tell me what your family did?

GARCÍA: How do you say a carnicería? I wanted to say carnicería.

WARREN: A butcher shop.

GARCÍA: Butcher shop.

[4:34]

WARREN: Here's where I don't think it's gonna hurt to have a little Spanglish thrown in. I think it's okay.

GARCÍA: What is it? Ca-meat?

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WARREN: Yeah, we sold, we cut and sold meat.

[laughs]

GARCÍA: And then there was a... we also had a [snaps fingers] we sold cheese.

WARREN: Uh-huh?

ROSDAIL: I don't think we have a word for cheese shop other than cheese shop.

WARREN: Yeah.

[5:00]

GARCÍA: We sold, okay, I would just say, can we say, like, traditional Mexican cheese? Like panelas, [sighs] what's the other one?

WARREN: Cotija?

GARCÍA: No...

WARREN: Queso fresco?

GARCÍA: Yeah, like, panelas, queso fresco...jocoqui. Okay, there we go, is the question going or...?

ROSDAIL: It started over.

WARREN: Okay, so tell me about what your family, um, how your family earned a living before they left Mexico.

GARCÍA: Okay, before my family migrated to Mexico, they made a living by having a carnicería, a butcher shop, and we also sold fresh cheese and other cheese products, with milk from the cows that we owned.

[5:45]

WARREN: So, you actually had the cows that produced the milk and everything?

GARCÍA: Mm- hmm. Yes.

WARREN: Tell me what some of the challenges were that your family faced as they relocated to the States.

GARCÍA: A challenge that I think my family faced when relocating would be the language barrier. My father did speak a little bit of English because he did study and go to school here in

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the U.S., but my mother and my sisters did not. And so, they probably struggled within the school system and ESL [English as a Second Language] programs as they were barely evolving back then. And I think when my mom went out, she probably struggled with the language barrier.

WARREN: Tell me the names of all the people in your family and how old they are, siblings.

GARCÍA: Okay. I have two siblings. My oldest sister is Miriam, and she is thirty-seven. And my older sister is Johana, and she is thirty. And my mom is Bertha, and she is fifty-nine, and my dad deceased at fifty-two.

[6:47]

WARREN: Tell me about how do you feel you're treated as a first-generation member of your community?

GARCÍA: As a first-generation member of my community, I think I'm treated kind of like I'm respected a bit more, at the community I'm at, here in Lexington, just because we have, I think, a large quantity of people and members that are first-generation students in college, and they respect us and they are willing to help us out with what we need, if it's with fundraisers, or supporting anything that we are reaching towards? Does that make sense?

WARREN: Mm-mm.

GARCÍA: But yeah. I think that's that.

WARREN: Tell me about your work here.

[7:37]

GARCÍA: My current job? My job here in Lexington, I work at a gift shop downtown, a local store. I feel like I get along well with customers just because most of them, or a lot of them, are known members of the community, teachers, or people within the chamber of commerce, and so I know lots of members that I can reach out to if I need help or I have a question with something and so it's mostly what's it called... customer service and retail.

WARREN: And, after you graduate from college, what are your career plans?

GARCÍA: After I graduate from college, my career plans are to get a job teaching Spanish in High School. I also have an ESL endorsement that I can go along with. I hope to go out of state, just because I want to get a new feel, relocate, kind of start new, start fresh.

[8:46]

WARREN: How do you think your experience would have been different if you had been born a male instead of a female?

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GARCÍA: If I would've been born a male, I think I would've maybe seen myself as head of the household, just because I would've been the only male in the family, having two sisters. Even though I am the youngest, I think I still would've taken on that responsibility. I'm not sure if I would be in school. I might have been working to support my family. I have thought about having a brother, what would it be like, if he was older or younger. But... I mean, I can't say much since I don't know.

[9:56]

WARREN: It's pure speculation. Who decided your family would come to the United States? Did the whole family want to go? What was the sort of general feeling?

GARCÍA: That's a question for my mom. But I can answer, okay. I think a large influence on why we migrated to the United States was my dad's family; he had a few sisters and brothers located nearby, and they wanted us to come to try it out and see if we liked it. And... my oldest sister, I know, did not want to come because she was fifteen at the time and she had lots of friends, family, friends like family and it was hard to let that go and just start new, not knowing the language and everything.

WARREN: How are you treated, when you visit Mexico, by the people that knew your family before?

[11:06]

GARCÍA: I'm treated very well by the people that knew my family before, because we're a really known family in my town in Mexico, and so, they always tell me, "Oh, I know your mom, she always used to give me this, she sold me the cheese when I was..." you know, or "She sold me meat," and about my dad, they always speak wonders; they speak that he was really respected, he was always willing to help anybody in one way, shape or form, I think we have impacted the majority of our town in Mexico.

ROSDAIL: Well... I want to go back to the question you answered where you said you could see yourself living in Mexico. Is that something you've thought about seriously?

GARCÍA: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

ROSDAIL: And how do you think your life would be different? What would you try and pursue if you were there?

[12:18]

GARCÍA: So... if I see myself living in Mexico, in the future, and what I plan to do. I see myself living in Mexico eventually; maybe after I retire or even before, pursuing something in education. I've always wanted to start a school to teach English, and maybe, probably lower level or all levels, of anybody willing to learn English. And I think I would be more relaxed. I

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mean, there's still stresses in life that affect you, but I don't think it would be as much as it is here in the U.S. with just having that daily routine that's...I don't think it'd be as stressful in Mexico.

[13:07]

WARREN: How would your priorities shift? You mentioned materialism vs. family and...?

GARCÍA: Mm-hmm.

WARREN: And quality time with people, how would your values shift if you were to live in Mexico instead of here?

GARCÍA: The culture in Mexico, I think, is oriented toward family and just kind of being together, being social. And so, I think that I would value that more; I would go out more with family, get to know them more, because I'm not always around them year-round. I would probably be more social and willing to speak to people, because I'm not used to that here. I was always shy and kind of set back because of that [chuckles].

WARREN: Tell me about the rest of your family who came from Mexico to the U.S.

[13:57]

GARCÍA: Okay. My family that came from Mexico to the U.S., my sisters and my parents, they... have... grown here, I guess, and raised their family, speaking on my sisters' sides. They got married, they have their kids, now they live here. And my older sister, Johana, she went to college; she was the first in our family. She graduated with her degree in social work and a minor in family studies. And my oldest sister, she managed to graduate high school and she's been at various jobs, because she never went on to college or to pursue a career in a specialized area. But she's raised her family and now her kids are going through the school system here, and they are third generation here.

WARREN: I was thinking of your dad's family. Don't you have extended family like around California, in..?

GARCÍA: My mom's is in California, and my dad's is in Kansas.

WARREN: Okay. So, tell me about your extended family around the States.

[15:02]

GARCÍA: Okay. My extended family is in Kansas and California. My dad's side of the family is in mainly Kansas and they all have their families here; they all travel, every once in a while, back to Mexico. I think they still carry some of their culture with them. You know, they still... I don't know how to explain it, [pause] Mmm, [pause] I don't know how to explain it.

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WARREN: Language, customs...?

GARCÍA: I don't know. They still, I mean, they all have implied [inaudible] Spanish on their kids, they, they see the importance of going back to Mexico and knowing where their kids are from. They always get excited when their kids go, and I know all the kids enjoy it a lot; they always say, "Oh, let's go to Mexico this summer," or something. My mom's side of the family, they all live in California. And so, I feel like there's not much of a difference cultural wise, because it's highly Latino-populated in California, as it is compared to Nebraska.

WARREN: Except...

[16:20]

GARCÍA: I don't know.

WARREN: The... the parade [laughs], the Dodgers...

GARCÍA: Mm-hmm.

WARREN: I'm just thinking of the things you do when you go to see them.

GARCÍA: I want to say, mmm, okay...

WARREN: When you go see, when you visit your family in California, what sorts of things do you get to do there that you wouldn't be able to do here?

[17:38]

GARCÍA: Okay. Well, I have family in California that is involved in a few of the traditional customs, Mexican customs. I have a cousin that is in the Baile Folklórico de Los Ángeles [Ballet Folklórico de Los Ángeles; dance company] and she travels throughout California, and she has traveled to other states, to do her folkloric dancing with a mariachi group. And she loves it, she's only visited Mexico about five times, and she enjoys it. And I'm surprised that, not knowing so much about her culture, she still enjoys a big a big part of it [laughs].

ROSDAIL: I just have one question. We're interviewing you but you're also a participant helping us out with this project. Why were you interested in helping with this project, and what benefits do you see coming from it?

GARCÍA: Okay.

ROSDAIL: That's a big question, I apologize.

GARCÍA: Can I say it's because of Dr. Warren?

ROSDAIL: I suppose you can.

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[laughs]

[17:48]

GARCÍA: Okay. This project was brought to my attention by Dr. Warren, and it started with a class that I had with her, and we had brought in a student's mom to talk about her experience with the war in El Salvador. And, because of that, she had this idea that people should be able to tell their stories and have it in hard copy, and accessible to other students. And so, I think it's important that our stories get told because our voice is all we have to express ourselves, in a way. And, by having it out there, someone is going to hear it or listen to it and relate to it, and then want to tell their story. And then more people will tell their stories. And so, we just have this collective book full of stories that are unique to each individual that participates. And maybe it'll go nationwide where other schools have these projects and do stories about their communities, and then, I think, if it extends far enough, it'll be a literal part of history where people have a story to tell and they're not afraid to tell it.

[19:16]

ROSDAIL: That was a good answer.

WARREN: That was a great question.

[laughs]

WARREN: No, it was a great answer. I teared up.

[19:25]