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Coming to the Plains

Enedina Manríquez, Interviewee
Dr. Michelle Warren, Interviewer
Jacob Rosdail, Videographer

Scottsbluff, NE; Guanajuato, Mexico

Interview date: 6/29/2018

WARREN: Okay. To start off with, can you tell us your whole name and where you're from?

[0:44]

MANRÍQUEZ: Yeah. My name is Enedina Manriquez and I'm from Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

WARREN: Great. And where did you grow up?

MANRÍQUEZ: Most of my life has been in Idaho, and here in Nebraska.

WARREN: You mentioned that you moved around a lot. Can you tell us some of the other places you lived and why you moved?

MANRÍQUEZ: Yeah. My family did move quite a bit. We did live, when we first got here, in Nogales, Arizona. We lived in Oklahoma. We've also lived in Missouri, Idaho, and Nebraska.

WARREN: And what took you to all those different places?

MANRÍQUEZ: I think my parents working, finding different jobs; we would move to Missouri, go back to Idaho, come back to another place, go back to Idaho. My dad has always been in the farming area of his job, so he would always work with farms and feedlots.

WARREN: Okay. You don't have to answer this, but I just want to clarify, so, your parents would've been qualified as migrant workers? Would he move with crops?

MANRÍQUEZ: Yes. He worked in the crops, picking oranges. When he was in California, as a younger boy, but when we moved with him, he started working in feed lots and farms.

WARREN: Okay. So, how old were you when your parents brought you?

MANRÍQUEZ: When I came to the United States, I was ten months old.

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WARREN: Can you describe the trip that they made? You can slow down, too, you don't have to answer quickly, because we want you to speak as much as you want to elaborate on your answers.

[2:22]

MANRÍQUEZ: Okay. When we came to the United States, it was me, my older sister, and my mom, with my mom's brother, my uncle. We drove to the border. The border back then wasn't very high; it was just high enough for my mom to reach her hands over and toss us to my uncle on the other side. My older sister was put over the border first, then it was me, and then my mom jumped over the border. My dad was already in the United States. My uncle was the one that helped my mom cross. Back then, there was not much security, so it was a lot easier to get through, keep in mind, this was twenty years ago. Then we arrived at Nogales, Arizona, and that was the first place where we stayed after we crossed the border.

WARREN: How old were you and your sister when you came?

MANRÍQUEZ: I was ten months old, and my sister would've been two years old.

WARREN: So, tell me about your whole immediate family, including siblings, any uncles, cousins, that were around you a lot when you came.

[3:33]

MANRÍQUEZ: We consist of six of us: there's my mom, my dad, I have an older sister, I have my younger brother and my little sister. My older sister's twenty-three, and my brother is nineteen, and my little sister is fourteen. During that time, we lived with a lot of my cousins, and my dad has an identical twin brother. My cousins are also DACA recipients. So, there's a lot of us in our family that have also gone through the same situation and were able to be there for each other during those times.

WARREN: Where are your siblings living now?

MANRÍQUEZ: They're all in Scottsbluff as well.

WARREN: Why did your parents choose to come here?

MANRÍQUEZ: To Nebraska?

WARREN: To Nogales, to Idaho, to...

[4:35]

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MANRÍQUEZ: My dad was the first one to come; my mom was pregnant with my older sister when my dad came to the United States. He was eighteen or nineteen at that time, and he came with his dad, and several of his siblings. And they were working the crops just to make enough money to support my family back in Mexico. After three years, my dad decided that my mom was okay to come. So, then that's when my mom was pregnant with me and... yeah, she came with my uncle and I. I haven't really talked to them as to why they decided, but they've always told us that they've always wanted to give us a better life. They've done exactly that for us.

WARREN: So, your dad must've actually had to cross...

MANRÍQUEZ: Several times.

WARREN: How old was your mom when she came?

MANRÍQUEZ: My mom would've been twenty-five, twenty-six when she came.

WARREN: And what kind of work does your mom do?

MANRÍQUEZ: Currently, my mom works at a restaurant that my parents own.

WARREN: Tell me about that.

[5:45]

MANRÍQUEZ: My parents own a Mexican restaurant, in Scottsbluff, which is I think a very big logro, a very big, how do you say el logro in English? Because I forgot [laughs].

WARREN: A big success.

MANRÍQUEZ: A big success for our family, just to see that they're able to have that comfort of knowing that they have a stable income. Because my dad had to work very... there were very low points in our life. When I was younger, I would notice, but they never made it apparent to us, they never made it apparent that they were struggling financially. Even living in Nebraska, there was a time where my mom would make us pay in quarters to buy something. For us kids, it wasn't a big deal, but looking back at it now... we really had to pay with coins because we didn't have anything else to pay with.

WARREN: So, tell us more about the restaurant.

MANRÍQUEZ: My family has worked in restaurants their entire lives...most of their lives. That's why my parents lived in Missouri, because a family member had a restaurant there. We actually came to Scottsbluff because my uncle owned the restaurant, so, he invited my dad to

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come over and work for him, and that's how we came to Scottsbluff nine years ago. As of four years ago, my parents own the restaurant; they bought it from my uncle, and it's been very successful, and it's helped us through a lot.

WARREN: What would you say is the best specialty of the restaurant?

MANRÍQUEZ: I think one of our most popular dishes would be the super burrito; I think it's a very famous one that people really enjoy. They just really like big burritos, in the area, I guess [laughs].

WARREN: This is totally changing topics here, but do your parents still maintain relationships with family and friends in Mexico? Or do you find that most of the people that they are close with have moved here, too?

MANRÍQUEZ: Yes, they definitely maintain strong connections with them. My dad still has several family...

WARREN: I'm going to have you start over and repeat my question in your answer, yeah... [laughs].

[7:49]

MANRÍQUEZ: Okay. Yes. My parents both still hold strong connections and relationships with their family that lives in Mexico. My father and my mother each have several siblings that are still living there. My grandparents... my mom's mom is blind, and my grandpa has health conditions, so, communication over the phone is a big part for them. She can't physically see them. And then my dad, his mom passed away when he was six from stomach cancer; that's why I have my name, Enedina, after my grandma. And my grandpa is still there; I have a step-grandma. My grandpa had twenty-seven children. Yes, with different women [laughs]. Ten of them are my biological aunts and uncles, and seventeen of them are step. But my dad always talks to them, keeps strong communication. They come and visit us as much as possible.

WARREN: That's a big family, wow.

MANRÍQUEZ: Yes.

WARREN: I love the story about your name. When your family communicates with your family members in Mexico, do you use FaceTime, or Skype, or...?

[9:11]

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MANRÍQUEZ: When my parents speak with family members in Mexico, they usually don't use FaceTime. My grandma can't see my mom, so I think with her voice... The last time she saw her facial features was from the last time she saw her, which was a very long time ago, twenty years ago. And then my dad, I think sometimes he does FaceTime them. My dad is more hands-on technology type of guy; he knows how to work it, and my mom doesn't know how to work it very well. But last time she did speak with them, she did use FaceTime to see them.

WARREN: Have your parents been able to travel back to Mexico at all since they came twenty years ago, or since your mom brought you twenty years ago?

MANRÍQUEZ: Yes. They had to cross the border again because my mom's dad... the first time they came was twenty years ago. They crossed over to the border again... I would say it was probably around twelve years ago. Last time my mom went was because my grandpa was very ill. He was on his death bed, but he made it through, so he's still alive, thankfully. My dad went maybe fifteen years ago. That was the last time he went back to Mexico; both times, they had to cross back again. And the times back then still weren't as secure as they are today.

WARREN: [sighs] Tell me, about how old you were when you realized that you were undocumented?

[10:50]

MANRÍQUEZ: When I realized I was undocumented; I don't think I really know how old I was, I've kind of just known my entire life. I don't think my mom ever sat me down and said, "We have something to tell you: You're undocumented." Because I know a lot of students, it has happened to them like that. They didn't know their legal status; they never questioned it. But my family had made it apparent to me. I don't even remember how old I was, but I remember the continued feeling throughout high school because I couldn't drive. I couldn't do everything else all the other students were doing. For security purposes, my parents didn't want me to get pulled over and not have any documentation on me, and then something happened to me. A lot of my friends would ask me, "Oh, when are you going to get your car? When are you going to start driving?" And I had to say, "Oh, I don't know yet, I don't want to ask my parents," or, "I don't know how to drive yet." I did know how to drive because I had to get my siblings around sometimes. But, I mean, I didn't tell other people.

WARREN: Were there other kinds of ramifications or side-effects of not having documentation as you remember, being a teen, you mentioned not driving, but were there any other...?

MANRÍQUEZ: Driving, I think. Working was probably a big one, too, because I wanted to be able to help my parents, especially when they couldn't help maintaining the house.

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WARREN: Mm-hmm.

MANRÍQUEZ: And then I think travelling. I couldn't get on a plane. I couldn't take the eighth-grade trip to Washington, D.C. because I didn't have a way of flying there. So, smaller things that probably other people don't really take into consideration were big things for me, because I couldn't be like the other students, because I really wasn't like the other students.

WARREN: That's huge. Did you feel because of your immigration status, that people would treat you differently?

MANRÍQUEZ: I think, at first, yes.

[12:44]

MANRÍQUEZ: Due to my legal status... at the beginning, I did feel kind of nervous to tell other people because of what they would think about me. Only my very close friends, who were also DACA students in Scottsbluff, knew; so, there were several of us that were under DACA and that weren't documented at the time. We knew of each other, and so they knew about my legal status, but my other friends didn't know because I didn't know how they would take it. And I was afraid that they would be very judgmental, especially because of their views that I'd heard in class, especially in our history class. I just knew the kind of people that I was surrounded by, and I didn't want to poke at them or let them know my legal status because of what they would say or do. As I came into college, my fear has slowly let go, because if nobody has a voice for this situation, nobody speaks out, and there's going to be no hope, and nobody's going to know what's actually going on.

WARREN: Would you explain, what is DACA, and what's the process that's involved in securing the status as a Dreamer?

[14:02]

MANRÍQUEZ: So, DACA stands for the Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals. It gives you a conditional permit for two years. So, we do have to renew our permit every two years. You had to be here prior to 2007. I believe it was five years prior to 2007 and I was here in 1997, which means that I automatically qualified. You had to be below the age of thirty... I think it was thirty. And then you had to have a background check, so you needed to have a clearance. The process of applying for DACA... My family actually waited a year just because we weren't sure if it was something that was safe to do. We didn't want to release any information to the officials, because we didn't know. My friends actually had DACA before I did. We applied a year after. After we applied... you have to submit an application, and it was my sister and I at the time. My parents paid for both. Each application, depending on who fills it out for you, or who your lawyer is, is

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how much you'll be charged for the service of filling out the application. Per application, I believe, right now, is four hundred fifty, if I'm correct; it could be a little bit higher than that. And it was one for me and one for my sister, and then after you apply and you get accepted, you have to go and get your biometrics. And then after your biometrics, if you're cleared... The first time we got it, we had to get our social security card. And our social security card is tagged; it says, "For work authorization only." So, if your employer or anybody else asks to see your social security card, it tells you on there that it's for work authorization only, so you know it's a permit and your stay here isn't guaranteed.

WARREN: Okay, that leads me to two related questions... You mentioned the four hundred fifty dollars application fee, but what would be an average legal fee...?

[16:14]

MANRÍQUEZ: An average legal fee for the DACA application really varies. I've heard people pay nothing because they fill it out themselves, which I wouldn't recommend because of the legal purposes, fifty dollars up to, I've heard people pay five hundred dollars for someone to fill it out. So that's five hundred dollars on top of the four hundred fifty, and that's just if you're the only sibling, or if you don't have any other family members that are renewing as well under DACA.

WARREN: Okay. And then the second question I had is, could you talk about when they did the biometrics, what exactly did that entail?

MANRÍQUEZ: When we did our biometrics for DACA, we do it in Casper, Wyoming; that's the nearest USCIS center for us.... huh?

WARREN: USCIS?

MANRÍQUEZ: It's the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

[17:41]

MANRÍQUEZ: Okay. So, when we take our biometrics for DACA... When you get an appointment, it's to the nearest USCIS center, which is the United States Immigration Center to your location. For us, since we are in Scottsbluff, which is on the western side of Nebraska, we are closer to Wyoming; Casper, Wyoming, is where we go, and it's three hours away that we have to drive to go get our biometrics. You have an appointment, and if you're late, your appointment gets cancelled, it's waiting again until you get another appointment. Their centers only open select days out of the month. So, if you miss your appointment, you might have to wait until the next month or the next other month until they are open again. I've never missed an appointment, thankfully, so I've never had to reschedule. Once we get there, they just ask for

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your appointment paper, you sign in, and then you wait. When they call your name, you go into a room, and they make you scan all of your fingers. After you scan all of your fingers, you have to sign, just so they can verify your signature. They take pictures of you, and they ask if you've had any bad criminal records, anything that would put you under risk... Usually they've been really nice; I don't think I've ever felt... bad about being there. They've always been kind. They've done a good job.

WARREN: So, just talking about the whole situation with DACA, can you talk a little bit about the current political situation with DACA, what sorts of fears that might reveal for you, or for anybody else who's a DACA dreamer?

[19:18]

MANRÍQUEZ: I think the current political situation for DACA is very iffy at the moment; we don't really know where we stand anymore, because we've heard Trump's stopping any renewal, but then it being allowed again for certain students that qualify. I think a lot of people still don't know that they qualify for renewal, and I've actually talked to a friend of a friend, that said, "Yeah, my friend can't renew because their DACA expires at a certain date." And I said, "She can still renew... I don't know if you guys knew, but she can still renew." So, I think a lot of people aren't informed well enough of what's going on, because nothing has really been made clear to us. I think for us, that have looked into it deeper, we've been able to look at that and have the resources. But, for other students that, once again, aren't involved with anybody around them, that are afraid to say that they're DACA, they might not know exactly what's going on. And, I think at the time, I wouldn't know what I would do if DACA was to completely erase. My DACA doesn't expire this year, so I'm still okay to wait and see what happens. However, I do know friends that their DACA expires in the year time, and they are very concerned as what their life will entail, of what it will look like, if they have to stop working, have to stop going to school, because you need a social security number, that means students that would be graduated in a semester, in a month, could not be graduating, ever.

WARREN: I have heard, and Juan Guzmán is actually the one that mentioned this to me, that some of the stance of the current administration has changed the ability of students who are undocumented or who are DACA to receive special scholarships, can you talk about that? And repeat the question... Yeah.

[21:04]

MANRÍQUEZ: Yes. So, recently, under the University of Nebraska, they decided to stop offering certain scholarships to undocumented students, or students under DACA, because they say that there's been no movement, so it's irrational to provide us with money if some of us will be unable to continue our further education anyway. Some of my friends that were under DACA

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did lose their scholarships, and I think, OMA [the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Nebraska at Kearney] has done a really good job of helping them find further aid financially. Because they didn't know how else they would be able to do it because those scholarships were the reason why they came to college, because that's how they were able to afford it. Some of them, I don't think, would be able to afford it if it weren't for those scholarships, and... I mean, just removing their scholarships out of nowhere, especially for students that are a year away from graduating, it was very hurtful. And just knowing that the administration of the university that we attend feels that way towards us, because we really just want a better life for ourselves, to provide for our families, and to pay back our parents for everything that they've done for us.

[22:17]

WARREN: I'm sure it's crossed your mind, even though you still have a year before you have to think about... What do you think you would do if DACA was taken off the table? What would your plan be?

MANRÍQUEZ: If DACA expires, I think my plan "B" would be what I've done for seventeen years of my life. I've done it for seventeen years, what's a few more until I can find a different solution? It is kind of my way; we've been able to find a way of getting money, working, getting around. And that's just how you have to live sometimes. I don't think I would go back to Mexico because this is the only life that I know. So, I think I would stay here, and we'll figure it out. We've done it for seventeen years of my life.

WARREN: I want to think about that phrase, because this is something a lot of people say, "Why don't they just go back?"

MANRÍQUEZ: Mm-hmm.

WARREN: Could you talk about... how ridiculous it is, when people say, "Why don't you just go back?"

MANRÍQUEZ: Yes. When people say, "Why don't you just go back?" I think, "What would I go back to?" I was ten months when I left; I didn't leave anything behind. Maybe my family, but I never knew them. So, it hasn't made a big impact on me. I don't know... My family is building a house, because my parents eventually want to move back, but my parents have family back there, they had everything back there. So, I think for them, it'd be a lot easier; even then, I don't have anything to go back to. There's nothing for me there that I would... do, I would say, other than my family and... I mean, I don't know Mexico. I've never been there. I know what it looks like because of pictures. So, that's it.

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WARREN: What kinds of advice would you give to younger undocumented people who have to face some of the struggles that you've had to face as a young person?

[24:22]

MANRÍQUEZ: The advice that I would give to young undocumented students, people in general, I would say, "Don't give up, because there will be brighter times in your life." I didn't ever think I was going to come to college. I sat there in tenth grade saying, "Well, I guess I'll have to work for the rest of my life, in something that I might not like. But I'm not going to go to school because I can't be like the other students." And look at me now, here I'm in college, hopefully going to graduate in a year [laughs], so, "Never give up, and always fight for change, because without fight, there's no progress."

WARREN: Tell me about your future career plans.

MANRÍQUEZ: Yes. My future career plan is to be a teacher, I'm majoring in the education field. I'm going to be a Spanish teacher for high school students, and I'm endorsed in English Language Learners, English as a Second Language. So, I'll be helping students that don't know English as their first language. I currently work as an ELL para as well, ELL: English Language Learners. So, I do help students that don't know how to speak English. I've helped a lot of students from Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Argentina, and Mexico.

WARREN: Do you have anything you want to ask?

ROSDAIL: Yeah, the only thing I want to make sure we get is... Can you talk about what region of Mexico your family is from and where you lived when you were there, where you were born, specifically?

MANRÍQUEZ: Okay. My family is originally from Guanajuato, Mexico, from la ciudad de Manuel Doblado, Guanajuato. That's where my family is from. I was born in a little town a few minutes, a few miles away, and it's called San Francisco del Rincón. So that was my birthplace.

ROSDAIL: And you've kind of touched upon this, that you've never been to Mexico, so, what does Mexico mean to you?

[26:18]

MANRÍQUEZ: Mexico means everything to me. Mexico is my identity. I am proud of my roots, even though I haven't lived there; I feel like I'm very connected to them. I've always wanted to go to Mexico and visit my friends. When they tell me about it, I get really excited because I want to go with them, but I can't, because I can't come back. But I think keeping my nationality, keeping where I'm from, and being proud of it, has been a very huge part of my life.

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I wouldn't change it. I'm not mad that my parents brought me here because they've given me everything, and they've shown me how to live up to my raza and be proud of where I come from.

WARREN: When you are able to visit Mexico, someday, because you will, I believe you will someday. What kinds of things do you dream about doing? Soccer games, or...?

MANRÍQUEZ: Hopefully by 2026 when the FIFA plays here... when I go to Mexico, my first intention is to visit my family, my grandparents that have never had the opportunity to meet me. Hopefully they're still alive by the time that I get there. As well as several family members. I think just meeting them and being able to experience what it's like being there. Hanging out with my cousins that I've never had the opportunity to meet, and just having the experience of, you know... My friends always say, "Oh, it's so nice, you can just walk outside and go to the grocery store, you can go to the jardín, the garden, and walk around with your friends, meet people. People there are so kind, the food is just very different." I think just the experience in general, visiting... Guanajuato has a lot of ciudades mágicas - what they call magical cities - they've maintained their original beauty since they were first built. So, they have very special places that you can visit, and I've always wanted to go there. I've wanted to go to La Basílica de la Virgen de Guadalupe, the Virgin Mary in Ciudad México. I've always wanted to go there as well. I think I'd want to visit Oaxaca and visit Tenochtitlan and all its pyramids. I think I would want to do a lot in Mexico once I get the opportunity to go.

WARREN: Are you watching the World Cup?

MANRÍQUEZ: Yes.

WARREN: No, repeat the question.

MANRÍQUEZ: Hopefully by 2026, when they have the World Cup in México, I'll be able to go and watch a soccer game because soccer is a very big part of my family, and we never miss a game when México is playing.

ROSDAIL: When you re-apply for DACA, do you have to pay the four hundred fifty dollars again, each time?

[29:03]

MANRÍQUEZ: Okay. The first time you apply for DACA, we have to renew every two years, every two years you do have to pay that fee, which has changed; I think it went up this past year when we renewed. But you do pay that four hundred fifty fee each time that you apply.

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ROSDAIL: And when you initially applied with your sister, was that at a time when your family was still financially strapped for cash? Could you talk about the burden and the decision to go through that process?

MANRÍQUEZ: During that time, when my family applied for DACA for my sister and I, my family wasn't financially stable. I was in tenth grade at the time. My dad had lost his job, so he was working at a different farm in Colorado, and we were in Nebraska. I think they made that sacrifice, they saved up the money that they needed to save in order for my sister and I to apply because I do remember telling my mom, "Are we going to apply now? Are we going to apply now?" But she said, "We have to wait and get the money first." So, I think that was a big, also a big hindrance to us.

ROSDAIL: And you had a lawyer?

MANRÍQUEZ: We apply through our services that are provided through a community college that's in Scottsbluff. We know a kind lady that helps us there.

ROSDAIL: Okay.

MANRÍQUEZ: My sister has a lawyer for her documentation. She's applying to be a resident.

ROSDAIL: I imagine when your parents came over, they didn't speak English.

MANRÍQUEZ: Mm-hmm.

ROSDAIL: And you were probably raised speaking Spanish, can you talk about the transition of learning English, if it came naturally to you, because you were so young when you came over, or if it was a challenge you had while growing up?

[30:51]

MANRÍQUEZ: My parents... their first language is Spanish, and it's the language they know the best; they can communicate in English and understand English, write it as well, and read it, but in my family house, in our household, we were raised speaking Spanish. In the house, we speak Spanish; once we leave the house, you're allowed to speak English. And that really forced and helped us stick to our native language. So, Spanish was the only language that I knew up until I went to elementary school. My older sister did go to school before I did, so she kind of knew a few words and passed those on as we got older. Our younger siblings also caught on to the English, but in school we did have to learn English. I don't really remember it because I was very young. I think I tested out of ELL pretty quickly. ELL is the support we see when we don't know English. I think I've always been able to pass, conquer that language barrier and further myself.

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ROSDAIL: Thank you.

WARREN: It was good you thought of that, because a lot of the people who came, like, your parents' generation, when we'd ask, "¿Cuáles fueron los retos más grandes?", a lot of people would be like, "Ugh, not speaking English," you know?

MANRÍQUEZ: Yeah.

[32:37]