

Coming to the Plains

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Videographer, Videographer

Guadalupe Victoria, Durango, Mexico

Interview date: 7/16/2018

[0:07]

CECILIA: Very good. Where are you from originally?

CONSTANCIO: Well, I am a Mexican. I am from Durango, from a little town called Guadalupe Victoria.

CECILIA: Very good. Could you tell me about your life there?

CONSTANCIO: When I was a kid, a young man, an adult, or...

CECILIA: When you were a kid and then you can tell me more...

CONSTANCIO: Well, when I was a kid, as I was saying, I was very poor. My family was very poor. When my parents were alive, I was happy in Mexico because they'd give me the little they had. I didn't go to school because... I didn't like going to school because I preferred the streets.

CECILIA: And why did you leave?

CONSTANCIO: As I told you before, I was very poor. When my parents passed away, I felt lonely and I wanted to forget that my parents had passed away. And well, I was very poor. I didn't have any money to buy what I wanted.

CECILIA: Tell me, when you left, how old were you?

CONSTANCIO: I was around 25, 24 years old.

CECILIA: What were conditions like when you left?

CONSTANCIO: How were conditions in Mexico?

CECILIA: Yes.

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CONSTANCIO: No, they were fine. I mean, I didn't have anything to support myself with. I didn't own land to farm, I didn't have anything like that. That's the reason I left that town.

CECILIA: How did you prepare for your trip to come here?

CONSTANCIO: Ah! For my trip to come here. No, there was no preparation. As we say, I just came with God's will. That's it.

[2:39]

CECILIA: Could you tell me a story, one of your stories when you came...?

CONSTANCIO: A story. Well, if I tell you stories, it will take a whole day, so I'm just telling you about the first time. I only crossed the river once. That time I crossed through Laredo, Texas and... I wanted to cross the river for the first time, but it had strong currents. We walked all the way to the middle of the river, and we came back to the shore. I told my brother that the currents of the river were very strong. So then, we got back and got an inner tube of a tire. Do you know what an inner tube is? Of a tire, the one you can blow up. We blew it up and got in the water and crossed on that. The patrol caught us, and I remember where the train goes through is where the patrol dropped us. And they said, "Go through there." They sent us back, up along the train tracks and when we were walking on the rails, we saw a train coming. So, one of my buddies said, "Climb up on the train." So, we did. When we were up there, the patrol said, "Get down, you sons of..." I won't tell you the whole phrase because it is really bad, "Get down, you sons of a bitch."

[04:23]

We didn't listen to them. They crossed to the other side, to Nuevo Laredo, and they dropped us there. The train was going slow, so we got down really quickly and my brother stayed behind. I had to go back, and the patrol caught me again. There was a long bridge where people crossed and we crossed by sliding. It was high where you cross to this side [US side]. Think about the danger of being up there to cross and then, we crossed. There was a helicopter following us all the way to here. To get to the next town it took us about thirty or forty miles like... we walked for three days and three nights to get to that town. We would carry with us some food. We had cooked potatoes – we hadn't brought money for more - and water bottles. We walked for a long time and we ran out of water. So, we would drink water where cows drink water. We had to drink it with excrement. We had to drink it like that because... we were so thirsty. And I remember that that time we got to San Antonio, Texas, and some good-hearted people told us, "We can give you a ride to San Antonio."

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[06:02]

And we arrived in San Antonio. We were there for a month, hiding in a house. They would feed us once a day. For a month we would eat nuts because we didn't have anything to eat. And after that... From there we went all the way to... During the month we were locked up there - not locked up, but we were hiding from the patrol - during that month we would have a meal a day. Later on one man told us, "Do you want to go to Carolina to work?" And we said, "Yes, let's go." They put fifteen of us in a van. We all were on top of each other. It took us three or four days to get to North Carolina. There, I learned what work in the United States is like. At that time, they paid me three dollars an hour, in 1985, 1986. I have lots of stories, if I tell you all the stories I have, we would be here all day and all night.

CECILIA: Okay. Who and what did you leave behind?

[07:42]

CONSTANCIO: As I told you, when I came here, my mom and my dad were not with me anymore. My siblings were in different parts of Mexico. I didn't leave anyone behind, just my wife and two of my children, Ceci and Javier.

CECILIA: Okay. We've already talked a bit about the way you came here. Why did you choose the United States, why not another country?

CONSTANCIO: Why not another country? Well... I don't know, everybody said that people made more money here than in Mexico. And this is the closest one, I guess. I don't know other places... For example, if I'd go to Guatemala, it's the same as in Mexico. If I'd go, where? To Spain, it's almost the same. My father, my brothers came to Texas. They worked in ranches, and we dreamed about coming to see... I imagined that here in the United States, horses were bigger. I looked it as a paradise, sort of. I imagined it like that, like everything was prettier than in Mexico and we wouldn't realize that it's the same. It's the same, but here we use dollars and over there we use Mexican pesos. Over there we don't make enough money. Here with one hundred dollars you can buy lots of things. In Mexico with one hundred pesos you can't buy even a chicken.

CECILIA: What was your first impression of the United States? Was it the same as you hoped?

[09:42]

CONSTANCIO: Well, when I was there [Mexico] I was working the fields, no, no... It is harder to work the fields than my job. Working the fields is really hard, you have to do hard work. It is harder than the killing floor, but, yes, I don't know. I made some money, and I was able to send some to my family.

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CECILIA: Could you tell us about your working experience here?

CONSTANCIO: Here in Lexington. I didn't like working the fields neither here nor in Mexico. I like my job. I don't know why I like that, cutting meat as I do at Tyson. Well, cutting meat with knives and stuff, I like that. I feel like I like the job that I have.

CECILIA: What are some of the biggest challenges that you have faced here in the United States?

CONSTANCIO:: Challenges, like challenges...

CECILIA: For example, it could be the language, English.

[11:11]

CONSTANCIO: Oh yeah! That's the most...I haven't... I didn't want to study... That's the biggest challenge that everybody... I've been here maybe for thirty years. I don't understand English yet. I don't know how to speak it yet, that's the biggest challenge and the biggest barrier that I have as a Hispanic. We can't communicate with people from here. That's the toughest because we just work and work. We don't realize that we need to study English to be able to be better in their community.

CECILIA: Okay. How were you treated by people from your home country when they found out that you were leaving, or when they found out that you were here in the United States?

CONSTANCIO: How was I treated? Well...

CECILIA: For example, when you left, because the question is asking, when they found out that you were going with... For example, could you think about your family that you left behind and how did they take it that you had to leave, or could you talk about what people thought or said when you leave?

CONSTANCIO: No, no, as I said, no, no, I can't talk about it because I don't know what people thought, what people thought about it.

CECILIA: Okay. It's fine. What are some differences and similarities that you have noticed between both cultures?

[13:03]

CONSTANCIO: Oh, no. So there are many. Here... In my time things were different, it is now very different. It's almost the same as in Mexico, but in my country, families, for example,

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fathers and mothers were very respected. The difference is that here, there is more freedom of expression. In Mexico children couldn't talk back to their parents in a bad way because they were punished. Here, that doesn't happen. There are many differences here. You can't ground your kids because laws don't allow it. That is very... what I have noticed here in the United States. The difference between the United States and Mexico is that here, we parents can't punish kids in the way we want to. We can't punish them because the law is different from ours. In my times, my dad or my mom would slap us when we misbehaved. They would slap us and spank us. And here we can't do that, that is one of the differences I have noticed. What else...like they say, there's more freedom. The word is freedom, or something like that.

CECILIA: Mmh-hm. I forgot to ask this this question, but going back to... How were you treated when you arrived in the United States and is it the same now or different?

[14:42]

CONSTANCIO: No, it's the same, we just... Well, I've never.... Maybe some Americans look at us in a bad way, they don't like us... because sometimes... For example, when I started working at Tyson, there were lots of Americans, and there was more racism, but honestly, here, in this little town where I live, I'm very comfortable. Actually, I don't know a lot of gabachos [Americans]. I just know Tyson is full of Hispanics. Americans slowly left Tyson. I don't know why... but I've never seen anything like that, I mean, racism. Maybe there's some, but not directly to me, no. Probably because I don't understand them, maybe that's the reason. If I understood I would say, "They are saying something to me," but since I don't understand them, I don't know if there's racism or not.

CECILIA: What hopes for yourself and your family did you have when you came here? Did those hopes become real?

[16:14]

CONSTANCIO: Well, some, others didn't. I wanted to become rich in three years, but I couldn't. No, I mean, I just wanted my children to... The truth is that when my son Javier was born, I hoped... I said, "When my son grew up..." I only had Ceci and Javier. I was hoping that my children learned English so they could help me here, in this country and I realized that I have to learn by myself. Because children leave and we are left not knowing what to do. That was my hope, that they would study to be someone in life, that they weren't like me because I didn't want to go to school. I now realize that school is important. I was never involved in their education. I told my wife, "You know what? You are in charge of our children's education, I will be the one working as hard as I can. You're in charge of our children's education. You ask them, what are your grades or how is school? And I will be the one working". And I now realize that I

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was wrong, I needed to ask them about school, about their grades. I think that, I don't know, maybe they are going forward.

CECILIA: That's it. Those are all the questions. That's it.

[18:17]