

Washington County Museum
Oral History Interview with Manuel Castaneda
At: Manuel's office at Pro Landscape near TV Highway
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Informant: Manuel Castaneda
Interviewer: Michael O'Rourke
Transcriber: Ellen Rogalin

MC = Manuel
MO = Michael

MO: Manuel, why don't we start at the beginning? Can you tell me when and where you were born?

MC: I was born in 1965 – July 4, 1965 – in a small village, **Rancho El Limone**. You translate it as Ranch of the Lemon because there was a lemon tree there. Approximately five homes I think.

MO: What were your parents doing there?

MC: Mainly farming, everybody was doing farming, and we, us . . . When I was growing up there I was a kid so I would help out with the regular chores of any farm, you know, chasing cattle around and tending to goats and that kind of thing. I also went to first grade school there in the same village. Very small village, so same teacher would teach first grade to sixth grade.

MO: Sort of like a one-room school . . .

MC: Uh-huh, like the old times, I imagine here, a hundred years ago.

MO: Really not quite that long ago.

MC: Maybe not quite that long ago. We would come and get our teacher about 45 minutes away to the nearest gravel road where she was dropped off and we would bring her up to the village in horses.

MO: And, your parents, were they farming their own farm or were they working for somebody else?

MC: Mainly our own farm, however, you know, a lot of the folks around when they have to harvest something and they need help, you trade days of work and then they come and help you, so the exchange of money was not high on the priority list. You would exchange more days of work or goods or horses or animals.

MO: Sort of a barter system?

MC: Yeah, sort of a barter system.

MO: And people just help each other out

MC: Yes, and sometimes you know money did exchange hands, but a lot of times I know we did a lot of the bartering system.

MO: Now, was it primarily livestock then that you . . .

MC: Primarily livestock, yeah. My dad used to buy goats up into, deeper into the interior where there was no access whatsoever. And the only access was obviously by horse and walking, and he would bring the goats down to the nearest big city and sell them there, and I would help out and so would the rest of my brothers.

MO: So you'd herd the goats on down?

MC: Yeah, that was one of my first professions. My first profession was, you know, helping around the house, but where I got paid for it was shining shoes and the second one was herding goats.

MO: And about how old were you then?

05:00

MC: When I was shining shoes I had a pretty good deal going there. I was making enough money to get by and I was in third grade so I must have been around, maybe, 10 years old. Right after that I started helping my dad to goat-herding and you know that kind of went on until I was 14, when I moved up to the States.

MO: And what were your parents' names, just for the record?

MC: My dad's name is Jose Castaneda and my mother's name is **Zenida Habarca**. And they're both living here locally with me.

MO: And what, besides shining shoes and herding goats, what sorts of things did you do in your spare time, or did you have any spare time?

MC: Not a whole lot of spare time, but we did a bunch of other things such as we would sell firewood, too, some of us kids, milk cows; we would play a little bit of soccer, not too much, but I also worked at a, I was sent to a bigger town so I could go to school, a better school, and I lived with my, during my third grade I lived with my godfather for a year. And they were very poor, too, but they had a better school in that town. And during my second grade I lived in a different town, a small town, with my grandmother. And during fifth and sixth grade I lived with my cousin so I could go again to a better school. And when I lived with him I worked at a, he had a little convenience store, so I worked there for him. And he provided food and shelter for me and gave me, I think 40 pesos back in those days.

MO: And what was the name of the town?

MC: **Aquila**, in the state of **Me** **n**. I just did the regular, at the convenience store I just did things such as, we used to call it "making kilos" because the sugar, flour, salt, everything came in big bags, probably 50-kilo bags, and we had to make them into half kilos and one kilos so that it could be affordable for the folks to sell to the public. And that's one of the things that I was doing on a regular basis.

MO: So you'd weigh out the . . .

MC: Weigh out the different measurements that we were looking for.

MO: And you mentioned, you implied, I think, by one of your remarks that your family wasn't terribly well off in those days?

MC: Oh, no, I mean we were pretty poor. I would say most people who live in that part of the country are poor. I would say that, well, up until the time when I was 14 years old, when I moved out to Tri-cities, we had no electricity and no running water and no sewer systems. Television was unknown, or telephones, so, I mean, no rich person is going to live in an environment like that. [chuckle]

MO: And what your parents did to own their farm?

MC: You know, even though people are very poor there they still own a little bit of property, most of them do, and most of it is passed down from their parents and grandparents and in that area there's also

10:00

MC: folks that don't have any property could also join a, they have a, they call it the ahilo, which basically is like a common . . . A huge amount of property there is owned by the government so the government allows them to use it and harvest whatever they want.

MO: Okay.

MC: So, basically, we didn't have one of those because my dad had received a piece of property from his dad and that's kind of how the whole thing was. Now these properties are very difficult to farm. They're not flat, they're very rocky and there's in most cases in the very steep hills so farming is a very difficult challenge. You need lots of property in order to produce small amounts of corn or maize, in this case, which was our main produce that we were producing here.

MO: And was that for feed or for your own consumption?

MC: For our own consumption and feed, but mainly for our own consumption. And we lived close to the coast, for example, so I helped out my aunt one year make salt, too, by the coast there, on the beach. We'd just carry water, buckets of water, to a concrete pad and let it dry out and it's very hot so you rake it up later and so those kinds of things were easily accessible because you could make a lot of your own food or harvest a lot of your own food.

MO: And what you couldn't make you could buy or barter for?

MC: Exactly, exactly. I know as I was growing up it wasn't as common but my dad says when he was growing up there even sugar, they would just make it out of canes. They'd make their own sugar there and even when I was there, there were still folks around that you could get all those things. And lime, they burnt rocks, they had ovens, to make lime, too. And I remember making soap, too, which was stuff that we used for washing clothes and sometimes for ourselves, too, for washing ourselves. Very, I would say, not very pleasant to put it on your

skin. [chuckle] We used it anyways. I don't remember all the ingredients because I was a younger kid but it can be done because I've seen it done.

MO: And was your father's land then also on a steep hillside?

MC: Yeah, almost all of them are. And if you have, you have a little area, maybe a couple acres out of 20 acres that are flatter where you can use oxes or horses to aerate it and the rest of it you just do it by hand. Yeah, you just plow by hand basically.

MO: What sort of foods did you eat in those days?

MC: Ooo, ok [chuckle]. Oh, let's see, we lived in a place where it's very tropical so we get a lot of fruits and vegetables growing. So, for example, eating mangos was very easy because they grow wild. Avocados they grow very easy. Coconuts, bananas. There's a few others that you probably don't see them here called **chalis** which is a vine out of tree and **anonas** which is something that looks like a big apple, it's soft. There's just a lot of fruit because we live in a tropical area. Being that we were close to the beach, too, we would also go and crab, too, and bring crabs back.

15:05

MO: And fish as well?

MC: We didn't fish a whole lot, but there was a little creek there that we ate a lot of crawfish, butter fish, so crawfish was definitely a delicacy that we had on a regular basis. Even some of the wildlife was part of it, too. We had some big birds that looked like pheasants, but they're called **chichalakas** and we ate a lot of those. We obviously ate a lot of chickens cause we had chickens on the farm and we ate armadillos. We had a lot of armadillos there and coatis? What is that? They look like raccoons but they're not raccoons of course. They're coatis? I don't know. They're in the raccoon family but they're reddish-looking. Yeah, and sometimes we even ate some of those too. So a lot of wildlife, too.

MO: So wild game and fresh fruit and vegetables?

MC: Yeah, exactly. I don't think people in that place can really get hungry; there's always something there to eat. You always find a way of eating something. Then there's milk – you can milk your own goats and cows, and out of that you make cheese, and you can do all kinds of things to find your way through problems.

MO: So you'd eat fairly well on the farm with all the . . .

MC: Yeah, and though right now it seems impossible for a lot of us to live without electricity or telephones, when you don't have them before it really doesn't make any difference. It doesn't seem like I was suffering because of it. Just, it was the way of life.

MO: And how was, well, first of all, how would you describe your father and his personality?

MC: He's a great man, he's a great man. He's someone that I admire a lot, very honest and very hard-working. My father has been very, very responsible. I never saw him argue with my mom or yell at my mom or anything and like that. So he wasn't drinking at home or smoking. Those were all no-no's, yeah. And I think his mom and dad were very religious, so he's a man

with faith. But I would say that he's definitely a very honest man and hard-working man. You know right now he's 65 years old, or I think next year he'll be – I'm not sure if it's next year or this year. He works for a local company here in Cornelius. I asked him about a month ago if he could get together with us on the weekend and he said "yes, after work." And I said, "You work on the weekends?" Now? At this age? And he said, well, the company's not doing too good so I have been volunteering weekends and working for free Saturday and Sundays. He's a very committed man, yeah. He says, I'll come *after* work. I don't know if people would in these days show up to work with that kind of commitment. And he's by no means in management or anything. He's pretty much toward the bottom of the labor force.

MO: It is rather remarkable.

MC: Yes, he's very remarkable and I admire him so much.

20:00

MC: My mom is just a little bit more modern. My dad is dark complex and he probably has more Indian in him. My mom is very blonde-looking so probably has a lot of European blood and is very little almost Indian blood in her, so we all came kind of **mystisos** – that's where you get the word **mystiso** – mixed. And she's more modern than my dad. I think she's the one that wanted me to come up here to the states and go to school and have an opportunity. Not that my dad didn't want it, but I think he values work more than education and my mom probably values more education than work, if I can describe them both like that, that's how I would describe them.

MO: Besides that, what else might you mean when you say she's more modern?

MC: Well, she's uh . . . we had strict curfews as we were growing up including some of the kids that were 18-year-olds so they couldn't come past 9 p.m. or 8 p.m. with my dad, and my mom was more loose, you know. If my dad was not there and he didn't know, he never – he acted more like he didn't know what was going on or my dad had I think more of a problem with my sister going away for college up in Salem, Willamette University. And my mom was very much on board and "yeah, go for it" [laughter]. So you can tell quickly that she's just definitely more modern than he is.

MO: So you have a sister and other siblings?

MC: Yeah, there's 10 brothers and two sisters, so 12 kids. I have two sisters and . . . there's two girls and 10 boys including myself and I'm kind of in the middle; I'm in the middle of the two girls. And my oldest girl, she . . . my oldest sister, she's a little older than I am, she pretty much acts like a mom. She tries to boss us around. [chuckle] And the one younger than I am, she lives in Texas right now, Dallas, Texas. I would say that what happened was that the older kids would raise the younger kids. And so you, there was a pecking order and there was a, definitely an authority line and in the oldest have authority over the youngest and that's kind of how it was until we came here to the States when things started turning around and so far I'm kind of in the middle and I had almost every, not all of them, but almost every . . . I would say 90 percent of all the family members work here for me, so sometimes they feel a little awkward, I'm sure. [chuckle] And me too because we're not used to that and especially like my oldest brother, he definitely used to, had a green light if we misbehaved to spank us and put us in our place and then and now things have turned around, but I don't spank him. [chuckle]

MO: Well how is it that the family came to the United States?

25:01

MC: My mom and dad had come over I believe in 1972 when the second to the youngest brother was born, just born, and they left him over there with us to take care of him and all the little kids. And they asked the neighbors and family members to watch the big family – to watch 11 kids. Can you imagine? [laughter] And obviously the oldest had a lot of influence to make sure that we kept on doing what we were supposed to do. And they came up to California, to the San Joaquin Valley, to work in the fields there. And I'm not sure how long they stayed there, but probably I'm going to say only about a year and then they came back. And they'd made a little bit of cash and they probably figured . . . I'm not sure what was going on at that time, but I imagine that we were having financial problems and that's why they left us over there and came up here. And then in, like around 76, 75 or 76, some of the older brothers started coming up to the States again to work.

MO: Also to California?

MC: To California, exactly. And then in 77 they were up in Tri-Cities, Washington, central Washington, and they brought my dad up because he was having problems paying a loan from a bank. And he wasn't able to pay, and if he didn't pay then we would lose the piece of property he had gotten from my grandfather. And so he came up here; my mom came up here and most of the oldest ones, they could work, could do something. And then in 78 they, uh, my grandma asked me down in Mexico, says oh, we finally got word from your mom and she wants to know, and your dad, they want to know if you can come up and translate for them, cause I was still 14 years old you know. So I said, sure, I'll go over there and translate.

MO: So you spoke good English then?

MC: No, I . . . somebody asked me the same question, whether I spoke English or not, and I said you know, now that I remember, I didn't even know what the word "translate" meant. [laughter] I just, I probably just wanted to be with mom and dad and I probably would agree with anything in order to come and be with them. But no, I had never heard a word. I think I knew what "jes" means, "yes", because like "si" just about everybody knows that. But then I went to school in Pasco, Washington.

MO: And I take it that you and your brothers and sisters and your mom and dad at that time still held Mexican citizenship, is that right?

MC: Oh, yes, yes. Yeah, we, uh, um, had to cross the border the hard way, yes. And I remember I came in with a friend cause there was no one else to come with, and none of us knew which way was north or south or what to expect. So crossing the border was definitely a life experience being that as we were trying to cross through Tijuana we got robbed. We got robbed, and there was a guy with a gun and another one with chains and they held us there for a long time. But me and somebody else escaped, but not my other friend

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MC: My other friend they took his boots and everything he had, but since I had escaped I still had 20 dollars in my pocket and that kind of got us through a long . . . I forgot how many days,

but several long days to have something to eat, yeah, when we got back together. But it was a painful situation.

MO: So you were robbed on the Mexican side of the border?

MC: On the Mexican side of the border, yeah. They were dressed as police officers and I don't know if they were or not, but they definitely had guns, so it was enough to don't look back and run and hide as fast as you can. I was lucky. But they beat him up, you know, my friend. We were not far away actually because we were under some bushes when they were beating him up. We could hear – cause it was dark we couldn't see – and they were looking for us because we had ran away, two of us, and they were, the thieves were definitely interested in catching us because they didn't want anybody to spread the word, probably. And they were calling our names. They were asking other people to call our names so that we could come out saying you know they're gone, but we could see them from under the bushes. It's a scary, it was definitely a scary thing.

MO: How did you first encounter them? Did they just appear?

MC: Oh, yeah, yeah, after an hour or two when we felt it was safe to come out, we came out and we were very close to where they were. They had them all rounded up there and holding them at gunpoint. They said, "God, I'm glad you guys didn't come. We were calling you but we were being forced to." We said no, we could see, that's why we didn't come out.

MO: And when did you first meet the police, or the people, the thieves?

MC: The thieves? Well, as we got off this bus, public transit system, and we got off in a dark area. There was a hillside close to the beach. And we were following this one guy who says, "Follow me" and we follow him into some ravines there, up through some hills . . .

MO: Hold on one second.

MC: . . . and I try to run back and there is another guy on the back, too, armed, so we found out that there was not a whole – you couldn't go anywhere. Except I don't know, in the panic some of us did try to run and they caught everybody except two of us and so that, uh . . . They just came of out nowhere. I'm sure they were hiding under a bush or they knew where people would normally cross or something like that, yeah. And I think it was pathetic because I don't think they probably got more than one hundred dollars in people's shoes and boots and coats and things like that. So they must have been real disappointed. [chuckle]

MO: And was everybody on the bus there for the same reason?

MC: No, no, no, no we, we just ride a normal bus and . . .

MO: Get as close to the border as you can?

MC: Yeah, exactly, uh-huh. And I couldn't tell you exactly where it was because it was dark and I didn't know the area.

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MC: I was from far south, so to me, I just needed to stay close to the person that I knew and that was about it.

MO: And then after you got together with your other friend, did you proceed to cross the border?

MC: Yeah, we did, we did.

MO: On foot?

MC: On foot. We crossed some water, whatever it was, some channels or whatever. It was pretty deep and I was not very tall, so they were holding me up from my arm so I wouldn't drown. But there was several long nights through there. I don't remember what it was. We was staying in orchards and places like that and sleeping over in the orchards and until, I think, probably three days later. Someone picked us up in a van and pretty soon we were on some highway and we see the lights from the border patrol, so here we go back again [laughter] after all that travel.

MO: You mean you hadn't yet reached the border then?

MC: Yeah, we had crossed the border already but we definitely got caught and we got sent back after several days of being out there in the cold and wet . . .

MO: So what time of year was this?

MC: It was in September.

MO: Okay.

MC: September 1978.

MO: But then you must have tried again?

MC: Oh yeah, yeah, we tried again and the next time we were luckier and unlucky that it didn't work out.

MO: Was it right away?

MC: No, they, it took us about another week or so, I think; it took us about another week.

MO: So the border patrol rounded you up and brought you back and handed you over?

MC: Handed us over to authorities in Mexicali, but then we would, we came back to Tijuana. Now that time we didn't have any more money to ride the bus. So the only one that had that \$20 was me so I gave it to my friend which was an adult and I snuck under their feet and didn't pay my pass to get to Tijuana; back to Tijuana from Mexicali. So I felt like I was in desperate need on both sides of the border.

MO: And so once you got back to Tijuana did you cross again on foot?

MC: We crossed again on foot but it must have been through another area because I don't remember crossing the same, crossing through the same area. And the next time around it was, actually, it was a hippie guy, an American guy, an American citizen guy who [laughter] drove us all the way to L.A. in his motor home.

MO: And so you met him on the US side the border?

MC: On the US side of the border. Well, somebody must have sent him there to pick us up.

MO: Oh, he was waiting for you?

MC: Yeah, I guess, I don't know. He was just, I don't think he spoke much Spanish. Yeah, and that was kind of the break and then we, I ended up in L.A. That's when I saw the first African-American person, the first Black person, yeah. It seemed so different to me.

MO: Well, you must have been almost broke by this time – no money?

MC: Oh yeah, absolutely not. Nobody has any money at all. No, I mean, if anybody gives anything to you or you find anything, you eat it [laughter] or you drink it, whatever it is.

MO: And so you survived by people giving you food and . . . ?

MC: Well, the, at this point they bring, well they bring usually Doritos or something, you know.

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MC: They pass on little bits of food here and there, or bread, and that's how you'd make it.

MO: And was this, were these friends of the person who picked you up or . . .

MC: I would think so, I mean I think they already have some sort of arrangement because obviously you pay somebody money to get you across and they figure out that. . . I wasn't paying anything, yeah, but some of the older people probably were doing that. I didn't know what that was, I just knew you have to follow this person, and whatever this person tells you, that what's you do. And then the person keeps on changing and they keep telling you, now follow this other person, and you never know their names or anything. That's usually probably how people are smuggled from country to country. I imagine that's the way it is because that's definitely the way it was with me.

MO: That's probably safer that you don't know . . .

MC: Yes, it's probably safer, because those guys I'm sure are probably not the honest people in the world [chuckle].

MO: And so then it sounds like it was a tough journey for you.

MC: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I mean it's been tough and, you know, life is not fair, but we've just got to deal with it. And if you work at it hard enough eventually it seems like you know you can make progress.

MO: Well, then, so you're in L.A. and were you in a house there?

MC: I was in a house. I don't know which house it was. The most interesting thing happened there because I was there for I think about a week or longer, some time, nobody would come pick me up. I didn't know what was going on. And, I remember one of them said, "Does any of you want to take a shower here?" You know you're filthy from weeks of crossing mud and everything else. And I said "sure". So I jump in the shower in the restroom, in the bathroom, and they say there it is. I went in there. I couldn't figure out how to turn the water on for the shower. [chuckle] So finally after I stay there for about 20 minutes trying to figure out what shall I do – you don't want to do something dumb in somebody else's house – and I pulled something, a lever or something, the water came out so I started taking a shower. I took a very quick shower. I came out of that bathroom steaming, looking like a shrimp, and they looked at me and they said, well what happened to you? I said the water's really hot. They all started laughing [laughter], you didn't turn on the cold water? Oh, I pulled it out, the water came out. So I showered with super hot water there. [laughter]

MO: Did you actually burn yourself then?

MC: Well, I think I probably showered really, really quick. I'm sure I was burning because it was pure hot water. But I know now that there is cold water and hot water. [laughter] That was an interesting experience.

MO: So did you go from Los Angeles then to the Tri Cities?

MC: To the Tri Cities, yeah. One of my older brothers came down and got me, picked me up

MO: In a car?

MC: In a truck, yeah. And I was in the back of the truck in a canopy. I remember from the time I was telling you I saw some African American kids playing outside and I kept on looking and I go, I've never seen this before. How does mom know which one is which, you know? They all look exactly the same. Obviously as time goes by then you find out that they don't look the same at all. [laughter] And I could see that that was because I hadn't seen anybody else than the people who lived in my surroundings here.

45:03

MC: I had never seen Asians either. It was just a big experience for me. Yeah, I kept on looking out the window and looking at these things and, it was just interesting.

MO: So, you arrived in the Tri Cities and what did you do there?

MC: When I arrived there, my younger brothers were not here, or sisters. It was only the older ones, the ones that could work. My dad said to me, well, you've got to learn English fast because that's what we need you here for. And I said okay, so they took me to school. I went to seventh grade in McLoughlin Junior High in Pasco, Washington. And I went to school there and they gave me one hour of ESL and the rest regular classes just like everybody else.

MO: One hour a day?

MC: One hour a day, uh-huh, or one period a day, and the rest regular classes. And every time I came back my dad would ask me, well, how much did you learn today? And after about the

second week – I wasn't learning fast at all because I was learning other things such as crossing the street. My sister was telling me, now when the light's green you can cross, when it's red you can't cross, that means this. Here's how, when the phone rings, pick up the phone, make sure the cord is on the side of your mouth (cause we didn't have cordless phones back then) and so little things like that. Here's how you turn on the TV and here's how you change the channel – that kind of thing. It was just taking me time to get used to all these things and my dad was desperate for me to learn English fast. At around two weeks he says, well, you're not learning English fast enough; we're going to have to send you back. Boy, I was committed to learn English fast [laughs]!

MO: You wanted to stay.

MC: Yeah, I wanted to stay and he asked me if I could accompany him to a store to buy some sandals and I said I would. And I asked in school, to some of the other kids, I said well what is a sandals. So they told me what it was and I kept on repeating it and I wrote it down and stuff so I could take my dad and I could impress him. That was the first time I took him to a store. And I asked the gentleman there for sandals and he says yeah, come over here, I'll show you. He said something, I don't remember exactly what he said, but we follow him and he took us to look at some big sanders with sandbelts and stuff like that [laughs] and my dad, when he started showing us the different models, dad just laughed, he figured. And we just thanked the guy and we figured that I wasn't ready yet.

MO: But he didn't send you back?

MC: He didn't send me back, no.

MO: Of course you eventually did pick up English?

MC: Yeah, I would say after the end of that year I started pretty much getting along.

MO: And how many of your brothers and sisters were there then?

MC: It was, let's see, me, Martha, [saying names very softly] – oh god, just four of us; five, five of us. Five kids. Plus my parents, so seven.

MO: And what were you doing to support yourself in Pasco?

MC: Asparagus, apples,

MO: Working in the fields?

MC: Working in the fields. 1978 was a tough year for us.

50:01

MC: The economy was bad in the United States, too. Even gasoline was difficult to find. And I remember we started going to different churches to see if they knew of any work and one of the churches told us about a farmer who had a chicken farm and we worked with this guy at least a week or two weeks, all of us, to see if he would choose any of us to work for him, for free! But he didn't choose us, so we kept on struggling there for quite a while until one of my cousins showed up over there. He was living here in Hillsboro and he showed up over there in early 79,

1979, and he says, oh, in Oregon, there's a lot of agriculture and there's, we don't have a lot of people to do it, so if you come over here it'll be better. So we followed him quickly and we ended up here, we ended up in Cornelius with cousin, his brother, and we quickly found work. We quickly found work.

MO: Was it better here?

MC: Oh, it was much better here, yeah, it was much better. They had a lot of farmers that needed help. I mean we literally would just drive from farm to farm asking for work and we found a lot of work. We quickly were all working in the different fields – cucumbers, strawberries – and I personally worked in the onion fields in Gaston for two years. So it was very easy to find work here.

MO: You mentioned that chicken farm in Pasco. Do you think the chicken farmer really intended to hire anyone or was he just trying to get some free labor?

MC: I don't know, but you know we were kind of twisting his arm to use us anyways. It wasn't him coming out, well if you come over and if it work out good . . . No, just let us work, work for free – if you like any of us, then keep us. I don't know if he needed anybody (laugh). We were just desperate to make some money and work. But things really, I really believe that things started changing when we moved here, to Oregon cause it was a much more peaceful place to be in and lots more work and a . . . very few Hispanics, though. Some of the Hispanics we encountered were folks that were coming from Texas to, as migrants to work in the fields. And we lived in Cornelius and . . .

MO: Did you live in a house in Cornelius?

MC: We stayed at my cousin's duplex. He was, well he was renting a duplex, him and his wife and kids and us, so this is a two-bedroom duplex and there's probably, I'm going to say, minimum 12 to 14 people in there [laughs].

MO: A little bit cozy?

MC: A little bit cozy, yeah. Having a room of your own or bed of your own, that just never happened for me [laughs]

MO: So you'd sleep on the floor?

MC: Yeah, floors and couches, yeah, mainly.

MO: And you worked for the _____ Brothers out in Gaston?

MC: Yeah, for the _____ Brothers in Gaston.

MO: How was that?

MC: It was good. I worked in the onion fields there and then the packing warehouses there, too. I was going to school at the same time. And I worked in a lot of fields, just like the rest of the family did and most of the other migrant families that were here. It was good. It was a minimum-wage job, I think three seventy-five at that time.

55:00

MC: But I was just happy to have a job. My dad; whenever we worked, we would always sign the check over to my dad anyways and he would give us back, you know, 20, 30 bucks back at the end of the week.

MO: So he's sort of run the family's finances then?

MC: Yeah, pretty much.

MO: And, at this point, after you'd been here for a couple of years and we now in Oregon where things were a little better, did you think of home or did you tend to be . . .

MC: Oh, yeah, yeah. No, see the reason why my dad left and brought the oldest ones here was to work and pay off the loan that he owed the bank.

MO: Right.

MC: Cause the bank in Mexico was not taking payments. They only lend you some money and then you pay it lump sum in five years or something, so when the five years were getting close he didn't have no money to pay. So for the first I think two three years we didn't get any money ourselves. We picked up every penny we made and he sent it down to pay the debts. And then after about three years I think we finished paying everything. So he said now we have to save so we can go back and have some money to take back with us. And we started saving a little, but then we were already going to school and learning the language and it was beginning to be a little bit more difficult. He kept on talking more and more about how, what we're taking back and how we're going to all go back and we were less interested in that conversation [laugh].

MO: So you were starting to feel at home here?

MC: Yeah, we were starting to feel at home right around three, probably four years. He was still talking – my mom was refusing to go back anymore and the kids were not interested anymore and my dad was sticking to his guns that yes we are going back and pretty soon we found an opportunity to buy a house there in Cornelius. He didn't want to buy, we said okay, it'll be better than paying the rent and when we get ready to go we'll sell it. Obviously that was not going to be the case [laugh]. We just wanted to get him going, get him to agree to buying the house and so we started making payments, purchasing the house, and at that point he was still talking, but now less and less voices were with him and more and more were too distant from thinking about going back and living over there. And for the first two years you do think a lot about home, you're homesick, but after a while, yeah, you just kind of refuse to go back and . . . I'm going to say six years down the road he stopped believing that anybody was going to follow him and he probably felt that if he left he was going to leave alone. All the kids and wife were going to stay here.

MO: So he gave up?

MC: He gave up. He never mentioned it again. [chuckle]

MO: And do you think he was okay with that after a while or has he always wanted to go back?

MC: I'm sure it took him a while longer, probably, but we, probably after three years we made up our minds, most of us, that we were going to have to be dragged out of here as opposed to follow [laughter].

MO: But in a way life up here must have been a little harder. You didn't eat quite as well as you did down on the farm in those early years . . .

MC: Yeah, but we always have worked hard so the reason we didn't have food is just we didn't have work and we almost always had work because if you go out there and ask and ask more, somebody's going to give you something to do. I would say for us we always lived in . . .

1:00:00

MC: either very crowded conditions or very rundown homes, but it was an upgrade from where we lived before. [laughter] And that's what a lot of people don't understand, you know, how we look at a shack out there and, you know, for folks how can they live there. And it's hard. I'm not justifying that we should say that's a great lifestyle, but it was an upgrade. It's an upgrade for a lot of people. I mean just having electricity, having a television – we had never seen television before, you know. So a lot of those things you don't want to give them up after a little while, and that's what kept us wanting to stay in here cause we felt like if we go over there, there's . . .

1:01:07 (end of first tape) Part one ends here

Beginning of second tape

MO: And you started working for Gardens _____ in what year?

MC: I believe that must have been in 82 probably – 83, 84, 85, 86 – yeah, around 82.

MO: So for about four years?

MC: For about four years, yeah. And February 1986 I left the company and that's when I started mowing lawns on my own and then right after that, I went and started Pro Landscape. registered the name.

MO: Really, right then in 86?

MC: Yeah, exactly. Not that anybody was going to steal it. [laugh]

MO: I think you told me over the phone, but why don't you tell me know what you had to start the business with.

MC: Oh, I, I basically didn't have much. I had received a credit card from First United States Bank for an 800 dollar credit limit. And I got that card since I was like, I think I was probably like 16 or 17 years old and nobody signed for me, but what I would do – I'm very persistent – I would do, I always ____ the one day I could have a credit card {laughter} and I would always go, whenever I went to a bank or someplace and I saw an application for a credit card, I filled it out. And even though I was under age [laugh]. Then one day a card shows up [laughter]. I'm sure they made a mistake and I kept that card, I kept my payments paid on time, so that helped me out. That really did help me out.