

8-5-1976

Interview no. 414.2

Margaret Candelaria

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Margaret Candelaria by Oscar J. Martínez, 1976, "Interview no. 414.2," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Margaret Candelaria
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 5, 1976
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: 414 B
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 414 B
TRANSCRIBER: _____
DATE TRANSCRIBED: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Daughter of an Anglo American father and a Mexican mother, born in Mexico.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Experiences as a young girl leaving Mexico with her family during the Revolution;
experiences as a nurse in South El Paso.

Length of Interview: 45 minutes Length of Transcript: 14 pages

Mrs. Margaret Candelaria
August 5, 1976
by Oscar J. Martinez

- M: Mrs. Candelaria, your husband was telling me about the time of the Revolution here, how you left Mexico and some of the experiences you had. Could you talk a little bit about that?
- C: We were very fortunate in not encountering bullets, really, but we did go through several experiences. For instance, when my father came to work for the Northwestern Madera Lumber company in Chihuahua, my sister and I were attending school in Aguascalientes, so we stayed with my grandmother and aunts to finish our school year. About that time, the communications to the north of Mexico were interrupted through the Revolution, and we went through quite a few experiences. Of course, being children, it was a lark for us. We didn't care or didn't know or didn't experience the hardships that the grownups had to go through. All we wanted was something to eat, to play, and so on, and it was all right with us. My grandmother and aunts, of course, being in Mexico, having a big house with a patio and a backyard and another backyard, they had chickens and rabbits, and then the only thing that we lacked and she had to look after was our milk; and other things that she naturally had to look for. But then my older uncle, Francisco Tiscareno, was in the north, and my younger one had been taken by a revolutionary general as a chauffeur, and he was stranded in Mexico City. And just as the communications started again from the north, my uncle went for us to Aguascalientes to bring the whole family to Chihuahua. Fortunately, that same night, my younger uncle came to Aguascalientes, and we all got together and came back. On the way from Aguascalientes to Chihuahua, we left three locomotives on the way. That's how bad things were. One was turned over; on another one the boiler had busted, and so on.
- M: You mean, three of them broke down on the way?

C: Yes, from Aguascalientes to Chihuahua. One of the turned-over cars was a banana convoy, so we had fresh bananas. The people got off the cars and traded or bought eggs and so on from people on the way, and they built fires and we had food to eat. But, anyway, we got to Chihuahua. My mother came from Madera and picked us up and we went back to Madera. That was the end of 1914. By the way, when I was in Aguascalientes, we were presenting our exams for the third grade when the revolutionaries got in, and, naturally, they were against the Church. This was a Catholic college, and the nuns very quietly shut the doors and the windows, and things were suspended. But they got in, peacefully; there wasn't any shooting. Then while we were in Madera, it was during the fall of Villa. He was angered by the American people letting Orozco's forces go through Ojinaga and defeat him at Agua Prieta. And my father was very partial to Villa because on many occasions he said that he was a fair man. But this time he knew that Villa was after the scalp of the Americans, so he said, "Mama, I think I'd better leave this town." And a train was formed so anybody that wanted to leave, could. And about 7 o'clock that night, several Americans left Madera to come north. At 11 o'clock, the Villa people started coming in, drifting in. It was snowing heavily, and those poor young fellow, they were hungry. Mostly they were from the south, they were not accustomed to the snow of the north; and they would knock at any house where they saw a light, asking for food or shelter. Of course, we weren't in a position [to give them food], we were afraid. And mother would say, "No, this is not a restaurant," and so on. But we stayed there several days in the house, and Villa's revolutionaries came [through].

M: Was this in Madera?

C: Madera. And so one night the godfather of my brother Frank was afraid for us to stay at home without a male in the house, he said, "You'd better come to [my] house." We left that night and went to sleep in his house. Of course, they had orders to quarter themselves in any empty house, and they found our house empty so they broke in and stayed there. It was a mess when Mother got there, naturally. They were cooking tortillas and a whole piece of bacon in the oven, and lard was dripping down on the floor. It was a Coronel Bracamontes who was in charge there. So he said, "Senora, we are not dislodging people. I'll be very glad to leave your house, just give me time." So they did. And after that, the Villa people left the place and Carranza's people got in. And the same story--they went and let themselves in the empty houses of the Americans, as ordered. I remember one funny incident. My brother Carlos and myself favor our father--we were redheaded, freckled--and they wouldn't let us out, being Americans and afraid of us being victimized. One day my little brother was swinging on the fence door when one Carrancista came and said, "Are you a gringo?" And my poor brother said, "No, senor!" (Laughter) They would cut the electricity about 8 o'clock at night and just leave the power to work the faro, for a light that goes around. Well, they left that so they would be searching. And then the fellow who was at the tower would phone and say, "There is a group coming this way. We don't know if it's Villistas or what." And everybody would get up and make lunch, or put extra clothing on to run off to the sierras. I don't know where we would hide. But anyway, after a while, he would phone and say, "No, they probably were cowboys, vaqueros, and they have left." And it was a lark for us children. But, anyway, at the end of 1916, boxcars were assembled and offered for any of the families

that wanted to leave. So we decided to come north, since we hadn't heard from Father. In fact, there was a big scare at one time, when those 16 Americans were killed in Santa Isabel. My father, fortunately, was not awakened by the attendant at the hotel, and he missed the train.

M: Was he supposed to go on that train?

C: Yes, he was trying to reach the family one way or another. So as he reached the station, the train had departed, so he missed that train. And Mother didn't know about it. She knew that he was trying to reach us, but it was things like that. Then, people there lacked one thing or another, but they would share. The men would go up in the sierra and hunt, and bring honey and wild turkeys; or somebody would kill a pig, and share it with others. Then farmers would come and exchange for what we had with what they had with them. The only thing I lacked was good shoes. I was accustomed to wearing American-made shoes, and they didn't have them. Then, of course, the train was made up and we were seven families in one boxcar leaving for Juarez. Mother had just a big trunk, her sewing machine, and some mattresses put in the train car for us. It took several days, I forget how many, to come from Madera to Juarez. As we had to come through Cumbres, the train had to be slowly taken car by car by a _____ engine up and down, switchback, since the big tunnel had been burned, for the railroad to go through. So when we came to Juarez, my father met us and brought us over here.

M: No trouble on the way?

C: No, no trouble on the way.

M: Was that a big adventure for you as a child?

C: Yes, it was. There were several instances, but like I said, we were very

fortunate that either the battle had been over when we got to a city, or it took place after. Like the big campaign where Villa was defeated in the south by Obregon, it was after we left Aguascalientes. And in Chihuahua, every time that they came in or went, we didn't happen to be in the city of Chihuahua. So, it wasn't too bad for us. We did without sugar, we did without the proper clothing and so on (like I mentioned the shoes), but we were fortunate.

M: And your father was already here in El Paso?

C: Yes, he was here.

M: He met you in Juarez?

C: He met us in Juarez, got one of the little apartments rented for us, until he got a job with American Smelter in 1917 and went back to Mexico. He worked for the American Smelter until the Depression, when people started being laid off. I was already a private nurse with a home here in El Paso, and my father came to live with me.

M: Did you go back to Mexico with your father?

C: Well, yes, in 1917, after Father went to work for the American Smelter, in a few weeks we went back and lived in Chihuahua. My father then was moved from place to place: Mexico City, Monterrey, Monclova, Rosita, and so on; but we stayed in Chihuahua as we had missed so much schooling and Mother saw what it was. So during the second epidemic of the flu in 1920, my mother died from flu pneumonia. My father was at that time in Monterrey. He came over and we were undecided if to go with him or come to live in the States with an aunt of ours. But we saw the advantage of having the children attend American schools, since we were an American family, and decided to come to reside in El Paso. Since 1920 we have been here. I have visited Mexico. I worked a year with the United Sugar Company as a nurse

for the hospital in Mochis. But all my life, since 1920, I've been a resident of El Paso.

M: Was your father an engineer?

C: No, he was a carpenter, and foreman of the car repair shops, first for the railroads that were turned over to the Mexican Government, then he worked with the Madera Lumber company and was laid off by the Revolution and circumstances. That's when he came to El Paso in about 1916. I guess it was the beginning of the year, because like I said, it was snowing; or the end [of the year]. I really don't remember exact dates. But anyway, he worked for the American Smelter from 1917 until the Depression, '33 or '34.

M: He was laid off in Chihuahua?

C: Yes.

M: Did they lay off a lot of Americans, or were they laying off everybody?

C: Everybody, everybody; it was just a general lay-off. And they were nice. They liked my father very much because he was such an honest, hard-working man. And even when he was here, years later, they would have him go on purchasing trips to Chicago and St. Louis for things that they needed for the railroad in their places in Mexico, the cars they were working on. When he was laid off, with the hopes of the work catching up again... They would lay them off with three month's pay, as the Mexican law required. But for him they made it half pay for six months, trying to lengthen the time and see if things would straighten up.

M: So in 1920 you came back here and you went to school here?

C: I had finished my primary and secondary school in Mexico, and so I entered Providence Memorial Hospital Training School, and graduated from there.

M: How long did it take you to get your nursing degree?

C: Three years.

M: And you practiced nursing here most of your life?

C: Yes, I'm a Registered Private Nurse. I still keep my registration.

Mr. C: She practiced on me when I was in the hospital with a ruptured appendix. That's where I met her. (Chuckles)

M: That's where you met, in the hospital.

C: Yes. After I graduated, I did a little private duty, surgical nursing and so on; and like I said, one year as a nurse in charge of the Mochis hospital that the sugar company had at that time, under Dr. West. Then I came back. After I got married, during the Depression, to help circumstances I went back to work at a dollar a day, room and board. But having a husband, a father, and two children to help support, it was rather tough. In 1935, I went to work for the City Health Department in Public Health and worked for almost 33 years there. I retired the 1st of April of 1968. I was very happy in my work in Public Health. There were so many changes, starting from taking care of very sick dehydrated diarrhea babies in the Southside, to the modern ways of preventive medicine.

M: I guess you saw a lot of problems in the Southside during your time as a Public Health nurse.

C: Yes. The things that were done and improvised... I worked under Dr. Rollins, who was so charitable and a great physician. He used to go out and deliver babies in the houses for five dollars, and usually took a nurse along to help him. We had so many things to improvise: using orange crates to make little furniture pieces, cradles; coffee cans for potties for the babies; oh, so many things. And, of course, we dispensed the free milk to the people.

- M: Do you remember any particularly interesting cases of families in the Southside that faced health problems and other problems, and you went in there to help out? Any incidents that stand out in your mind?
- C: Well, for one thing, I remember a young blind woman that was married to a very old man, and they had a child every year. It was very hard, being blind and with children every year like that. And we tried to help her and make her understand how to read the clock so she would manage to feed the children at regular intervals, or hearing the chimes of the church relate to the hour of the day. There were sad cases. There was one woman that I was trying to show how to make the formula for the baby. To shorten my time at the house because I had to build fire and all, I took water from the clinic and showed her how to mix the formula and boil everything for a 24-hour period. The next day that I went for a return demonstration, she went ahead and took the water from the faucet and made her formula, as she made it [without] using the boiling water, nor boiling anything. The baby did all right, fortunately.
- M: Do you remember any humorous experiences while you were in the field?
- C: Well, would it be humorous to say how afraid of dogs I was? (Chuckles)
- M: Is that a problem for you?
- C: Yes! I used to be scared to death of dogs, and I remember a house that I had to visit on Canal Street, and they had a vicious female always sitting by her little house, and tied. This time I went there, and the gate was open a little bit and she was staring right there; but she was laying, and I thought, well, she must be tied. So, slowly, I glided to kind of shut the door before I would call the people, but she was watching me. And just as I got to the gate, she jumped at me, and I screamed so hard that

I scared the dog and the dog scared me! (Laughter)

M: She didn't bite you?

C: No, she jumped the fence and ran across the canal!

M: Were there other nurses doing the same thing as yourself, going to South El Paso and helping out that way?

C: Oh, yes. At first, there was a very short number of nurses. I think there were three or four [in] the Child/Maternity Division. At the time the school nurses were under a different jurisdiction. Then Dr. McCammet enlarged the number of nurses and that's when I started working. By and by, they divided the city into districts, and I was under Child/Maternity Care. Then the state put in more nurses until we were a rather large group--but, of course, never large enough to cover everything. And the programs were different. At one time, we used to cover the whole city and deliver a birth certificate to every home where a child was born, whether they needed our services or not. But it was to contact every new baby in the city and see if we could help in any way. Then also, besides being the Child/Maternity Division, in the schools there was the Contagious Disease nurse that was a separate one. Then a generalized program was put into effect, and we did everything that befell us in our district--school nursing, child welfare, communicable diseases, tuberculosis; anything.

M: I've read in the newspapers of those days that the people of South El Paso had a lot of problems with many diseases--tuberculosis, typhus, all kinds of things like that. And since they had very little money, they could afford very little health care. Was enough health care given to them on this basis that you were working under, or did these people have to suffer most of the time?

C: There were many helps and there was very good communication [between] what is now the Thomason Hospital (at that time it was County Hospital) and us. We reciprocated and everything was so simple then. We had a card that was called a transfer card that we would give to the people for services over there when we referred them. On that same card, the results of the visit or whatever the final decision was that had been made to those people was written [on the card] and returned to us. For instance, the maternity cases. We used to have maternity clinics, pre-natal clinics, where we have instructions and demonstrations on how to bathe the baby and food-preparing for the baby and mother and families. And the maternity cases, after so many visits to the clinic, were referred for delivery at County Hospital. We would get a notice when the patient was delivered and when the patient left, so we would make a home call visit the same day that the patient was home and looked after the baby, because we would have to dress the cord and bathe the baby and see that they nursed it (if it was breast-nursed or bottle nursed). Then also at the time there was a rather large number of midwives in El Paso, and they also were supposed to report every case to us on the third day of birth, and we would visit and supervise their care of the patient and baby ourselves. Then once in a while there would be an unattended baby that we had to look after, and fill the birth certificate and register the baby. There were many facets to the work.

M: Sounds like you were quite busy.

C: Very busy, yes.

M: What was your maiden name?

C: Work.

M: W-O-R-K?

C: That's right.

Mr. C: Trabajo. (Chuckles)

M: You had the right name for what you were doing.

C: I'll tell you, the day that I graduated from Providence Hospital they had a little party at noon for me, which was customary. But for some reason I was left on the floor alone and they were calling for me to come down. And the superintendent says, "You're living up to your name till the last minute."

M: What is your first name?

C: Margaret; Margaret Work Candelaria.

M: Was your mother Mexican?

C: My mother was Mexican, born in Guadalupe de Zacatecas, and her ascendancy was French and Spanish. She was a very fair complexioned woman with wavy black hair. In fact, she was whiter than my father.

M: And your father was Anglo American?

C: Yes. I thought and he thought that he was entirely Irish, Welsh-Irish, but I have found through genealogies that we really are Scotch. And our family tree goes 'way back to John Work, who came to the States in the 1600s. I have a history of nine generations of Work families.

M: I'm curious to know what you have considered yourself all your life, Mexican or American?

C: I have considered myself both, depending on the circumstances. For instance, if somebody speaks ill or hurts Mexican people, I'm aroused; same with the other side, because I feel both ways. And, naturally, I want to be fair. When I see that things are not fair, then I am concerned.

M: When you got married, in those days there wasn't too much inter-marriage

between Americans and Mexicans. How was it for you when you got married? Of course, you were half Mexican. But did people look at your marriage as unusual?

C: No, not us, because we are so accustomed to both languages and so on, that invariably we lapse into a conversation in either Spanish or English. And my father and my mother was a different thing. But then being that he was working in Mexico, he met his wife there and married, and it was a rather unusual marriage. They did get along fine, but there was the language problem. They understood each other, naturally, but they didn't speak fluently. And my mother's friends were usually Mexican, and my father's... He attended the jockey club or whatever there was in the city where we lived, and went bowling with his friends. And whenever we had a party at home, he would attend the dinner table and then excuse himself and leave the rest to Mother.

M: When you were young people and at the time that you got married, what were the general attitudes in El Paso of Americans marrying Mexicans?

C: I really don't know, because I had always lived on the north side of the tracks, and Rudy attended El Paso High, and he was very cosmopolitan. And we didn't have any trouble or any bad feelings or experiences, that I can recall.

M: Did you hear other people talk in general terms about inter-marriage?

C: Not inter-marriage. But the work situation, I recall two instances. One time I worked at the Smelter Hospital. I wasn't married then, my maiden name was Work. But another nurse that had a Spanish name was not well received there and she recognized the rejection and left the work. Then also, in later years, when I was working with the Health Department, there

was a beautiful New Mexican girl, her last name was Baca. At the time there was a vacancy in Fabens and she was offered the work. But the people there didn't want her, the American people there. So she didn't accept the work, naturally, and left the city.

M: There was rejection.

C: Yes.

M: What about doctors? Did you have Mexican doctors here?

C: At the time, there were a few doctors that I was acquainted with in private practice. And then of course at the Health Department, Dr. Ornedo started doing the calls on food cases and so on, and was paid part time for his work. In later years, he became the director, and was a very good director.

M: Mrs. Candelaria, I seem to have exhausted my questions. Do you have other experiences that you wish to touch on?

C: Well, my life is rather a long life, you know, 72 years. And naturally you remember some things. One thing that I remember is having a very happy childhood. I don't regret anything, and like I said, it was free living and I left all the responsibilities and everything to the grown-ups. I'll tell one incident that's funny and probably immature in a way. But the day I was 17 years old, my mother made a funny remark. She said, "When I was 17, you were already born," and I felt so incapable of any such thing! I was a schoolgirl by heart and didn't care about boys or anything. I loved dancing, but we went as a trio of young girls. My mother was so young in spirit and all. She, my sister and myself all dressed together and were taken to dances and danced like three young girls. But my mother married very young, she was 16; so she was 17 when I was born.

M: What about during the Depression? You mentioned that it was especially tough.

Can you recall instances that stand out in your mind about those years?

C: Well, I don't know. We have been very fortunate in being healthy, so we didn't suffer in that respect. And things were meager; in fact, when I was on night duty, I used to save part of my lunch or a little of the dessert or something to bring to my children the next day, the little boys. Of course, things were cheaper. We were living in a house that was divided by a hallway, and we rented half of it and another family rented the other half, for \$12.00 a month. And milk was cheap, 10 cents a quart; eggs, 10 cents a dozen, and so on. So what little we had, we managed with it.

M: I want to thank both of you very much for this very, very interesting conversation. I appreciate you sharing your recollections of your life with me. I have found them fascinating. Thank you very much.

Mr. and
Mrs. C:

You're welcome.