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Interview no. 247

Garcia Family History

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Family History

INTERVIEWER: Written by Irma Garcia

PROJECT: Class Project

DATE OF INTERVIEW: December 8, 1975

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

History of the Garcia family.

These are some recollections of my father's early childhood life in Arizona and California during the 1920's and 1930's, his family's migration to México during the Depression and his subsequent return to the United States at the age of 23 in 1944.

This first part will be my father's recollections as told to him by his mother, Delfina González, who was married to his father, Vicente Flores in Tombstone, Arizona in 1916. My father, Vicente G. Flores was born February 10, 1921 in Arizona and when he was three months old, the family moved west to California, hoping for a better life because in those days there was much hunger, sickness, money was scarce and there were no jobs, not even on farms and ranches.

His father was a handyman who knew many trades and was one of the few Mexicans who spoke fluent English. He managed to buy a 1919 or 1920 Ford Model T. Somehow he afforded the gasoline and the family moved across the desert on a dirt road to Indio, California. They stayed in Indio, moved north to Pomona for some years and then moved further north in about 1923-24 to Lankershim, which is known today as North Hollywood.

Here, he worked at whatever job was available and as his financial condition improved, he started his own business. He made concrete pipe for sewers and also curved hollow block for living cesspools. He was given the exclusive contract for installing all of the city's sewer lines. There was much work and thus he went into partnership with his brother-in-law, Miguel González. Difficulties arose from this partnership and Vicente Flores sold out his interest to Miguel. Unable to

find work, the family moved again in about 1926.

This second part will be my father's own memories and experiences as he remembers them. He remembers one morning leaving North Hollywood and seeing the ocean on the coastal road going north. The family stopped at various small towns but did not stay because his father could not find work. The first stop where they settled was named Colma or Colman where his father found work with the railroad track repair group in the early months of 1926.

From Colma or Colman, they moved to either Santa Clara or San Jose during the fruit picking season.

By this time, the family numbered four children who were all ~~too~~ young to work. In the summer of 1926, his family moved from orchard to orchard of apricots and plums and living under a tree, or if lucky, in tents that the rancher provided. Most of the time, though, he recalls looking for an abandoned house or making a tent with a piece of canvass for a home.

After the fruit picking season was over in about September or October of 1926, the family moved to South San Francisco because of either family troubles and/or circumstances. They settled here as my father was ready to start school. His father went to work for the Western Meat Packing Company and worked there until school vacations and the fruit picking season began. Again they moved with the crops to San Jose where his father was commissioned to hire laborers and as foreman. Though he was a foreman, the family still had to live in run down houses and tents.

With the end of the fruit season, my father's family

moved again, this time to the San Joaquin Valley in about October or November of 1927. They stopped at a ranch, Dos Palos where cotton was grown. From Dos Palos to town was quite a distance; my father recalls that he used to go to town almost every other day with his father. He remembers that on this road there were jackrabbits which his father shot and which my father ran out and picked up. My father says they used to eat these jackrabbits and years later was told by his mother that the jackrabbits were necessary to supplement their diets.

Moving from Dos Palos, the Flores family moved to a town called Firebaugh where his father worked irrigating new lands. My father continued his schooling. He says they had to ride the bus as they lived quite far from town.

In early 1928, my father's family moved back to South San Francisco. His father was not well; he had heart trouble since childhood and as he had worked in the mines in Bisbee, Arizona it only contributed to his bad health. Shortly after arriving in South San Francisco, a younger brother died of the mumps. Later his father was admitted to the hospital where he died in July, 1928 at the age of 38.

With the death of his father, my father's family was destitute. They received help from an older lady from the Community Chest who paid the rent and provided blankets and groceries. She advised my grandmother to go with relatives so my grandmother and her children went back to North Hollywood to live with her brother. They lived in the homes of several brothers, my father attended school until March, 1929 when no longer wanting to be a burden to anyone, my grandmother moved her children to San Jose. They went with two other families. His mother and sisters worked in the fields to support

the family. My father worked too during the sweet pea season. He remembers that on their way to the fields they could see an observatory in the distance.

After picking sweet peas and cherries came apricots which my father said was easy because the men could pick the apricots and the women and children would cut the fruit to be dried and this could be done in the shade. After the apricot season, there is a two to three week wait for the plum and prune season where everyone works. Most of this year, my father could not go to school because it was necessary and more important for him to work.

When the fruit season was over, they moved again to the San Joaquin Valley to pick cotton. By this time, they had been joined by an uncle who drove them to Madera. In Madera, they were joined by other relatives and it is here in Madera that my father came down with rheumatic fever which would affect his whole life. Though he missed about a month of school, he attended along with some cousins. His sister and mother were working in the fields. After the cotton-picking season again they moved to North Hollywood and went to school there.

In North Hollywood, my father says his mother started making menudo for sale. He along with his brother would go house to house in the Mexican neighborhood selling it. This business was not profitable; they lost money that they had saved from the fruit and cotton picking which they could not afford.

The next event changed his life radically, none for the better. This man, Don Macario Hernández whose family along with my father's and another traveled together to San Jose. He was the one who found work for all the families and who contracted the ranchers for a percentage.

My father knew him as the man who arranged for housing, credit for groceries and whatever was needed on the camps. This man, Don Macario, had left his other family(he was not legally married nor were the children his) and became my father's stepfather although he did not marry my father's mother nor did he adopt my father. This, my father and his sister took very hard; they were forced to use the Hernández last name which they detested. Before moving to San Jose, they lived in San Ardo and went to school with their new last names. His sister refused to go to school because of this. From there, they moved to Santa Clara where he enrolled in school again. He went to Campbell Union Grammar School which was in a suburb of San Jose. When school vacation came, he went to work picking raspberries, plums and prunes. He says they must have made good money and saved because his stepfather bought a small plot of land on San Antonio Street and began making plans to build a framehouse on it. Meanwhile they lived on the raspberry farm owned by a Japanese named Sarro. The farm was located in a suburb of San Jose on Moorpark Avenue.

In November or December of 1930, the family moved into their first own home that had cost all of them much hard work. By this time my father was in the high third or low fourth grade in school. In January, they moved to Madera where he used to pick cotton after school. In March, they were back in San Jose picking peas on Saturdays and Sundays. By May or June, they were back on the raspberry farm and my father returned to Campbell Union Grammar School. He recalls that one teacher there was always reprimanding one certain boy; she disliked Mexicans.

Here they worked all season until about October, 1931 when all of a sudden, they were traveling south with all their belongings to México. My father lived in México for 13 years and returned to the United States at the age of 23 in hopes of a better life. He says if things were bad here, they were worse in México.

When My father returned to the United States, he was married and had one son. He returned in 1944, ready for the Army. He reported to the U.S. Consulate in Juárez on November 3, 1944 to reclaim his American citizenship and was immediately recognized. He was sent to the Selective Service Board who in a few days sent him to Ft. Bliss for a physical examination. He was then sent home as he did not qualify and his draft card was changed from 1A to 4F.

My father went to work for a while with the Pullman Company but did not like the job so he quit or rather was given a release from the job because in those years it was not easy to quit. He then made a short trip to California to see his uncles and worked with one of them in the cement industry. He stayed there from February to about May-June 1945. He came back to El Paso as he still had his family in Juárez. He had been making arrangements for the immigration of his two sons and wife. During this time, my father says it was a nightmare to go through all the red tape involved in getting visas. It was a real struggle to claim the right to have his sons and wife with him in the United States even though he was an American Citizen.

My father then went to work for a packing house where his brother also worked. He worked for a while and decided to move to California because he always had in mind the thought to settle down in California.

This never came about.

Again, my father went to California--he went to look at the house which he had lived in as a child. He thought it was not the best thing to do if he tried to reclaim it because it had been sold to some people and my father figured they had kept up the taxes on it so he saw it as theirs. He stopped in North Hollywood and stayed for a short while. While he was here, West Germany and Japan had surrendered.

My father came back to El Paso. While he had been gone, my mother had been going to the U.S. Consulate taking all the required documents.

By this time, my father had gone to work for American Smelting & Refining Company (ASARCO) but did not plan on staying long because the work was rough and he still had in mind living in California. He began working there in August, 1945 and worked there for 23 years.

Meanwhile he still could not ^{obtain} visas for his family. He says there was an old man working in the Consulate, Harry Pangburn, with whom he raised Cain about all the documents he was required to have. He told this man to either give him the visas or else he would tear up all the documents and write to Washington about the runaround they were giving him. Finally, after one more trip to Chihuahua, he was given the visas for the family which now included his wife, two sons and a daughter.

On October 30, 1947 my father returned to the United States with his family and lived in the Second Ward.

Going back to working at ASARCO, my father says he worked hard and applied himself to the job. After 3 years he was given the opportunity to and applied for work in the shops. He worked harder and showed his ambition to learn. My father worked in the pipe department --he learned to read the blueprints and asked for a chance of being an apprentice.

steamfitter. He served a four year apprenticeship and afterwards worked at top-rated jobs. During this time, he was active in union work.

My father says that Spanish-speaking men were given few opportunities to learn these trades. There was not one Spanish-speaking foreman in all the shops. For years, this was the case.

The last three years that he worked there he was given the opportunity to relieve ^{the} foreman when he was absent. He also was given charge of his department which was not an easy task. He had learned his trade well and had gained the confidence and trust of both his superiors and co-workers.

My father was retired with a 100% disability at the age of 47 because of the rheumatic fever he had in 1929. Though he fought the decisions of doctors in El Paso and Houston, the doctors advised him to retire.

Today, it is difficult for him to live on his Social Security and is taking a locksmithing course by mail because he feels he may have to start a small business to help him financially.

My father's hopes are that his four sons, three of whom are married and two married daughters will have an easier life than he had.