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Interview no. 264

Eulogia Perez

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Eulogia Perez (1896-)
INTERVIEWER: Mike Apodaca
PROJECT: Class Project
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 13, 1976
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 264
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 264
TRANSCRIBER: Mike Apodaca
DATE TRANSCRIBED: December 4, 1976

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Resident of Socorro, Texas.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Life in San Elizario, Texas; the Depression; peso devaluation; thoughts on the word "Chicano" and those who use the name to describe themselves; illegal aliens; outlook for Mexican Americans.

39 minutes.
13 pages.

(Interview with Eulogia Perez by Mike Apodaca, November 13, 1976.)

A: When were you born and where?

P: I was born in San Elizario, Texas, November 23, 1896.

A: What did you father and mother do for a living?

P: My father used to work as a farmer and my mother as a housewife. She didn't do anything else.

A: Do you remember anything from when you were a real little girl?

P: I just remember I used to play like a little girl. Once I fell from a ladder and cut my tongue, and, as there were no doctors, we had to ride the wagon with horses clear to Ysleta so the doctor could sew my tongue. My mother thought that I couldn't talk very well, but since then I can talk as well as anybody else. (Laughter)

A: When you started growing up, where did you start going to school--your first grade?

P: My first grade I went to was San Elizario--to the old Portales, that still exists. That old building is still in San Elizario. When I first started I went there. And later on when my mother and daddy could send me to another school, I went to the Sacred Heart School in town, in El Paso.

A: Was it where it is now?

P: It's still in the same spot where it was when I was a young girl--not very little.

A: How did you get over there?

P: My brother used to take me in the buggy and a horse. And then we used to ride the streetcar called the Inter-Urban. And that's the way we used to go to El Paso.

A: Till what grade did you go to Sacred Heart?

P: I went till the sixth grade. We used to graduate in the seventh, but my

mother got sick and I didn't want to go to school anymore. So I didn't graduate, I just went to the sixth.

A: And you never went back to school?

P: No, because when my mother died, I had to be the mother of the house for my brothers. I had to stay with them.

A: So you only went to sixth grade. When you started getting older, what did you do? Just keep house?

P: Just keep house. And I stayed there until I got married in 1922.

A: Who did you marry?

P: To Ysidro Perez from San Elizario, too, in November 12, 1922.

A: Did you know Guelo (I'll call my grandfather "Guelo") since you were little?

P: Since we were little. We used to go to school together but we never did play together, because they never let the girls play with the boys or the boys play with the girls. The teachers were very strict.

A: When you married Guelo, what did you do on Saturdays and Sundays? Did you go to the movies?

P: Sometimes we went to dances, sometimes we went to visit friends. Sometimes we used to go to town. But mostly every Saturday we used to go get our groceries and things that we needed.

A: Did you have any times when they didn't want to serve you at stores because you were a Mexican?

P: No, no. I never have trouble! I had my four girls, and when they were young girls I never left them at home or with anybody else, I just took them with me; and nobody ever, ever... Pues que nadie nos hizo menos. Nobody degraded

us. They used to treat me the same way they treated all the people, the Americans and everybody. They never degraded me; never, never!

A: When you got married with Guelo, what did he do for a living?

P: He used to farm, work in the farm.

A: And you were the housewife?

P: I was the housewife, always, because there was nobody else to take care of my kids and him. I used to do all the housework. I even used to chop wood, milk the cow, take care of the chickens--take care of everything in the house, everything we had. We used to raise most of our food. Like, we used to raise our pig and kill it so we could have enough lard and meat. Then we had our chickens to have eggs, and our cow to have enough milk for the girls and us. I used to do all the work, and nobody used to help me, but God!

A: At what time did Guelo get up in the morning to go work?

P: He used to get up at 6:00 because he had to start at 7:00, always. And I used to get up very early, put his lunch, and then he left. Sometimes he had to go walking and sometimes the landlord used to come and pick him up.

A: What time did you come at night?

P: He used to come at 5:00, 6:00.

A: How did you and the four daughters spend the evenings?

P: I used to spend the evenings playing with the girls and, when they started going to school, teaching them their lessons, their ABC's, and then more and more. The little bit I knew, I used to teach them.

A: You used to weigh the cotton, verdad?

P: When we went with Judge Coldwell in 1932, we started working in his farm.

Then I started weighing the cotton. That's the first time in my life that I worked to earn my own money. And I used to save my money, and buy food with my husband's /m̄oney/, what he earned. I saved my money for just me and my girls. I never spent anything in food nor in anything else.

A: What was your job everyday?

P: Well, I started making the beds, cleaning the house, and then I started cooking. And very, very early in the morning I put him his lunch and he left, and I stayed with my little girls and fed them breakfast. When they were little, I cleaned them as best I could, and then I /w̄ould/ start cooking something for them to eat. I fed everybody, every one of them, and I ate myself. And then I took care of the animals I had.

A: But when did you weigh the cotton?

P: Oh, that was later when my youngest was one year and the others were going to school; /t̄hat's/ when I started weighing the cotton. Early in the morning I used to get up and send them to school, put my lunch, and go to the weighing scale. I used to stay there all day with the little girl by my side.

A: Did she ever do anything that...

P: No, no. she never... She had her little doll, the little toys in a box. She used to take them there and play there by my side. I used to take my lunch in a big bucket, and at noon, your granddaddy used to make a little fire with the wild wood that he could find and warm our food. Then /w̄e'd/ sit down and eat. And then the pickers would start coming to weigh the cotton. I weighed the cotton, and they left.

A: Was there any picker that you still remember?

P: Yes, I remember once an old man and his daughter were picking cotton and

he started cussing the girl as hard as he could with dirty words. I stood up and told him (his name was José), "Mr. José, will you stop that dirty language right here in front of me? I don't want to know how ugly you can talk. Will you please stop it? And don't treat that little girl bad! Because if you treat her bad, I am going to put you in good shape with the police." And the man stopped it. He changed, like a new man.

And then another time there were three boys, very mean boys. They used to say very dirty language. I told them, "Well, boys, here we want workers, not dirty speakers. If you want to work, let's work together, and don't use your bad language here in the car. When you want to talk bad, you go to the field 'cause I don't want to hear you. And if anyone don't want to stop it, just leave." And then one of them answered me back, "I'll leave right now, if you pay right now." And I told him, "No, sir, I cannot pay you because today isn't payday." And then he told me, "Well, I'm leaving." And I said, "Go ahead and leave." And he said, "I'm going to send someone for my money." I said, "If you send someone for you money, I won't send it. You come yourself, because I won't send any money with boys like you. Because if you don't get it, I have to pay it. If you don't come, don't send anybody." So later on he sent somebody for the money, but I made the receipt with my book. I had my book, and I made the receipt with the name of the boy, showing that I gave him the money. And I told him, "You sign here." And the boy signed. So the other boy never came back, 'cause I think the boy gave him the money. I told Judge Coldwell about that, and he told me, "If that man comes to pick up his money, if he says he didn't receive it, you just let me know and I'll come and get him." And he was a judge. What do you think about that?

A: So that man never came back?

P: Never came back. I think the other man gave him his money.

A: You used to tell us stories about witch doctors and what they use when you put the ventosas and all of those. Do you remember some stories about people del diablo, possessed by the devil? Did that ever happen around here?

A: No, not with my family. No, because we never admitted anybody into the house, like drunk friends. Sometimes your granddad used to go with his friends, but when he came back, he came back alone. He never brought anyone home. So I never had trouble with that. No, no, no.

A: Did you ever hear any stories?

P: No.

A: Where were you when World War I started?

P: I was in San Elizario still, I was not married. That was in 1917, I think, and I was there with my mother, 'cause my daddy had already died. I was there with one brother because the other one was in California. My brother that was with us was called by the draft. And they were going to send him to San Pedro, California, and he met my older brother in town. So one went to the Army, and the other came home. He stayed with us for a little while, then the Army called him and he had to leave. So they both went. They took them to France, overseas. They stayed over there a little more than two years.

A: Do you remember when the guerra de México--Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata? Did you ever have trouble here in San Elizario?

P: No, I just heard about the trouble the people had, but nobody would ever bother us. And it was just my mother and I living in the house, and

nobody bothered us, nobody.

A: In Prohibition, when they didn't let any beer be sold, what did you think about that? How did los hombres that would bring it undercover, what did they do?

P: Those who brought it as a contraband sometimes got killed or sometimes they got caught. I know that a friend of mine who was 28 and had two little girls, her husband was killed very young. And then another man was killed near my house later on when I was already married. We heard the shots about 4:00 in the morning. And I told your granddaddy, "Listen to the shots!" I woke him up and I said, "Listen, listen!" And he told me, "Maybe they caught someone with liquor." Later on we saw them pass by with him. We didn't know who he was; we never knew.

A: Guelo never did that?

P: Oh, no. Your Guelo? No, no, no.

A: How were you affected by the Depression?

P: We had hard times with the Depression because we couldn't buy what we needed. If we bought 25 pounds of flour, we had to buy 12 pounds of rice flour and 12 pounds of wheat flour so we could mix them, because it was hard to make tortillas with them. But we still had to make them some way, and eat, because we didn't have anything else to eat. And everything was high.

A: But you really never suffered?

P: No, we never really suffered because we always had our own milk, our own eggs, our own meat. If we were hungry, we would kill a hen, fix it and make soup, then we'd have enough to eat.

A: Did you know anybody that was really poor?

P: Yes, somebody that was very, very poor. My mother used to give milk to a mother that didn't have any money to buy milk and she had little ones. My mother always used to help her, the little we could, because everybody was poor. It was not noticed that we were poor, because everybody was the same. Everybody was poor, so we just managed to help one another. But in our case, we never needed help, because my mother and father worked hard to save. Not like now, when I have the freezer full of things. In those days, they dried everything. They dried tomatoes, they dried chile, they dried beans; many, many things. The dried pears, apples and all those things, we called them orejones. In winter my mother made us very good pies with those orejones. We would kill the hog so we had enough pork. Or he killed a little goat for meat for the family. And the cow always gave milk.

A: How did the devaluation of the peso affect you?

P: We didn't shop in México that much. But we used to get two pesos for one dollar. And sometimes I liked to go with my daddy to get some candy or something from there. And they let us pass everything; but not very much food, just goodies.

A: Did you ever get affected by the Chicano Movement? Did you ever have anything to do with it?

P: No, no, no, no, no, I never had anything to do with it. I never heard anything about that until now. The Chicanos, I always criticize them. Why don't they say mexicanos? Why do they say Chicanos? Can't they speak like men and not like babies?

A: So you don't like Chicanos at all?

P: No. Why don't they say mexicanos? Because they are grown men, they are not little boys to be called Chicanos.

A: So what do you think the word means?

P: Oh, I don't know; mexicano. Mexicano, that's the only thing it means, me-xicano. But they say Chicano, I don't know why. I don't agree with that. They are old, grown people. They have a grown-up tongue. Why don't they say mexicanos, not Chicanos.

A: What do you think of the illegal aliens, the mojados?

P: Well, I think they are doing very wrong, because they just come here to steal something. And if they want to work, they never find work. And if they chase them back, the next day they find them in somebody else's place. The bad thing of them is that they steal anything that they can get a hold of. I'm always scared of them. But with my dog, that tells me if somebody [is] around. That's my only help.

A: Did you ever have any trouble with the illegal aliens?

P: No, I never had any trouble. Sometimes they used to come when there were very many. They used to come and ask your granddaddy for a little bit of something to eat because it was three, four days that they hadn't eaten anything. And I used to make them tacos with anything I had, beans or meat, potatoes--anything--and give [it to] them. That's all. We never had any trouble with them 'cause we never mess with anybody. We used to have neighbors that were living and picking cotton there illegally because the enforcement was not as hard as it is now. The officers didn't pay so much attention like they do now. So, they used to pick cotton and stay hidden in their houses, and then get their money and leave, go back to their country. But they never did bother us, never.

A: When was the first time you voted?

P: When I was 21 years old. Because that was a privilege that every citizen

had, to vote without poll tax if I was 21 years old and could prove it at the courthouse. I proved it /by/ my baptismal registration. I went there and they gave me a poll tax without paying it, because we had to pay for the poll tax, you know. And since then I started voting, and I have voted all my life. And still I vote.

A: At the time you started voting, did you really understand all that?

P: I really understood, because the ballots were not like the machines now. They were just a big ballot with the names of the candidates. And I could read the ballot very well, so I just scratched the one I didn't want and left the one I wanted.

A: Do you remember the president you voted for when you were 21?

P: Ay, ¿quién sería? I don't remember. Some things I forget, you know; I'm old. How do you expect me to remember those things?

A: Why do you think that the mexicanos never get to be in office? Why just puros gabachos and gringos? Why not the Mexican Americans?

P: Well, since I can remember, there were many Mexican Americans, like Crispi Aranda, Elcario Montes, Luis _____. They used to be Mexicans, and still working in the courthouse and with the government. But /the Mexican Americans/ didn't apply, so they just had to work in the farm. But anyone having a little education and applying could get jobs, and they were treated just like the Americans. But some didn't have a little bit of education, so they have to work with pico y pala, the shovel and the hoe.

A: Why do you think the Mexican Americans are not interested in positions such as Mayor?

P: Sometimes they are interested, and sometimes...You know, like Rogelio. He's a commissioner and the people voted for him. Like I tell you, if you

have a little education and apply... Sure they get tired, but if they don't apply and don't know what to do... They don't have any education. But having a little education they can get good jobs. And they are treated the same as the Americans. Because they never treated Mexican Americans like mojados, like wet Mexicans, no. Wet Mexicans, it's different; they are illegal.

A: What do you think about the Chicanos, the Mexican Americans, that say, "They're prejudiced. The gabacho doesn't like us."

P: I never believe that. The thing is, if you are a Mexican American and behave like one, they treat you just like one. But if you were a Mexican American and you liked to hang around the marijuanos or drunks, saying dirty words to everybody or trying to hit somebody, surely they don't treat /you/ well. But if you are really a Mexican American citizen, you just act like one, and nobody bothers you. We are old, /and/ your grandfather /has/ never been bothered by the law, much less I.

A: So you think that those who get into trouble, it's just because they want to?

P: Just because they want to get in trouble, that's why they do. Because they don't want to obey the law. Just the simplest thing, you know; those that are driving without a driver's license. Don't you think they're stepping /outside/ the law? Well, they are just asking for trouble. And that's why they don't treat them like they should. But if you have your own license, you can go everywhere and I can go with you, and we are not scared of anybody. But if you don't have your license and you want to take me somewhere, they can catch us, take you to jail and send me walking home. That's the trouble with the Mexican Americans. They don't behave like they

should--like good citizens. That's the trouble with them. But anybody who behaves like a good citizen, obeys the laws, and respect each other, everybody treats them as good as the best American with blue eyes.

A: What do you think about the people on welfare?

P: Some people on welfare don't need it, you know, because they are able men, able to work; but they don't want to work, and they go ask for welfare. And they tell 101 lies, then they get the welfare. And then when they find it out, they just drop them off. Like with the food stamps, they go say lots of lies, and they get them. But when they get discovered, they just get kicked out.

/Pause/

A: We were talking about food stamps. Do you think that's wrong?

P: The ones that go and tell a lot of lies. I know a woman who used to say she had two little boys, orphan little boys, and she applied for the stamps and for welfare. So she got the welfare check and the food stamps. But a neighbor that knew she didn't have the kids just went there and told them, "You watch that lady. Send somebody to investigate, and you'll see she don't have any orphan children." So they did, and the investigator found out that the woman was saying a great big lie. She didn't have the kids. She was just sitting down there eating and enjoying the benefits. But she didn't need it.

A: Finally, I'd like to ask you if you thing that the Mexican American will stay the same or va a subir?

P: Well, I think they'll do better if they behave better and learn more, get a better education and appreciate their education. They can do better and have better jobs, better positions and everything. But, if they don't appreciate their education and they just go against the law, that's the

worst thing for young and old. If they don't obey the laws of the United States, then they just get run down and plastered. But if they get their education and appreciate it, they can get better jobs and better positions, and have a better life and everything. But the thing is that the man and woman have to control themselves and have to obey first the law of God, and then the law of man; if they don't do that, they have to go to HELL!!