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## **Interview no. 1568**

Cora C. Reyes

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Cora C. Reyes

Interviewer: Beth Morgan

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: La Mesa, New Mexico

Date of Interview: January 24, 2003

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Transcript No: 1568

Transcriber: Vanessa Macias

Cora C. Reyes was born in Mesilla, New Mexico, on January 1, 1926, to a family of farmers; her family moved to La Mesa, New Mexico, in order to take in her aunt's orphaned children; in 1944, she married Silvestre Reyes, who was also from a family of farmers; the Reyes family often hired braceros throughout the duration of the Bracero Program; Ms. Reyes briefly recalls her childhood and early adolescence; she went to school only through eighth grade, because she had to help her parents at home and on their farm; in 1944, she married her husband, Silvestre Reyes, who was also a farmer; the Reyes family often hired braceros, and there were some who continued to work for the family for over thirty years, which included the time during the Bracero Program and upon their naturalization; the Reyes's built a house for three particular braceros who brought their families with them and stayed on the farm year-round; the seasonal braceros would sleep on bunk beds in the barn, but they would share the facilities in the main house; on holidays, many of the braceros would return to Mexico to see their relatives; Mrs. Reyes recalls one tragic accident where a worker was strangled by a cotton picking machine; her husband would hire undocumented workers who were in need of work, and he would hide them whenever immigration officers would show up; she concludes that she thought very well of the braceros and had few if any problems with them; in addition, she comments that many of the local farmers would not have survived without the help of the braceros.

**Name of Interviewee:** Cora Reyes  
**Date of Interview:** January 24, 2003  
**Name of Interviewer:** Beth Morgan

This is Beth Morgan. It's January 24, 2003. I'm visiting with Cora Reyes in her home in La Mesa, New Mexico. And this interview is for the UTEP Bracero Oral History Project. So the first thing I want to ask you, Cora, is when and where were you born?

CR: I was born in Old Mesilla, just across La Posta in 1926.

BM: And La Posta is the restaurant?

CR: Yes, restaurant, yes. On January 1, 1926.

BM: Where did you go to school?

CR: I went to school for awhile in Old Mesilla and then my dad moved to Fair Acres to farm over there. I went to Fair Acres till the age of 12. Then we moved to La Mesa to take care of the orphans that my aunt died and she left three kids, two boys and one girl. So we moved to La Mesa. We've always been farmers, all of us.

BM: What was your aunt's name?

CR: The one that died? Umm, her name was Maria Luhan Chavez. The youngest child was 3 years old, so we came over here to take care of them. My dad started farming. There was a farmer here that owned a lot of property and his name was Mr. Potter. A lot of people sharecropped with him. So, he had a lot of land here in La Mesa.

BM: Did your Dad work for him as a sharecropper?

CR: Yes, he did. That's right.

BM: What was your dad's name?

CR: Las Chavez.

BM: And your mother's name?

CR: Emma Lopez Chavez.

BM: Eva Lopez...

CR: Emma.

BM: Emma. E-M-M-A.

CR: That's right.

BM: Alright, so your dad, was he always a farmer?

CR: Always.

BM: So, he farmed in Mesilla also?

CR: In Mesilla, he shared the farm that his brother had. But, when I was like 8 years old, we lived in Garfield for awhile and he farmed over there also. It wasn't a big, big farm, but still, it was farming.

BM: Was that his own farm there?

CR: My grandfather's.

BM: So, if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to get the names of all these people you are talking about. So your dad's brother that he farmed with in Mesilla...

CR: Yeah, his name is Nemeico Chavez.

BM: Nemeico. So that would be N-E-M-E-I-C-O. And, his grandfather was it that SOMETHING

CR: In Garfield. His name was Gregorio Serna.

BM: Serna. And that was your dad's...?

CR: My mom's grandpa.

BM: Your mom's grandpa?

CR: That's right.

BM: Alright, so then he farmed in Mesilla and Garfield and Fair Acres. And Fair Acres, was that his own place?

CR: No, that was his brother's place. Nemeico Chavez was the owner of the farm.

BM: He had two places. Okay. And then when you came here, he worked for Mr. Potter?

CR: Mr. Potter, mmm-hmm.

BM: Do you know if your parents used Braceros at all?

CR: In the old days, it was mostly for picking cotton because they did most of the labor, you know the family did most of the labor. So, there were no cotton pickers at that time. That's when they hired the Braceros. For cotton picking.

BM: Alright. You said you went to school in Fair Acres until you were twelve?

CR: Right.

BM: And then you moved down here?

CR: To La Mesa.

BM: Did you continue your education here?

CR: Just till the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in San Miguel because, um, I didn't have formal education because my mom was the only one who would take care of the children, so I had to stay and take care of the children. That's the reason I didn't go to high school. Because we had a lot of things to do for them, you know, and it was hard. We worked out in the fields, also, to help my dad.

BM: What was your husband's name?

CR: Sylvester Reyes.

BM: How did the two of you meet?

CR: We met at school. We were neighbors here in La Mesa. So, we started dating like when I was 17. I got married in 1944.

BM: Was his family also...

CR: Yeah, they were farmers also, that's right.

BM: How long had they been in this area?

CR: Oh, my goodness, for a long time. When we moved over here, his father was already a farmer and his name was Jose Reyes and he was already a farmer. He worked for Mr. Potter also.

BM: Mr. Potter. Okay. Then when did you and your husband start your own farm?

CR: After he got out of the service. I think it was 1948.

BM: 1948. That was here in the La Mesa...

CR: In the La Mesa area.

BM: Would that be this place, or?

CR: No, it's a place over there.

BM: Closer to town?

CR: Sí, closer to town. Just a little ways from the Church.

BM: That's the place where the two of you were living and farming when you first began using the Braceros. So that was owned by you and your husband?

CR: Well, the first 15 acres, we bought from Mr. Potter and then we started, you know, whenever we made money, we started buying more land.

BM: Right. At the time that you first hired Braceros yourself, how many acres did you have?

CR: Well, like, I think, okay 25 and 15, 35 acres. And they would come and do the weeds, you know, but at that time we probably had one or two. We didn't have that many. But then when the cotton picking season was here, then we hired a couple more.

BM: You were growing cotton?

CR: Mostly cotton at that time, it had a good price. And alfalfa, also.

BM: When you started in 1948, you were growing cotton?

CR: Cotton, that's right.

BM: Did you grow other things as well?

CR: Not at that time because we didn't have that much land, so we just, you know. And then after we bought more land, than we started hay, onions, lettuce, and all that.

BM: How many acres did you acquire in total?

CR: Totally. About 85 acres.

BM: Do you have any ideas by the 50's what crops you would have been growing?

CR: By the 50's? I think by that time we still had to, the cotton had a good price, but we also grew onions at that time.

BM: The Braceros, did they help you with onions.

CR: Yes, they did.

BM: In the 60's, what about the 60's?

CR: In the 60's, it was almost the same. Cotton prices were still very good and we gins in every town of the Mesilla valley. Every town had a gin.

BM: A gin?

CR: Ah-huh, a cotton gin.

BM: I want to stop this for just a second and make sure it's going right.

CR: Okay.

BM: Well, it's not backing up. Now it's going forward. Okay, I think what we did was created a second track, but that's okay. I just wanted to make sure it was recording properly. How did you first hear about the Bracero program?

CR: First, my husband would attend the meetings with the Farm Bureau and I think that's where he first learned about the Braceros. We had a few relatives that moved to an area and we hired them to work on the farm.

BM: Okay, were they people who had been living on this side of the border or did they come from Mexico?

CR: No, they came from Mexico. Yes.

BM: But they were not...were they officially Braceros also or were they...?

CR: No, they were mostly family, but they needed the job so we helped them out.

BM: You found out from the Farm Bureau then. Why did you and your husband decide to hire Braceros?

CR: Because he rented a big farm and he needed more help, so that's the reason. Mrs. Kenyan was the owner of the farm.

BM: Kenyan?

CR: Uh-huh, Kenyan. So, we, um, we had to hire somebody. It was like maybe a hundred acres, so we had to hire Braceros to help.

BM: Do you remember what he had to go through to hire the Braceros?

CR: I don't think he had a lot of problems. I mean, a lot of people knew how to go about it, so I guess they told him how to go about it. When he was like that, I didn't get involved, he did all that. My husband did all that. I have no idea.

BM: So you don't know what the regulations were?

CR: No, I don't.

BM: Or what kind of paperwork he might have had to fill out?

CR: Mmm-hmm.

BM: You said that he attended the Farm Bureau meetings, so was that the government agency that was administering the programs?

CR: I have no idea. All I know is that a lot of the information that he would get was from the Farm Bureau.

BM: Do you have any idea how many years you employed Braceros?

CR: Well, some of them would just come and work for a season and then go back to Mexico or move to another part of the country. So, just a couple of them stayed with us, for like, 30 years. But those were the only two that stayed that long.

BM: But it was during the whole period of the formal Bracero program from the time that your husband started the program in 1948 through the end of the Bracero program?

CR: Program, that's right.

BM: You did have some that returned, then?

CR: Yes we did, uh-huh, from you know, just SOMETHING, there was no work for them, so they go back to Mexico. They knew we had a job for them so they would come back.

BM: You SOMETHING, you employed Braceros every year?

CR: I think so, yes.

BM: Do you have any idea how many Braceros total you may have employed?

CR: Um, okay. There was like 3 that came with their families, so we had to build a little house on the farm to provide for the ones that had families. And then, the rest, I guess maybe 5 more.

BM: They were usually ones that came back?

CR: That's right.

BM: Can you tell me, typically, what the length of the work contract was?

CR: The ones that stayed, it was year round. Yeah, because my husband also did custom work. Like people that had small farms and didn't have the equipment, so he did a lot of custom work.

BM: And that would include...?

CR: Yeah, the Braceros.

BM: What do you classify as custom work? Would he be like combining things for people.

CR: Like plowing or planting, things like that.

BM: The Braceros, did they help him with everything? Typically, what were their duties?

CR: The two that I know of, they were the ones that did all the work on the tractors. As a matter of fact, one of them died on our farm because he was given, what is it called, the one that picks the cotton, the cotton machine ready to go pick cotton and he had it going while he was working on it. It got his jacket and choked him.



BM: Oh my goodness.

CR: Like I said, those two men really worked for us. They really did.

BM: So, they operated farming equipment.

CR: Equipment, right.

BM: What other things did they do? I think you mentioned earlier that they would clean the weeds out of the fields?

CR: Out of the fields. In those days, we didn't have cement ditches, you know, so we had to clean them before we started watering the fields.

BM: So they helped with that.

CR: That also.

BM: Was that done at a certain time of year?

CR: Right. I think that would be mostly in September and November. So, they would get rid of all the leaves and then clean up because, well, like in the old days, we used to water late, you know for the alfalfa and all that. They kept the ditches pretty clean at that time.

BM: So it was kind of almost a year round operation, if you were going to raise alfalfa during the winter.

CR: Mmm-hmm.

BM: The Braceros weeded and used farm equipment, what else did they do?

CR: When there was nothing to do, sometimes, my husband would put them to clean the barns and do stuff around the house. If the ceilings needed work or painting or something like that, they would do it. They always had something to do.

BM: How did the Braceros reach your farm? How did they get there?

CR: Most came because they knew my husband, see? He knew a lot of people, so even over there in Mexico, they would tell each other, go to this farmer and he'll hire you, so that's the way most of them knew my husband. Most of the Braceros we hired.

BM: Did they come from a specific place in Mexico? Were they all from the same place? Was it in the interior?

CR: Well, they were mostly from Chihuahua, the Chihuahua state. Most of them were from there.

BM: When they came to you, were they bused up here from the government or did you have to go pick them up?

CR: No, they came on their own. We just hired them to work. They came on their own.

BM: They got here SOMETHING.

CR: Yes, exactly.

BM: Do you happen to know if your husband ever went to one of the Bracero processing centers? Because apparently, there were places in Mexico where they would kind of call them to a certain place and say, okay, if you want to work in the Bracero program, you have to come here first and then we will distribute you from there.

CR: No, no he never went. He never had to do that.

BM: Do you happen to know what the government required you, as farmers, to provide the Braceros you hired?

CR: A good home, you know, that they had everything. The house that we built, we even put a bathroom in it. It was a nice little house and we had to pay them the minimum, also.

BM: And the minimum would be, not necessarily minimum wage, but whatever the prevailing wage was for farm workers in the area?

CR: Right.

BM: What was the least you could do? I know you said you had some who were actually living here that you had built them a house for, but the ones that just came very now and then, where did they stay?

CR: We had another barn that we had beds there and then they would stay there and sleep there. Sometimes, they would use the kitchen in the house to do their cooking, but they would sleep in the barn.

BM: Did you provide the food for them or did they buy their own food?

CR: They bought their own food, but there was times that they needed food, so my husband would provide food for them.

BM: What about medical care?

CR: We never had problems with that.

BM: Except for that one poor guy.

CR: That poor guy.

BM: I guess he didn't need any medical attention after that accident.

CR: No, he didn't.

BM: Do you know if there were any government officials that came around to check and make sure that your husband was meeting the requirements?

CR: I think they did, once in awhile, they would come and check on the houses and everything.

BM: That would have been the Farm Bureau?

CR: I think it was the Farm Bureau. I think they were the ones who did that.

BM: Did the Border Patrol ever show up to make sure that your Braceros were legal?

CR: A couple of times, but they didn't do it too often. A couple of times, I think.

BM: What about the immigration services, did they ever?

CR: No, we never had any problems with any of that.

BM: When they came to check on people, how did they go about that? Did they set an appointment or did they just come?

CR: They just came.

BM: They just showed up.

CR: They just showed up. Some of them who were here illegal, they would hide in the ditch, you know, or something like that. (Laughs) They would run and hide in the ditch. (Laughs)

BM: Was that guys that were working for your husband?

CR: Yes. (Laughs). There were a few. You see, I think in the old days, when they came to pick cotton, I think that they had to go through the process of being here legal. Then when they had to return, they returned. So that's the way it was.

BM: Maybe it was more formal for harvest season than it was for other kinds of farmwork?

CR: Exactly. Other kinds of farmwork.

BM: Some of your Braceros slept in the barn. Did they have like a dining room set up out there, too, or did they eat in the little house?

CR: They would eat in the little house. They just had beds in the barn where they slept.

BM: Who procured the meals for them?

CR: They did.

BM: They did.

CR: They prepared their own meals, uh-huh. They're good cooks, let me tell you.

BM: In general, they bought their own food, but if they needed a little help...

CR: Yeah, if they needed a little, my husband would, they would make a list and my husband would go get them what they needed.

BM: Okay, what kind of foods did they make?

CR: Mostly, sometimes, I would even cook the beans, you know, the pinto beans. As long as they had tortillas, pinto beans, and chile, chorizo, and all that, it was a meal for them.

BM: So they were pretty happy...

CR: Yeah. (Laughs)

BM: Beans and tortillas, okay.

CR: Beans and tortillas. (Laughs)

BM: So you said you didn't have any problems with the Braceros becoming ill?

CR: No, we didn't. Most of them were very young, very good health.

BM: The ones that brought their wives?

CR: Two of them brought their wives and their children, but I think that when they came here, they were legal already. Two of them worked with my husband and we let, as a matter of fact, the kids were going to La Mesa school. Two of those kids.

BM: So when you say they were legal, does that mean that they had immigrated or that they were legal Braceros?

CR: They immigrated, I think.

BM: Then they may not technically have been Braceros anymore if they weren't

SOMETHING

CR: Exactly, hmm-mm.

BM: Let me see, where am I. Do you happen to remember what the minimum wage was that you were paying them?

CR: No, like I say, my husband took care of that, so I never. He would even say, "Come here so I can show you this." And I told him, "No, I don't want to learn nothing like that." (Laughs) I told him I'm like never going to be a secretary. (Laughs)

BM: Did you happen to know how the wages were determined? You know, how they decided what they were going to be?

CR: I have no idea. Like I say, I never, paid much attention to that. (Laughs) My husband took care of all that.

BM: So he kept the books and those things. Do you know if he was required to withhold any taxes or did he put money aside for them in a savings account or anything like that?

CR: At that time, I don't think so. What they did sometimes, they needed money, they would borrow money from my husband and, you know, later on they would pay him or he would take it out of their salaries. You know, during the month.

BM: But he was not required to withhold taxes or anything like that?

CR: No.

BM: I don't know if you can answer this, but I'm going to ask you anyway. It says, were you or your hiring agent members of the local agricultural organization?

CR: Umm, I don't think so. It's like, I say, the only thing I can remember is anything that he needed to know, he would go to the Farm Bureau.

BM: So, maybe?

CR: Maybe, uh-huh.

BM: Did the Farm Bureau have any influence over how the Bracero program was operated?

CR: I have no idea. No, no idea.

BM: We already talked a little bit about the work that the Braceros did on your farm, can you tell me sort of what a typical day would be like for them during the growing season and then maybe during the harvest season?

CR: Well, they would start early in the morning and they would work until sundown, so it was like maybe eight hours. Sometimes, if they had to irrigate at night, they would work at night for a few hours.

BM: When you say they started early in the morning?

CR: Like maybe at 6 in the morning.

BM: During the growing season, what did they have to do? They would have to irrigate and...

CR: Almost everything. Except the ones that did the labor in the tractors and all that. But the other ones would clean up the fields and put the fertilizer and all that was done by the ones that didn't work in the equipment.

BM: And during the harvest season, what would a typical day be like?

CR: Well, like, when they went to pick cotton, they didn't have to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning. They didn't have to go that early. So, probably, maybe it was like 8 or to 5, or something like that.

BM: During a typical day, let's go back to the growing season now, what kind of tools did they use?

CR: Um, well when they pick cotton, they just, you know, the cotton sacks were provided for them and then when they cleaned up, just the hoes. And that was about it.

BM: What about gloves and hats and that kind of stuff?

CR: They had their own equipment, I mean, they had their own. Sometimes my husband would buy gloves for them, but their hats, they had them.

BM: Did they ever have to wear protective clothing, like say if they were applying the fertilizer or something like that?

CR: Really they didn't, you know, they just wore their own clothes.

BM: We talked a little bit earlier also about the kind of work that they performed. It wasn't only field work, but if they needed something to do, then your husband would just put them to work around the...

CR: Around the farm.

BM: So, did they drive the tractors also?

CR: Just the three that my husband trained because, you know, some of them ask if he could train them, so he was afraid something might happen to them. So he only had three that were well-trained.

BM: Were they the ones that were living in the little house?

CR: In the little house.

BM: Those were the only ones he allowed to...

CR: And then my husband did a lot of the work at that time because he was young and he was in good health, so he did a lot of the work himself.

BM: How much contact did you have with the Braceros? How much contact did your husband have with the Braceros?

CR: Oh, he did, he did have a lot of contact with them.

BM: So, he would be talking to them everyday?

CR: Yes, hmm-mm.

BM: Giving directions to all of them?

CR: Yes.

BM: Did you know any of the Braceros by name?

CR: Um, well, see like I only knew the ones that lived there in the little house, you know. They were like family with us. But, the ones that just came for a few months and then leave, I never got in contact with them.

BM: What were the names of the ones who were living in the little house?

CR: Um, okay, one was Poncho. I think his last name was Mendoza. The other, they called him Junior, but I don't know what his first name was. And then then other one was Emilio, the one that died. I can't remember his last name, but his first name was Emilio.

BM: What about Junior? Do you happen to remember his last name?

CR: No, I don't. He's the one that I SOMETHING his kids went to school here in La Mesa. I can't remember his last name.

BM: Okay.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE ONE

BM: Does anyone of these Braceros stand out in particular in your memory?

CR: Just those three, those are the only ones.

BM: And that's primarily because they lived...

CR: Yeah, they lived right there. And sometimes I'd bake a cake or something and then I go take it to them.

BM: You said that there were two of them in particular that worked really hard?

CR: Yeah, Emilio and, um, Poncho Mendoza.

BM: Okay.

CR: We could have gone on vacation and my husband and I didn't have to worry about anything because he would take care of the farm like it was his.

BM: So they were almost like a family?

CR: Yes, ah-huh.

BM: Family, well you said family.

CR: Yes (laughs)

BM: Okay, did you have a foreman?

CR: No we never did.

BM: Your husband...

CR: My husband, yeah.

BM: His relationship with the Braceros, what was that like?

CR: He always got along real good with them.

BM: So I gather he spoke Spanish?

CR: Hmm-mmm, Yes, he did.

BM: He was able to speak Spanish...

CR: Yeah, speak Spanish with them.

BM: Okay. Do you happen to know what the Braceros did on their days off?

CR: Oh, some of them would go to the bar and get drunk. (Laughs) Poncho was a good dancer. As a matter of fact, we went to a wedding and he was invited and he danced with me. He was a good dancer. (Laughs)

BM: Was that here in La Mesa area?

CR: In La Mesa.

BM: Do you remember whose wedding it was?

CR: I can't remember which one it was. This was years ago when he first came. I didn't even remember whose wedding it was (laughs), but in the old days, they had weddings at the church, at the parish hall. They had the dances and everything



there, in the old days. Now, they go somewhere else (laughs), to different places, and more expensive places (laughs).

BM: Too bad things have changed, huh?

CR: SOMETHING.

BM: Do you happen to know what they did for fun, or was that pretty much the same as what they did on their days off? (laughs)

CR: (Laughs). Well, mostly, they like to go dancing. You know, they'd go to the bars, and a lot of the bars had a dance hall. So that was mostly their entertainment.

BM: How about, like at the end of the day, did they have any like card games or anything that they would play just to pass the evening?

CR: I never saw them do anything like that.

BM: Did any of your Braceros have any special privileges?

CR: Well, one of them was very concerned about this family in Mexico. So, he would always send them money. Sometimes I would make the money order for him. But that was about the only one out of all of the Braceros that we had that was very concerned with his family.

BM: What about any paid vacation days? Was your husband able to pay them for any vacation time, like holidays, like Christmas?

CR: Well, he gave for Christmas, he gave them a gift, you know, I mean money for Christmas. But that was just for the ones that had been working with him for a long, long time.

BM: Right, okay. And what about any of the other holidays, were there any...

CR: The rest of the time, if they had to work, they had to work. They didn't take their day off, even if it was a holiday, they would just go work. And they would get their salary.

BM: If they were off on those holidays, say like Christmas Day, what would they do?

CR: Most of them would go and visit their families in Mexico because I think they didn't live too far from Juarez. Most of them, so they would go see their relatives.

BM: What happened with the Braceros who were not living here on your property when the contract ended? When your contract with them ended. Did they...

CR: They would go back to Mexico. Some of them would like to go, as soon as their contract was ended, they would leave right away. They wanted to go back to Mexico, so we didn't have problems with that.

BM: Did you every have any who were helping you with your harvest and they would go to another person's farm in the area to help them when they had finished with you?

CR: Well, if somebody that my husband knew needed help, he'd send them over there. His brother had a little farm here in La Mesa also, so sometimes they would go work over there. He had like 25 acres.

BM: And so when that happens, they were paid by the other person?

CR: By them, the other person, right.

BM: Were there any obligations at the end of a work contract? Say, one of your Braceros went back to Mexico, was it kind of understood that he would come back and work for you again, or...?

CR: I think most of them that were happy, that enjoyed living on our farm and dealing with my husband, most of them came back. So, we didn't have problems with that.

BM: But it was not necessarily a formal agreement?

CR: No, just verbal.

BM: Okay, and the ones that lived in the little house, did they work for you every year?

CR: Most every year.

BM: Do you have any idea if they, I think you said something about 30 years before, did all of those three worked for you?

CR: No, just the one that died on the freeway. Poncho, that was the one.

BM: Junior?

CR: We even had his family, we had another house right in La Mesa, there by the church. He lived there with his family.

BM: That was Poncho?

CR: Yeah, Poncho. But they weren't his kids. He married this lady that had the kids, so he brought them to live there. They lived there about 7 years.

BM: What about Junior? Do you know how many years he worked for you?

CR: Junior, about five years, I think, because he found another job and he took off.

BM: And Emilio?

CR: Emilio, he died. And he started when he was very young. I think he died in his thirties and he started with my husband like when he was 18 years old.

BM: So maybe twelve years?

CR: Twelve years, a-huh.

BM: Did you ever have any problems with the Braceros?

CR: Like I said, I wasn't very close to them, so my husband would take of everything, so I have no idea.

BM: How about when they've been partying? (Laughs)

CR: (Laughs) Well, sometimes they come home and kick the screen doors and break the glasses in the windows, but it was, they seemed to get along pretty good.

BM: It was pretty easy going.

CR: Yeah, it was. (Laughs). We didn't have problems with them. They respected him.

BM: So, let me turn for a minute.

CR: Yes.

(TAPE INTERRUPTION)

BM: SOMETHING, third try. Okay, so we were talking about whether or not you had had any problems with the Braceros. You were saying that sometimes if they got drunk, maybe they would make noise?

CR: Yeah, kick the screen doors and we had to replace them (laughs). And stuff like that, you know, but other than that, they were okay. They did respect my husband a lot, they did.

BM: They were generally pretty harmless. SOMETHING.

CR: Yes, no we never had any problems like that.

BM: Did they ever get into any fistfights or anything like that?

CR: One time, two of them did because, I don't know, they started an argument and then they just started hitting each other. My husband went out there and calmed them down and it was okay. (laughs)

BM: I'm going to stop this because I'm not sure it's recording this time because I can't hear you in the microphone.

CR: Oh, okay.

BM: Make sure it recorded. It's not going backwards. (LONG PAUSE). Okay, so there was a fistfight once, but it was not too big?

CR: It wasn't too big. My husband just went, calmed them down, talked to them, and that was it. (laughs). It was nothing violent.

BM: Did you ever have any criminal behavior from any of your Braceros? Did they ever get thrown in jail for stealing or anything like that?

CR: I don't remember if, I know one time Poncho had one time, they had caught him driving while he was intoxicated. Other than that, we never had any problems.

BM: Okay.

CR: Like I said, they would go to a bar and go dancing and then just come home real tired and go to sleep.

BM: They had places here in La Mesa where they could dance, or did they have to go...

CR: Well, most of them would go to Vado. There were three bars in La Mesa, the Chopes and the, uh, the Alvarez, and another one I can't remember the name of it. But we had three bars in La Mesa and they would go there.

BM: Okay. Did any of the Braceros ever complain about their living conditions or what they were getting paid?

CR: Not that I know of, no.

BM: So, you husband never had any talk with you...

CR: No, he never did. They seemed to be happy because the houses were, you know, they were pretty nice. I'm sure they were better homes than what they had in Mexico, you know, so they were real happy.

BM: Do you know if any of the Braceros in this area ever had like a labor strike or anything like that?

CR: Uh-huh, not that I know of, no.

BM: Okay. You know there were the Braceros who were the ones who were coming in legally under that labor program. And then there were undocumented workers who would come across illegally. Did your husband employ both?

CR: Both, uh-huh.

BM: Did the fact that he had Braceros make him more likely or less likely to hire undocumented workers?

CR: Anytime he would hire undocumented worker was because they needed the job and because, I mean, according to them, they needed to send money to Mexico, to the families. Sometimes they didn't even have money for food for them, so that's the reason why my husband would give them a job. Those that did didn't last that long, you know. It was just during our season that they would stay and then they would take off right away.

BM: Were their times when you had maybe a crew that would have both Braceros and undocumented workers?

CR: Not working at the same place, no.

BM: I was wondering how the two different groups would get along.

CR: No, one would be on one farm and the Braceros would be at the other, so they were never together.

BM: Your husband was aware that there could be problems between them.

CR: Exactly, exactly, uh-huh.

BM: So, he sidestepped that whole issue.

CR: Hmm-mm.

BM: In your opinion, how would you rate the quality of the Braceros' work?

CR: Sometimes, some of them are very good workers, but others, they're not. Because I had a big house over there and I hired girls to come and stay with me so they could help me. I used to work at the grocery store here in La Mesa since I was 15 years old, so I worked for sometime and I had a girl that worked for me, so I had to show her how to clean house and how to do the laundry and everything. So there were Braceros that we had to show them how to do the job, you know, because I guess a lot of them had never worked before. So, they didn't know.

BM: But once they learned how, you were satisfied with their work?

CR: Yes, we were.

BM: If you were going to compare the Braceros work to that of people who were already U.S. Citizens, was there any difference that you could see?

CR: Not really, no.

BM: Were Mexican-American farmhands, you know, ones who had already immigrated...

CR: Um, there was a lot of farmers here that succeeded because of the workers they had. Some of them were very good workers. They really putting many years and a lot of work with the farmers.

BM: When your son came in, we had stopped the tape just shortly, but we were talking about some of the grocery stores that were here that catered to Braceros. What was the name of the one that he mentioned?

CR: SOMETHING. I worked there since I was...

BM: Bellman? B-E-L-L...

CR: B-E-L-L-M-A-N.

BM: Okay, and that place no longer exists?

CR: It's still there, but now it's Eagles...

BM: Eagles Grocery?

CR: Right. I started working since I was fifteen years old. We had everything, I mean, groceries, hardware, shoes, clothes, dry goods, everything we had in that store. They would bring us a list of the groceries that the Braceros and we would get it all together and the farmer would come and pick it up.

BM: Okay, so that would be like from any farmer in the area?

CR: Any farmer, exactly.

BM: What kinds of things did the Braceros usually have on their grocery list, do you remember?

CR: Pinto beans, and flour, sugar, and baking powder and stuff like that because I think a lot of them made their own flour tortillas. And maybe meat, you know, they would order meat.

BM: Was that clothing that your son was saying, that they stocked clothing?

CR: Mostly that they bought was shoes and boots. That's mostly what they would buy.

BM: Did they have like jeans and dungarees, the ones that you could buy there?

CR: Yes, uh-huh. But I think that for the Braceros, people would give them clothes, you know, people that didn't use the clothes anymore, they would give it to the Braceros, so they didn't buy that much clothes at that time.

BM: But they went through shoes?

CR: Yes, shoes and boots. (Laughs) They did.

BM: Did you ever notice any animosity between Braceros and any other farm employees that you had? Well, you said your husband kind of kept them separate.

CR: Yeah. I guess, he knew how to handle that. (Laughs) I don't know an idea.

BM: Do you have any idea of what the advantages and disadvantages of the Bracero program were now that it's over, what do you see as being its strong points or weak points?

CR: Well, I think that it is good that we had the Braceros to pick the cotton because their were farmers here, you know, in this country, that would pick cotton, but they didn't do as good a job as the Braceros did. I know of like one Bracero that he picked 800 pounds a day. 800 pounds a day. So, when it came to the cotton season, they did a great job, they really did.

BM: Would you have any idea what contributed to the program being ended?

CR: I have no idea, no I don't.

BM: If you had any influence on the situation, would you like to see the Bracero program reinstated?

CR: Well, probably it would help because, see nowadays, we don't worry that much because of all the farm equipment that we have. So, so, just for a few things. I don't know, I don't, well, maybe like onion picking and lettuce and all that, but it would just, I don't know.

BM: So, it might be helpful at harvest time.

CR: At harvest time exactly, uh-huh.

BM: If it was to be reinstated, how do you think it should be different from the way it used to be run?

CR: Well, it would be, like, I think it would be more expensive because the salary is much higher than the old days. I think it would be more expensive for the farmers.

BM: Probably...

CR: Housing costs and all that.

BM: Okay. I went through my list of questions here, but I wanted to ask you if there's anything we haven't talked about that we should talk about. Anything about the Braceros?

CR: I guess, um, that covers it, huh? I think.

BM: Can you think of any other people here in this area that used Braceros that I should talk to?

CR: In this area, let's see...

BM: You had mentioned the Archer Farm.

CR: Yeah, it's right over here.

BM: And who would I talk to over there?

CR: Mrs. Archer lives there. I'm sure they have a lot of history about the Braceros because he's been a farmer all his life, I think. I think they are a little older than me.

BM: What is, what is there names?

CR: I think her name is, I'm getting confused, Dorothy Archer. I should have asked Reuben. I can't remember, I know the last name is, I used to SOMETHING. And their son's name is Phillip.

BM: Phillip.

CR: Phillip Archer. I remember him because he was a little boy when he would go to the store as well. You could talk to Phillip. He lives in the SOMETHING house right here. The other is the parent's house.

BM: So, if I wanted to come...

CR: Yeah, if you wanted to come, yeah, call him, Phillip. He's a real nice guy.

BM: Alright, I'm gonna stop this now because I think we're pretty much done.

END OF SIDE B, TAPE ONE

END OF INTERVIEW