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Delia A. Pompa Nunez

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Delia A. Pompa Nuñez

Interviewer: Alejandra Díaz

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: Tolleson, Arizona

Date of Interview: January 12, 2008

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Transcript No.: 1595

Transcriber: GMR Transcription Service

Delia A. Pompa Nuñez was born April 20, 1952, in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, Mexico; her mother's name was Sofia, and her father's name was Gildardo Espinoza Pompa; she had six siblings; her father worked as a the bracero in the fields of Arizona, California, Idaho, Texas and Wyoming picking various crops; in 1956, when Delia was roughly three years old, the family moved to the United States; they later settled in Litchfield Park, Arizona; when Delia was sixteen, she married and eventually had three children. Ms. Pompa talks about living in Mexico with her mother while her father, Gildardo Espinoza Pompa, worked as a bracero in the United States; he labored in the fields of Arizona, California, Idaho, Texas and Wyoming picking various crops; her parents began filling out papers to immigrate to the United States in 1950, before Delia was born; while he was gone, her mother worked as primary school teacher; he often sent money by telegram, which her mother cashed at a local bank; in addition, he sent material, thread and needles to his wife for her sewing; once, when he returned home, he surprised Delia with a huge doll; as a bracero, he worked in some places where he was treated very well; however, in other areas, even the animals were better cared for; upon crossing into the United States, he was put in a holding area and went days without anything to eat or drink before getting transferred to the camp, where he was immediately sent to work; while he was away, her brother Elio was born; shortly after, in 1956, the family immigrated to the United States; they finally settled in a labor camp in Litchfield Park, Arizona, which they were very excited about, and the family continued to grow; Delia also worked in the fields, went to school and helped raise her younger siblings; she offers several anecdotes about her experiences living in the labor camp; when she was sixteen years old, she married and eventually had three children, two girls and one boy; she is proud of her father and his work as a bracero, because he was able to provide a better life for the family.

Length of Interview 64 minutes

Length of Transcript 35 pages

Name of Interviewee: Delia Pompa Nuñez

Date of Interview: January the 12th, 2008

Name of Interviewers: Alejandra Diaz

AD: Today is January the 12th, 2008. We're here interviewing Delia Pompa Nunez. We're here at Tolleson, Arizona. We're doing this interview for the Bracero Project of the University of Texas at El Paso under the Oral History Department. Hello.

DP: Hello.

AD: I was just wondering if we could start with your birthday.

DP: Okay. My name is Delia Angelina Pompa. And I was born in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, Mexico, and my birth date is April 20 of 1952.

AD: Okay. Perfect. What's the name of your father?

DP: My father's name is Gildardo Pompa, and he went by middle name, Espinoza. So it's Gildardo Espinoza Pompa.

AD: Okay. So how is – what was it like, the house that you grew up in?

DP: Our house was a very busy house. There was six kids, my father and my mother. We lived in a small apartment, like a two-bedroom apartment with a one bathroom. It was six kids in one room, and my parents in another, so you can imagine the crowding there. My sister and I shared a bed, a twin-sized bed. My brothers shared bunk beds, so there was two on one bed and two on the top. Once in a while, the little one, the baby, Ernofa, would once in a while walk out of the room and go to bed with my mom and my dad. He was the spoiled one, so he'd go over there. Actually, it was very – we led a very simple, very humble life.

My parents, they didn't have a lot to offer, but we got by with what we had. We never got spoiled with things, you know, toys, expensive toys or anything like that. There was no such thing as those kind of things for us back in those days. My mother was a great cook. She always kept us fat with her tortillas and frijoles and all the good things.

AD: What was her –

DP: Like this –

AD: Oh, I'm so sorry. What was her name?

DP: Sofia.

AD: Okay.

DP: Sofia. And she was well known for her cooking all throughout the little ranches where we lived here and there, so that's one thing. And she used to just take it upon herself, once in a while, and just teach her neighbors how to make tortillas. How to do, you know, different dishes, you know, that they liked, that they tasted, from our house. So then they wanted the recipes. So my mom used to be good at that. She used to love to teach people, or women in the neighborhood, how to do things, you know. And they were a lot younger than her, so she enjoyed that. She loved to be needed. My mother was the type of person that loved to be needed.

She was a great spoiler. She would spoil us, I mean constantly. She was more of the disciplinary type of woman, where my father was more of the nurturing, more of the loving, more the huggy, the kissy, type of person. So we respected both of them greatly. My father and my mother both, you know, they worked the fields. Every day they'd get up at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. They were gone.

AD: Did they own their land?

DP: No. My father and my mother never owned any property back when we were growing as young children, no. It wasn't until later on in life, my father must have been already – well, my brothers were all teenagers. They were already grown when my father first owned his first house. So we were always living in the living – well, homes that the ranches offered for the workers to live in.

AD: Okay.

DP: That's the type of housing they had. So –

AD: So you kept changing address then?

DP: We kept changing a lot. The most – the longest that we stayed in one place was in Litchfield Park. We lived in Litchfield Park for many, many years. I remember moving there when I was probably, like, in the third grade. And I – we lived in the same little house. I remember getting married and leaving that house,

and my parents still stayed there for quite a while after that. But as far as, like, our – the boys, my sister, we all went to school at Litchfield Park, and then from there we went to Avondale, we went to the Agua Fria High School.

AD: Okay. But that was after your dad was a bracero, right?

DP: This was after. This was after.

AD: Okay.

DP: Now –

AD: How about – oh, I'm so sorry.

DP: No, that's okay. Go ahead.

AD: How about in – when you were living in Mexico, and your father was a bracero, I understand. So were you living in the same place, or it was the same, like, moving around because of the ranches?

DP: No. My mother and myself, we lived with my father – oh, I mean with my grandmother. We lived with my grandmother.

AD: While he was gone?

DP: While he was here as a bracero. So he would work for certain amount of months, and then he would go and visit, stay for a month or whatever, and then he'd return back to the US to work. He would send money to her and would instruct her, you know, save your money. Save the money because I'm gonna bring you with me. And my mom thought it was all just a dream. I mean from the way she used to tell me, she thought that it was just a dream, that she would never come over here. My dad would always be the one working here and just sending money.

AD: How did he send the money? Do you know?

DP: I think it was all by telegrams, back in the day, Western Union type of thing.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: But I remember they used to – my mom, she would go to the – she would pick up a telegram, and then she would go to the bank and cash it. I don't know how it all worked back in the day. I was very

little, but I remember her just telling me that she used to get money from him. I think it was more like Western Union type of thing.

AD: Okay.

DP: And then she'd go cash it, and that was it.

AD: Okay.

DP: But she was a good saver. She would save her money.

AD: Yeah?

DP: She wanted to come and make a life with Dad.

AD: Oh, that's great. But would she spend it on something, like –

DP: She would – yeah, she would, of course. Yeah, my grandmother, she depended a lot on my mother, too. And my mother, I know she worked when we were in Mexico.

AD: Oh, yeah?

DP: She worked –

AD: What did she do?

DP: She was like a schoolteacher.

AD: Oh, okay. When he left?

DP: When he left, uh-huh.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: My mom was a schoolteacher. And I don't know that my brothers all know this, but there is a lot of things that I guess, through time, you know, you forget. And my mother didn't tell them this little stories about their life in Mexico, too. But my mother was a very well educated woman. She went through school, and she got her education, and she became a schoolteacher. And she taught, I believe, in the primary, like they called it primario. So it was, I think, from first grade or kindergarten up to, I believe, sixth grade or something like that.

AD: Yes.

DP: So, but she was a schoolteacher. And then right around – I would say, around 1950 – I wasn't born yet. My mother said that's when they started, like, their process, their paperwork for their process to come to the US. She said it took years. It wasn't anything that you can just jump into and do right away. So it took years for them to do the process of the paperwork. And then –

AD: So while the process was going on –

DP: Going –

AD: You were born.

DP: I was born in 1952. And then the process became a little bit harder because it was like – the way my father explained to me, it was like only so many could come in yearly, so you would get – it was almost like a lottery. You had to be picked to be part of that group to be able to sign in for that year. So it was like they kept trying and kept trying, and it just wasn't happening. So I think I was about like three years old when it – finally, they got their paperwork straightened out where they were able to, you know, get everything set cross the border to come and live here.

AD: Like '55, '56?

DP: '56, I would say '56, yeah. And then, I remember – because I was four years – I was about four years old, but I remember a lot of things. I would grasp a lot of things back in the day, you know, when I was little. And I remember, we came in through El Paso and stood in line for days. I mean just, literally, days to just get into the state or this – I think it was like a state office that they had to go through to go through the process. And they would have to get all their paperwork, everything, certified. And then they'd have like certain people that would speak to them, question them to see how much they knew about the US, who the president was.

My dad would say that it was like a little history test that they would throw at them, you know, see how much they knew. And my dad, of course, well, he was here quite often, so he knew quite a bit. So he didn't – my father never learned how to read or write, but my father was very bright. And you could tell him something, he would remember it.

AD: Wow.

DP: To the day when he passed, I mean he was very sharp; very, very sharp. I mean he always – you could – like I said, you could share something, he'd remember. And if he – if you took him – drove him somewhere, he would remember directions.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: And he'd remember how to get there; where we won't, but he will, you know, so.

AD: That's really handy.

DP: I know. I know. But finally, when he had already gotten everything set up, because when he had been in Texas and he already knew that he was gonna come into the US, he got a job. He got a job in Texas. And it was in Austin, Texas. That's where we – all four – all three of us came. My mom had already, in the process, had my brother, [Helio](#).

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: In the process had Helio because he was born in '56. So I – that's how I remember my mom breastfeeding him and stuff because he was a little, tiny baby, so.

AD: Oh, okay. So when you had to stand for days, was it like do you stay there like day and night?

DP: Yes. You have to stay there because you didn't want to miss your place.

AD: Wow.

DP: Because it was like – you had to stand in line because they would only allow so many per the day or per the week. I don't know how that – how they handled it at the time. I think it was so many that they could take because, I guess, back in the day everything was manual. There was no computers, nothing like that, so everything, you know, paperwork they had to do manually. So they could only accept so –

AD: They took forever.

DP: Yeah. So the process would take so long, so they would have to take so much work only. So in order for us not to miss our place, that's what we did.

AD: So everyone had to stay there for –

DP: Pretty much we lived like hobos, you know. We would have to have, like, our little blankets and pillows and whatever. And I remember going through that.

AD: Wow.

DP: And my father would have my mom just stand in line and say, “Just stay there with your mother. I’ll be right back.” So he’d come with something to eat. I mean it wasn’t the greatest, but he would come with something, you know. And when we finally made it through, we got a little house – it was like a little, tiny apartment house in Austin, Texas. And my dad worked for a rancher. I think his last name was Anderson. I’m not quite sure, but I think it was Anderson. And he was in – he lived – he worked in a pig farm. It was a pig farm for a long, long time. And around – he was there – we were there from like 1956, I want to say, until about ’57, the end of ’57.

AD: One year?

DP: Yeah, right in there. Because my next brother, then, was born in Austin, Texas.

AD: Oh, okay. So you were the only one born in Mexico or in –

DP: I was the only one.

AD: And –

DP: My brother, Helio.

AD: And Helio, right?

DP: Yes.

AD: But was he born in Chihuahua, too, or –

DP: Yes.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: Yes. So then –

AD: At this point your father is not bracero any more, right?

DP: No. At this point he's not a bracero anymore. He's considered a legal –

AD: Worker.

DP: Worker here, uh-huh, with a permanent papers, so he was able to work here. So that's where we moved. We started off our lives in Texas, in Austin, Texas. We stayed there for, I would say, approximately about a year. Then he had this other friend, his name – their last name was **Allejandro**, but I cannot remember their – his first name. And he convinced my dad to come to Arizona. And he had a little girl; her name was Blanca, and she used to hang around with me all the time, so that's how I remember – and convinced my dad to come to Arizona, so we ended up in Casa Grande, Casa Grande, Arizona.

And my father worked there another year or so, and then he started looking around. My dad was not the type that would sit around and wait for work to come to him. He would be the type that he would be out looking for work or looking for something better than what he already had. So I started school over there. I went for about a year. And then my father then came home and told us that we were moving again. So we were just on the go, you know, all the time. And we ended up in Litchfield Park. That's how we ended up in Litchfield Park.

AD: That's how. Yeah.

DP: And I was already, like, I think second or third grade. I can't really recall. And that's when we moved over to this area.

AD: So you started school here, right? Because you were like four when you first over.

DP: Actually, I was late because my mom didn't put me in school when I was in Austin, Texas, because I would have already been almost five. Let me see, yeah, because they came – no, not quite.

AD: '56? It would be four.

DP: Right. It would be four. Yeah. So then I started in Casa Grande because I remember starting over there. So then we – Bert was already born. He was a little baby. He was a little toddler. And then we moved over here to – that's Umberto, you guys have it

recorded as Umberto. So Umberto was already a little toddler, and then that's when we moved to Litchfield Park.

AD: Oh, okay. And then the rest were born –

DP: And the rest were born all here.

AD: Okay.

DP: All here. Now it was – my sister – I take it back, my sister was born in Casa Grande. She was – was she born in Casa Grande? No, she wasn't. I'm sorry. It was just my brother born in Austin, Texas, and then the rest over here.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: So the rest were born here.

AD: Okay.

DP: But then, it seemed like when my father moved us over here, we were all very excited. It was a big move for us. And when we saw this little house, I mean, it was like a little apartment, but to us, I mean, that was really special because we walked in and it actually had a little kitchen and, you know, had everything that we needed.

AD: Yeah.

DP: So we were really happy about that. But, you know, that's where pretty much we landed in Litchfield, and that's where we grew up, so.

AD: And then, do you have any memories of your dad leaving, or you were too young to remember? Like when he came over as a bracero, and you were living with your grandma and your mom in Chihuahua?

DP: I have just one vivid memory of him going, and we – him arriving at the house where we were staying. And my mom already knew that he was coming. And I remember her just holding my hand and telling me, "Go outside and look that way." And I said, "Why? I don't want to go outside." You know, where there is like you live like in a housing type, like an apartment type, but there is like a big corridor or like a big area, like a little – oh, what do they call them – yeah, kinda like – and then there is like a big gate, like a big gate to go out to the street.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: You know what I mean?

AD: Mm-hmm.

DP: So anyway, I open the door, and I looked outside, and I didn't see anything. So I remember telling her I don't see anything. And then finally I see him coming around the corner, and he had a big, old doll, a big, giant doll. And I remember just running down the street and just, you know, running into his arms, you know. And that's one thing I remember.

AD: So he brought you things?

DP: He would bring me things. But that's my most vivid, you know. And I was so, you know, taken by that, you know. And then I remember just – that's about really all. I remember him having to leave, and my mom crying a lot, you know, because she didn't know if she was gonna see – how soon it would be before she saw him again.

AD: So you never knew how long he was going to stay over there before he left?

DP: No. No. Because I was so little, but I just remember from time, as I grew older, my father would tell me he would be gone for months, sometimes up to six months.

AD: So you didn't realize how long he was gone?

DP: No.

AD: So you learned English when you came, like, in school?

DP: Yes.

AD: Okay.

DP: When I started, I didn't speak English at all, so it was very difficult for me when I got started. Back in the day when I was little, there wasn't – bilingual was just not around. You didn't see very many Mexican people or Latinos in the school system. It was mainly black and white. So if you would see another little Mexican kid, you'd get excited because, wow, there's another kid just like me,

you know. Only with me, it was so funny, because I have – I was naturally born a redhead. And I was a little white girl with freckles and, you know, I would get mistaken for being a little white kid when I wasn't.

And then when they hear me speak Spanish, they are like why – what is she doing speaking Spanish? So they thought I was – that was kind of funny. But I had to –

AD: Will they treat you bad?

DP: No. Really, I never went through any mistreatment in school. The only thing I did notice, when – this was – when I started school in Casa Grande, I never got treated bad. I did notice that when I went to Litchfield Park there was a little bit different treatment.

AD: Like more segregation?

DP: Yes. And they would sit, like – well, the teacher that I started with, she would sit all of the Mexican little kids on one row but at the end row, and all the others in the center. So we were always be, like, in the end, you know. So I remember that, you know. So – and I wasn't the brightest child in school because I was – I struggled because my parents, well, they didn't speak English, so they couldn't help me with what I had to learn, you know, with my homework. So I struggled with that. And it was very hard for me to grasp, as a child, because I had a lot of – I had responsibilities at home.

Even though I was a small child, I had responsibilities. When I got home, I had to do things because my parents, sometimes, would be gone. My – I would have to go and get my little brothers from the sitter or from the person that would watch them, temporarily. And then I'd bring them home and feed them and do what I had to do. So I was babysitting at a very young age. I must have been, probably, maybe eight or nine years old, and I was already babysitting and feeding the kids. So those were my responsibilities. So until I got all the – all my responsibilities out of the way, I'd try to do my homework.

And I remember not being able to do it because I didn't know, you know. I just couldn't grasp it in school, and then when I got it home and there was nobody to help me with it. So –

AD: And you were tired, too?

DP: And I was tired. And so I would just go to bed. And my parents would come in late, sometimes one would come in early, the other one late, and – it all varied, you know, it all – depending on the time of the year, too, because sometimes my mom would work early, come home early, and sometimes she'd go in later because it was the winter months. And we had very cold winter months back in the day.

AD: What was she doing?

DP: My mom would work – they called it the **desighe**, she would work getting the weeds out of the cotton, when it's a baby cotton, when it's barely coming out, and when it's newly planted. Or she would work in the lettuce, in the lettuce, too. So the lettuce, that was the most hardest work I've ever done in my life because I did that, too, along with my mother.

AD: Were you helping here?

DP: Yeah. I was only about 12 when they started – when I started working in the field, too, so. I worked in the field before, but not as much, you know what I mean? She would take me out, and my dad would get my – you know, sharpen up our little hoes to go to work. And it's very strenuous work. I mean you're bending over the whole day. And it would be like seven, eight hours a day. So when you get out of there, you are crawling because you can't even straighten up, you know. It's very difficult. So I remember doing that, and it was like in the winter months because the lettuce was more, like, in the winter months.

And in the summers we would work cleaning the cotton, like the cotton fields, pulling out the weeds and stuff. But we would still use the longer hoes, back in the day. We also worked in the grapes, and that was out in the El Mirage area. That's when – where my other two little brothers were born. We used to work out there, too. So I worked up until the time – pretty much until I got married, and I got married at a very young age.

AD: How old were you?

DP: Sixteen.

AD: Sixteen?

DP: Mm-hmm.

AD: You were young.

DP: I was very young, yeah, and very dumb, very dumb. But I don't know if I did it to escape all of my responsibilities. I don't know why I did it. I still think in my mind, now, you know, why did I leave? I could have, maybe, had a better opportunity because – and it's just something I did. And I – you know, I made a lot of mistakes in my life, you know.

AD: We all do.

DP: I shouldn't have done it, but I did. But out of that came three beautiful children that I have, so I am happy.

AD: Oh, that's the best part.

DP: I have my three kids.

AD: How old are they now?

DP: My kids? My kids, my oldest one is 38, and my youngest one is 33, and I have a son that's 36.

AD: Okay.

DP: So I have two girls and one son.

AD: Yes. So were you in school when you got married?

DP: No. Well, I was in school. I was a sophomore in high school when I got married. And, oh, it's a tough one. I stayed with the same person. He quit school, too, and we both got married. And in those days, you got pregnant, you just didn't hear of you just not getting married or living at home. You had to marry the person that got you pregnant. So I left – we got married and made our own little house. It was hard. I mean we were struggling, but I always had my father to lean on. My mother was more the strict one, but I could always kinda sneak by and say, "Dad, you know, I need this or the other."

He would make a way of helping us, too. So instead of helping them, I kinda brought more burden, really, because there was two more mouths to feed, you know. So, and then when my daughter was born, it was like my dad just took her in like his own kid, like his own child. So my oldest daughter is not – does not see my brothers and my sister as their aunt and uncles; she sees them more

like they are big brothers and big sister because that's the way she grew up, you know.

AD: Because they were also pretty much the same age.

DP: Exactly. **Arnofo** was just – I believe he was, like, eight years old when my daughter was born, so he was little, probably about seven, I would say.

AD: Yeah.

DP: So they grew up, you know, with her and –

AD: They all, together?

DP: Mm-hmm, all together. Right. So –

AD: Okay. So what do you hear about your father come here as a bracero? What kind of stories would he tell you?

DP: Oh, he would tell me about when they first would come in, in groups, he says it was – he said it wasn't hard to befriend other people that you came with. He said pretty much they would stick into little groups together and kinda help one another. He said that whenever the – whatever type of housing they gave them, whatever state they had to work, he said that they would pull together and kinda put their monies together, like, for food, for clothing, that kinda stuff. He said it was very hard. There was times when it would take time for them to get paid, you know, to get any kind of money for them to go buy groceries or do whatever they had to do, so.

AD: But they were not getting paid or it was because they were in, like, picking a lot of things?

DP: They would – yeah, they were getting them paid, I guess, like every – **[inaudible]**, he said every two weeks, you know, so they would get paid like every couple of weeks. So during the time – and back in – I don't think he was earning very much. It was just very, very minimum, you know.

AD: You don't remember how much he was making?

DP: I know that when he was starting at Litchfield, he was like making 80 cents an hour, 75 cents an hour.

AD: So you think it was less when he was a bracero?

DP: I mean, yeah.

AD: Okay.

DP: You can imagine. I mean, you're probably talking maybe a quarter, I don't know, maybe very little. I remember him having to put a lot of money away, you know, just so he could send money to Mexico. I don't think my mom received a lot of money. I think she received a little money, but whatever she could along with what she was making would put away to save.

AD: Do you –

DP: But –

AD: Do you have any problems, like, getting the money? Did it ever get lost or something?

DP: No. I don't ever recall my father or my mother saying anything like that. No.

AD: Would your mom work even when he came back?

DP: When he would –

AD: Yeah. Like when the contract was over, he came – he would come back.

DP: Like to Mexico?

AD: Yes, exactly. Would she still be working?

DP: Yeah. My mom was a very hard worker. The only thing is that when we moved to the United States, my mom, her – as a teacher, she could not do that here, you know what I mean?

AD: Because she couldn't speak English.

DP: Because she couldn't speak English. That was hindering her from moving ahead. So – and then with all the kids, she couldn't go to school. And my – and there was opportunities that were offered to them to go to school and to learn English, but they – it was something that they would be embarrassed to do, and they never did.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: They never learned. But going back to, you know, like the – his friends, like he would befriend, you know, other braceros, and they would kinda help each other and guide each other along the way. And if – and, you know, if one would go to Mexico before the other, the other would trust that one to take certain items or, you know, **dropa**, you know, from **segundes** and stuff to take back home.

AD: What kind of items would they take besides the clothes?

DP: I remember my mom, you know, taking – my mom was – she loved to sew, so my father would send her material, lace, thread, needles, whatever he could get in a box to send her.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: Those are the things that he used to send her.

AD: Would they mailed the things to her or just, like, take it back?

DP: They – sometimes he would take them back with him when he went or if one other braceros would happen to go by that area in Chihuahua or maybe close by.

AD: Yes.

DP: He would take – you know, he would trust that person to deliver that stuff to my mother.

AD: Yes. You never heard some stories about, like, people not delivering those things?

DP: Actually, no, no.

AD: That's great.

DP: They all – like my father said, he made a lot of very good friends. Through the years, you know, they lost touch.

AD: Yes.

DP: But I know that the one in Casa Grande he kept in touch with for many, many years.

AD: So long-term relationships?

DP: Yeah.

AD: Well, that's great. Wow, that's so good. And then, for example, what kind of job would he do when he went as a bracero?

DP: Okay. My father did several different things. I know that he came in – he said he was a coal miner for a short time.

AD: Where?

DP: I believe, if I'm not mistaken, I am thinking Wyoming.

AD: Okay.

DP: Okay? I am thinking that's where – if not Texas, one or the other. He used to do irrigation. He used to work in the fields and irrigate the fields. He worked as a –

AD: Where was that?

DP: Here in Arizona, basically. And he worked in the cotton fields, and the cotton fields that would be here in Arizona, too, in Casa Grande, basically. And in Idaho, of course, the potatoes, that's what – where he did. But my dad didn't run any type of machinery. They always gave him like the lower jobs, and my dad never – you know what I mean? There was others –

AD: Like picking –

DP: Exactly. He was always doing the fieldwork. So he did, like, the potatoes. And then the onion fields, too, he did that, too.

AD: In Idaho?

DP: In – yeah, uh-huh. And in California, they did a lot of, like, the strawberries, the plums, the peaches, grapes, just various, you know, because over there that's the type of work that they do in California. Now over there, there were times, too, that even when we were living, like, in Casa Grande and living in Litchfield, sometimes work would be really scarce, like in the summers, so my dad would pack us up and we would go out to California to work as a family, so we would all go.

AD: And you were – you would all work in the fields?

DP: I remember myself, my mother and my oldest brother.

AD: The four of you?

DP: Mm-hmm. I know that my brother, Umberto, tends to block things out. I don't know if it's something that he just can't deal with because, to him, it was like – it was something that shouldn't have been done to a child. We have talked about it, and he's always been really, like, hurt by that. And I said, "But Bert," I says, "they had no other way of life back then. You know, you were a child that would help your parent, and that's the way it was, you know." So, but I know Helio and I and Bert, we did pick cotton. We worked in the fields, in the onion fields. We just did a lot of various things, you know, just to help out.

AD: Okay. So did he tell you how was the life over there? Where they would live or –

DP: Where?

AD: For example, in Wyoming or Arizona or Idaho.

DP: There was, like, special housings that these ranchers – because they were basically, like, big ranchers, wealthy ranchers that hired on braceros to work in their places. My dad said that sometimes they weren't the best living conditions. Sometimes they were – they would treat the animals in the ranch better than they would the braceros. And I know that there was some that would have, like, no running water, no running toilets.

AD: Oh, yeah?

DP: They would have outhouses where they would go to the bathroom, and that sort of thing. Sometimes he said they would go without days and sometimes weeks without a bath because there was nowhere to take a bath.

AD: Do you recall where that was or, like, was it a state specific or –

DP: Yes. I think he had told me that it was, basically, Idaho, Wyoming, and in Texas because in Texas, before we made our life there that he brought the family in, he did work there temporarily also for different ranchers. And –

AD: Yeah. When he moved to Austin, right?

DP: Mm-hmm. So there was a lot of – you know, the living conditions for the people were very, very bad. They were just like little huts, like little wooden huts, kind of like you see on TV with the old movies with Shirley Temple, that kind of things. And it was just like one room with a little chimney in the corner, and that was it. There was no kitchen, no nothing. And they would sleep on the floor. I mean, you know, just sorta – just like that. And then they didn't have jackets to cover them from the cold. I mean their shoes were not the best. So they suffered a lot. I mean it wasn't just my father, but in general a lot of them.

AD: Would they take them to buy things?

DP: Yes. He said – he would tell me that, like, on Saturdays they would take them out to go buy provision, back in the day that's what there was for grocery shopping. So they would all get dressed, and they had like buses that would line up in the ranch there. And then they would just load them up and take them to town for a couple hours and then bring them back.

AD: Because they had – did they have to cook their meals?

DP: They had to do their own cooking, yes.

AD: Okay. So they –

DP: And sometimes –

AD: They bought their groceries, everything.

DP: Exactly.

AD: Okay.

DP: And sometimes, he said, it would be difficult because they didn't have the things, like dishes and spoons and pots and pots and pans or anything like that.

AD: Not even the basic.

DP: Exactly. They didn't have the basics, so sometimes they would just open up a can of beans and heat it in the can of beans, you know, and eat it out of the cans. So just – you know, just various things like that.

AD: Was the same, like, in every place he went?

DP: No, not every place. Sometimes, he says, there was ranchers that would be very good to them, and they would have – they would even give them clothes and – you know what I mean? They would be nice to them, and they'd say, "Oh, you look like you could use this. Let me give you this shirt or let me give you these pants or, you know, let me see what size shoe you wear." And my dad was the type of person that he never asked for anything, but he just had that kind of look, like, you know, people liked him. He was a talker, and he was a jokester.

And even though he was down on his luck and down, you know, on his luck and everything else, he would just be that type of person that would just have that charisma. I mean if he were sitting right here, he'd be joking with you making you laugh, you know. He was just that type of person. He was –

AD: Very likeable.

DP: Very likeable. And I think this is what made him move on in life, just to put behind him the things that would make him depressed and make him sad and just turn it around and be a –

AD: A positive, yeah.

DP: A positive kind of person, you know.

AD: Yes.

DP: And move forward. But he – I remember him telling me that there were a lot of his bosses that would give him clothes and shoes. And they liked him well. And where he would offer himself, even after he put in his hours of work, that he would offer and do something around their house. So he would always have, you know, not only his regular work but other things also, just to get a little extra.

AD: Extra money? Yeah. Do you remember, like, did he tell you how many hours did they work every day?

DP: Yes. They used to work between 10, 12 hours, sometimes longer.

AD: Did they wake up early?

DP: Very early, sometimes at the – like 4:00, 5:00, the buses were already waiting for them, so they had to hurry up and get things, you know, like their lunches real quick, little burritos or whatever they were gonna take and move on.

AD: Okay. What did they do with their spare time?

DP: I don't think they had a lot of spare time, but he would tell me that a lot of the men would – for entertainment, they would just get like a fire going somewhere in the yard.

AD: Yeah.

DP: And they would just tell stories about what they were gonna do, and when they were planning on visiting their families, that kind of thing. There were some that were – that liked to play cards, you know, stuff like that. So that's how they kept themselves entertained.

AD: And how many days a week did they work?

DP: Every day.

AD: Monday through Sunday?

DP: Monday through Sunday.

AD: Do you know how many people were there in the fields?

DP: No. That's something my father wouldn't really tell me, but I remember him telling me there was, like, buses filled with people going to the grocery. So they had – depending on where they were at, at the state where they were working, you know, it could be, I would say, maybe 20 to 100 people. It would all depend on where he was at.

AD: Yeah.

DP: Because even as a young child I remember when we lived in one ranch in Casa Grande, they used to load up the people on Saturdays and take them to town to the groceries or whatever shopping they needed to do. And that was when live was getting a little better. And we used to fill up, like, I remember three or four buses. And it was just a little camp and – so that you can imagine. It would all depend, I guess, where he was at, at the time.

AD: Yeah. Exactly. Because there were like big fields and small and –

DP: Yeah. And then the ranchers, back then, too, my father would tell me that sometimes they would request to have, you know, maybe 10 people, maybe 20 people, maybe more people, you know, because some of them had small ranches, some of them had big ones, where it would all depend on how many they needed. So it would all vary on the size of the ranch, I guess.

AD: Yes. Do you know which place was his favorite?

DP: He said his favorite was Wyoming. He said it was a very beautiful state. I remember him telling me that.

AD: Did he like the landscape and all that? That's why?

DP: Yes. He said he liked the landscaping. He said it was very beautiful. I guess they took them by train when he went there. And he said it was a real beautiful state, very pretty, a lot to see I remember him saying.

AD: Oh, did he kind of like travel around and saw a lot of things?

DP: Yeah. He – well, when they would take them, like, from Texas, when he first came in, and they would take them, they would take them by train or – it could be either by train or by bus. That's how they would transport them to their jobs.

AD: Okay.

DP: Because they would have, like, a certain place – he says it was like when they would bring in the braceros, you would report to a certain place. And then from there, you would kinda just distribute the workers wherever they were needed.

AD: Okay. So did they stay at that place and then daily they took them to the place?

DP: Uh-huh.

AD: Or was it like they got there, and they took them, and they stayed at the place where they were working.

DP: No. They would stay there where they were working.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: Because they were given, like, little houses, little huts to live in.

AD: Oh, okay. Yeah. I just asked because sometimes they just kept them all together, like all the workers in one place. And then daily, they took them to the workplace, and then they came back. That's why I was asking.

DP: Yeah. Because they would be – they would live in the ranch, but then they would drive them to their work, yeah.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: Because none of them had vehicles. Back then, they didn't have cars.

AD: And it was kind of far.

DP: Yeah. So they would just load them up and either – as a matter of fact, there is a picture of my father in one of these open trucks with – kind of like the ones that have, like, the wooden gate in the back.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: And they would stand up – they were standing up, and they were being driven to their job site. So I should get – try to get that picture. I remember that.

AD: Yeah. That's a really good picture.

DP: So they would take them either by bus or by trucks, you know.

AD: Big trucks, yeah.

DP: Big trucks, yeah, to their job site.

AD: Okay. Well, did he ever tell you how was the process – like when they decided to be braceros – because – so they went somewhere to get hired or – how was the process? Did he tell you?

DP: I don't recall too much, but I remember him saying that he heard it through a friend or by talking to people about it. And he said they were encouraging him to do this. And at the time, he had just started going with my mother. And he says, "You know, I wanna try it because there's no" – there was no work in Mexico. There was nothing to do. So he says, "I'm gonna try it." So I guess there

was like an area there in the border, in the borderline. And living in Chihuahua, it was always – I remember him saying we always came in through El Paso. So I don't know if there was an office in El Paso or somewhere in the border, I don't know. That they would just go and apply to be a bracero and then come over.

AD: Did he talk about crossing over? Did he say anything, like, what they do?

DP: They would put them, like, in a holding area for days at a time. And that's when I remember him telling me that they would, you know, not have anything for them to eat or drink or anything like that. So it would be like – they would like – it was like a holding area where they would wait until they were told or that certain facility or place would tell them – would be told we need workers. We need so many workers at this place. And then they would haul them off to that place. So can you imagine going from there, in that holding area, with not drinking or eating for days at a time, then going to your job site or going to where you had to report to work and not have gotten anything to eat or drink?

So they would still move on and work with no money in your pocket. So, you know, I remember him telling me that.

AD: It was tough.

DP: It was very tough, so.

AD: Do you remember if you had to have any documents?

DP: He always had to have a document with him. I remember looking – it was – it looked like a certificate. It said something like a bracero – something about the bracero program or something. I can't remember. But I remember a picture – it having a picture of him and his date of birth and where he was born and everything else, so. But he always had to carry something with him, yes.

AD: Okay.

DP: Some kind of identification, something showing that he was legally here, you know, working as a bracero.

AD: So he had to do all that process every time he crossed over as a bracero?

DP: I don't know if it was like an update – like they would stamp them every time that they would come back in, you know what I mean?

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: Because he was already registered, so he would go home to visit. Because I think they – from the way I understood it, is that they would only allow them to work so long, and then he'd have to go back and then come back.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: So I don't know if it was six months at a time.

AD: Like contracts?

DP: Exactly.

AD: Okay.

DP: So I don't know if it was like six months at a time, a year at a time, I really don't know.

AD: Okay. So did they have to go through a doctor's exam, do you remember?

DP: I think he did.

AD: Yeah?

DP: Yeah. I think he did.

AD: Okay.

DP: And I'm not too clear on it, but I think he did. I think he told me one time that, yes, they did have to go examine them.

AD: Did you keep in touch while he was there?

DP: What do you mean?

AD: Like when he was working, would he write to you or –

DP: He would have other people write him a letter to send.

AD: Yeah. Because he couldn't –

DP: Exactly. He didn't read or write, so he would have somebody either write him a letter to send to my mother. Then my mother would write him back and –

AD: And then someone had to read for him?

DP: Yes. Exactly.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: Yeah.

AD: Did he have any problems, like, I don't know, like a strike or maybe they were mistreated or something like that?

DP: No. I don't remember him being on any type of strikes or anything like that. I just remember one place – and I cannot remember the state that he was in – where he was eager to get out of there, just to finish that job and be eager to leave. I am not – I cannot remember that place [inaudible] remember.

AD: How come he wanted to leave?

DP: Because of the living standards, the living conditions. He just – they just couldn't – they were not treated well. It was more like a slavery type of thing.

AD: Was it the one where he didn't have any toilets and all that?

DP: I think so. Yeah. It had to have been there because I can't think of anyplace else – because in Texas, he did fairly well there, I remember. In Arizona, he did fairly well. The only states that I'm thinking is probably Wyoming and Idaho. Those are the only two. Now he was in New Mexico, too, for a little while in 1948. I remember him telling me that. That's around the time he married my mom.

AD: Okay. And what did he do over there?

DP: I have no idea.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: There I don't know, but I remember him telling me that he was there, too. He was in Oklahoma, too, during that time. So all of

these states in the mid-western and the southwestern area, where – whenever they needed braceros they would, you know, take them and – for temporary times. But I remember him naming Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico, Wyoming, and –

AD: So he went a lot of times, then?

DP: He went to a lot of places during the time 1947 all the way to '46 so – or '56.

AD: So I'm guessing he went, like, a couple times per year, then?

DP: That's what I'm thinking, too.

AD: So did he ever complain about the pay? Like, did he think it was too much work and a real low paycheck?

DP: Oh, yeah. He said it was too much work and not enough pay. He always said that, I remember.

AD: Was he really tired or –

DP: My dad always seemed – he said he got tired a lot, and they would try to rest as much as they could, you know, when they could. So there was no – I mean my father was a young man. And, I mean, there was no times for partying or anything like that like young kids now, you know. There was no – they wouldn't go out to town. They were pretty much confined in their place because these ranches were, like, far from town where they couldn't just hop in a car and go into town.

AD: Yes. Of course.

DP: It wasn't like that. They were confined to their job.

AD: How old was your dad when he went?

DP: My dad must have been, probably, maybe, late 20s. So if he was in his late 20s – because he married my mom when he was 30, and he was – that was in 1948, so.

AD: Oh, okay. So he went before he got married and then while he was married.

DP: Yeah. He went when he was about 28, 29. So, yeah, he was already starting to work very young and crossing the border here.

AD: Yes. And do you recall if he said something about sickness? What would they do if someone got sick?

DP: No. Not really.

AD: Or in case of an accident or something like that.

DP: In case of an accident? I don't remember him saying anything. He'd be quite honest with you. I just remember when he would say that he would have the flu or the cold or something like that, it was just something that you – they just got over.

AD: Oh, okay. They couldn't stop working or anything?

DP: No. No. Because they could – there was no doctors that they could go to.

AD: Oh, no?

DP: There was no insurance, unless they paid out of pocket, you know what I mean? But I remember him just saying if he ever got sick, I mean you just work along. You just get going.

AD: So how would the supervisors treat them?

DP: He had good ones, and he had bad ones. Because I asked him, I says, "Did you have good people that treated you good?" He says, "Oh, yeah, there was a lot of them that was good." But then there was a handful that were not. He says they were just – they just wanted to use you. They knew that they can use you as cheap labor, so they would use you.

AD: They wouldn't care about the person.

DP: Exactly. Exactly. But then there were some that did. And he had a lot of very good bosses that were very caring and very concerned about them and their welfare.

AD: Did he tell you any stories about that?

DP: In particular, I think he had, like, several that were, like, in Texas and California. Those were the two places, mainly, that he had bosses that were very, very good to him.

AD: Oh, yeah?

DP: Mm-hmm. They were very good to him.

AD: Did he have any contact with the families, like the supervisors' families, or even the owners?

DP: No. Not that I can think of.

AD: No?

DP: Mm-mm. It was just, like, brief, you know.

AD: Yes.

DP: Nothing like where he was invited over to their home or anything like that. No.

AD: Would they take them into town just to kind of like hang out or something?

DP: No.

AD: No?

DP: Mm-mm.

AD: Okay. They had no time?

DP: No.

AD: Okay.

DP: No. That was – because, see, I remember him telling me there was no time for party, no time for going out and sightseeing or anything like that.

AD: Okay.

DP: The only sightseeing they would get is like when they would go into town just for the groceries or when they were being driven from one job to another. That was the only sightseeing they would get, you know. And a lot of times they would just sleep, you know, they would sleep in the bus or whatever just to get to –

AD: Because they were too tired.

DP: Uh-huh. So, but no, I don't remember him telling me anything else other than that.

AD: Okay. From all the stories that he told you, do you think he was happy with being a bracero?

DP: I think he was, for the most part, because to him I think it was – it seemed like a better life than he had in Mexico. I mean he was pretty much, literally, starving over there with his family. So to him this was better. At least he was contributing. He was doing something for himself and then sending my mom, you know, whatever he could to survive. So it was like a survival type of thing, you know, back then.

AD: So how do you think that experience affected your life?

DP: When I was young, I really didn't think much about it. It was more, like, when I got older, when I started – I was being curious, and I would sit down with him at times, and I would just ask him questions. I would just say, "Well, what did you do?" He says, "Oh, if you would know the colds that we suffer and the summers, the heats that we suffered. I mean we went through so much."

AD: Because the field was really hot for them, right?

DP: It was hot, and then in the winter it was cold. And some of these states, you know, back then, those days, they had some snow or some cold, cold weathers where –

AD: Did they provide any, like, jackets or free sample? During the hot season, would they give them water or things like that?

DP: They would give them the water, of course. Yeah, they would do that. But as far as, like, jackets and stuff, sometimes they went without. So it was hard for them. He says that they didn't even have gloves, sometimes, like to put in their hands, I remember. So he went through quite a bit. So whenever he could, he said that – I remember him telling me that he never knew there was secondhand stores. And when he walked into the very first one, he said he was, like, wow, what have I been missing out on? I can come in here and buy, you know, a shirt for a nickel or ten cents or whatever. And that's when he got smart.

And I think, later on, when he had already been back and forth from here to Mexico, then that's when he would go to the segundas, to the second-hand stores and buy whatever he needed.

AD: Because it was cheaper?

DP: Mm-hmm. It was cheaper.

AD: Okay. So what does the term bracero mean to you?

DP: Bracero? That's a very hard word to define, really. Just a labor worker, labor worker, that's all that really comes to mind. I can't think of anything else.

AD: How do you feel when people call your dad a bracero?

DP: How do I feel? It doesn't – I mean I'm proud because it took him – that road – he had to take that road in order to make a better life. I feel proud for that, but I don't feel proud for what he had to go through to get there. I mean it hurts. There is – it hurts me. And to this day I think a lot about him, and I think a lot about what he had to go through. Not too long ago – if I can tell you a short story –

AD: Yes, of course.

DP: Not too long ago – my mother has Alzheimer's. And my sister and I took it upon ourselves to take my mother back to visit her family in Mexico. And she only had three sisters and two brothers left out of ten. So we went in 2001, in August, before the 911. We took her back and one of her brothers and two of her sisters, their living conditions were so bad and so poor. And, I mean, I am like – I just looked around and the way their children are. They are not that well educated, you know what I mean? They are still poor. And there are some that aren't, but they still don't help one another.

It's – it was like, wow, you know, you have some that are kinda like middle class and some that are very, very low class. So when I came back – we visited for about ten days over there. We saw all of our cousins and stuff. And come back and I told my dad, "Oh, Dad," I says, "I am so happy you brought us here." And he goes, "Is it that bad?" And I go, "Yeah. There was at least three families that were really, really bad and poor and, you know, they don't have a whole lot." And he goes, "Yeah." He goes, "That's why I wanted to bring you – you know, this is why we came here." And I said, "Well, I – if I could kiss your feet right now, I would."

I says, "Because I am so happy you brought us and took us out of that life to here, you know, because I am so proud." And this was,

like, about – before he died because he died in 2003, and this happened in 2001. And I says, “You know, Dad,” I says, “I am so proud for what you did for us.” And the way – even though he didn’t have money to take – to send us to college, we all managed to do something to get our way in there and through grants and stuff and scholarships. We all managed to get to where we’re at right now.

AD: Did you all graduated then?

DP: I didn’t graduate from high school, but I later on went back to school for my GED.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: And then I – all of them did. All of them have degrees. My brothers, they all have degrees. They are very well known.

AD: Oh, yeah?

DP: My brother is very – my oldest brother, Helio, is very popular because he’s on TV a lot. He’s – he started as a fireman, and he’s like a go-getter. He’s a go-getter, charge. I mean he’s going. And he doesn’t – nothing can stop him. He became a fireman, and then he became the chief – the deputy chief fireman for Glendale. You are talking the head person for all the firemen, all the fire stations, everyone. I mean that’s a big thing. That’s a –

AD: It is a really big thing.

DP: It is. And then my brother Bert, he’s an accountant. And he went to school for that. And he works for a big company. My sister, she’s an executive over for Hensley Beers. She works for the Budweiser. So she’s got a big position there. And my little brother works for Qwest. He’s a manager there or – actually, I think he’s more than a manager. I’m not sure his position. And **Armero** works in the bank, for the banks.

AD: Oh, okay.

DP: So he works for Bank of America and –

AD: So you all are doing really good?

DP: Doing very well.

AD: That's really good.

DP: And I'm more, like, in the health industry for – I have worked for a couple of health plans. I am kinda semi-retired right now, so I'm working just part time.

AD: Well, that's good.

DP: And this is something else. Yeah, just to keep me busy.

AD: You're getting to rest a little bit.

DP: A little bit. But we're – and I know it's – and I told my dad, I says, "I am just so, so thrilled and so happy that you just set this for us." Because even though he didn't read and write, he would stress, "You get to your homework." After we were growing up, he wanted to make sure that he didn't want us to be like he was in that type of job. He said, "Don't break your back like I did. I won't live long," he says, "because of all that I've been through and all that I've – my body is worn out." He says, "I don't want you guys going through that." He says, "I want you to finish school. I want you to make something of yourselves and be proud of yourselves."

And they all did. We all did. And I'm happy for that. And I told him. And he says, "You see, I'm glad, so all of this was for something." And I go, "Yeah. It was, Dad." And that was about –

AD: So he changed the lives of all of you?

DP: Of all of us. And to the end, he touched our lives. I mean he was just always laughing, always just, you know, making life good for us, you know what I mean, and always bringing us together. My dad had a habit. He was funny. On Sunday mornings he would call me and say, "Come on over." He goes, "All your brothers and your sister, they're all here." And I'd go, "Really? Is everybody there for breakfast? Nobody called me." He says, "Yeah. Come on over." So then I'd tell my husband, "Hurry up. Get dressed. Dad says we're having breakfast over there." So then we'd drive up, there is nobody there.

And he goes – and then pretty soon everybody starts driving in. He'd do that to everybody, so everybody would be at the house at the same time. So we're all popping in at the same time. It was so funny. It was just because he loved the house full of the kids, you know. He wanted everybody there all the time.

AD: Like, even though you had your own families, he wanted to have you close still.

DP: Mm-hmm.

AD: Well, that's really nice.

DP: That was funny. So that was his way of getting everybody at their house, yeah.

AD: Getting everyone together.

DP: Yeah.

AD: Oh, that's –

DP: Nothing was ever planned. He just – come on over. Let's do this. Let's do the other. But he was always a very loving, very nurturing, very, very good man, very good man. And we're all, obviously, very proud of him, you know. He went through a lot to get us where we're at now.

AD: Exactly. And that's really good.

DP: And, unfortunately, I had to tell you the sad part of it, but, you know, there was a lot of good –

AD: But it's all part of the story. So it's good because you don't – you can't always have it good.

DP: Exactly.

AD: So you have to start from somewhere, so that's really good.

DP: Exactly.

AD: Would you like to add anything else about your dad's experience?

DP: I think – like I said, with my dad's experience, I think that kind of made us all a lot stronger in life. Whenever we're – he taught us one thing, to help one another and to never – if you see one down, don't let that one go down. You go over there and help each other. Never stand just aside without doing anything. If one of – if your sister or your brother is hurting, you go over there and you help out, even down to the nieces and the nephews and the grand – you know, the grandchildren.

AD: The whole family?

DP: The whole family stick together. I mean that was one thing he stressed before he passed. He called us in individually and told us, you know, please promise me that you guys will keep this family together. Don't ever fall apart. Don't ever drift apart. I mean let my experience in life show at least show through you, and it did.

AD: All right. That's great. Thank you very much for your time for this interview.

DP: Oh, no problem. Thank you.

AD: And your dad seems like such a great person.

DP: He was. He was a very, very special person, and I'm sure he's dancing up in Heaven knowing that we at least acknowledge something about his life here.

AD: And he's really proud. I bet he's really proud of all of you.

DP: I know he is. Thank you so much.

AD: Thank you.

DP: Okay, Alejandra.

AD: This is the end of the interview.

DP: Okay.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 64 minutes