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Interview no. 1687

Mary Zamora

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Mary Zamora

Interviewer: Yolanda Chávez Leyva

Project: Voices from the Border Project

Location: Café Mayapan in El Paso, TX

Date of Interview: July 27, 2016

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Transcript No.: 1687

Transcriber/Summary: /Ana Urías

Summary of Interview: Mary was born in Ysleta, Texas in 1955. She grew up in Socorro, Texas and lived there until she was seventeen years old. Her paternal grandfather was a Comanche from San Elizario, Texas and her grandmother was an Apache from Ruidoso, New Mexico. They met in San Elizario, got married, and had fourteen children. Eventually they moved to Socorro, Texas. Mary attended Socorro Elementary School. She spoke mostly Spanish but had to learn English quickly because they would swat them for speaking Spanish. Her father worked building houses, was a janitor in the Ysleta School District, and would cultivate cotton. Mary grew up picking cotton and was about seven years old when she started. They had to pick at least 200 pounds a day or they would be punished. She would get good grades but would have to study very hard. Math was not her best subject. Her father would tell them that they had to learn but did not see school as an important way to earn money. He only had a third grade education. Today, he buys and sells land lots. Her mother had a sixth grade education. She worked in Mexico as a nurse but when she moved here, she was not able practice what she had learned. She became a home keeper. Her mother was born in Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, Mexico and lived in Torreon many years. When Mary graduated from 8th grade at fourteen, her father did not send her back to school and put her to work. He told the school that she had gotten married. She wanted to be a nurse and continue school but it was more important to him that she work the fields. Mary has a sister who is ten months younger that was also forced to quit school and work with her. She has brother that was born in 1962. He did get to graduate from high school. He joined the marines to get away from their strict father. At sixteen, her father took her to work at Farah Manufacturing but she only worked there for four days. He was disappointed in her for that because he felt that they were supposed to help contribute to the family. Mary got married at seventeen and moved to Ysleta to get away from home. She had two children and was a home keeper. She saw her married life as a mistake. Her father told her that the doors back home were closed. She eventually left her marriage but life was not the way she had imagined it would be. She remarried and had four more children. She believes that education is the most important thing because you cannot live happily by just running from home. The best thing to do

is to be able to support yourself. She later acquired her GED through a grant from the city and worked as a home health aide. She attended community college for two years. Her children were growing up so she had to quit school. She had five boys and two girls. She was a very strict mother because she was a single parent. They did well in elementary school but in middle school they started getting in trouble. She would expect them to deal the consequences of their actions and feels that she made them into strong adults because of that. Her daughter was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder at the same time she was pregnant with two sons. Because of the medication her daughter was on, the boys were born with many complications when she was only five and a half months into the pregnancy. They are sixteen now and inherited the same issues that her daughter had. Mary and her husband try their best to raise them to be productive adults. She feels that the school and the teachers are not equipped to handle children with disabilities like her grandsons. Her grandsons are Tigua and she would like for them to pick up the culture and learn to be a part of their heritage and tribe as they grow into adults. Her message for young people is to not stop asking questions because there will be somebody to help them. She wants them to not give up and continue to acquire as much education as they can to be productive adults. She recalls a time when her son was telling his children that she was a very strong person and never saw her cry during the day, but would hear her during the night praying and crying for strength to provide for her children. She believed that they had grown up not knowing that side of her. She is very proud of her children. She always felt that her father was angry at her for not being a boy. She never received a hug from him. From kindergarten to second grade, she cannot recall any Anglo children in school. But there were some from fourth to and on. They were the children of ranch owners. She always felt that she was seen as an inferior person and she would see that her classmates were not treated as well as the Anglo students. When she mentioned this to her father, she was spanked because she was not supposed to question anything. She considered the Anglo children to be lucky. The teachers were all Anglo. In seventh grade she had a science teacher named Mr. Quintanilla who later became a politician. He was a great teacher to her and was fair to all his students. She has always felt that the girls were not as important as the boys in school and in her family.

Length of interview 47 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a