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Borja, Martha Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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RL: What's your full name?

MB: My full name is Martha Swietenia Borja Godoy [Spell's it out]. It's a long name.

RL: What's your date of birth?

MB: Ok, I born [date removed], 1963.

RL: Where were you born?

MB: Mexico City.

RL: What was your mother's name?

MB: Victoria Godoy Bodadilla.

RL: And your father's name?

MB: Gustavo Borja Luyando.

RL: Do you have any siblings? Brothers or sisters?

MB: Oh, I got a lot: I got nine.

RL: Nine?

MB: Nine.

RL: Do you know their birthdays too?

MB: I know the, uh...

RL: Just the day?

MB: Just the day.

MB: The old one is August 27.

RL: What's his name?

MB: Gustavo. Alfonso is November 20, and then Marco is December 28. And Carla,
Carla is August 21st. And Guillermo is May 12. Then Alexandra is August 10. And Claudia, June 29 and Enrique, May 18. All these people. I have a half brother Hugo, and I really don't know about Hugo.

RL: Then Jaime's name.

MB: My husband? Is Jaume Raymundo Amaro Herrera; Hispanic names are too long.

RL: When did you get married?


RL: Where did you get married?

MB: In Toluca City- it's a city by Mexico City.

RL: Now your children's names?

MB: Jaime and Alex.

RL: What's their birthdays?

MB: Jaime is [date removed], 1986. Alex is [date removed], 1990.

RL: Where were they born?

MB: In Toluca City.

RL: What's your religion?

MB: Christian.

RL: Where do you go to church?

MB: Third Reformed.

RL: Did you go to school?

MB: Yes, my education? I got a degree in administration business in Mexico and here I tired to... I finished an associate in early childhood and I'm trying to get my full
Where have you lived, the places you've lived in your life?

Different cities in Mexico. I lived a long time in Toluca, and I lived in Cancun. I lived in Campeche; I lived in Mexico City also.

Do you know the dates you lived there?

Well I remember about Cancun and Toluca. Toluca- my family moved to Toluca when I was 13, so since '79 and so eight years ago I moved to Cancun. The other cities- no, because I was really little.

What were your jobs in the past?

Well in Mexico, I got a lot of different jobs. Basically, after I got my degree I worked in administration business. I was, for a long time, manager in a big company and taking care of all the stuff about customers and accountants, and my last job was a general manager in a company in Cancun taking also the accounting business, but everything was around administration business, always.

Did you have any memberships in any clubs or organizations?

Not really in the USA. The only membership I got was in my church.

Do you know the approximate salary you got in Mexico?

In pesos I know, my last salary in pesos was almost 5000 pesos. Compared to dollars, is 500 dollars per month.

When you first came here what was your first job?

Cashier.

What was the salary then?
MB: Six dollars per hour- sometimes I was working twelve, fourteen hours a day.

RL: Did you get any other jobs?

MB: Here? When I was working, it was only this job. Working really early in the morning 'til four or five to take care of my family. Just one job at that time.

RL: Then did you get any different jobs after that?

MB: After this job I started to be a teacher assistant in Head Start, and it was like one year and a half being an assistant, and then it was study at the same time. Now I am a teacher leader, but just two jobs here.

RL: How did you find those jobs?

MB: Well the first one, I meet with the owner of the store and he offered me the job, and I took the job. Then I started to meet with the church- Third Reformed. They told me about this job, and they suggest me to change the job because it was not really good job. It was hard for me, and they help me a lot for apply- for reference and all this stuff for a better job.

RL: How long did you live in Mexico before you came here?

MB: How long? All my life.

RL: How many years?

MB: 34 and a half.

RL: So do you remember the date you moved?

MB: I arrived in an airport in Chicago; it was July 19, 1997.

RL: Why did you come here?

MB: Well the first thing was because my youngest son, he was asthmatic- really hard
asthmatic in the past. He needed a lot of medical attention. In Mexico, the medical attention is free but not always the best. So somebody suggest us to move here and they offer a lot of options, and that was the first idea to move here- for Alex's health. That basically was the idea.

RL: Did you know any English before you came?

MB: No, none at all. I got English lessons before in college, but you really don't learn the English because the people who were trying to teach me- they never practiced English. I can understand a lot reading in English because in my school, many of the books about administration come from the USA. But not really speak because it's hard, the accent all this stuff- especially because my accent is too strong because it's too hard for me. But speak, no- I never speak nothing before.

RL: Was that really hard when you were a cashier?

MB: Yes, it was really hard because it's a different culture, it's a different language. Everything is different, so in my country, I was working the really nice jobs in my office, sitting in my office with somebody to help me. When I moved here I needed to do physical work. It's too heavy for me because I never do this kind of job before. It was a process to assimilate and have a cultural wall. It was really stressing for us the first two months- it's terrible because it's hard. You want to communicate and you can not do it because you do not speak the language. It was really hard for us.

RL: Was it hard to find jobs?

MB: Not really for me because somebody from the church helped me to find this kind of job. I really don't have time looking for a job. More my husband than me. 'Cause
he's the papa, he need to work more hours than me to support the house, but it's kind of hard when you don't speak the language.

RL: Did he find something?

MB: He found other things to do, but he worked in a factory, stuff like that. Sometimes he can find job for two months, four months and then they- like contracts but he really don't have one. Like one job, two jobs are the same.

RL: Were there any unique stories from your past before you came?

MG: Well when I got married and we decide to have kids, I was excited about having kids- that I was a healthy person all my life until I get pregnant. My pregnancy time was all the time like a high risk always, and Jaime was born with eight months pregnancy. And then get another pregnant time, I lost the baby with seven months pregnancy. And then Alex with six months pregnancy. When Alex, my water in my side was broken and with the six months pregnancy, and I go to the doctor and the doctor said, 'oh there's nothing to do because the baby is too premature- he don't have any sound already, he's died' he said. And this time I never read a Bible before in my life. I was Catholic all my life for tradition. This day I started to believe one God is talking care of me because the doctor said 'your baby died, you didn't have nothing to do', and I was praying to God with Jaime. And two hours later, one doctor check me again, and they can hear my baby and he's here. So it was something really important in our lives because when Alex born our lives started to change in many ways, and I think Alex is... I think God sent us Alex for change our lives because everything that would happen around us is connected with Alex's life. So this
something really important for us because it is a time when our family know Jesus. And I think it is the most exciting thing in our lives for a long time.

RL: Were there any struggles you had to deal with when you came to the United States, besides the language.

MG: First thing was try to find a way for our family. My family first moved here with tourist visas, and it's kind of hard because everybody is pointing you because they really don't know what is your status. So the most important problem with us was this because I tried to change the status 'tourist' to 'job'. It's kind of hard in this country, but it's already in process. So I'm just praying for this process continues. That was the only thing, I think, because the first thing is if you don't speak the language, people assume automatically you are not legal. And it's kind of hard because they don't know what you are trying to do. So it's hard for us... in another way- no, because the community is really, how do you say, special community. You don't feel like you are in a different country in Holland. I was for one month in Chicago and I felt completely foreign because they make you feel like that, nobody talk with you, nobody speak with you. In Holland, everybody's trying to help you-everybody's family. So I think it was not really really really hard hard hard for us. It was hard for adapt to the culture, the language. To learn the language was the most. I think it's okay, especially in Holland. I don't think they have really hard things for us.

RL: Did you have troubles finding a house, a place to live?

MB: Yeah. Our first apartment was hard because they ask you for a lot of reference, for
previous renting, all this stuff. Finally we got an apartment and the owner of the store where I was working, he offered to sign for us. That was the first apartment for one and half year, we rented this apartment. And then the church buy this house, and they offered to rent to my family and the second house was easy because now all my family is members of the same church. It's hard for people to find, especially find an apartment in a good area. A safe area, it's hard.

RL: What did you expect of the United States before you came? What did you think of the United States?

MB: When I came here, my expectations was to try to find like a health program or something to help my son, but I really don't have much expectations because I was sure if my family move here, everything would be better than Mexico. Because in Mexico, you work like a professional, but you live like a work. In USA, you work like a worker but you live like a professional. So it was a long time I studied the USA economy. When I moved here I was sure about what this country can offer me. They have a lot of opportunities for everybody, just be a little bit intelligent to take the opportunities because they have much to offer. Too many people just walk around and don't take this opportunities for growth. I think this country can fill al the expectations for people.

RL: Do you have more family in Mexico?

MB: Yes.

RL: Was it just you and Jaime and Alex and Jaime- were you the only ones who came? Or did you come with someone else?
MB: Just Jaime and I moved here, but before one of my oldest brothers- he had fourteen years living in New York, he got married fourteen years ago with a North American woman. He lived there, and I got another brother who live in Puerto Rico- four years ago. No any more who want to come because they have a, oh not a perfect life, but they got a good life in Mexico and they don't have any ideas about move here. Not really, it's just us. It was just for Alex.

RL: How did you get here?

MB: By plane.

RL: Was it hard to become legal?

MB: Well it's a long process. It's a long process because you need prerequisite, requirements. The most important thing is somebody who support you economically. In this point, our church is helping a lot and that's the reason this process is working. I know many people who have ten to twelve years, and they can not be legals because they check everything. They ask for your education, they ask many things, they check everything so it's kind of hard. It's a long process. I really don know when this process will finish.

RL: Was it hard to get medicine for Alex?

MB: What happened is when my family move here, I take him to the health department, and they checked him and they gave me all kind of attention- also medication. They ask me how much income I got and percent my checks. They helped me a lot. Was not hard because they help me a lot. Then I started to work for Head Start, and I have insurance now. So now I can use my insurance, but before they helped me.
The Health department helps a lot of people. They don't care is you're legal or not. They don't care about status, they help kids always.

RL: Do you like it in Holland?

MB: Yes a lot. I think it's perfect place for grow kids because one of the most important factors of all is the Christian community here. It's really strong so you can find some areas with problems. You can have your porch open all day or you can put your bicycles in the yard and nobody take. Many places you can not do that. In Mexico, if you leave your door open for only one hour if you leave something, all your furniture is gone. Depending on where you live, but his place is awesome, I like it.

RL: What do you think of the growth of more people coming here?

MB: I was talking with my husband and I don't know what to think about it. It's kind of, it's not fair for Holland people who grow here. Like my family's moving and moving and moving here, because all the families around here, well not all the families who move here want to grow. They just move because they want good jobs and a safe place, but they are doing nothing to keep these conditions. They move here but they move with ideas from large cities and they don't respect much- the community. It's not fair for people who were born and grow here. Maybe it can be good if these people come here and participate to the community because it can be a strong community. But if they come to break rules, it is not really good.

RL: How long do you think you'll live here for?

MB: I really don't know because I don't know if our process is working. But if they decide don't give us finally status because they have the right to say no. If they say
no, my family need go back because I don't want to stay with a illegal situation because I can not expose my kids to this. So if they decide to give us the permit, probably stay here until my kids graduate or something because they got good opportunities through the education here.

RL: Do you think you'll keep your job here for a long time?

MB: Yeah, well I want to finish my degree and take more classes in college. I never think before to work with kids. What happened when I moved here, USA department recognize our degree in our country. They are required to go to the college again for two years. So if I started to pay by myself for the college, it is hard because you can not work and study at the same time. So now in this agency, I like my job because I am working with Hispanic kids. I feel like I am starting to start a new focus in my life with the kids. So I plan to continue in a college because the agency pay for my college. I like my new job and I really enjoy what I'm doing so I think I will stay and continue teaching preschoolers.

RL: How did you get to know more about Christianity?

MB: The first connection was with Alex because Jaime and I started to feel like somebody is up taking care of us, but nobody told us about Jesus- nobody teach us never to read the Bible. So one day I meet with the missionaries from Church of Christ in Mexico. They invite us to assist the church. My family was hungry about know about God, and I started to read the Bible to a class with the church. I started to meet with the church. I remember when Jaime and I first came to the church, it was just ten families there and they invite us to work doing the same- talking to different people.
When my family moved to Cancun, this was a big congregation so Jaime and I continued being Christians, but it was a transition because when you don't know nothing about Jesus and somebody talk to you about Jesus, you put all your faith in one doctrine, because it's the only one you know. And then when my family moved to Cancun we could not find church around to meet. So I started to meet in my family home- our own services. Then when my family moved again to USA, I started to live around a Reformed Church. But it was a long process, it was almost seven years of growing in our faith by themselves because they have no really people around trying to hold close relations with God. Many times my husband and my kids sitting in the living room singing hymns and reading the Bible, talking about God because I didn't have any church. They had a lot of Catholic Church around but my family decide to broke relations. Because all our life we grow with this kind of religion and nobody teach us who was really God. So now I think in this time in USA, God really show us how much he loves my family because he take care of us from the first day we moved from the coast to this country until now. He's always present in our lives so I think my heart has a good relation with Him. Basically was our first basic was in the Church of Christ in Mexico with missionaries.

RL: Do you have anything else that you would like to share?

MB: No.

RL: Thank you very much.

MB: You're welcome.