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Marquez, Noelia Oral History Interview: Class Projects

Juliane M. Lenon

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Oral History Interview
Interviewee: Noelia Marquez
Interviewer: Juliane M. Lenon
November 2, 1998

JL: Please state your full name.

NM: Noelia Marquez.

JL: What was your date of birth?

NM: [date removed], 1969.

JL: Where were you born?

NM: Mexico, a small town called Lamo.

JL: How long did you live there?

NM: About 22 years.

JL: What were conditions like in your hometown?

NM: Like?

JL: Was it a big town?

NM: It was a small town. It's about 300 people, 500 maybe.

JL: Were there a lot of businesses?

NM: No, there were no business.

JL: What was your childhood like when you were small? What was your home life like? What did your parents do?

NM: Okay, well my home was a big house. It had four bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, dining room, two bedrooms. It was big. It was very nice, we had a farm. We walked there. We had a lot of cows and animals and chickens.
JL: Did you work on the farm?

NM: I helped out, but I went to school too.

JL: What traditions and customs did your family have when you lived there? Did you celebrate holidays and Mexican culture?

NM: Yes, we had a lot of holidays there. Like today, November two, we have something called Dia de Los Muertos. We celebrate that too. And Christmas and November 20 we have another that is like, it's a holiday, it's a big holiday for the country. We have about, oh- a lot, but maybe twenty holidays per year.

JL: Did you go to school in Mexico?

NM: I did.

JL: What grades did you go through?

NM: I didn't finish high school. I quit high school. But I went to the eleventh grade, I almost finished but I didn't.

JL: What was it like there to go to school?

NM: It's a lot different here. Teachers were different. I had a lot of friends. I really liked my school.

JL: Did you have a job in Mexico or did you just go to school?

NM: I went to school, and I helped my parents on the farm.

JL: What did you do in your free time?

NM: I went to play volleyball with my friends, we went out shopping, we liked to play basketball too, a lot. It was one of our favorites.

JL: Did you belong to a church in Mexico?
NM: Yes, Catholic.

JL: Were you really involved in that church?

NM: Oh yes. I think it was one of my hobbies too. I spent a lot of time there. I didn't spend a lot of time but I helped with everything that I could. At my church we'd celebrate Christmas. We used to do a big party of that. And I was always involved in that. It was like five months.

JL: What was your main influence in coming to the United States?

NM: My parents.

JL: Was it a difficult decision for them?

NM: Oh yes and for me too. I cry a lot. I didn't want to come. I remember, I still remember, I cried the whole way here.

JL: Why did they decide to leave?

NM: Because my parents wanted us to go to school. There was a big difference. It was difficult to go to school there. It was a small town. You could go to certain grade and you'd have to go out of there to go to school because they don't have like universities there or colleges or something, just high school.

JL: So it was mainly for education for you.

NM: Umhmm.

JL: Did they have any concerns about leaving Mexico?

NM: Well it was difficult because it was our hometown but all my family lived in the United States. We did not have family there so we didn't have that concern. Just my home is there.
JL: What did other people think of you leaving, like your friends?

NM: Oh my friends, they didn't want us to come. The night before we came to the United States, we did a small party like a birthday party and I remember all of them cried too. When I remember it I still want to cry. But now all my friends lived here in the United States so we call each other and write and I see them very often.

JL: What was your overall view of America before you came here?

NM: I didn't know much about America and the culture. Yeah, I'm still learning.

JL: So did that scare you when you came?

NM: Well it was difficult because the language, it was very, very difficult. At first I remembered I didn't know how to say 'hi' or 'thank you'. It was difficult at first. I think that was my main obstacle, it was very difficult, the language was.

JL: Did you leave anybody behind? You mentioned before that you didn't have any family in Mexico right?

NM: Not right now. I have my friends still but when we left, they left too. About three or four months later.

JL: How did you get here?

NM: By car.

JL: Where did you first settle when you came? Did you come directly to Holland?

NM: To Holland.

JL: What brought you here?

NM: My father work here before we came. He live in Chicago for many years but he didn't like us to come to Chicago because it was a big city. It's very different schools and he
looked for a small town. He liked Holland.

JL: What were your first impressions of America after you arrived here?

NM: I liked it. I like it a lot.

JL: Did people seem to accept you?

NM: Yes. I hear a lot about discrimination and all that. I have never had it happen to me. When I think about it I say, 'what are you talking about? I've never had it happen to me'. Yet... so far.

JL: Was America different from the stories or the background that you had?

NM: That I had heard before? Well, I didn't hear a lot about Americans before I came. Just that school is small and a little history of the United States, that was it.

JL: Was there a legal system that you had to deal with or your parents when they came here?

NM: Yes, we had to get our residence before we got here. Our passport and all that. We spent days.

JL: It was a long process then?

NM: Oh yes.

JL: Did you find work after coming here?

NM: I didn't work right away because my parents wanted for us to go to school and learn some english before we start working. I spent three years at Community Ed. learning english, and then I start working.

JL: Did you know any immigrants that came here with you or before you?

NM: With us? No.
JL: So it was just your family?

NM: It was just my family. Yes. It was very strange because we didn't know anyone here. At first I said I really wanted to go back, but now I'm okay. I like it here.

JL: What specific events of your early years here in America are most memorable to you?

NM: The events?

JL: Anything that happened after you came here that you remember well? That you were happy about or didn't like.

NM: Well, I like that now I go to college and I'm very happy with that. I learn a little bit of language, and when I went I got to college I got a job. I have six sisters. I have four nephews. All of them were born here, and I think that our family is very close.

JL: Where did you go to college?

NM: Davenport.

JL: Have you travelled back to Mexico?

NM: Yes twice, but we stayed there for only two to four weeks.

JL: Was it to visit friends?

NM: Yes, well I don't have a lot of friends there. But always is nice to go back to my hometown. To my house.

JL: What is your impression of the city of Holland?

NM: I like Holland. I like small towns. They are quiet and the people are different.

JL: How has it changed since you first arrived? Has it changed at all?

NM: Yes a lot. I've been here for about eight years. Seven or eight years. I remember that when we got here, there were not a lot of Hispanic people. There were very few and
the only thing we would hear was English and English. And now I'm surprised that there is a lot of Spanish people, and you can hear a lot of Spanish everywhere.

JL: So you can relate to them?

NM: Yes. It's getting bigger too, Holland.

JL: When did you learn to speak English? You mentioned you learned in college.

NM: Yes, I went to the Community Ed., and I'm still learning. I always think, 'how could I say that, how could I say that'. But I'm getting there.

JL: You do really well now. Do you believe that there is a difference between people raising their children in America than the way they raise them in Mexico?

NM: I don't think so, but parents are parents everywhere. They always love their childrens and they want the best that they can have for them. I think it's the same everywhere.

JL: What do you like the most and least about American people?

NM: The most and the least. Wow, that's a hard question. I never think about that. I like being here because, as I said before, life is different. It's more easier. There are a lot more opportunities. I think it's what I really like about Americans. They give you opportunities to advance when you really want to.

JL: Do you still celebrate the Mexican holidays here, or not as much?

NM: Well, not as much. It's different because there on holidays you don't have to go to work and here we do, so we don't have time to celebrate them. Sometimes we remember, 'oh, it's a holiday in Mexico'.

JL: Are you involved in the Holland community?

NM: Yes I go to church, I try to help people whenever I can. I like to get involved in
JL: Are you a member of a church here? You said you just went to church. What church do you go to?

NM: St. Francis De Sales.

JL: Would you ever want to go back to Mexico to live?

NM: Yes, I'd want to go but, I don't think that I'd want to go to live because now I have my life here. Sometimes I think, 'well what am I going to do there?'

JL: Have you been happy here, and would you make the same decision again to come here? But your parents made the decision.

NM: Yes they did for me. They said 'let's go whether you like it or not'.

JL: In what ways has your life changed most?

NM: I think it's very different. I think it's that now I am very busy. I almost do not have time to do whatever I like because I have something to do. And there, I had all the time in the world to do whatever I wanted. It's different, but I like being busy always.

JL: What do you miss most about Mexico?

NM: Christmas and New Year.

JL: Do you have any last comments that you'd like to share? That's all the questions I have.

NM: Well, what can I tell? I'm very happy here. I like my life here. But I still miss my country a lot. I don't think that I can't ever forget my hometown or my house.