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Cantu, Ernesto Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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Oral History Interview
Interviewee: Ernesto Cantu
Interviewer: Andie Masick
November, 1999

AM: What is your name?

EC: Ernesto Cantu.

AM: When were you born?

EC: [date removed], 1936.

AM: In what city were you born?

EC: Monteray, Mexico.

AM: How long did you live there before you came to the United States?

EC: Oh, seventeen years.

AM: You were seventeen years old when you came?

EC: Yes.

AM: Can you tell me a little bit about your city or town down in Mexico? What was it like?

EC: It was a big city, like any other big city.

AM: Do you have any memories of what you did as a child, what kind of activities you did and stuff?

EC: Well, I used to play football when I was in college.

AM: Can you tell me a little bit about your family- like how big it was, what you guys did together, and stuff like that?

EC: Well we were only two brothers, that's all. One lives in Monteray and the other one lives in Guadalahra, and myself.

AM: So you went to school in Mexico?

EC: Yeah.

AM: How many years, just seventeen?

EC: Well, I went six years in grammar because everybody does six years in grammar. Then three years in like a high school, and then three years in college.

AM: What were your first decisions to come here to the United States?

EC: I'm not sure now. At that time- well, my mother passed away when I was small, and then my father got married again. And then I decided to come here, that's all. I used to have some friends in Chicago and I came with them.

AM: Did you come by yourself or did your whole family come?

EC: Yeah, just myself.

AM: Did you work at all before you came here- in Mexico did you work?

EC: No, I was in school.

AM: Were there any difficulties for you to come here?

EC: No.

AM: How did you get here?

EC: Well, like I said. Some friends, they used to live in Waukegan. So they gave me a ride to Chicago, and I stayed in Chicago with some of my friends and they just keep going.

AM: What made you decide to come to Holland?

EC: Well, I used to live in Chicago for about seventeen years. I got married there, I got two kids. And then we started looking for a smaller town because Chicago started

getting too bad- you know the neighborhoods and everything. I used to work in General Motors at that time, electric motor, and one of my friends- he born here- and we used to come with him every weekend, stay a few days, whatever. And I liked it so then I start looking for a place and then we came here.

AM: What was your first job here?

EC: We bought the store and we stay here- 29 years ago.

AM: What were your first impressions when you arrived in the U.S.?

EC: First impressions. Well, I really liked it because everything was nice and clean and the traffic and everything- so it was nice.

AM: Were they different impressions then when you thought they would be before you came?

EC: No.

AM: As an immigrant, have you felt accepted in our society, or have you felt some discrimination at some times in your life?

EC: Well sometime there are. (laughs)

AM: Do you want to say anything about those instances?

EC: No, I'd rather not.

AM: Did you know english before you came?

EC: A little bit.

AM: Was it kind of a barrier at all?

EC: Well, not too much.

AM: How do you keep in touch with your family and friends back home?

EC: By phone. I mean, before we used to go a lot. Now we don't, but I mean I always call 'em.

AM: Have you gone back to visit at all?

EC: Oh yeah, but not for the last seven years. The last time I went it was seven years because then I got sick, and then I got surgery. First I got a knee replacement, then I got cancer. They cure it in three months. But anyway, I have to keep going for check-ups and everything. But next month we go for vacation.

AM: What traditions and cultural celebrations did you celebrate back in Mexico?

EC: How did they celebrate them you mean?

AM: Yeah, because I'm not really familiar with it. I don't really know what goes on.

EC: Well me neither because I was too small when I came here. I mean, when you're a teenager, you don't care too much about everything. But, what I really celebrate more now than I used to before. Like in a small town, yeah they do it a lot. But in big towns they don't do it as much as in a small town.

AM: From your family back home and now your family here that you have, what are some differences. How have you raised your children different and stuff like that?

EC: Difference in raising?

AM: Yeah, I know that some people say that families in Mexico are really extended and you have a lot of people who you're really in contact with.

EC: Well, over there they are more close together. They see each other more often and they are together more. Here they don't. Like my son, I don't see in two- three weeks, maybe more. But over there, everybody's more close together.

AM: Do you carry on some traditions that you had back in Mexico? Did you have many traditions in your family that you did or anything?

EC: Yeah well sometimes we do that. But actually, the big one over there is labor day, same as it is here. It's a different, but then you got another one like Revolution Day- November 20. And there are a few that we don't celebrate day.

Lady: Independence Day.

EC: Oh Independence, yeah. Sinco de Mayo and September 15, that is independence.

AM: Do you tend to celebrate those while you're here too?

EC: Well not exactly, no. We just remember and we know what it is and everything, but that's about it. Like in Chicago they celebrate more. What they do in Chicago or in San Antonio, where they have the parades and everything. Over here there's no holiday.

AM: When you got into Chicago at first, what did you do there? Did you work?

EC: Oh yeah.

AM: Where did you work?

EC: I start working in a steel mill. Then I just keep changing jobs every so often.

AM: Did you find it hard to find a job or was it pretty easy?

EC: No.

AM: Do you want to comment on any experiences you've had. Like back home or here or just like life experiences.

EC: Life experiences. I don't remember that much.

AM: I don't really have any more questions. Thank you very much for your time. I

appreciate it.