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Trevino, Maria Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with Maria Trevino

(unedited)

Conducted November 21, 1996 by Janet Tate

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project "150 Stories for 150 Years"
JT: First, if you could tell me your name and state your maiden name too?

MT: My name is Maria, my maiden name is Gomez, and my marriage name is Trevino.

JT: Your date of birth?

MT: [date removed], 1961.

JT: Can you tell me where you were born and when you came to Holland for the first time?

MT: I was born in Saginaw, Michigan. We came to Holland almost two years now, two years in December.

JT: Where did you meet your husband, in Saginaw? And you were married there?

MT: Yes, right.

JT: What was your first impression of Holland when you first came here two years ago?

MT: I loved it.

JT: Why did you come here?

MT: Basically for the jobs. When we were living in Saginaw, we were on assistance. There's really no jobs down there, so we moved down here to look for jobs. We were tired of being on assistance, and we wanted to show our kids that being on assistance is not a way of life. There are jobs out there for people who are willing to work and we didn't want them to think that, like a lot of kids are doing now, they don't finish school, they get pregnant, they get on assistance, and they think that's a
way of life. And it’s not. I try to encourage my kids to stay in school and do better for themselves, for that way they can have a good future later.

JT: Do they seem to like their schools?

MT: Yeah, they enjoy it. I have my oldest in high school now, I have two in middle school, and the two youngest ones in elementary. So, they like it.

JT: How is Holland different from Saginaw? The place itself and the people of Holland, how is it different?

MT: As I mentioned, Saginaw has no jobs. Holland does. I find the people here a lot different. Over there everybody looks at you for who you are, and here, they kind of basically put you in a category. I don’t know quite how to say this. A lot of people treat you a lot different here. Some places where we’ve gone, they don’t seem to want to help you. I’ve found a lot of prejudice...racial people here. I don’t like it. I don’t like being judged for what I am.

JT: For what you look like on the outside?

MT: Right. A lot of people do that. A lot of places where I’ve gone, they disrespect you because of your color. I don’t know, maybe it’s just life: you have to learn how to deal with it.

JT: So that really stands out in Holland as opposed to Saginaw?

MT: Yes, it does.

JT: How do you deal with it when it happens?

MT: I try to ignore. I look at it that, if they have to look at me for the color of my skin, then I think they have a bigger problem than I do. I try to be myself, just ignore it.
JT: What about your kids, have they encountered discrimination or prejudiced people?

MT: Yeah, in the school system. I guess what really hurts me more is when people treat me like that in front of my kids. If they treat me when I'm by myself, I can deal with it. But it hurts more when they do it when I have my children with me.

JT: That's too bad. Are you involved in a church anywhere?

MT: Not at the moment. We were going to a Bible study, a couple of people that come over on Sundays, but, I had my surgery and that's been postponed for a while already. No, I haven't found a church that we really go to now.

JT: You've only been in Holland for two years, but do you think that diversity in Holland is increasing, or what's your impression of how diverse Holland is in terms of different races and different kinds of people? It's not all white or it's not all any kind of race...

MT: It's increased. I've noticed a lot of Hispanics are coming down here. I know a lot of people from other states. I've noticed there's a lot of people from Mexico here.

JT: Really? Coming to look for jobs?

MT: Yes. There's basically a lot of mixed nationalities. I have noticed that there's a lot of Hispanics coming down here, more than what I've seen when we first came down here. I think that's what bothers me about the community, too, because some of the community's programs and organizations...I've gone for help, and they've turned me down. Other people that come over here that are not from the states, the community and organizations and stuff are willing to help them before they would help somebody that's from here. I don't think that's fair.
JT: So they’ll help people from Mexico, but not people from the states? Do you have any feelings on the Dutch heritage in Holland? Have you noticed anything in particular about that?

MT: There’s some that are real prejudice, but there’s some that are real cool. I mean, I work a lot with all kinds of people. I guess it depends on how you treat them, they treat you the same way. It works both ways: to get respect you have to be respectful. You have to earn it. You can’t just want something.

JT: I’m sure your kids have noticed that in you, too—that quality in you.

MT: I hope so.

JT: So at your work, there’s a really good interaction between people of different cultures. Your work environment is pretty good?

MT: Yes, I like my job. There’s always somebody who’s going to be in the crowd. Always. But, you’ve just gotta deal with that. It’s not the company, it’s just some people.

JT: Have you noticed any kind of generation gap between the people in Holland, between the old and the young, how people interact?

MT: Not really. The area we live in when we first moved down here, everybody was, "Oh no. Don’t move on that side of town. That’s bad. That side of town is not good," and "You don’t want to take your kids there," and we heard all kinds of stories. We’ve lived here for two years and this was the first house we rented, and to me, the area is real good. There’s basically older people that live here. You do have your little crowds, like the kids hang out at the store after school, but I’ve never seen
any real bad things going on. They’re pretty cool, real talkative, real friendly.

JT: How do you think Hope College fits into Holland? Do you think people in the community react well to that? How do you look at Hope College kids?

MT: I think it’s real good, me myself, personally. I think it’s good. They have a lot of programs. They help the kids that are in school that need help. It helps them to get their education that they need. I like it because, like I mentioned before, I always encourage my kids to stay in school and finish school. I tell them, I says, them being Hispanics, they can earn a grant. I say, go to college and do something with your life. Be somebody. I don’t want them to have to struggle like I do at work. My job is hard. At times it gets stressing, but it passes through. That’s my dream for my kids to finish school, and hopefully, maybe some day they can go to Hope College, and that way they don’t have to be far from home.

JT: Do they have anything in mind yet of what they want to do when they grow up?

MT: Well, one of my daughters, she is always, "I want to be a lawyer." That’s my third oldest, Esmerelda. She’s in the sixth grade now. I encourage them, I tell them, you can be whatever you want to be and you just got to set your mind to it.

JT: What about your son?

MT: My son? He likes a lot of stuff. Right now he’s going for training for boxing. He likes computers. My husband had a garage business; he went to mechanic school. He’s worked on cars since he was, I think, about fourteen or fifteen years old. So he knows how to do a lot of mechanic work, and he does body work. My son likes the body work more than mechanizing. But, he hasn’t decided what he wants to do yet.
He was working at the De Graaf Center here in Holland, for the youth job program that they have in the City Hall. Him and my oldest daughter worked there this past summer. That really helped us because they bought all their stuff they needed for school, and they put their money in the bank. I try to show them some kind of responsibility in that way. And not: "Oh, I got money. Let's go here and let's go there."

JT: So do you think that Holland offers good programs for the kids, then? Things to get involved in? Eva has CASA, and she seems to like that a lot.

MT: Yeah, she does.

JT: She's fun to have. We have a good time. What do you think about the role of women, maybe in your job or in the community in general?

MT: Women can be whatever they want to be. I guess it depends on the individual herself. You know, it's just like the men. There's a lot of jobs. They have a lot more opportunities to do something with their lives.

JT: Does Holland offer good opportunities?

MT: Yeah. I think they don't go by, well, it's just boys. It's for anybody who wants to join. It goes both ways.

JT: What does your husband do?

MT: He's a tool technician. He does the tooling for the process that we run at work. We do deep drawform parts for air bags, automobile parts, antilock brakes. We deal with some parts for Delta water faucets. He does that. But the plant, now, is getting into a lot of computer stuff, so you got to know how to bring up the parts and make sure
everything is organized.

JT: What things about Holland do you consider to be the most positive aspects? You've said the jobs... is there anything else that stands out in your mind? Your family, what have their impressions been when they come to Holland to visit you? What have you heard other people say about it?

MT: They like it. Only my sisters came to visit. They enjoyed it. They liked the town. Basically, they're the only two that's come and visit. My parents are a lot older, they're in their mid-seventies, so they don't really come down here. My dad can't drive anymore that good, so it's hard for him to get around. My mom don't know how to drive at all, so it makes it even harder for her.

JT: How did you hear about Holland?

MT: I have a friend of mine, her sister lived here for years now. She said that her husband was going to come down here looking for work, and she asked my husband if he was willing to come down here. We were like, "Sure, why not?" So we came down here. I have a sister-in-law that lives here that my husband hadn't seen in years. We've been married for seventeen years, and out of the seventeen years, I think he's only seen her twice. They're real distant. They're real far apart.

JT: How has your life changed since you've been in Holland? How would you compare your life now to when you were in Saginaw and you were living on assistance? How has it changed financially?

MT: Financially, it's still hard. Trying to raise five kids... it's real hard. But we manage. We had to cut a lot of, like, going out to eat and stuff like that.
JT: It gets expensive.

MT: But I guess you can make it without assistance if you really wanted to. By me working, it's given me more self-esteem. I know I can do it. Yeah, it's hard, but what isn't in life? Everything's hard in life. I've been up at my job for a year. I started out at Manpower, and back then I was only getting $6.50 an hour. So what I'm making now... I got my review and I got a raise. I'm making more now. But, my friend at work, she goes, "They should have gave you more," or whatever, but I go, "No, what I get is fine with me because I know I've earned it and I don't want people giving me stuff that I know I don't earn." I get something, I know it's because I've tried for it. That's the way I look at it. But I am making a lot more now, then what I was through temporary services, once I got hired in. I've had two reviews since then. I started there as an inspector, you just inspect the parts and make sure there's no defaults in the parts. I've learned more about the washers, we have huge washers that the parts have to go through, and I learned how to clean and work with the washers also. Now, I'm going as an operator to run the presses, and that's what I was in training, before I had my surgery. So, hopefully... You have to go through tests, they give you tests that you have to do. There's a lot of different kind of presses for different parts and stuff, and you have to know almost all of the presses there. You have to take your tests to be certified. Well, I did take three of the tests so far. There's, I think, nine of them that you have to go through before becoming certified. So, once I get back to work I'll finish that up.

JT: So then you'll be certified?
MT: Yes. You build your way up through the company.

JT: So you and your husband work different shifts, right? How does that affect... Do you see him very much?

MT: (Laughs) Not really. I work first shift. I go in from 7 to 3:30. He goes in at 1 or 2 o’clock in the afternoon, second shift. He gets out at 11:30, 12 o’clock. So when he comes home, I’m sleeping, and when I get up, he’s still sleeping. Basically the time we spend is during the weekends.

JT: What kinds of things do you do on the weekends?

MT: We like just riding around, taking the kids out. We’ve gone to Kalamazoo, and we’ve gone to Muskegon, and we go to Grand Rapids and Wyoming. He likes fishing. When it was hotter outside we’d take the kids to the park, or just stay home and rent movies. Just spend time together and stuff like that. The little things count more, you know?

JT: That’s neat that you take time out for them like that.

MT: They’re getting big, but to us they’ll always be our babies.

JT: Do you have a turning point in your life, or a specific time when things kind of turned around for you, or something happened or maybe an attitude change? How can I put that? I think that getting a job here, you really are to be respected because of what you say you just want to make what you earn. Was there a turning point...? What made you decide to come to Holland, to say that, “We don’t want to live on assistance anymore?”

MT: We were just tired of being on assistance. A lot of people think it’s easy, because
assistance, they pay your rent, they pay your bills, and you get stamps to buy your
groceries. Everything's really basically given to you. But, they only give you
enough to live month by month. You don't have that extra money. Here, it depends
on how much you get an hour or whatever, but at least you know you're getting a
check that you worked for every week. You don't have to worry about, "God, I've
got to wait every two weeks," or "I'm not going to have enough," You can't say,
"Well, I can always pay it or pay half or whatever to make ends meet." My
husband, he'll work on cars to get extra money, on the weekends and stuff. It works
out. It's not easy, but you just have to do the best with what you got, I guess.

JT: Do the kids...are they learning responsibility for money?

MT: Oh, yeah. They all have their chores, and my oldest son, when he worked, he
would, him and my daughter bought their own clothes and they opened their own
bank account. If they wanted to go shopping, because, here the mall is so small, they
wanted to go out of town to go get their clothes and stuff. They're like, "Well, we'll
give you money for gas if you take us." They know that the car doesn't run on
water. But they, "Do you need something?" or "Do you need something for the
house?" They'll pitch in. Or if we were at work, and they get hungry, my son will
go and buy the girls a pizza. They kind of all look out for each other, especially the
bigger ones look out for the smaller ones. I think it's pretty neat because they have
that bond, you know, they all stick together.

JT: They're kind of a team.

MT: Yeah. I don't let them really go out anywhere unless I know where they're going. I
just try to encourage them, because I know there’s gangs all over the place.

JT: Have you seen much gang action?

MT: Not really, not really here, I should say, compared to Saginaw where there’s a lot of gangs. My son, he’s more a quiet type. He don’t like to hang around with a lot of people. There’s only certain friends he’ll let come over. They’re here. I’d rather have them here than out in the streets somewhere. The girls don’t really go nowhere at all. I have to keep a closer eye on them.

JT: They have each other.

MT: Yeah, there’s four of them. They can keep each other company. I’m real strict with them. I think it’s better to be strict than let them go out there and not know what they’re doing or who they’re with. I’d rather have them here at home.

JT: Well, those are all the questions I have. Can you think of anything else about your family that you’d like to talk about, or about you, or what it was like growing up when you were young?

MT: When I was growing up... I was born in Saginaw. I went to school there. My father, he worked for GM. He got out on disability. My mother worked for a while at Vlasic pickle factory. After that, she didn’t work anymore. She just stayed home with us. My father worked. My mom and dad came from Texas, and they moved in Michigan sometime in 1940s, around there. I think my oldest brother was born in 1944, and he was born in Texas. So it had to be after that when they moved down here to Michigan. My husband’s from St. Charles, and that’s close by Saginaw. His parents were from Texas also. I guess back then there was more jobs then over there
than there are now. His father passed away at an early age. My husband was 13 years old when he passed away. His father worked in a railroad company. In the '70s his mom passed away of breast cancer, and he was, I think, 16 or 17 years old. So he lost his parents at an early age, and it was hard for him growing up. He's lived a hard life, losing his parents and stuff. My mom and dad love him.

JT: Well, anything else?

MT: I don't know what to say.

JT: I have a good question. This is talking about what you make of the industry in Holland, the factories that are around Holland. What do they contribute to the community?

MT: There's a lot of factory jobs, a lot. Our jobs where we're working at, it's good. I mean, we have our medical benefits, dental benefits. We have our life insurance, our 401K, for our retirement plan. They offer quite a bit. You have to pay for it, you don't get nothing for free.

JT: So they provide a lot of jobs to people? Do you think a lot of people are drawn to Holland because of those jobs?

MT: Yeah, I think so.

JT: So it's kind of helped the community grow in numbers?

MT: Yes. I know they're opening a lot more plants, too, especially in Zeeland. Our plant, we got a new facility. Where our plant is now, I know they're building other plants all around that area, so there will be more jobs out there.

JT: So do you think that even more people will be coming here for those jobs? Is there
enough housing for more people to be coming?

MT: The housing is very expensive. Right now, we're renting. It's hard, being that we relocated over here, it's hard for us to try to establish our credit here. We're in the process of buying our house, this house we're living at now. I went to the Community Action House. It's an agency that's supposed to help people. The city gives them grants to help people, and that didn't work out. I had been trying to call and get a hold of the lady, but they don't want to help. She tried to say that my husband went in there yelling at her. My husband never met her.

JT: Really? Why do you think that they don't want to help?

MT: I went there once when we first moved down here, and they gave me food and stuff. I guess there's certain foods you have to get from the shelves, and she put some toilet paper in there, in the stuff that she had gave me, and the lady up in front, she was checking, because I guess they check your stuff, and she goes, "Well, you're not supposed to get that paper." I'm like, "Well, she put it in there." But she made it sound like I had just went in there and grabbed anything.

JT: So they didn't trust you?

MT: No, no. To me, I felt embarrassed. I felt so low. I just grabbed my stuff and hurried out of there. We had went there to see if we could apply for the grant because I would rather go ahead and buy a house than be renting one. I had went there before and we tried to apply for our grant to see if we could find a house. At first, she said that we weren't making too much, and then they said that we were making too much, afterwards. Then she said that our credit was bad. I called her the
other day and, what happened was, I called and, because it’s hard to get a hold of her, I asked that lady, I go, "Well, can you put me on hold?" and she goes, "Well, sure." They had me on hold for like fifteen minutes. Finally she came on the line, and I gave her my name, and she goes, "Well can you hold for a minute?" I says, "Yeah." So here I was on hold for another five or ten minutes, and then the secretary came and she goes, "May I help you?" I go, "I was put on hold to talk to so-and-so, and then she came on the line and then she put me on hold, and then you come back on the line," I says, "Well, what the hell’s going on?" That’s all I asked. Well, she blew it all out of proportion and said that I was swearing at her on the phone. I just told her, "Well, I’ll give you my name and number and have her call back or whatever." So she did, and the lady called me back and goes, "Well, I’ve called your husband and he’s yelled at me on the phone." She didn’t really want to help. I told, I says, "Well, if you don’t want to help us, just say so. All I was doing was calling for an appointment to see if we could qualify for the loan." She goes, "Well, we can’t right now, there’s no more grants." The other person that referred me to go there that said that they had just gotten grants. So I told her, I says, "If you don’t want to help me, fine. That’s all you have to say." She goes, "Well, it’s not that we don’t want to, it’s that we can’t." Okay, you know? They act real snotty.

JT: That’s their job to be helping people. Why are they like that?

MT: I don’t know. The first time when I went there and they gave me the food, there was people, you could tell that they were from Texas or from Mexico because they don’t talk no English. Here they’re translating for them and willing to help them right
away. I'm like, "Hello. What's going on?" You know, it's so sad to see your own race willing to help someone else, that you're from here, they treat you like crap. I don't think that's fair. Probably because I was never raised like that. You treat people for the way they treat you. You don't look at their color. That's the way I try to raise my kids but it's so hard around here. Because, you know, I'm telling them one thing and they go out and they get treated differently. It's not right.

JT: Are there many African-Americans living in Holland?

MT: I haven't seen a lot, but I've seen more than when we came down here. So I think they're expanding.

JT: How do they interact with Hispanic people? Do you see any kind of prejudice between those two groups?

MT: No. In Saginaw, the majority of people are mostly blacks. I was raised around them. They'll treat you the way you treat them. You disrespect them, they'll naturally defend themselves, like any person would. No, I don't think that there's problem, not with the Hispanics and the blacks, no.

JT: Oh, I think the tape's about the run out. Well, I guess that wraps it up because I don't have any other questions to ask. I just want to thank you for doing this.

MT: You're welcome.