

South Texas Hispanic Farm Labor Communities Oral History Project

Interview with Clementina Carrillo

Interviewee: Clementina Carrillo

Corpus Christi, TX, 2013

**For the most accurate representation of the interview, see the audio recording held at the South Texas Archives at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, as the process of transcription can contain errors or not fully reflect voice intonations, pauses, and other factors that may convey important meanings. The transcript might not reflect the precise phonetic meaning of what was said in all cases. For instance, what sounds like "mm hmm" might be transcribed as "uh huh," etc.*

Phone interview with Clementina Carrillo

Haley Carrillo: Hello?

Alfonso Carrillo: Okay so I'ma call my mom

H: Okay

A: so hold on

H: Okay

Faint noise of students talking and laughing

A: Okay hows that Haley?

H: Um I don't hear grandma... Its-

Clementina Carrillo: Hellooo?

H: Oh hi grandma!

C: *chuckles* hi how are you?

H: Hi, good, sorry we were having so much trouble with this phone cus we were trying to do like a record over the phone so-

C: Uh-huh, okay

H: *laughs* okay yay it finally worked

C: *laughs*

H: Okay, well, um I was just gonna do a thirty- I mean a twenty minute interview with you, just kind of ah wanted to know about you, you were telling me one time about how you would go in the summer and you would kind of go place to place and pick cotton and pick crops and stuff.

C: Uh-huh, oh okay so you want me to start where the beginning? *laughs*

H: I mean you can kind of talk whatever you would like to, you can kind of vary around there

C: oh okay so you'd start talking right now?

H: Mmmhm *laughs*

C: Okay between me and my sister I was like fifteen, and, and she was like fourteen we use to go with my grandparents to west Texas to work on the cotton or whatever, onions, cucumbers we use to go, lot of people would go in the same truck we carry all the stuff that we need like things for the kitchen and mattress and uh blankets and we'd roll it up and make it has smashed as we could and uh we'd sit down

on the mattresses and that's how we went on the back of the truck for nine to ten hours and then uh when we got there we....they, they had to find out a place to stay. We didn't have a place to stay so if we didn't have a place to stay sometimes we had to uh sleep in the...you know in the...were they use to uh carry, put the onions on the train and we, we, we use to sleep on the depots and then finally when we got to a house we would stay there until the season was over and then and then uh we would stay there like two, three months and then we would go back and uh and uh. We would go back to Odem and go to school again and then every every year would be the same thing we were we were use to working in Corpus and around Corpus in the fields too and sometimes we would go to when it was cold and we have to sleep in the outside in the uh plan-platforms of the depots of the depots it was cold *chuckles* but uh it was it was what we all use to do at, at, that time mmm mmm

H: How much money would you make the entire season? Like the entire family?

C: No, we we didn't...it depends on how much cotton, like if it was cotton you you get paid by how much cotton you pick and then and then, uh, my grandmama would, would save the money for us because we need to buy when we go to school. She would save the money and then the weekends she would give us like five dollars to spend *laughs* dollars to spend in the little town we were in. She would save the money, buy shoes and stuff for school. We didn't make that much money *laughs*

H: And when you were up-

C: But it only happened like two seasons because the uh uh the next the uh the other two seasons my dad didn't let us go anymore. *laughs*

H: When you would go would it be like seven days a week or would you get like off days or...?

C: No we, would've, we didn't work Saturdays and Sundays, we worked five days. On Saturdays we would go down to to town to town. We went to buy groceries and mmm sometimes we'd go to the movies and then on Sunday we'd stay home and and everybody would rest.

H: And did like everyone from Odem usually go and kinda do summer jobs like that?

C: Well na only only only the people that use that use to do that all the time some people had their own job. But that was my grandfather's job, take people everywhere to work, that's why we went with him. He had a, he always had a lot of people to take.

H: So your grandpa always worked in the fields? Like his whole life?

C: Yeah. Mhm, yeah and they use have two trucks and they, and they, will you know, they would take enough people to fill the truck and then they'd they'd had like a contract they'd had with like the farmers over there. You bring twenty-five people and uh I'll pay you that and uh you bring fifty people and I'll pay you that. And they use to go every year, my, my grandparents go every year.

H: When he would go round up people how early did he have to wake up usually, to actually find twenty-five people?

C: Oh he was uh, because they knew each other and uh he would go by ward and one people tell the other people "they're gonna leave on 'certain day'" if they wanna go, get ready, things like that

H: When you would actually-

C: When I- wh what?

H: Oh, no no go ahead sorry, I was just trying to help you with questions

C: Oh okay, Um one year we, uh they have to, we have to stay over there, and bring my grandpa to, back to Corpus because uh he got real sick and uh, his heart, he never went back, doing that, but my uncles took over, took over the truck. Okay give me a question *laughs*

H: So your grandpa and all his brothers, that's what they would always do? Like that was-

C: My, my, my grandpa, he start, he had like four or three sons

H: And then when you would-

C: And-

H: Oh I'm sorry, go ahead *laughs*

C: They'd, yeah, they'd start getting married and then they'd didn't wanta no go no more, so in the end they just like two, two sons left and my grandpa.

H: So there, there wasn't usually a lot of people or were there always like...?

C: Oh there was, always was a lot of people that wanted to go to work over there, because over here there, there was hardly any jobs over, over there in Odem, in Corpus, (8:21)Ed. That time in Edroy it had a lot of cotton gin and there was a lot of work there, around Edroy .There was fields everywhere. They would come to work in Edroy and then after, all the work was done they would go to West Texas.

H: So after, well you were staying in Corpus there wasn't very many jobs was that just because of the time period or was it just because the season was out and there wasn't any more crops to harvest.

C: Oh it was because of the time period, uh-huh

H: Was there a lot of businesses closed down or was it...?

C: Oh, yeah, there was not that many businesses at that time, not like, not like today

H: *laughs* How old were you- oh you said you where fourteen, was there any family members that went that were with you that were younger than that?

C: Not in my family but there were in other families, they use to have to take kids younger than that, some, they would take whole families. Even if they didn't work they them

H: And how long would you work, like every day?

C: Like eight hours, every day. They would let us rest at noon like for an hour and a half. We would stay out of the sun and eat and rest...and, and, and we use to have those uh sacks, we pick cotton and we'd lay and sleep for a while *laughs*

H: Is there any kind of memory that really like sticks out some being over there, remember a certain day, like?

C: Yes, I'd never forget when we tried to go to the movies and they didn't let us in because were Mexican *laughs* even though we were from Mex- the United States *laughs*

H: The town that you were picking in was it mostly white or was it mostly a certain-

C: Yeah, it was mostly white, mmhm

H: So when you would go shopping on Saturdays would they look at you funny and kind of...?

C: Oh yeah they were prejudice *laughs* There was nothing it was Taylor Texas.

H: Your uncles or, and your grandpa, did they go to school, like I know you were saying that after the season you guys would just come back home and have a normal, like school week in the fall and the spring.

C: Yeah

H: Did they come back to school or did they just kind of

C: My, My uncles didn't go to school they, my grandmother used to be a teacher in Mexico and they were, they were taught by my grandmother and, and but not any English just Spanish. I don't know when they learned English. They, they um I guess they, they did automatic learning from listening or...But no my uncles never went to school, no I don't remember them going to school.

H: Was it a normal thing for you to go off to the summer and then just come back is that, was that the norm or...?

C: Yeah, a lot of people were doing it, mmhm. A lot of people then didn't have enough money to survive mmm mmhm. A lot of people were doing it because they liked to go *laughs*

H: And you said you only did that for a couple of years right?

C: Yeah, mmhm

H: And then your normal school was just like, just the same, did it change how your high school was or...?

C: No, it was the same, it it wasn't, it it was, first I went to Edroy and then I went to Odem and that where I, I graduate from Odem.

H: Mmm...Is there anything else you kinda wanted to share about that time period like because I remember you were saying that, that the economy was bad, was there anything that you remember that your family had to like cut back on or had to do something extra?

C: Uh, well, um well my da-, well my dad he would, we would have something to eat but like by the end of the week there was hardly anything to eat but my, my dad would never want to go get food stamps or help or nothing. He was like, he didn't wanna get help from the government it was the way he was, I don't know why *laughs* we suffered because he didn't wanna go get food stamps or nothing.

H: And how many brothers and sisters did you say you have?

C: Four brothers and two sisters

H: Did you live in a kind of smaller house because um I know that Odem is still kind of small so...

C: Mmhm well we use to live in Edroy and then when, when uh, when my father got a job in Odem he started building a house and he built a little house and then we lived, we lived in that house. It was a two bedroom house and a bathroom and a kitchen and we lived there all our lives. But he built it himself and his friends helped him.

H: Um I remember seeing all your high school like sports trophies and like all the activities you were in, what made you get in all those school events and programs

C: Because I loved playing basketball and volleyball and I was good at it *laughs*

H: Where you in it all throughout high school or was it just like towards the end of it or...?

C: No, high school. I was good I use to play in all the tournaments *laughs*

H: *laughs* Mmm let me see what I can ask you...Oh did you ever think about going back once you started a family, like just kind of do it in the summer like you use to do?

C: Oh no *laughs*

H: Was it just because, like it hadn't crossed your mind or was just too hard or was too far away or?

C: Its too far and and you had to travel a lot and no, it was not worth it *laughs*

H: What would you do during the car rides because you said it took like nine or ten hours in the back *snorts* of a truck, like sleep or...?

C: Yeah *laughs* We'd sleep and then when the truck stops we would go to the bathroom and then go back and then go back to sleep again *laughs*

H: *laughs* When you say truck, it was like an open bed truck, where it was just completely exposed right?

C: We, it was uh, they have uh, they put uh a canvas on top, on the very top so it wouldn't be so windy, so nothing would blow away, mmhm. They would tie it real good and then...So if, it it rained you wouldn't get wet mmmm because we had that canvas on the top. They would pack everything in the front of the truck and then they'd, they would like make make space for everyone with the, with the mattresses. We took, everyone with mattresses. Not that kind with springs, the ones that don't have any springs in them, and they would fold them and they would make a little chair for everybody, all around the edges of the truck. On the trucks they have those big, um, you know the um, wood, wooden, I don't know what, the, the truck had cover mmhm.

H: And would you guys get a chance to like stop and like, like make something to eat or was it just on the road, nonstop, other than to-

C: Oh no they would stop, they would stop into the stations, there were not that many stations that time so they stop whenever they would find one, mmhm. And they would, if we had money to buy to buy things, we would buy things and everybody would have a, a lot of things to eat in the truck like canned goods and all that

H: And then you said um after, when your, you were out picking and then you would come back into the little house, would you essentially just make dinner and then it was time to go to bed or would you guys you know play games or something?

C: No, everybody would take a bath and go to bed *laughs* there was no time, there was no T.V. at that time *laughs*

H: *laughs* So Saturday was like the only, really relaxing day and then Sunday was just like another relaxing day but like church and stuff

C: Uh yeah, mmm people who, whoever wanted to go to church, there there, the owners of the truck would take to the church if they wanted to go.

H: So when you were in the little towns would you guys, really just completely cut off from the rest of the town, you said you had the only little houses and then really if you walked into town, anyone would really spot you, so was it?

C: Oh no, no one could walk to town, we, we always stayed real far from town. When the truck went into town everybody had to go, whoever, at the same time because it was real far away mmhm. Because everybody would, like on Saturday morning, they would say at "eight o'clock or nine o'clock we're gonna leave, everybody be ready" and then, and then we would come back, "we're gonna leave at certain time" and you had to go on like a bus schedule because it was one way it was too far away to be coming back and forward

H: So really once you were there at the little house you were pretty much stuck there until

C: Yeah

H: The whole group went

C: On Saturday we went, we went to town and we left in the morning, everyone would go in the morning and then, then the truck would stay there all day and then we'd would come back at like five or six when they said it was time to be coming home, that was it. Some people would go and some people wouldn't want to go

H: Um well really if you want to talk about anything else, it doesn't have to be specifically about um going to West Texas but ah just kinda anything else in that time period or really anything.

C: Oh but uh I can't remember nothing *laughs*

H: *laughs*

C: *laughs* I can't remember nothing anymore

H: *laughs* You're doing pretty good

C: I hope so...What I remember is that, when I, when I did go for the first two years, I didn't want to go back again *laughs*

H: Was it just because the trips were so long, were the-?

C: Yeah, Yeah. I want, I wanted to be home.

H: At- After those couple of years did you have like other summer jobs?

C: No. I use to work for a lady in the morning before I went to school, every morning I would go over there for half an hour and clean her kitchen and her bathroom and then I would go to school but that was like years after, when I was in high school I was, I use to work for that lady every morning she was like um kind of uh paralyzed she wanted me to go help her in the morning and so I did, I went uh every morning uh thirty or forty minutes before I went to school and clean her kitchen, her little kitchen and her bathroom and have everything ready by her bed because she was gonna be by herself all day it was not really long It was for like three or four months only, until she got better

H: Well I think that's kind of it, if that's, if that's all you really wanna go into, we pretty much covered everything so unless theres anything else but

C: Okay mi hija

H: Okay thank you

C: Bye bye

H: Sorry for all the confusion with the phone calls

C: Oh okay, okay

H: See you-

C: Have a good day

H: Thank you

C: Love you

H: Love you too bye

C: Bye

*Phone call ended *