

South Texas Hispanic Farm Labor Communities Oral History Project

Interview with Irma Woods, Rosa Linda Reynoso, and Renato Ramirez (panel discussion)

Interviewee: Irma Woods, Rosa Linda Reynoso, and Renato Ramirez

Interviewer/moderator: Derek Oden

Others present: audience members

Corpus Christi, TX, July 11, 2015

**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.*

MARK ROBBINS: The following is a panel discussion held at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas on July 11, 2015. It was held as part of the Mexican-American Studies program summer seminar in conjunction with South Texas Hispanic Farm Labor Communities World History Project.

The participants are Irma Woods, Rosa Linda Reynoso and Renato Ramirez and the panel is moderated by Derek Oden. The recordings started late due to technical difficulties.

ROSA REYNOSO: (Inaudible) this is machine is noise. It's too noisy so we couldn't talk to each other even though we were like that because we couldn't hear.

So one time on the assembly line, when it started -- it was like a U, there was -- of course, the machine picked up everything; dirt, the whole plant and there was this snake and it came around the assembly line. So it was like when you know I would tell-- you know, bump her and then bump the other, bump the other so we were just like, okay, the snake can ride free.

So, you know, I mean I have so many but I'm gonna go ahead let Dr. Woods go next.

IRMA WOODS: I'm a second generation Mexican-American. My parents were born here in the United States but my grandparents are from Mexico. They came to the United States because of the Mexican -- Mexican Revolution of 1910. They came to this country and they settled in the Yorktown, Cuero area.

And they were -- both families on my father's side and my mother's side were farm workers. They worked the land. They toiled for years. They came to the United States, of course, to seek a better life. And my mother did not like farm work. She did not like working in the fields so she convinced -- she married at the age -- I need to tell you my mother -- grandmother had 19 children. And my mother was third, the third oldest so it's interesting that my mother was pregnant with her first child and my grandmother was pregnant with her last child.

So you can see how, I would -- I'm the third of my mother's children, and so my aunts and uncles, many of them were close -- I was close to their age. They were older of course but not much more than I was.

And so they -- my mother convinced my father to move -- they worked the lands around Yorktown and Cuero picking cotton and various products. My mother convinced my father to leave farming, to go, come to the city because she did not want to pick, work in the fields anymore. She had children and she wanted a city life. So they moved to Corpus Christi. My father became a dishwasher at a -- restaurant, here in Corpus Christi. They got a little house on the (inaudible) street and it is no longer exist. It is covered by the courthouse, today.

So where I was born, I was born at home, delivered by a mid-wife and that street is no longer there. But, my grandmother on my mother's side was my greatest influence. I followed her and she would still work the fields when I was five years-old, I would go with my grandmother and my aunts and uncles and we would go out and work the cotton fields and pick tomatoes in Florida, cucumbers in Michigan and we would just followed the crops. I was not in school yet so I could go along but because I was only five are years-old I was just the

the water girl. I would take water to the people out in the fields. But I was also the look-out girl.

What that meant is there were no bathroom facilities for anybody working on the fields. So when you think about it, you know, how do you manage? I was the look-out girl. I took -- there was an old oil cloth that we used to, I would -- used to hold it up and hold it while my aunts went to the bathroom. So they would have some degree of privacy. I didn't have to do it for the men, just for the woman. And I was really glad about that.

But it was, it was an experience that shaped me for the rest of my life. Because later in my career I think that's what propelled me to go into the field of child development because I saw the conditions that children and families lived. And I was too young to understand it then, I didn't understand it until much, much later, but I became an advocate for families and children and I think to a large extent that's why I went into the field of early childhood.

My biggest memory is picking tomatoes with my aunts and uncles and feeling the fuzz of the stem. It was fuzzy and when you picked the tomato it hurts. It hurts your hands and that's a very vivid image I have, I never forgot it. Today when I go to the grocery store, and they have the tomatoes on the vine, you see the four tomatoes on the vine, I always look to see if there is fuzz on it (laughter) because I remember how much it hurt my hand. Of course I was just so young.

But at the end of -- by the time I was in the fifth grade, my grandmother said I should no longer work in the fields. My grandmother was the first person who told me I was smart. No teacher had ever told me that before. And I realize my grandmother saw the potential in me, she saw that I was intelligent, that I could go far and she said you stop work in the fields and you stay in school. And that's what I did. (Audience clapping).

RENATO RAMIREZ: I'm not necessarily very politically correct, I was born in the rough barrios of San Diego and Alice, down here in South Texas. My name and Renato Ramirez.

I wanted to mention, Derek Oden, didn't introduce himself. He's Derek Oden, historian

and professor from Del Mar College and a very good friend of mine. And when he brought up the idea that when he sees -- he opens up the refrigerator in the morning and sees the fruits and vegetables, I hope we can remember me because I've often been called fruit by the [inaudible] and as I get older I'm slowly becoming more and more of an vegetable, you know, so [laughter]. Well, that's okay. But that -- you can remember me whenever you open up the fridge.

My family comes from Los Reyes Ranch in between San Diego and Freer off of Highway 44. It was founded by three brothers; Solomon Reyes, Martin Reyes and I don't remember my other uncle's name, first name. But they settled that area in the 1880's after Porfirio Diaz took over in Mexico.

As Jim Klein was talking about yesterday, the push and pull of immigration into this area. My family is actually -- I'm direct descendant of Juan Jose Ballí, who had land grants. He and his uncle, Nicholas, José Nicolás Ballí, had land grants that helped establish the cities of Matamoros, Reynosa, Mier, Camargo and then Padre Island. Okay. And they date back, these grants, date back to the 1700's, and perhaps even earlier.

So we were pushed in the period of expansion out of central Mexico into this area as exploration -- came about into this region. And as poverty struck and immigration from up North came in this direction as well, we were eventually pushed back into Mexico.

And then came back in the 1880's and settled in the brush country between San Diego and Freer. Okay. And that area, Los Reyes, they built a church, they built a one-room school house as well, and all my parents were -- all my, mother and father and all my brothers and sisters were born at home, most of us in the ranch some of us in town. We eventually moved to San Diego. But we had a mid-wife, birthed us all at home as well.

Some of my earliest memories of working, were picking cotton with my mother and my brothers and sisters. We never traveled out of state. We just emptied the neighborhood in San Diego where we grew up -- on a flatbed truck every morning about 4:00 in the morning drive

out field get there at sunup and the entire neighborhood would go, almost the entire city basically. You know, and we'd pick -- I was probably about six-years-old at the time, I was old enough at that time to actually get a cotton bag for minors; okay, for young folks. It was a smaller bag than the adults carried and it was very easy to fill up. And I would -- after I would fill it up, I'd pour it into my mother's or my brother's bag, the bigger bag so that I could contribute to that, you know.

I remember Rosa Linda telling me that -- I remember telling -- one of my memories was that when it got too hot during the day, they would put some of the young kids that were less than ten-years-old under the truck. That was the only shade around, okay. And so we'd sit there. I remember Rosa Linda telling me last week, that one time she saw, she witnessed a child get run over when the truck took off after it was filled and get killed. And that was one of the dangers that you would always -- had about that, you know.

Also snakes were very common, that's in the fields. I remember when we'd killed a snake it was a means -- that we'd hang it on a fence and hopefully that would bring about some rain. Okay. That was a common, not necessarily a myth but a belief that they had. That ranchers and farmers in this area, if you killed a snake and especially a poisonous snake, you would put it on a fence and that is going to bring some rain, okay. And that was one of the early beliefs that we generally had.

But, my father ended up fighting in World War II. When he came back he was able to get a job at the base here but we still -- he was doing custodial work, okay. And we still needed money and so everybody else in the family ended up picking cotton. And my next door neighbor was my grandfather and grandmother, they picked cotton in their old age. And their next door neighbor was their other son and daughter-in-law and their family and they picked cotton. So it was just the entire neighborhood going picking cotton every day when it was -- when the weather allowed it, you know -- at a very early age.

And we picked in front of a -- there was a -- there was a cotton gin in front of the fields

that we used to pick that were between San Diego and Alice; it was called the Jagermier Gin [spelling?], I don't know if anyone has ever driven Highway 44 in that direction, it used to be very prominently right by the highway and across the highway was vast expanse of cotton fields and that's where we would pick every morning, well every day and then take the crop right across the street to the cotton gin and have the bails made. It was a very efficient type of labor, at that time. But still, it was very labor intensive and very poorly paid. But that was an experience that I had as well.

IRMA WOODS: I think it was ten cents a pound, the cotton; is that correct?

RENATO RAMIREZ: Well, it was very low

IRMA WOODS: It was very low. I wanted to say that my grandmother made a little cotton sack for me because I was so young, I was six years-old and she made this little – Renato was addressing the size -- it was very small. I think you could only fit maybe ten pounds but I thought it was a lot, it was heavy.

The adults would pick a hundred pounds bags, a hundred pounds, and those would drag -- yes. I remember weighing the bags at ten cents a pound for one 100 pound sack, they got a dollar. It was hard, hard work, it was harsh. But as a child, I just thought that's the way it was. I didn't question it, I didn't think there was anything wrong with that, that's just the way it was. And you dealt with it as you came to it.

But I was fortunate, I got to keep the cotton that I picked. I didn't have to turn it in because then my grandmother would make little mattresses and pillows for me to play with. So I would play -- I got under the truck and I didn't have to go do bathroom duty or take water --

R RAMIREZ: -- very similar experience

ROSA REYNOSO: -- I would stay under the truck and play with little rocks and sticks and the little mattresses that my grandmother would make for me from the cotton that I picked. So it was an incentive for me to pick a little of the leftover cotton, the leftovers.

And it was very hard to pick the cotton, you got pricked [Rosa Linda concurring] you have to be just so, so perfect to pick out that cotton without getting pricked from the -- what do you call that, I forgot how you call it in Spanish? -- the container that hold the cotton. And pull [few people talking all at once] El Capullo -- that means be the little cup where the cotton is. But anyway it was --

ROSA REYNOSO: I said that was in the fifth grade, so it was '69. I forgot to mention that was the first year we went up North and I was in fifth grade going into sixth grade. The summer of '69, y'all know where you were, the summer of 69, July? We were just getting into Ohio and I remember the grown ups, the truck driver and my dad and his brother we got to the truck driver's brother, he was already in Ohio, "Hurry up, hurry up. Come on you're going to miss it." And we would, you know, we didn't know what was going on.

Oh, it was only the astronaut's first landing on the moon whatever, one of those (laughter) one of those days. I mean we were kids and, you know, but having said that, that's how we started fifth grade -- the June we went with the neighborhoods like Renato said and they took us and we did the cotton and we did the gumbo which is the okra, the okra. And the cotton since I was older than five years-old or six so we -- it was just me and my younger brother and we did the larger bag and we were so happy because we worked all day and we did take a break under the truck but we were several and so the man didn't take off with all of us under it. But we made ten dollars and we are so happy. I gave him five and I got five. But it was hard work and, you know, being at that age you just think that's the way it is. You know, you just don't think.

And then when we went up North and we saw that the first man on the moon, we didn't know. But that's where my memory is on that, 1969 July, and I'm like, okay. But now you look back and you realize those memories, you don't forget that, it's just there.

And I have so many because I was in my teens, you know, ten through 19, so I have more vivid memories of the picking and all the other stuff that goes with it. But I know that there's two other questions so I'm going --

DEREK ODEN: -- Sure, I can ask another question. I'm just having a great time listening to everybody and I can't wait listen to the recording and go through this again.

But my question was --- you were talking about conditions, you mentioned the truck and child labor -- and you know one of the things I was thinking about as everybody was saying that, is that agriculture is one of the least regulated industries. And another thing that came to mind when we were talking was that even in the late 20th Century, the average life expectancy for farmer workers was 49, and sitting here at 42, that seems very, very young, you know.

So my question is just kind of to the continue on with this question of challenges -- but a lot of time when you think about agriculture, you know, we think of kind of kind of an organic process. But when you think about the 20th Century, we think about tractors and trucks and pesticides, herbicides, and all the chemicals that really come into farming in the late 20th century. So, I just wanted to kind of couch the question -- what were some the health, you know, health challenges you might have experienced and -- Renato was talking about older folks working in these fields, as well, and even little kids, very little children as well.

So, are there any memories you have of health conditions? And I remember reading in Irma's biography there about the number of children and child birth in these situations. And I just thought I would -- if you could think about health and dangers and specifically crop dusters, that sort of thing. I'm going to go ahead let you start, I've already talked too long.

ROSA REYNOSO: Okay, for health we were lucky none of us got sick during the time. Of course there might be some effects later. I know I've already lost my brother from diabetes, my sister has diabetes and, you know stuff like that. I'm not saying it's from that, but you don't know the effects until later, later, years later. I'm still young by the way (laughter).

The other thing is the childbirth. I have -- my youngest brother was born in Ohio and, -- but the hospital, when my mother -- we got in Ohio, Findlay, Ohio, and we -- the ranch house we got that we arrived at, it was like 30 minutes away and so she had traveled from North Dakota to Ohio because that's where we were in North Dakota. And we moved -- we would move from North Dakota to Ohio to Indiana, you know, and vice versa. But we had gotten there and she got sick, she started feeling sick. Of course she was already, you know, almost nine-months pregnant and so they took her and it took a while, and you know, they did -- it was C-section but that's -- I don't know if due to the traveling and also the time, I mean it could have been worse. You know, there are some dangers with especially childbirth out there.

But the other dangerous, I think -- it happened I know that when we were in North Dakota, with the sugar beets, you have to work with those hoe's and you have to sharpen those hoe's, and sometimes, you know, accidents -- I know it happened to one of my brothers when he was sharpening -- but it wasn't a bad cut to where -- you know, we took care of it right there and then. But we had first aid and stuff right there.

DEREK ODEN: Thank you.

IRMA WOODS: Stories that my grandmother told me with her 19 pregnancies, by the way 6 of the children died at infancy, 13 remained. Of the 13 that who grew up through adulthood had families, 6 have died and there are seven left. My mother is oldest of the seven; she turned 90 years-old this past April. She is currently in a nursing home with the last stage of Alzheimer's.

But I remember my grandmother telling stories about her pregnancies. She was working in fields until the water broke. She was just working and working, the water broke and she would rush to the house to give birth. My mother would run to the neighboring farm, which was pretty far away, she would run and call somebody to come help my mother, my grandmother. And my grandmother sometimes delivered her children by herself because there was nobody around.

So the lack of health -- and no health insurance. So they never went to the doctor unless they were really, really, really sick because they didn't have money to pay for a doctor. So that was one the greatest challenges of being a farm worker and being away from a city with facilities, medical facilities. So they, you know, they developed cures to help each other. And neighbors helped one another especially when they were -- woman were giving birth. But those were really, really difficult times. And my grandmother took it all in stride, that's just the way it was. And I remember growing up with that idea. So I didn't become advocate for children and families until I was grown up, until I went to college and I learned that -- there was a man named Cesar Chavez, who was organizing unions for farm workers and so I joined the cause.

I was -- I became an activist at that time. And I joined the cause and I joined the boycott for grapes. I didn't eat grapes for I don't know how many years.

RENATO RAMIREZ: I still don't

IRMA WOODS: I still have a hard time eating grapes because I don't know -- the misery that the farm worker went through to get those grapes on the table.

RENATO RAMIREZ: Related to what Irma was saying, I went to Pan American University shortly after I graduated in 1972, just briefly but, um, at that time is when the United Farm

Workers Union was organized in the Valley by Tony Orendain. And he was able to get Cesar Chavez to come down to the Valley and bring his stature to bear on the farm owners down there, people like Lloyd Benson and McAllen family and others.

One of the problems with the pesticides was that there was a lot of runoff of the chemicals into the water system. And these babies, babies were being born, I mean people would consume the water and then babes were being born with defects. A common defect that was found in the Valley that was not found nowhere else in the country was anencephaly. Which was a -- babies being born without their brain stem. And this was a direct, it was directly linked to the chemicals in the water that were directly associated with the pesticides we had used in the fields, you know.

And I think that helped bring Cesar Chavez down to the Valley. The fact that you had old world diseases and mutated babies being born that weren't happening anywhere else in the country. That was one of the major health effects as well as

IRMA WOODS: I just briefly wanted to mention, we look at physical effects of dangerous materials of the environment, but the other, the other problem that occurred with farm workers who were separated from their families was depression. And we didn't talk about too much about depression at that time as a mental condition.

But families who were separated from one another because of the work situation often went into depression. The sadness that they were away from their families, they didn't know if they would see them again because of the dangers of being a farm worker.

And I remember mothers crying for their husband, children crying for their mothers. It was years later, years later when I had a better understanding of children's development, I realized the effect it had on them, on the families, particularly on the children.

ROSA REYNOSO: I can relate to that because I mentioned the two younger; my sister, my

brother. They would go to the farm and pick them up, um, migrant school. It was called Texas Migrant School. They had Texas Migrant School all over in Ohio, Michigan. I think everywhere we went they had a Texas Migrant School.

And they would go to all the farms, different farms and very early mind you, and pick them up and then one year I got -- this was one -- my last year -- I had already graduated so they had asked me to go help them in the bus. So I would go in the buses with them and pick up the children, and you're right, the first day it was crying, crying. And there I am trying to -- and then of course it's Spanish, you have to talk to them in Spanish. They don't know any English. You're talking about three, four, five years-olds and we had infants. But those infants, some other ladies would take care of them. So I would take care of the three, four, five year-olds mainly,

But in the bus it was all ages. But I would talk to them in Spanish and tell them just to keep their mind off their separation from the family for the whole day. I would tell them, "Oh, que bonito vesitdo," "What a pretty dress you have." And this girl is crying and crying. "Quien te lo compro, tu Mami?" [spelling?] "You're Mommy bought you this dress?" "Oh, you have a good mommy." You know, trying to take their mind off that they were gonna be separated. And then I would tell them, "A ratito vamos a volver a ver to Mama." "We're just going to go have some fun go learn stuff," and I would tell them all that in Spanish. And just trying to, you know, to let them know it's okay, it's gonna be all right.

And at the end, we would have -- in the afternoon we would have to take a nap, after lunch nap, and then we would round them up and drop them off and then I would tell them, "Okay you have to take a nap after the nap then we're just gonna get a snack and then we go him, you're gonna go home." And they were like like okay. They would take a nap. Some of them didn't want to take a nap. They were like very hyper. But they, you know -- that's one of the other experiences that I had because I did it so many summers. So, but yeah the children I can relate to that so.

DEREK ODEN: The last question we'll have and then we'll save some little bit of time for some questions from the audience, but we mentioned a little bit about union organizing and efforts to improve these conditions and I thought we just take a little bit of time and just comment on that before we have our audience ask some questions.

So any recollections of farm workers movements in California or even the Midwest. You know, in places like Ohio and Michigan and those places there was a very active -- a campaign -- organizing there and so that's something I really want to talk about as well as because sometimes we forget about the Midwest but --

ROSA REYNOSO: Okay, like I said I was 13 years -- in the 70's I was a teenager, pre-teen or teen, whatever you want to call it, but I do remember the Cesar Chavez movement. We would be in the fields and they would -- and this was Ohio and three four years that -- between the 70's. One of the things I do remember is the Nixon files, the Nixon -- (female voice Watergate) -- the Watergate.

Anyway, see those things that you remember, it's like, I remember that, it was like, ugh. But I was a teenager, it was like, you know, again, again another day, another day with this thing going on. I didn't realize you know how really important it was. But the Cesar Chavez movement in the early 70's, one of the years I think it was '72 that I mentioned we went to California you could hear that a lot in the California. It was Cesar Chavez here, Cesar Chavez there and of course I wasn't, my mind wasn't set like as an adult to realize what, what it all involved as far as activism; activism. I just knew about it, but I didn't really participate. I couldn't make the connection because I was kind of in between, so --

IRMA WOODS: I was fortunate enough to attend Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio for my college, I began my college studies there, and at that time the Catholic Church

was just emerging with the concept of social justice. This was in the 60's, so we were, we were introduced to the concept of social justice and the plight of the farm worker became prevalent. So the movement of Cesar Chavez became very strong in San Antonio. So I joined the movement in San Antonio where we boycotted grocery stores and boycotted any business that sold fruits and vegetables.

As college students we were on fire. Have you ever been on fire on anything? It's something that propels you to do things you normally wouldn't do. And I, basically I'm a quiet, shy person. But when it came to families and children what I knew from experience was happening out in the fields, I was on fire. And my children today cannot believe it, "Mom, you mean you were like that?" "Yes, I was." I keep -- my picture came out on the newspaper, protesting, holding signs.

And so the Cesar Chavez movement became very, very critical and important to me.

RENATO RAMIREZ: In 1968 in Mission, Texas, La Lomita Monastery, MAYO, the Mexican American Youth Organization held its first national conference there and Carlos Guerra, who Manuel Flores talked about yesterday, was elected national chairperson of the Mexican-American Youth Organization. Carlos Guerra is from Robstown. And they decided right then and there they were going to build a college for Chicanos. And they built Colegio Jacinto Trevino down in Mercedes, Texas.

And my brother was one of the original graduate students, and a faculty member there as well. And that lasted for about six, well actually roughly about a decade, and one of things they did was develop a curriculum that emphasized Chicano culture; Mexican American culture.

And another thing they did was to follow migrant students throughout the country and help them graduate from high school because they never could do that on a timely basis. And so they helped them get their GED diplomas and helped them enrolled in college as

Freshmen and help them teach them in a way not to be ashamed of their background and that they would be -- developed pride and honor their heritage. And that was very, very unique. But it was also attacked very heavily as being a front for communist ideology and so forth.

So, and that was a way of organizing and protecting the livelihoods and the culture of these folks back then. That Colegio didn't last more than an decade but it eventually moved to St. Edwards University in Austin and became what is Lincoln University and that lasted roughly for another decade as well. And my brother, Aldolfo Ramirez, who wasn't here today -- he was supposed to be here -- helped organize and maintain that college and I'm real proud of that but a lot of -- there were a lot of folks involved in that endeavor and yet it's rarely, rarely ever mentioned publicly, you know. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did he speak to us last year?

RENATO RAMIREZ: Say what?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did he speak to us last year?

RENATO RAMIREZ: Yes, he did. Right.

ROSA REYNOSO: Before I, before I give it back to him I just wanted to relate what he said about trying to finish high school, you know, the migrants. The way we did it, we would leave, we would be out by late April, early May so we could go up North, travel up North. Big trucks at first, and then on our own. It was 50 miles an hour -- big flat beds, it took us three days, two and a half days to get up there and way back, we would -- late September, early October and I would -- the challenges I would face is even from our -- in the schools -- and I'm from Brownsville so a lot of other Mexican-Americans they would say, "Oh, trabajo usted se van el

Norte." [spelling?] " Did ya'll go -- your so behind." You know, they would tell us stuff like that so that kind of challenged me, and I said, no, I'm not going to stay behind, and I never did. Because we, we would have to go to tutoring after school and we had to make up all those weeks and then, and then somehow -- but I was determined. I said, "No, I'm not gonna --" you know whatever they would tell -- you know (inaudible) they would tell you stuff and so we made it back -- that's how we finished school. I finished high school. I never got in my school yearbook because I was always late, but I graduated. I know I did, I got my diploma. (Laughter).

IRMA WOODS: I just wanted to say one more thing. I just wanted to say that my first teaching job, first teaching job was teaching first grade in a migrant school in San Juan, Texas. I understood when the families, how the families worked.

The children arrived in late October, early November and left in April, late April. I understood because of my own experiences with farm workers and I hope I was sensitive enough to guide them in their education.

DEREK ODEN: Well, as you can see, we could probably go a couple of hours instead of -- I'm so interested I could sit here for easily three or four hours and listen to so many stories. But we have a couple of minutes hopefully for, you know, three for four questions. And if you could just raise your hand or stand up and address our panelists and ask a question. We'll go ahead and start with that.

RENATO RAMIREZ: I'll ask a question. Did anyone else here work in the fields... [hands in the audience are raised] there you go, quite a few.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think she got paid three dollars for every hundred pounds.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: I could relate to a lot of what you said. But I would like to add one more challenge to the health issues and I think drinking the water out of the same cup like --

RENATO RAMIREZ: Oh yeah, dysentery stuff like that...

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: Exactly

IRMA WOODS: That was common practice

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Inaudible, talking simultaneously)

ROSA REYNOSO: Can I --

RENATO RAMIREZ: -- they used to have it tied to a string on the door of the truck, you know --

ROSA REYNOSO: -- so you wouldn't lose it or it dropped or something. That was the clean part so it wouldn't drop on the floor and then reuse it. But everybody used the same one.

I wanted to add something real quickly. When we went, the first time we went to pick strawberries. Oh yeah, at that young age we loved strawberries. So we saw the field and we're like, "We're going to pick strawberries." And were like, "Oh strawberries!" You don't think that they've been sprayed, so we would eat strawberries, just like -- okay, one for us and one for the... (laughter) -- yes. It was like I don't want to eat strawberries anymore.

And the bologna sandwiches on the way up there. It was like, "Oh, bologna

sandwiches. No more bologna sandwiches.” There's stuff that, memories that, you know -- I mean I could go on and on but.

IRMA WOODS: The tortilla tacos packed in a paper bag. No refrigeration, no coolers. It was at room temperature, the soda colorada; the red soda's. Very common.

RENATO RAMIREZ: Thank you, folks.

DEREK ODEN: Yeah.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: You had mention you had to speak to the children in Spanish --

ROSA REYNOSO: Yes,

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: -- now, were these children, where were they from? Were they from Mexico or were they born here in Texas?

ROSA REYNOSO: No, from the Valley. I mean when we were in Texas migrant school, you had families from all over, even Cuero, Mission, Edinburg, Brownsville, McAllen, Hidalgo, you had them -- Ed Couch, (inaudible) Alamo, you know, you had families from the Valley going up North. And the Valley, it was Spanish --

IRMA WOODS: -- It was Spanish speaking

ROSA REYNOSO: That was the first language. I mean, I was Spanish. I had an accent, believe me, I don't have it anymore (laughter). But I had very thick accent.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: But there was only -- was this only the folks that were going, the migrant workers or were there all the people that lived in the Valley that did not speak English or practice English --?

ROSA REYNOSO: -- the adults you mean?

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: No, everyone

ROSA REYNOSO: There was some parents that didn't know English at that time

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: So they came from Mexico, that's what I mean

ROSA REYNOSO: I don't know, sir. I was just -- when we went to the, to the camps, the migrant, I mean, the camps, workers' camps, they were just there. We just picked up the kids, the parents, you know the ladies would take the kids [to] the bus stop and we just picked them up. I wouldn't really talk to the parents.

IRMA WOODS: I just want to add that the State of Texas funded a program called the Texas Migrant Council, and they set up child development centers throughout the state, particularly located where migrant families lived. And so what the Texas Migrant Council did is when families went North, the teachers from, who lived in let's say Mercedes, they would pack up also. The teachers would follow the families so wherever they were, they would establish a school for the children. And, of course, I didn't learn English until I went to school.

It was Spanish speaking only in my home and so that's, that was the case for most of these families as well. So the teachers followed the children whenever the families went, the

teachers went with them. They set up the Texas Migrant School. So you could have it in North Dakota, California, New Mexico, wherever -- these were the families from Texas. I'm not sure if that answers your question.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was -- I also was traveling with migrant workers, I left my family -- I ran away from home when was 12 years-old and I followed the families and they spoke Spanish but there was some English that also was being spoken. But I noticed when we went up North there was -- and that's why I mentioned, was it only migrant families or was it all of them? Because a lot of cases, by the way I was born and raised in Laredo, Laredo, Texas, and I traveled -- I went and joined migrant families but they spoke Spanish and would not speak English. They just didn't want to do that. But they could, but [inaudible] not to. So when we went up North, I befriended with people who spoke English, you know, while the others told me don't go over there (inaudible) stay with us. And I didn't. I went with the Anglo people and made new friends (inaudible). But yeah, that was an experience. The strawberries, cherries, it was -- for me, it was strawberries.

ROSA REYNOSO: The cherries

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: The cherries

ROSA REYNOSO: The cherries were the -- cherry trees

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: I remember that (laughter)

ROSA REYNOSO: Yeah, that too. You had a question.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, actually it was more of a comment. Bringing up the, the fact that your mother had giving birth after moving from one state to another, the [inaudible] the fact that there's no consistent prenatal care for [inaudible] woman and also just the labor and delivery, and I don't know if there have been programs that have been developed since that would be comparable, because we still have people who move from place to place with the migrant labor or so forth. I don't know if...

ROSA REYNODA: I haven't kept up. After my last year, that was it. (Laughter) but, no prenatal care.

IRMA WOODS: Actually, now they're more clinics in rural areas. So they have -- medical care is more accessible today and there's a greater awareness of the prenatal care necessary for (inaudible). So more of the rural areas have clinics -- did not exist at the time my grandmother gave birth

ROSA REYNOSO: Okay. I think we're gonna stop now. I know there's a lot we could go on and on. I know I could go on and on, because I mean my dad was a mechanic and when we stayed in Michigan -- Kalamazoo, Michigan, I could tell you stories about Kalamazoo, Michigan being the only two families, Hispanic in the high school, I was in the high school then, it's just too many, too many to share. Maybe during Hispanic Heritage Month, we'll do a session here at Del Mar for that -- okay

DEREK ODEN: We definitely have to do this again. I think we should give a round of applause for our panelists. Thank you so much for sharing your stories.