

South Texas Hispanic Farm Labor Communities Oral History Project

Interview with Santos Molina

Interviewee: Santos Molina

Interviewer: Mark Robbins

Corpus Christi, TX, March 2, 2014

**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.*

SM: Okay, I'll begin how -- to tell you how we all started. And this involved my whole family. It started with -- me having a conversation with my dad and, and I wanted to find out who my ancestors were; my grandparents. And, um, so I started with myself and then with my parents and I just went on and come to find out that my, my grandfather was born at a ranch outside of Laredo. That was called Molina ranch and it was located on, what they called, (inaudible) 52. And this was the same land that donated by the King of Spain back in 1865, I'm sorry, 1765.

And, um, now I don't know how my grandparents, how my grandfather or my assessors really got ahold of that land but I did find -- in old records at the University of -- at UT Pan Am -- back, oh, I don't remember the year, but I'll give you the year later. We, we were going through the archives at Laredo, and they referred us to -- they told us that most of the papers were sent to University at Pan Am because apparently they had had a fire at the courthouse so the papers were -- they wanted to preserve them so they took them over there. And after we reviewing some records at the library, come to find out that my grandfather

did purchase some land. Back in 1846, '48.

MR: Wow

SM: And, um, so as we started putting all this together, it started getting interesting. And, and I recorded my dad having conversation with his sister because his sister -- his sister, they were real close. So I recorded conversations because they both grew up at the same land.

They were not born there because they were migrant workers, so they had to go to other ranches to go work but after the season was over, they would all go back to their homes. And even though it was close, but back then transportation was hard, so, so they had to go to other ranches and stay there.

Um, I couldn't make the connection why my dad wasn't born there. Being that they were living there at the same ranch that I am talking about; the Molina Ranch. And um, one of my dad's uncle[s] that lives Modesto, California, confirmed that -- I asked that same question, it's like, "well, why, why weren't the people born there?" Because it says that dad was born at San Rafael Ranch. And, um, he said because there were migrant workers, they would travel, so -- and I just, oh wow, that confirms -- and that just -- I was able to comprehend that. Because, I kept placing myself during that time. Where transportation was hard, people were just poor and they needed to work and so they had to move where the jobs were.

So, anyway, as we continued, continued that research, keep in mind also back then there was no computers. So the resources were not that great. You had to -- if you wanted to find some research, you had to be there. You had to visit the courthouses, you had to visit the libraries, you had to do a lot of reading,

you had to -- so resources were not as easy as it is now. And, um, there was no ancestry.com or any of that family search. So, so now we have those, which are a great asset to us.

But anyway, um, my dad would always talk about a family cemetery. And um, every time we would go to Laredo -- because he would take us to Laredo frequently because of the relatives that were out there. And, um, every time that we would go out there, my dad would take us to go visit -- well, to us was the country (laughter). Because we had no idea whether this is -- this used to be our land. No, no. It was like we're going to another country again.

So, but his sole purpose was because he wanted to find out where the cemetery was, because he knew there was a family cemetery. And, um, listening to the conversation that he had with his sister, they would both get into deep conversations. It was like, remember when I lost my necklace and then years later we found it in the -- it's like, here I am. I am just listening to the conversation.

And, it, it just gets interesting all the time. Because it's just like putting a puzzle together. You put the pieces together and every time you find the pieces, like, oh wow. So you get all excited. And, um, on one of the visits that we went to - searching for the cemetery -- you know, you also have to keep in mind that the lands were no longer the family's. So it was kind of hard to get to the lands because a lot of times, people didn't give you permission or anything. And you had to ask for permission to visit.

So on one of the visits that we went to Laredo, I remember my dad -- me telling my dad, "Dad, I think you're crazy. I think you're losing it because there's, there's nothing here, it's all wooded area." And he said, "No, there has to be one here." So anyway (phone rings. Mr. Molina talking on the telephone).

MR: It's all right.

SM: Anyway, um, where did I leave off?

MR: You were saying how, you had trouble finding it, so you were wondering whether if this exists.

SM: Oh yeah. I told my dad, I told my dad, "You know what dad, I think your losing it because, there's nothing here, it's all wooded area." And he said, "No, there has to be one here."

We used to live like right in that area, right there in that section. And it's like, wow. Anyway, and I honestly I really thought that there was no cemetery. For years we grew up going over there searching for it. And, um, for years I never believed him. I said, well, maybe in his mind he thinks -- well, come to find out that, um, three years ago, four years ago, um -- well, I'll take you back.

About five year ago, this man -- I've always had a land line. And I had it for more than 40 years. This man called over here and when I answered, he just started talk away. And, um, I said, "Sir, who are you talking to? Who do you want to talk to?" He said, "Oh, I'm looking for Santos Molina." I said, "Well, yeah, but did you want --" Specifically, I said - he was looking for my dad. He thought he was talking to my dad. So I said, "Oh, wait a minute. I know who you are." He said, "You do?" I said, "Yeah." "How do you?" I said, "Because my dad would always talk about y'all."

He always talked about family and that was his thing; family. Even though I never met him, but I knew him, it's like -- and, um so this man -- I told him, "No,

dad passed away years ago." So he said, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that." So he said, "What about his sister, so-and-so?" And I said, "Well, some of them had passed away and so-and-so is still around." "Oh, okay."

So in our conversation he said, "You know what? I want to meet you." And I said, "Okay." So two weeks later my doorbell rings. And it's, I see this man and I -- "Sir, can I help you?" He said, so he started laughing he said, "You look just like your dad." So, he said, "Come here, I'm going give you a big hug." So he gave me a bug hug. Anyway, this man is named, Rodolfo Molina, who happens to be my dad's uncle.

MR: Wow

SM: Right now -- he's a year older than my dad. I think my dad would be like 88, 89, somewhere around there. Um, so but he didn't know much about the ranch, about the land because, um, I don't think they grew up there. They knew it was there, but I guess he must have lived in town or something. And, um, I asked him was there was a cemetery, and he said, "Yeah. I remember, I remember going to the cemetery. So I said, can you show me where it's at? He said no, I don't remember. It's been more than 60 years."

He hadn't seen my dad in about 60 years, so, um and he said it's been long, it's been a real long time. So when he got married, he moved. So, and um, um, still, with the interest of finding that, um, -- that man, my dad's uncle, kept coming to, to Corpus. And -- one of his visits, he called, he said he was going to Laredo. I said, you know what, I'm really disappointed because you being one of the older ones, you don't seem to know much. But yet here's the thing, he wanted my information. He wanted everything -- he wanted all this, all this

research that I'd done. I said you know what, I think it's best if you do your research. You have kids, have your kids do the research. This way we can put them together. Whatever they find, I didn't find, whatever I find -- and um, so anyway that's another story. But it gets interesting because -- it's, it's a never ending thing.

So, um I said I'm disappointed in you because being one of the older ones, you know, I was expecting that you would know where the cemetery was. "I don't even know where the land is." I said, "Oh my." I said, "Well, you know what, since you're coming to Laredo; If you have some free time, and you want to go visit, give me a call, I'll drive to Laredo and I'll show you where the ranch is. I'll -- used to be. And I'll show you where dad used to take us to go search for the cemetery." So um, he came down with his family to, to Laredo. So um, he gave me a call. He said, "You know what, can you come down?" I said, "I sure can." And it was on a Sunday. I believe it was on a Sunday. So I - - I got my things and I called my mom. I said, "Mom, let's go on a road trip." And I called my sister, "Hey, get the kids, we're going on a road trip." So we ended, we ended up going to Laredo. And we were searching, um -- and I'm skipping a lot because I want to the point. And, um, and we got there and we went -- and it's so easy because the road that, that leads in there is called Molina Espejo; Espejo Molina Road. So that's how I know because I took a picture of my dad with the sign that says Espejo Molina. And that's the same area where the land is.

Anyway so, um, when we got there I went to the hotel to get the man, um, oh oh, my great uncle. And, um, so, um, we drove outside of Laredo and we couldn't find it because they built a freeway. So, Highway 83 is not the old road, it's a freeway now. So, which means a lot of things changed but the road was

still called the same. So, um, once we got to the road, it was easy to find but it's just getting there because, oh, wow, everything changes. And, um, so we went to this, same area, this trailer and we asked, we knocked on this door and this man came out. And I have his name there, we told him, "we're -- our families used to live here at one time back in the 1800's. And, um, there was a cemetery here, and I was wondering if you know anything about this cemetery." He said, "Yeah, I know where it's at." Oh my God. I wanted to die right there. I mean cause after years and years of searching for it and right -- I thought about my dad. I said, "Oh, dad, I wish you would have been here." What a great moment. So, um, and I wrote my feelings down here, that I experienced at that moment

MR: Oh, wow.

SM: And I'm skipping a lot, but this is a little by the closer to what I experienced at that moment. But I have to rewrite it because I just went

MR: Sure

SM: And, um, it was -- I wanted to faint right there because I just felt -- I couldn't believe what I was hearing; what that man said. And, um, you know, he said I'll take you over there. So he drove us over there. And, um, it was an awesome experience.

MR: Was this sort of at the back of the ranch where you had to drive on a farm land, um?

SM: No, it's all clean area. And I got a picture, so I'll show you. It was just, it was just awesome. My dad made a map years ago. I mean, years ago when we -- anyway, and he said, "Here's where the houses were and here's where the cemetery was and all of this. And you could see the river. And it's like oh my, the same thing. It's like I was standing right here, you could see the river. The -- Rio Grande River.

16:31

MR: Wow

SM: And, and, um, I mean it was just awesome. Awesome, awesome, awesome. So, um, I started thinking about my dad. Anyway, so we started walking to this wooded area, and it's like everything else was clean. And, um, I saw this wooded area and it's like, wow.

So as we started walking in there, and -- there was a lot of trash, a lot of bottles, water bottles, and um, paper wrappings and all that, and um, I saw a cross that was made out of steel and then I found a tombstone. And then I found another cross -- apparently it was a cross because it was a just a metal plate sticking out of ground. And then I found, I think it was a wooden cross. So, there was a wooden cross, metal crosses and, um that regular -- and I saw an area looked like it had been -- you know how people put little fences around

MR: Yeah

SM: Okay, but I think this was made out of, not barbwire, but that type of that big fencing

MR: Yeah

SM: I don't know how they call it. But it's something like they used for the goats or something.

MR: Was it a bigger grave or was it for a child?

SM: No, no, no. I just saw it on the ground.

MR: Huh

SM: We didn't have enough time. Keep in mind because I had to drive up there. He called me around 10 o'clock so by the time I got there, it was about 12:30, 1 o'clock and then um, they were slow. I mean I'm a fast person anyway, and with something like this we're all excited.

So, and by the time we -- it was already the afternoon, so and I'm sure the man had something to do, so, um, so that time was very limited, so and I just saw what I saw. Anyway, I saw a tombstone and, but I couldn't make anything of it so I started digging, because most of it is sand. And I'm sure that throughout the years the sand just blew and started covering up because I dug the hole about this, about six-inches and I just started scraping it and it's like at the end of the -- and it's like, oh my God, there was a slab. So, you know something like that is exciting

MR: Oh, yeah.

SM: So I started, I started digging and digging some more, it's like -- I saw some letterings. So, and, and, the letterings were in Spanish. So I started doing that and it's, it's March 20th, I believe, or 1928. So, um and my dad was born in '26. So, um, you know, the excitement, so when I was digging, because we were all excited, it was like oh we started getting chills and all that so I just leaned forward and I kiss the tomb -- I don't know who it was but I kissed it because, you know, being that my dad was so family oriented, and he loved the family so I just, I just leaned over and I kissed the, the slab, right. I mean and I know it had to be a relative. So anyway, um I know my dad would have done the same thing.

MR: Yeah.

SM: So, um, that was exciting. So afterwards, we had to come home and I was just too excited I didn't leave the place. I mean I just wanted to clean the place, I wanted, um, I wanted to cut some trees; shape them up and fix the area, pick up all the trash. But the man said, you know what -- oh, because I asked him afterwards, I said, "Do you mind if I come on one of my free times and come and spend time over here and clean up the place?" He said, "You know what, I would say yes, but right now it's not a good time because the Rio Grande is right there." Being that the water is almost -- to go across is only waist high.

MR: Oh.

SM: So the -- there's a lot of drug trafficking through there. There's also a lot of shooting from over there, over here. I said, "Really?" I mean because we're not you used to that. I said, "For real?" And he said, "Oh, yeah. This place is under

surveillance. I wouldn't doubt it if, um, Border Patrol comes by and tells us what [are] we doing here." And, um -- but you can justify your reasons why you're here and, um so, um he said, "I wouldn't recommend it. And if you do decide later on, then give me a call and I'll tell you if it's safe to come or not." And, and I just haven't in those three years because I respected him too. But at least I'm documenting everything and with pictures and all. It's like, like, you know, the ranch -- the land did exist. The cemetery did exist also.

So, um, on my way back to the truck, I started picking up some rocks. Some rocks because -- that was my family's land, so I brought some rocks with me. A lot of people may think it's crazy but for me it's like, it's exiting. So, um, and afterwards we went to go eat and we just started with talking and sharing information and all this. So, it was just an awesome experience.

MR: That's very cool. Did, did your dad or your uncle talk about what they did there as kids, um, kind of in the cemetery, did they go to it very much?

SM: All my uncle told me about my dad was that grandfather was very strict. He said your dad was a good man because they never did nothing wrong. They were raised different from the way he was. He said because your grandfather was very strict and he kept them in-line and they were hard workers. So I don't know what he meant about that, but you knew my dad and I knew my dad was a hard worker and knew he was a good man. But, other than that, no, because they hadn't seen the children in years, in years.

MR: Do you know how far they migrated in doing work? Just mostly around Texas or did they go further?

SM: Now, keep in mind, I'm talking -- I'm not talking about my dad or my grandfather. I'm talking about his - my great grandparents.

MR: Oh, okay.

SM: Okay. Now my grandfather, he was also a migrant worker. My father was born close by there but not at, at that same land. That's why I was asking my uncle, why wasn't he born right there because where they were working is not - is in the same area. He said, because they were not -- they were living here but they working or over there. So my grandmother got pregnant here but had her baby over there because it was [the] season to work. So that's why he was born at another ranch and not here because he was born during season, not off season.

But whatever that crop might have been or what they were harvesting, I don't know. But anyway, and he confirmed that because I asked him that question. It's like, you know, you all were living here -- if the family was living here why was everybody scattered? Because everybody had to go work and where ever there were living, at that time, that's where they would have their child. So, that makes sense. So anyway, my grandfather was also a migrant worker. But he was one that would take people to Nebraska, to Michigan, to other northern states; Wisconsin. And I have notes on that too.

MR: Oh, wow

SM: Because my mother when she married into to family, my mother was not

used to that. My mother had a different upbringing and she met my dad without even -- my mother was going through a divorce. And, um, she was -- this was back in the 40's.

Times were hard after, uh, after the war. Times were hard and people were just managing - living however they could. So, my mother grew up as an orphan. So she grew up with older aunt and uncle. And, um so she got married at a real young age to this military guy. But she -- marriage didn't work out. So, she came to live with some people and she met my dad, because where my mom lived with the family next door to them was my great aunt. So when ever my dad would come from, from working out in the fields out in a different state, they would come and visit. So that's how my mom and dad got to know each other.

So, and, and the season was gonna start in Michigan again, so mom -- oh, dad told my mom, do you want to come with me? And my mom; you know, being single and with a child it was difficult because she was working as maid for those people and wasn't getting paid. She was just paying for her living quarters. So, and when my dad asked her, "do you want to come with me, and, and um we're going to Michigan because season started." So mom said yes without even knowing much about him.

So, but my mom was a beautiful woman. She was young and beautiful, she could pass as a white person. And, she should speak good English, good Spanish, too and um, people really thought she was white. And, when they left, my grandmother was not comfortable with it so, um -- during their first night together, my grandmother said, "You're not going to sleep with her. Until she's divorced and you're married." Because she was a devout Catholic. So, up there, they started working on her divorce and she was finally married through the Catholic Church. Up in Alma Michigan.

MR: Oh, wow. Okay. I'm from just outside of Lansing, Michigan.

SM: Oh, oh they went to Lansing a lot.

MR: Oh, wow. Okay

SM: Yeah, there were migrant workers in Lansing. Do you know where Suttons Bay is?

MR: Suttons Bay, that sound familiar, that's -- is that on the kind of the east side of the...

SM: I have no idea, I've never been up there

MR: You don't remember (Laughter)

SM: Suttons Bay. Because my grandparents -- their last year that they went to go work as migrants was in 1967. They were killed in a train-truck collision.

MR: Oh, man.

SM: Yeah. In Suttons Bay, Michigan.

MR: Oh, man

SM: And, a lot of relatives from Laredo were heading out there. Keep in mind we're talk about difficult times.

MR: Yeah.

SM: They were traveling by truck. People were in the back and I don't know if you can picture this, but I remember when I was growing up, we used to work the cotton fields and they would throw us in the back of the truck. And we would be either sitting down or standing up. Well, that's how they traveled over there.

Of course, it had a tarp for the rain and the -- and people would stop on the road and they would sleep out on the side of the roads or they would stop at, um, at a gas station and just -- that's the way people lived back then.

Um, so my -- when my mother; I know I'm jumping back. So when my mother married into this family, she wrote some of her stories about what she experienced. And it's like to her it was like wow. My grandfather would get a tarp and just, um, - - they would stop on the side of the road and they would get a big tarp and just extend it over. And they would get a little, I don't know, like a barbeque pit or something, and the women would start rolling tortillas, another one would be washing clothes and it's like, so mom wasn't used to that.

(Laughter).

I mean, aren't they afraid a snake might bite them or something. So that's like -- I want to show you everything but it's too much to comprehend. And I want to tell you everything about it, but, but -- and a lot of this is not even documented

MR: That's the great thing about these conversations. That's how you document it (laughter).

SM: Yeah. Um, but I keep jumping back and forth.

MR: That's good.

SM: And, and, oh man, I don't even know where to continue. Um, my parents got married in Alma, Michigan at a Catholic Church up there. And then -- every year they would go and, and to Michigan or Wisconsin or Nebraska but they would go and work out there.

And, um, I -- we were migrant workers too, because I remember when I was growing up -- I must have been -- actually I was ten years old. But there's a lot stuff that I just I don't know. Because I was, I was still a kid. Um, I remember that the last day of school, all the windows were, on the house, were all covered up; the last day of school. And we would come in and mom would say, "Okay y'all need to go to bed now because we're getting up early in the morning."

And, we each -- we didn't have a suit case -- we each had a pillow case. That pillow was for all my -- my pillow was in there, my clothes was in there. Everybody had their pillow. The pillow case and their pillow and there was no, "oh and I'm gonna pack" -- I mean we would be gone for like three-months. And then ee would come back. When we would come back, the first thing we would do, they would take us to Laredo to go buy our clothes, school clothes. And, um we start school with new clothes. They would buy our tennies at JC Penny's in downtown and, um, that's, that's pretty much it

MR: What, what...?

SM: Ask me questions.

MR: Oh, sure. Sure, sure, yeah. So what was it like traveling as a, as a kid and how far did you go?

SM: It was exciting. It was exciting because -- well, when you're a kid, back then, and I'm talking maybe 50 years ago, you don't know much. But you're excited because you're going somewhere. And we weren't the only ones, there was a caravan.

There was other families also traveling along and everybody was just following each other. Now, we went to California. We lived up there for three-months. And, up there, we lived like in a camp -- camp site. I don't know if you saw that movie, La Bamba?

MR: It's been a while

SM: Okay. You know how they had tents?

MR: Yeah

SM: Well, we didn't have tents. We had housing.

MR: Okay

SM: I guess the government must have been providing housing back then because we lived in a real nice house.

MR: What part of California was it?

SM: Um

MR: If you remember.

SM: Santa Paula.

MR: Okay.

SM: Santa Paula. Santa Paula in Ventura County, North of Los Angeles

MR: Oh yeah, yeah, I know where that is

SM: So, and it's all migrant workers. We work[ed] out there. We used to pick lemons. And there was a lot of different types of vegetables. There was grapes further on and there was avocados and, different rows and rows of different colored plants and roses. Oh, just everything, beautiful out there. That's what I remember.

MR: Did, the other -- you mentioned the caravan, were those other families that you knew or other random...?

SM: No. We didn't know them because there was people from -- a lot people from Corpus, we met some people from Austin, people from everywhere; Laredo.

And everybody would -- some families would travel in caravans but once we got there, there was people that had already arrived there. So but we all lived in the same area. It was like a cul-de-sac.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: And, um, everybody had; every family had their house. So, um, yeah. And at the corner, there was like the, um, I would say barracks. But it wasn't barracks, it was more like, um, housing for men; single men.

And I remember on the weekends, they must have given the men, um, some Corn Flakes in the mornings because we had some friends that lived in - - outside, outside the grounds. And, um, in ranches around and I remember there was -- and I want to go looking for him one of these days, I will find him. He was a little white boy and I can't remember his name right now. Anyway, and we became such good friends. And, I learned a lot from him. And, and every Saturday and Sunday we would get together and we would -- a bunch of little kids we would -- reminds me of the Little Rascals -- and we would go to the barracks and we would knock on the door (knocking sound) and, um, and we would yell out Corn Flakes. I don't know (laughter) and we would open the door Corn Flakes (laughter) and the men would be lying on their beds and they would go like this, "here you go kid" (laughter). And they would throw us the Corn Flakes.

And we would go to the, I guess it must have been a small creek or lake. To us it was a river. But it was one of those rivers or streams that was real clear and lots of rock. Beautiful country, I think. Anyway, and we would take the Corn Flakes and all of us would be walking like this over there to the creek and we would be eating the Corn Flakes, just like that. And we spent a lot of time out

there just talking and laughing and swimming and without realizing that we were too little to be out there in water and, um -- you know, we could have gotten in danger.

We got to see some -- back then they would call them hobos, not homeless, they were called hobos. And we got to see some hobos out there; that was the first time I had seen one. I had never seen a hobo.

And, um, I kept some of the, I kept some of the dishes from when we were migrant workers and, um, actually I found them out at ranch. And, I told mom, "Mom whatever -- why do you have these?" She said, "Those were the ones we used to use when we were in California." I said, "Oh really? I'm going to save them." So, I saved them. And I have them, I still have them.

MR: That's great. Yeah. So how, how many hours a day as a kid did you have to go out if you had to estimate?

SM: Actually, I would go work -- I would go with my parents to help them out and we had to carry a shoulder bag and they would give us some scissors and we would have to cut the lemons and put in the bag. And as soon as that bag was full, we would throw it inside a box. And put it where the truck passes by, and they would pick them up and load them up and they would mark how many boxes you had and all this.

This is how my dad would get paid. But I would help him with the lemons that would fall. I had my own little bag and I would put them in there, because there were a lot of lemons that had fallen and yet they were still good. So, um that's what I would do with my parents.

MR: Wow. So how did -- you might not know, have realized this as a kid, but how did your parents go about figuring out which field to go to? Did they have like a trucker who would decide -- work that out?

SM: Well, being that my dad had been in the business for years, because he learned that from his father, I think there was a government agency or something that would, they would consult them and I think they would give them a certain amount of money for every head, but that I'm not sure. I'm just, I'm just from what I remember hearing, it's like you take so many, you get so much for every head. And I guess that was for travel time and, and for once you get there this is what you'll need and all this until you get to settled in.

I'm thinking that's what happened. Now, as far as my grandfather going up to Michigan, that I don't know. And I think that was mostly survival.

MR: Yeah.

SM: But, um, I got -- I have a picture of my grandparents when they went up there because we went to California in 1965, they went to Michigan in '67, that's when they got killed. So that was the last time we worked as migrants. I, I worked as a migrant here, but, but it wasn't -- it was here at the shrimp company

MR: Oh, okay.

SM: In Port A, I believe. Port Aransas or Aransas Pass. Aransas Pass.

MR: Yeah.

SM: But, um, and when I was going to A&M, I was trying to finish up -- and I needed money to pay for my books so I went to Calallen, because Calallen has -- there's a ranch out there that has plants; okra, and melons and all that. So all you have to do is turn them over and cut the - whatever was ready to be cut. So, and that was tiring; working all day for \$20 (laughter). It's like...

MR: Oh, my. So they paid you by the day or --

SM: Oh, yeah

MR: Go out and it was just \$20, huh.

SM: So I would get \$40 because it was \$20 for Saturday and \$20 for Sunday. So \$40, that's, that's enough for my books. Not enough but it's okay

MR: Yeah. And was that -- were you going to school here on the Island at Corpus Christi State or up in the...?

SM: Uh huh. No, it was Corpus Christi State.

MR: Yeah. Yeah. Wow. So when you were a kid and went over to California, did you have to leave school early or come in late or anything like that?

SM: No. No. Everything was done accordingly. We left at [the] last day of school, as soon as -- like I said, as soon as we would come in, our house was

boarded-up. And, and then, um -- but everybody, everybody everyone that lived in that area -- not everybody could afford going out.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: But if they stayed her, they would still work the fields; cotton fields.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: We would travel. And I don't know why my dad did that, I mean we could have stayed here and worked still.

MR: Did anybody in your family ever stay and work and cotton around here, or they all went...?

SM: Oh, yeah, we all did. We all did.

MR: Oh, okay.

SM: That was our last year of going out and the rest of the years, we worked in fields. As soon as summer would get here we would work in fields.

MR: Okay. Did you mostly do that around Robstown or in, um, what sort of...?

SM: We, um, we went -- we would work -- do you know where the State School is?

MR: Yeah, yeah.

SM: Okay. That -- before the state school, that wasn't even there. That used to be a field; cotton field. We worked there.

MR: Wow.

SM: Yeah, we worked there, we worked in Taft, in Robstown, outside of, by the airport, um -- I don't think we ever went to Robstown. I remember going to Taft, maybe we did work Robstown but I remember working in like Calallen area.

MR: Oh, okay.

SM: Oh, well, outside of Robstown. I guess that would be outside of Robstown. And I think we also worked like, um over there off of Cimarron, because it was all fields. There was no housing, there was not even a freeway.

MR: When you were out there did -- was it mostly other local residents working or did - - were there other folks coming in from other parts of Texas?

SM: My grandfather would take us. My grandfather was the truck driver. So he would go, in the mornings, he would come by and pick us up. And there was another man after my grandfather wasn't doing that, there was another man and I think his name was -- that's what they would call him Peloton. And I not even know if that's his real name or what. But Peloton means like, big, big bald or big

head, or something like that. Anyway, but, um -- what was your question?

MR: Oh, yeah. I was just curious if there were other folks from other parts of Texas that came in to migrate to these areas while you were out there with him?

SM: Not down here. I think all this area were all locals. But I remember that my grandfather would come and pick us up like around four in the morning, 4:30. And, we would have our, our paca; our, our sack. And even though I was young, but I remember getting all the cotton and making it in a ball and then my father would get there he'd pick it up and put in, um, -- once we were able to pull our own weight, then, we would get other own sack and we would just pick the cotton and

MR: Were you paid by the hundred pound or by the hour?

SM: I have no idea. I have no idea, because by the time I was growing up my family wasn't doing that anymore, because, um, I don't know I guess we were growing and things were beginning to change; the economy was get a little bit better. I don't know I can't answer that because I don't really don't know.

MR: That's all right. Yeah. It's great to learn all these things myself. Do you remember them ever bringing in machines at that time?

SM: What kind of machines?

MR: Like picking machines. Was that ever a discussion or was it all --

SM: No, no.

MR: -- so it was before that time.

SM: In fact, but I can tell you something my parents became friends with the Mork family in Michigan. They became like brothers and sisters. My grandfather loved them. And they loved my grandfather. And, um, the Mork family and, um - - Mrs. Mork, when my grandparents got killed, Mr. Mork and Mrs. Mork they took it real bad because they were going to visit them. They were gonna go work, they were going to their land to go work, so Mr., Mr. Mork took it real hard, because it's like they treated my family like royalty, they really did. And, um, you know hearing mom say all these wonderful things about the Morks and they were -- I think one of their daughters married a Kellogg. From the Kellogg

MR: Oh, yeah, yeah over in-

SM: Yeah. Yeah. So, um, anyway,

MR: So, if you were to look back and compare what it was like being out picking cotton locally here (phone rings) - - that's all right.

SM: (On the phone).

MR: If you need to speak, I can wrap it up if you like?

SM: No. They can call me later.

MR: So, if you were to compare what it was like, what were some of the differences, or similarities between going to California and picking lemons and cotton locally here?

SM: I think it was exciting to travel. Um, seeing the country. I remember going through Arizona and I remember we would stop at rest areas. To me it was like a picnic, a big picnic. Um, seeing all these families and out there and I remember, I remember one year -- let me see what they're doing (dogs barking, door open) -- Oh, what was I saying?

MR: You mentioned it was it was kind of exciting?

SM: Oh, oh yeah. It was exciting. To me it was exciting, I mean I think to the whole family -- but there was a lot things we didn't understand like why cover the windows and all that. But, and I remember when we came back from California, we stopped in fields and, um, we stopped and we saw some relatives working the cotton fields.

MR: Oh.

SM: So we stopped to talk to them -- not me but my dad. Stopped to talk to his sister because his sister's family was working out in the fields. So, so, and I guess my grandfather was also working in the fields.

MR: Wow. And these were in different places than Ventura County? Even just on your way home?

SM: No. No. That was -- they stayed here, they didn't go with us.

MR: Oh, okay.

SM: That was after we got back to Corpus.

MR: Oh, okay.

SM: I guess my dad knew where they were working at, so, so he stopped by and he was like hey, we're just getting here, so. And but every family coming back every family went their own way.

But I remember this on the way back there was, um, there was this man that wanted to take a different route, a different route. Because when we were coming back, we were not coming back to Corpus. We were coming to work in Northern Texas and then head back to Corpus

MR: Uh huh.

SM: Which we did. Um, but, my dad took it upon himself to let the man -- the man said he that knew another route which was easier. Yeah, but he took us, he took us through Devils Canyon. And that was a real dangerous road because we had to do a lot of climbing on the mountains and these were the mountains that have no fencing on the sides and you could actually -- so if you fell off that cliff or

mountain, guess what? You were dead.

And up and in the mountains there was Indian tribes. So instead of going through the main highway, that man took us through a different route. And I remember my dad being upset because the man didn't know what he was gonna -- that road he was gonna bring us through, so, um, but we finally got this this northern town called Littlefield, Texas

MR: Uh huh.

SM: And, I remember, I remember a little bit about that place. And I don't know what we worked on, or what we picked out there. But I remember we worked and we were just there for a short period.

I remember they had huge sunflower plants. Big sunflowers, because I had never seen a sunflower that big, so to me that was amazing. And, um, I had seen the little ones but not the huge ones. So when you're a kid it's like, oh wow was a giant (laughter).

MR: Oh, yeah (laughter)

SM: So, and I remember that in Littlefield, where we stayed at, I guess migrant people would also go out there, because they had little houses also. And um, they also had, um, hurricane -- um, how do you call that? Not a hurricane, a tornado.

MR: Oh, like a shelter.

SM: Yes, yes. With those doors, which reminds me of the Wizard of Oz because it looked just like that. It looked just like that where you open those doors and you get in. Um, I remember, at that ranch, they had that, so it must have been a tornado alley or something. But I remember that was in West Texas, I think.

MR: How long did you stay in those place out in West Texas, or, you know, those that weren't local or weren't California?

SM: California, I think it was like two, two months, two and a half months. And then in west Texas I want to say it was like two weeks.

MR: Okay.

SM: Yeah, it wasn't that long, but it was on our way back.

MR: Okay.

SM: And, um, but to me it was exciting especially when we were out there -- I had never seen Oriental people, or Asian people.

MR: And were, were they picking as well or just living there?

SM: No, no. I didn't see any - - working with us there was a lot of, of, a lot of single men. A lot of, um, um, a lot of Hispanics or Latinos, a lot of White men, too. Mostly single. A few families. I didn't see no blacks, at least not at that time

MR: Were there, um, black folks, African American folks working in the fields locally here usually when you were out there in Calallen?

SM: I never saw them. I never saw them.

MR: Okay. Now you mentioned before the role of religion in your family, was it hard for - I don't know if your grandparents ever mentioned being able to go to church and do those sorts of things when they were moving around a lot - or did they have religious services out there? Did they ever speak to that very much?

SM: Well, my grandmother was a devout Catholic. And I know by 6 o'clock in the morning she had already gone to mass and back. So it was like (laughter) who does that? I mean now a days, who does that?

MR: 6 a.m. That's an early one.

SM: Um, um, and I'm sure she followed her tradition.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: As best as she could. She didn't like the fact or she didn't accept the fact that mom was gonna, um, live with my dad without even being -- because she strictly told my dad, "You're not going to sleep with her. Don't make any plans. She's, she's been married before and she's not gonna -- she needs to get a divorce first and then get married before you even touch her."

MR: Uh huh.

SM: So I mean that pretty much explains it how devout she was. Um, she was real strict. She wasn't one that would go to the borders. She didn't like the border town at all.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: She was, um, I don't know I guess they were poor but they were proud, though.

MR: Uh huh. Yeah, so when you were out in California, do you remember folks going to church on Sunday or anything like that or just --?

SM: I don't remember going to church. I know before, here we did. [When] we were growing up we were -- in fact my dad was the type of man that if you -- my dad would always sit in back of us, always. Always. And then like and there were kids over there and we wanted to be over there but he would get us by the shirt (laughter) or, or - - and if somebody would open the doors to walk in and if we went; if we went to see who was coming in, he'd get our head and put it forward. In other words, look straight, not to -- don't worry about who's coming in.

MR: This reminds me of church. My, my mom would always sit in between my brother and I is he we wouldn't --

SM: Oh, yeah.

MR: -- start giggling and all these kinds of things. So it sounds familiar. Yeah, yeah, so-

SM: My dad was very devoted to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: So, um, every, every, um, he would also drive to his mom's house to pick her up to take her to church. That I remember.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: And then he'd come and he'd take us to church. But that was every Sunday and we wouldn't drive, we would walk to church.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: And every single Sunday, that was first thing we'd do. Oh, my mom did say that the priest would come to the ranches.

MR: Oh.

SM: Yeah, the priest would come to the ranches and listen to confessions and give them communion and all that. Yeah.

MR: Wow.

SM: So, so, yeah, that was a big part of, of their lives when they were out in Michigan and, and Wisconsin and all those places.

Now I do have some cousins that stayed in Wisconsin and Michigan and, and all those northern states. Um, because by -- when doing research, we asked about whatever happened to so-and-so. "Oh no, he, he, he lives in Wisconsin with his family or he got married over there," and, you know, so, so they no longer come down south.

MR: Wow. Have you gotten in contact with any of those relatives that are still up there?

SM: No, I haven't. I know who they are, but I don't know them. I say I know them, because - I know them because I studied them but I don't know them, I've never met them. But I know, you know, the most interesting thing about doing research -- and I'm always going back and forth, and I've been doing this for like 40 years and, um, you know, I read them, I study them, I feel like that I know them. And, you know, it's just amazing what one experiences when doing research.

And my mom used to say -- and I'm changing the story around a little bit because I'm go to add a little humor to it. Um, one day my mom said, she was -- my mom used to read a lot and she was talking about Neiman Marcus (whispers), wait a minute, mom, I asked her, "What do you know about Neiman Marcus?" She said, "Oh that's where all the rich ladies shop." "Have you ever been to a Neiman Marcus?" She said, "No." I said, "Do we have one here at the

mall?" She said, "No, you don't find those stores in small towns like Corpus." I said, "Where do you find them?" "Oh, like in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles." I said, "Really, oh, wow." So anyway, so that stayed with me. It's like wow, you know, she learns all this through reading

MR: Uh huh.

SM: So, anyway, I was in Las Vegas with my sister. And, on this trip, there's a Neiman Marcus. So I told my sister, you know what, because that reminded me of what mom had told me, you know what, I want to get mom something from Neiman Marcus. And she said, "Are you sure?" "Yeah, why not, why not, you know." And she said, "What do I get her?" She said, "Well, I don't know anything. You know mom likes anything you get her. She'll be satisfied. Even if you take her a rock, she's satisfied." And I said, "You know what, get her a night gown." And she said, "It's \$600." [I said], "Don't worry about it, I'm going to charge it anyway, and have it gift wrapped."

So we did right, so and here I was very excited because I was, I was bringing her a present from Neiman Marcus, so, um, when I get to her house, I said, mom I got you something. She said "Oh, Neiman Marcus. Why did you do that?" I said, "Oh, well, why not?" It said, "It reminded me of what you told me about Neiman Marcus." And so she put it aside. I said, "Aren't you going to open it?" She said, "No, I'll open it later." "No, open it now, mom." I was more excited than she was.

MR: Uh huh.

SM: So, um, she opens it up real carefully. I said, "Mom, just open it up." "No, no, no, are you crazy?" I said and here I was, "Why aren't you opening it up?" And she said, "I'm going to save the bow." (Laughter). She pinned it on the wall. And I said, "And the paper?" "Oh, I'm gonna to use it on top of my dresser. Because it was real pretty."

MR: Uh huh.

SM: And I said, "Oh my God." (Laughter). I said, "Okay. I mean after all it is yours, I mean you can do whatever you want to." So she opened the box and she got the -- it was a moo moo dress. It was wasn't a night gown, it was a moo moo dress. So she got it and she saw it and she said, "Oh okay." So, and I couldn't understand why, you know. And, um, she said, "It cost you a lot of money." I said, "No, it didn't." (inaudible) I spend more at the mall here than what I do -- so, um, she, um, I said, "Mom try it on. Before I leave I want to see you try it on." So she put it on, right. It was a little bit long, it looked okay. I said, "You can do alterations to it."

Well, the next day I went to work, I came for lunch and um, I, um, she had the dress on. And I said, "It looks different, it doesn't look like the same dress." So I kept looking at her. I said, "Oh, I see you did some alterations." She said, "Yeah." I said, "I thought it had long sleeves." She said, "Yeah, but you know I'm always cooking so I didn't want the -- to get burned."

MR: Uh huh.

SM: I said, well, okay. So she cut the sleeves (Laughter). It was no longer the

dress I bought. So I said, "I thought was longer, you know those moo moo dresses are long." She said, "Well, you know I'm always going in and out and the steps, I was afraid I was going to trip on the dress. And you know I'm always hanging clothes out on the clothesline." I said, "Okay, well that's understandable." So I said, "I don't remember it having pockets." She added two pockets (laughter) and then she said, "Well, you know, I needed a pocket for the clothes pins." I said, "Oh, okay." "And I needed another pocket for my tobacco." (Laughter)

So, and then I said, "Okay mom, tell me the truth, at first you weren't too liking of the dress?" She said, "You know why? Because I could have made it myself." (Laughter) Okay. And that's true and that's true because she would also make our clothes (Laughter).

MR: That's funny. But she used the paper on the dresser.

SM: She used it on the dresser. I mean like one of those mats (laughter).

MR: That's funny.

SM: Anyway, so you want me to show you what I have?

MR: Sure, sure, I guess I'll stop it right here then.