

Washington County Museum
Oral History Interview with Maria Loreda
At Virginia Garcia Clinic in Cornelius
March 27, 2001

Informant: Maria Loreda
Interviewer: Michael O' Rourke
Transcriber: Carly Lave

M= Michael
L= Maria Loreda

M: Michael O' Rourke for the Washington County Historical Society. Beginning interview with Maria Loreda on March 27th, 2001. And today's interview's taking place at her office of the Virginia Garcia Clinic in Cornelius.

L: Cornelius. And I'm going to unlock the door, just so people can knock.

M: Okay. Great. Maria want don't we start at the very beginning...

L: Uhuh.

M: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

L: Oh I was born Mission, Texas. In 1948. And my parents are from, well my father is from Mexico. He was from Mexico. Rio Brado. And my mother was from McCowen, Texas. Was born in McCowen, Texas.

M: Okay. And what can you tell me about your parents? Maybe starting with your father.

L: Well I'll start with my father, well my father worked as a, in agricultural. But he also did brick laying. So during the winter he would help build houses in Mission, Texas. Before that he was Bracero. And I don't know if you know what a "Bracero" is but a Bracero is the person in or around their thirties and forties when the United States needed workers because of the war, they needed people to do the agricultural work. So the United States made an arrangement with Mexico to bring men over to do work, the agricultural work.

M: Formal arrangement...

L: Yea, formal arrangement. It really was formal, so that the men were contracted in Mexico, and then they would be at the border, and the border states, all the border states from California to Texas, men would be at the border of there to cross over. And then they would go through a check up of a medical interview, and then a medical checkup and then they were sent to different parts of the United States to work. So my

father was one of those Braceros. Worked in different parts of Texas, plus I think he went over to Oklahoma one time to work. He, I think he worked for probably about three or four years doing that. And then he met my mother in, my mother lived in the border state. So they got married. So he brought her, took her to Mexico to live with him. And they lived in the little, around that time in Rio Grado they had "Aheros" I don't really know what a "Aheros" is but people were given land, ya know by the government. Ya know, that they can sort of grow their own crops and do all and be given some land. So my grandmother and grandfather had land. And so my father was given a partial of land to work. So he took my mother and so...

M: And this was again just right after they...

L: Right after they got married.

M: Uhuh.

L: Yea, so my mother went with him to Mexico. And it's not real far. Rio Grado is only about I don't know maybe thirty of forty miles from the border, it's not very far. So they lived there for a couple of years. And the reason I know all this is because my brother kind of told me the story. But they lived there for a couple of years. She had two of my, my brother, my oldest brother and my oldest sister were born in Mexico. And then I don't why, for some reason they thought it be better if all the other kids were born in the United States. So my mother when she got pregnant with my second brother, my second youngest, she went to her mother's and had the babies there. So then around 1947 or 46' they decided to just come and live in the United States. So my father and my brothers and sisters, crossed the, and it's still funny, because they said, at that time to become citizens fo the United States, all you had to do was step over the Mexican Flag. So that I guess at that time, they had a flag, a Mexican flag on the floor at the border, and you just step over it and you become a U.S. citizen. So they had to step over the Mexican flag, so they became citizens. But I think there was another process. I don't know what the process was but they became citizens or residents of the United States. And then both my brother, my oldest brother and my oldest sister could not go back to Mexico. It was one of those stipulations. Because once they left Mexico, they couldn't come back. So because until they turned eighteen when they can date themselves up high and get residency.

M: Okay. They didn't become citizens then?

L: They didn't become citizens then, they were sort of citizens but not legal ones for some reason. I don't know what it was. But I guess they, at eighteen, they would. Because my brother went to the army, the U.S. army for 20 years and so they were citizens of some sort, but I don't know. They couldn't go to Mexico. I don't understand that part but there was something going on about how they applied for their citizenship

at that time. So my father worked as a brick layer. My mother died about in 1953, so she died about five years later in Texas.

M: When you were a very young child.

L: When I was very young. Yea, I was only four years old, or five years old when she died. And she had died of some kind of complications. She had just had my little sister, who was only about two weeks old. And so there were eight of us in the family. Eight children, and my father. And so my father at that time, my oldest sister was thirteen. So she was the one that was going to be in charge of all of us. So my father decided that my youngest, who was only two weeks old, to give her to the godparents. So then the godparents took over raising her. And I think it was going to be for only a couple years, and then he was going to take her back. But then life got hard and because he had kids growing up, and he was a single parent trying to raise eight kids... seven kids. So I think after two or three years, they adopted her. And he Okayed the adoption. We still are very related, we still talk to each. She knows who we are; she knows what happened and all that other stuff. But that's what happened, ya know, when you're a single parent and you have to make decisions about your children. And so he gave her up. So he worked in the fields during the summer. Just picking anything. In Texas it ended up picking cotton.

M: And the godparents were living in Texas as well.

L: In Texas, yes. The godparents were in Texas so the godparents were only a few blocks from where we lived. She's now a teacher in Texas. So I think the good part was that she didn't have to travel, she didn't have to migrate. She didn't do anything. And so she was able to finish her school, and graduate, and go to college. Which none of us were able to for a long time, except for my younger brother. We were not able to do that because we did a lot of migrating. So my father during the summer, because a lot of home building work got low during that time. There was not enough home building in the summer. So he would take all the family and we would just go off and pick cotton in different parts of Texas. And so we would go all the way from where we lived, we lived in the Orlando Valley, which is right almost if you look at Texas, right close to the Gulf of Mexico. We were probably only sixty miles from the Gulf of Mexico. So we would travel from there all the way to the panhandle. Ya know, in plain view. I think we even ended up in Oklahoma. Edna, I always remember, Edna, Oklahoma because my sister's name is Edna. So we went Edna, Oklahoma and we would work. I was, I think I remember my first time working, I was six or seven years old. It was a couple years between when my mother died and we would be picking cotton. My father would take us out to the field, and we'd all work. My oldest brother and my sister would be the main workers, and then we were the ones who sort of just helped out the rest of the family. Either by bringing water or by making little cotton, picking some cotton if they were ahead, so they could

pick it up and put it in their sack and stuff like that. Also did the tomatoes and reds. I loved the, there a lot of things we didn't eat. It's funny, cause we did the spinach and all the green vegetables, we used to cut those and put them in baskets. And that's called, Canastaole. And I think they were only five cents a basket, so we had to make a lot of baskets at that time. I think the most we made was fifty cents a day for each of us. So we came out of there with probably five dollars for a family of ten dollars per family. But ya know its money. It's what's made.

M: And it was worth more then.

L: It was worth more then, than now. I mean, I remember getting paid fifty cents an hour working in the field. Hauling or picking or doing anything. I mean, it was fifty cents an hour. So you work ten hours, you make five dollars. So we would make like twenty-five dollars a week. So twenty-five dollars a week; and then there's four of us or five us working, ya know we made a hundred and some dollars, or almost two hundred dollars. Even depending on, I mean, I don't know how many people were working in the family. Because all of us worked in the fields, there was nobody that didn't work. So that was just the way we, my father survived. I mean he survived, the family survived was by all of us working. We went to school... he put us in school, regularly, like we were supposed to. We would go into school in about October, because picking cotton, we follow the crop all the way up and then we would follow the crop down. Then by October, late October we would end up back in our home state, in our home city. In Mission. And the our father, my father would put us back in school. And then we would from October until about May. And then he would take us out again. So we never finished the school. We never started the school and we never finished it. We always were in the middle. So we had a lot of catching up to do. And then around 1961, ya 1961, he heard there were like these stories about Oregon. And that in Oregon you could pick these huge strawberries, and then you can make a lot of money. Ya know, like you could make little boxes, there like, you could pick little boxes and there worth like two dollars each and you could make a whole bunch of boxes and from that you can make money. So and there was not a lot of work there, in Mission at that time. And said we're not gonna go pick cotton, we're gonna pick strawberries. And we didn't even know what a strawberry was, which was the other thing. (laughs) and we never had eaten one, we never had seen one. And so my father had decided to go strawberries, to come over to Oregon and pick strawberries. And so a contractor, the guy that had told him about the strawberries, came over to our house and gave us a hundred and fifty dollars, and said he would come by and pick us up two weeks later. We had no car, so we were supposed to pack some of our belongings in boxes or whatever. And then he would load up this big flatback truck, the back had some fenders up and then a canvas over it, over the top of the truck. And we were supposed to go in there. And so we packed our clothes in a couple of boxes. And put our blankets and pillows, and a couple of dishes,

cause we didn't know what to take, it was like we were gonna take the same things we took in Texas. Ya know, we had like our own pants, and our own dishes. So we did that. And then he came one morning, at three o' clock in the morning. We closed up, we were renting an apartment, but it was a like a duplex. It was three bedroom. My father was renting that, so he paid ahead some of the rent, and then locked up the whole house and boarded the windows. My stepmother, cause at that time my father had remarried. My stepmother, we had plants in the house, ya know, plants that she had. She put a bucket, a huge bucket of water, and then put the plants in there, and thought they would last all the time we were gone. (laughs). And so she put them in there, and then put another tub with some more plants. Cause she had a lot of plants all over, hoping that that would make the plants live, and that when we would come back they would still be there. And they were not there. I mean, it was like, when we came back they were all dead. But ya know, we didn't know. We didn't know how long we were gonna be. I mean, we knew we were going to Oregon, we know we were gonna come back. I don't even know how my father knew we were going to come back. And had, and that we were just going to go make some money. And so we got on this truck. And then he went, I don't know if he to.... He went to another little town in Texas. And picked up another family. And then we went to another town, two or three families and picked up another family. And so there were about three families in the truck. And all of them were about seven or eight members to a family. So there were about sixteen of us, or twenty of us in that truck. All the belongings were in the bottom of the truck. And then there was a floor that they put on. Ya know, like a layer so all out stuff went on the bottom, and then our blankets and food went on the top, with all the family members were. And that was our first night out of the house in Texas. We were still in Texas. And it was already nine o' clock and I can't remember what town we were in but we were in Texas. And the next day we traveled to Arizona, we ended up in Arizona. And we spent a night in Arizona. And another night in New Mexico. And then by the time we got to California we had no money. Cause we ran out of money. I think we spent two nights in Texas, and then one night in Arizona, and then one night in New Mexico. And then by the time we got to California, we were out of money. And so my father had to borrow more money for food. Cause and he had spent some money to pay for the rent, and so they didn't have a lot of money. So they spent two weeks in California. And so two or three days in California, cause it took us seven days to get to Oregon. So we ended up in Oregon. The family that came, it's so funny, cause the family that came with us, we were talking about work we were going to do. And some of the work we were going to do was strawberries. And other work was asparagus, which we didn't know what it looked like. But they had told me it was long and skinny plants that handle sprouts coming out, or leaves coming out. So this man that was getting out of the truck, one of the men who was getting out of the truck. We got to this camp, and he got out of the truck and looked at the pine trees and said, "Ah, these are huge asparagus" Ya know.

(both laugh heartedly)

L: So then he, so we all thought, these are the asparagus. So one of these asparagus can feed ya know, like hundreds of families. And he said, no no no, those are not asparagus, those are pine trees. And he goes, "Oh, trees." And he said, " I thought is was an asparagus." But it was so funny. We all remember laughing and joking about him for a long time. So we got to Oregon, Jefferson, Oregon. And in Jefferson there was a couple of camps and we were living in one. We got one little cabin that was given to us as part of this is where you're going to live. They had stoves, it wasn't really a stove. They had a wood stove, some kind of wood stove. But it was just a metal piece and then brick on the edges. And that was where you were supposed to cook. We had never cooked on wood before and so we were supposed to heat the house, or this room he had. So it was very hard in the beginning, because we didn't know how to work and how we were gonna eat in Oregon. I remember my father buying a lot of canned food ya know, like canned tuna and canned chicken and canned beans. Just everything canned because we didn't know how to eat, because it was like how are we going to eat our own food. And so one of the things he did after a month of being here was he sent a letter to my sister, my eldest sister who was already married, and told her we needed a couple of things from Texas. We want our own "Mochaheta" I don't know if you know what that is. But that's a, sort of like a bowl where you smash all your spices...

M: Okay. Yea like a bowl..

L: Like the pharmacists have. So we had that, but it's made out of rock. So we used that to make our spices.

M: Like a spice grinder.

L: So he told her to get him that. And also get our Palote, which was our rolling pin to make tortillas. And some spices. And so he got all that stuff from my sister, which she sent over the mail. So at least we had something we could cook with. So the first couple months were hard. My father got sick. We had no refrigeration. We couldn't put anything, there was no refrigerator around. We couldn't eat a lot of meat. We had to eat a lot of canned, that 's why we were eating canned food. So he got sick, cause he was used to eating meat. And so he got sick for awhile. And then I remember somebody came by, and they were killing, they were selling sheep or goats. So between my father and another family we bought a couple cheap, and they killed them right there in the camp. And took the blood, too the meats out, took everything out. And then they dried the meat in, they learned how to dry meat, and put it on a string, and put a lot of salt and pepper and dry that meat to offer us for him to eat and for us to eat. Cause we had no meat. And we had no milk. Cause there was no place to put it. My little sister from my step mother, was only about six or nine months old. So she was also getting sick

because there was not enough stuff for us to eat. But we worked, they took us to different places around Jefferson. We worked the strawberries, we worked the raspberries. We were working, they would take us to the mint. There was a lot of mint over in that area. And so we did that. And as we were working, one of things that they had told us was that they were going to pay us a dollar an hour. And that the strawberries were like seventy-five cents a pallet, or one of those little boxes. The thing that's filled with twelve little boxes in it. They told us they were going to be seventy-five cents, and they were paying us sixty-five cents. And they were paying us ninety-five cents instead of a dollar. And so one day wage and hour came by, people from the wage and hour then the state came by, and were talking to all the people. Ya know, "So are you getting paid well? Are you getting... How are you getting paid? Are there any problems? Are things doing well?" And so my father said No. We're not getting paid, they told us they were going to pay us a dollar an hour, and they pay us ninety-five cents. And they told us they were going to pay us ya know, a certain amount for each pallet, and they're paying us less. And so they're keeping that money ya know, and we don't know if we're going to get it. Ya know, and we just want to know. I mean, if we're going to get it that's fine. But we don't know if we're going to get it or not. So my dad complained, and then another family complained. And then the next day, the contractor came by and told us we had to leave. That we couldn't stay there anymore. We had no car, we had nothing. We had worked there for two months, but my dad had put some money aside, and then was told that we couldn't stay there anymore in this camp. Because we had complained. And that we shouldn't be complaining about wages, or we shouldn't be complaining about hours of work, and all this other stuff. So my father had to make a decision of where we were gonna go, and how we were gonna get out of there because we had no car. We went on this truck, and this guy that took us. Now you're on your own. And so he and another man that also complained, he was kicked out too but he had a car. Cause he had gone there on his own. So he and my father went out into town and came back with a 1949 four-door Chevrolet. Really old that he bought and said we now have a car, but we had no driver. Cause my father didn't drive and my brother didn't drive. So now we had a car and we had to leave and nobody knew how to drive. So they had gone all around to Salem, and they had gone over to the other side of the state and they had found a camp. So now we had to move over to the other camp. Where they had found another migrant camp. So the man's, this man who befriended my father, who also had been kicked out, his son knew how to drive. So his son drove our car to the camp. And all the family. So we ended up in Independence, Oregon in that same year in 1961. Late July, cause they were picking green beans at that time. My father had spent all his money that he had saved up to buy a car and then move us out of the camp. And so we worked there, in this camp in Independence called Green Villa. It was called the Green Villa Farm. And right next to is was Potoma farm, which had more people. Hispanics or Mexicanos, they were from Texas or Arizona or

California. And it was a nicer camp, we really liked it. And we got worked. And we were getting paid regular, like a dollar an hour. Everyone was being paid a dollar an hour. And so we worked there, and we picked green beans. We worked in the hopps. It then came to be September and the camp closed down again. By that time, my brother, one of my brother's, not my older brother cause my older brother had already gone, he was in the army. And so my brother Ruben learned how to drive. And so he was the one that drove us to Mt. Angel... was it Mt. Angel? No, St. Paul. And St. Paul would be the cauliflower and broccoli. And we worked there for another month. And it came to be October and there was no more work and so it was time to go back to Texas. And my father, well I remember my father saying, "Well I don't know if I can get us back." Ya know, it's like we came in this truck, we didn't know how we got where we got because we were all inside this truck not knowing, never seeing a map, never seeing anything because somebody took us. And so we studied the map. And looked at the map and sort of figure out a path to get back to Texas. And we made it back. We went another route. We went through Nevada. We went through Hoover Dam in Las Vegas. It was great cause I got to see a lot of the stuff that you read about in books and stuff. And then we went through Phoenix...

M: And who was driving?

L: My brother. My brother was driving. No license.

M: Uhuh.

L: He was only fifteen I think. He was driving and my father was with him. And then we ended back in Texas. And at that time, my father decided not to put us, put me in school. I was only thirteen at that time. I didn't go back to school. My fifteen year old brother did go back. And my sister before me went to school. But I didn't, because he said that sixth was enough ya know, for girls. And that going to high school, or junior high wasn't a need for us. So then the next year, in that year, we just spent it, my father was trying ot find a house, cause he wanted to buy a house. And so by the next year, we had built a little house right there in Texas, in Mission. And my father had another baby. So we had my sister, and then another baby with my stepmother. So then we said, we'll build this house, now we have to pay for it. So we decided to come back to Oregon. So we did that for four years to 1966, when we stayed. And we stayed mainly because, and we came to the same town, to Independence. We had our own cabin, it been locked up every year. So we'd kept most of our belongings there, so we didn't have to carry much back. We had a lot of dishes and our blankets and stuff and we kept there. So we had like two homes, right. We had a home here in one of the camps, and then we had our regular house in Texas. So every year we would come back. And the last year that we didn't go back, was when my little brother was born. He was a birth defect. And at the hill at OHSU. And my father felt that if we went back to Texas he

wouldn't get treated because the closest hospital, like the one at OHSU for children, was in Houston. And he thought that there was no way that he would be able to take him to Houston from Mission, Texas. And then to get all the papers done and to get all the help that OHSU gave us at that time it would be too hard. So he decided that we would stay that winter in '66 to take care of my little brother cause he was going to need a lot of surgeries during that time. So we stayed our first winter in Oregon. And we stayed in the camp, cause the camp was year round. The camp was really big. It had about, I think it had about three hundred or four hundred people. So there were some bunks that were closed in the winter and some that were open. The ones that were closed were on the bottom part of the camp and then the ones on the top were open all year, so we stayed, by that time we were already established people..... migrants (laughs) that came in. So we had the cabins on the top that had water coming into the cabin, cause there was some sink with a faucet and such. There was no bathroom there. We still had to go outside to ya know, they had bathroom and showers together. They were for everybody but at least we had our own water inside our cabin.

M: Mhm.

L: And that winter I think was the hardest winter, because we had never been in Oregon. At that time there was ice and snow and raining all the time. Which we weren't used to. But we stayed and we survived that first year. I remember my father getting a lot, going over for food boxes, getting food boxes from churches and stuff. Cause we had no, nobody was working. Sometimes we got food boxes. And other times, we would be in line in Salem. In this footline for soup, to get soups and cracker and stuff. We would be there too. So um, it was hard it was a hard time for all of us. But we lived there. And the owner was very nice. It was Mr. Canny. And he gave us work during the winter, like one or two days a week. And I remember I used to clean his house. His wife, ya know, there main house was right in the middle, was at the end of the camps. And so I used to do house cleaning and ironing for him. So I would iron all his shirts and I would clean their house and then I started doing housesitting. Like staying there when they were gone on vacation. And taking care of their Great Dane. Which was, "Ew" (both laughs).

M: Don't like dogs, huh?

L: Two Great Danes and I had to take care of them. And I was so scared of them, but they paid me for it. So I would just go in, feed the dogs, stay until late at night and then go back to the cabin. But I worked there for the winter, for several winters cause we stayed there for the four years. Then and we working, then my father in 1969, my father got killed working. In the farm, in the Green Villa. I don't know if you know, ya know when they burn the fields, have you seen that?

M: Residue seeds?

L: Yea, where the burn the grass to kill all the seeds. Well my father worked, my father and my brother were working burning the fields, there in the Green Villa farm. Well my brother was driving the Tractor, and my father was walking behind him watering the edge of the road because they didn't want then fire to go across the highway. But it was really smokey. So my father was walking and spraying the water, and then a car came and just killed him because they didn't see him. There was a lot of smoke. And so he was killed that year. And we didn't know what was going to happen. Ya know, he died and we buried him here. Then the farmer gave us a place to stay. He said you can stay here for however long you want to. My stepmother got workers comp, benefits from my fathers death. Cause, ya know. She had four little ones already. And then us, that we're older. And so we stayed there, working in the fields there, in the farms. They moved us to closer to the highway, that way we could have.... Well by the time my father died, nobody knew how to drive again. Here were eighteen or twenty year....

(pause elapses while tape changes over)

L:... So he left two months after my father died. And he was the only driver. So we had no...

M: Yea, so he just needed to get out of there?

L He needed to get out. H needed to get out. And I understood. I sorta, I didn't understand at that time but I understand now. Ya know, you understand parts and stuff. So he was the worst.

M: He was pretty upset about your dad?

L: Yea, he was pretty upset.

M: I imagine it was a real blow to the whole family.

L: Oh, to the whole family. Oh yes, we had, here we were, ya know four children, and then there were already seven or eight of us there. And no place to go. And it's like what are we going to do now. And so then my younger brother left, and here my sister and I, here I was twenty-one and my sister was twenty and we didn't know how to drive. And he had two cars. And we had my stepmother and four children, and needed to go to the doctors, and needed to have appointments, just things that had to happen and nobody could drive. So the farmer, Mr. Kennedy, moved us to the other side of his farm, which was on the highway. Ya know, close to the highway. And there was this big barn, with a house on the side, it was built into the side. And so we, and he said, "You can have this." And he said, "If any of your friends come by, they can figure out things here." And we had a phone. They put a phone so we could call. And so had, we were able to have

other people come and pick us up to take us to different places, so that year I learned how to drive. And I think that, it was funny cause I didn't think that I could learn how to drive because I had never been in the front of a car before. I always sat in the back. And so I got my license that next year, and then my sister got her license, and then we were driving, ya know our cars from the house.

M: Question too, during these teenage years and earlier, was it Spanish you spoke in your family?

L: Spanish. It was all the time Spanish. We were the translator for everyone. My dad didn't speak English. So we were translating all the time.

M: But you yourself knew English then as well?

L: Yea, because from the schools.

M: Oh yea the school system, sure.

L: So I was a translator for my father I would say from the age of seven or eight, I was translating for him, everywhere. And one time I had to translate for him while he was going to the doctor. He was having some pain. And I remember going with him, and the doctor said it was pneumonia, ya know. And so I told him, I said, "Be glad it's pneumonia." Ya know, it's not something bad. And he got angry with me because he said, "well it's Pneumonia ya know." But I said, but I had thought it was a heart, ya know he had heart, or it was something with his heart, or he had cancer. Ya know, it's like for me was like something. But Pneumonia can be taken care. So aren't you happy that it's Pneumonia, ya know? And he said, "How can you say that? Pneumonia's bad." And I thought, my god, doesn't he know that heart is worse ya know. (laughs). But ya know, I remember getting upset, not with him but with myself for saying, "Oh I'm glad it's Pneumonia and not something else" because for him, an illness is an illness and you have to take care of it. and I know I was bad, and I said I shouldn't be translating. Ya know, he should be talking to his doctor on his own. Ya know. But he had nobody else. There was no doctor who spoke Spanish. And I remember translating for my stepmother, and I remember translating when we bought a car, ya know. I was the negotiator. I mean, I learned a lot during that time. I learned very fast. Because I was the one negotiating everything during that time. I had to negotiate every single thing they bought and on. And so I remember going to welfare because they wanted to get food stamps during the winter. And they couldn't get food stamps because my sister and I were living with them. I mean, if we were not living with them they could've gotten food stamps. Because of the baby and my little brothers and sisters, and then both of them. But because there was an eighteen year old and a seventeen year old with them, then they were too old. So we could work. So I remember feeling bad because of that. So I said, well maybe we shouldn't be here. Maybe we go on our own, that way they

could've gotten food stamps. But my father never wanted to separate the family, he wanted to keep the family together. So that just was the part of the job, my job in our family was to do translating and negotiating for every single, everything we buy. Except when we go to Texas. In Texas you can negotiate with everybody. They spoke Spanish. But once we were in Oregon, I had to do all the translating.

M: Ohh. Uhuh.

L: So when he died, we moved over to the side of the road and we lived there..

M: And you learned how to drive?

L: And I learned how to drive. (laughs). So then I was driving, and we were still working in the fields. And this farmer was a very nice, gave us work during the winter. Ya know, just a couple days a week.

M: And what was his name?

L Mr. Kennedy.

M: Okay, I think you mentioned that already.

L: Yea, and so he gave us work. And I remember working like in the spring, like during this time we would be spraying the pear tree and the apple trees. And we would be driving tractors. And ya know, I never had driven a tractor, but I drove a tractor. And then we started managing the people that came. Sort of taking care of where they would do their work. And so I, not contractor, but just managing the people. So he would put us in charge. Because we lived there year round, he knew us and he would trust us. And so we did that. And then I got sick. And I remember that I had to end up going to OHSU and have surgery. And so during that time I didn't work work. And in the year before that, a couple years before that I also had gotten hurt in the job. We were cutting broccoli and asparagus, and so I hurt my back. And so I couldn't work, and I got workers comp. And so during that time, I went to school. Because they were offering some classes during the winter for us, and so I got my GED. I got my diploma in 1971-72. General, it's called General Education Diploma. So I got that. And I remember when I was working with a teacher. And see I only had three months to get my diploma. So I studied for it, and then I went in and took all the five tests that had to be taken there one day. Because I knew I didn't have any more time. It was like, I had to do everything in the time I was sick. So I had to go in and got it done. And I remember the teacher saying that I should go to college because I was really good in my math and I was really good in algebra. And I had passed my GED test really faster. And she felt that I could do really good in college. And I said no, my stepmother wouldn't allow us to go to a college. So with the diploma it's fine at least I can get a job. Ya know, something for

else I did in the fields. So then that passed. So a year later, I was translating for my stepmother at a dermatology clinic in Salem. And the doctor, I talked to the doctor reference later, and then at the end he asked me if I had a job. And I said, "No, I'm not working cause it's winter and I don't work during the winter cause the fields are not ready." And he said, "Well do you want to work here?" And it was this huge clinic, really nice clinic. And I was just dumbfounded. And I said, "You want me to work here?" And he said, "Yea. We can train you to be a medical assistant." So I turned to my stepmother and I said, "He wants me to work here." And she goes, "What? You work here, ya know?" And I said yea that's what he said. And she just goes, "No I don't think so." And I said, "Maybe." I didn't say what she said, I just said maybe.

M: Uhuh.

L: And so he took me to, he said, "Well let me take you over to the clinic manager, and you'll talk to the clinic manager." So I talked to the clinic manager and the clinic manager just talked to me, and said yea we'll do the training. All you have to do is just get your, we'll give you money for some uniforms. And you can come in and work, ya know. So then I went home and I talked to my stepmother. And I said well I talked her into my working in Salem. And she agreed. And she said, well since you're not working, and we do need money, go ahead and work. So I wen into work in this clinic in Salem. Really nice, really nice people. I learned a lot, while I was working there. And I got to meet a lot of people. That was the nicest. Cause working in the fields, you don't meet very many people, you just work on your own. I mean, you meet the people that come and work but you're never actually talking or visiting cause you're working. And over in the clinic, cause I was able to meet the people that I worked with. Cause I've all these people that had so much information, and so much knowledge. And they were all talking to me about different things. And I was already twenty-four or twenty-five years old. And I hadn't known anything. Because I was in this cabin, living with my stepmother and little brothers, and just taking care of them and working. And not knowing what was going on in the world. And I really liked that. I think it was one of the best jobs I had because I got to meet a lot of people. And then it came to be summer, and spring. And so my stepmother wanted me to go back and quit the job in the clinic. And go back to working the fields. And I just thought, I can't do that. I really like this job. And so I told her, that I wouldn't, and so she took the car away. She said, "If you wanna go to Salem, well then you have to figure out a way to get to Salem." And so I took the bus. The bus came right by where we lived. And so I took the Greyhound into Salem. So I did that for a couple weeks. Then she took the money away that I was earning. And said, "Well you're not going to have any more money to go to Salem." And that was what really sort of, I had to think about what to do. Cause I didn't want to be working the fields. I wanted to continue working at this clinic that I really liked. And so I had to make a decision. And so my decision was that I had to leave the family. And so I just walked away. Had no car,

and just walked away. And went to my brother's, who lived in Independence. And told him that I was leaving the family, and that I wanted to learn more. And I wanted to (stutters momentarily, emotionally), excuse me, I just wanted to liberate myself, I guess.

M: Uhuh.

L: ... From where I was.

M: And that was hard, obviously hard to do.

L: Hard to do, yes. Very hard to do. So I did that. Then I went back and got my sister. (laughs). Because I felt that my sister was going through the same thing. She was my age.

M: Mhm. Why was your stepmother so opposed to you working?

L: Well I think she didn't like the idea that I was meeting people. She didn't like that I was learning. She didn't like the idea that I could someday move out. She was afraid of the change. I think she was afraid completely of, she was very dominating. She wanted us there all the time. Cause I remember one time, well after that I remember talking to my brother. And by then he was already married. And I remember talking to him and saying. And ya know, she my stepmother used to say, you can't go out unless you got a car comes and takes you to the movies, shopping, all this other stuff. So we waited for my brother, and my brother never came. So then my brother said, "Well she told me not to come." See

M: So she was....

L: So she was controlling. But she would tell him not to come, but she would tell us to wait for him. Ya know, unless your brother invites you, you can go. Otherwise you can't go. So those were little things that were happening, but we didn't know. And at the end, I think I felt that that was what was holding me back. And that her holding me back from not giving me money, from not letting me drive the car, ya know. All this other stuff. Taking my own money was one of the reasons then, I realized this can't go on. Ya know, I need to change. And my change was to leave. So I worked at the dermatology clinic and decided to go to college. Then during the same time, my sister, also working in the fields, went to work at State Farm Insurance as a filing clerk. And she and I lived with my brother for a couple, six months and then we got our own apartment, got our own car, which was amazing. We bought our own car. We had never owned anything in our whole lives, because everything was family. So we had our own car. And she got a job, and I decided to go to school. And work at this clinic part time. So I went full time to school. Worked at the clinic for three years. Continued doing that, every year, every year. I remember, I was remembering then, that I didn't have any breaks in between

because I remember driving from the school to work and eating my lunch in between because I had to be at work in the afternoon. So I would go from school in the morning to work in the afternoon, and then go to school at night again. So it was like all these school all was going through. But I was learning a lot, learning a lot. And I really enjoyed that. I never, I remember studying nights and weekends. Never going out. Doing everything just because I wanted to do this. And my sister started enjoying going out to the dances, or dating and all this other stuff. Well I remember just making pots and pots of coffee and just staying up and reading ya know. (Both laugh). I think that was the best time of my life, was while I was doing that.

M: Did you maintain contact with your stepmother during these years?

L: No. No we did not. And it was her own. She didn't want us to. Yea, she just said you cut all ties, so your gone.

M: Uhuh.

L: So that was hard.

M: That must've been really hard.

L: Yea. I think our family, because we are a family then, and family's so important to us. Ya know, that breaking those ties was very hard.

M: And did you, you mentioned that she was domineering, did you have an okay relationship with her up until that time?

L: Yes, yes. We had, see I never knew, and now that I've studied so much about it, abuse and stuff. And all this stuff that happens with child abuse and emotional, I think she used a lot of emotional abuse on us. She never hit us or anything, but she used a lot of words to hurt you. That I never knew till afterwards, when I'm studying and reading and stuff. And this was what was happening to me. This is what she was doing. That I never realized because you're sorting your lives because you think everybody is doing the same. Ya know, sort of like when you talk to a child. And he says my mother's hitting me, the other kids are gonna hit too. Ya know. And I never knew, that that's not normal.

M: Right, exactly. Everything's normal at home.

L: Everything's normal at home. And I sure thought it was normal until, and that's what she didn't like was that I was learning so much where I worked at this clinic. And the people that I worked with, the assistants and other doctors really were encouraging me, they were saying you should go to school, you have so much to give. Ya know and all this other stuff. And I really was getting so enthusiastic about going back and really

learning. Cause I remember one of the doctors telling me I should've got there, when I told him I was going to go to school, he said well go be a doctor. And I said, oh I can't be a doctor. He said, "Oh yes you can." I said, "I'll be a nurse." That's what I told him. And he said, "Okay, but you know you could be a doctor." And I just said no, no. so I went to school to be a nurse. And I took all my classes at Chemeketa Community College in Salem. I was on the list. They had a lottery system at that time, which was pretty bad. It shows out of three hundred in some applicants, they only choose a hundred. So my name would go with everybody else in this pot, and they would pull a hundred people out, and those a hundred would go to nursing school. So I was taking all these classes while I was going to Chemeketa to, they were transferable they were applied to this nursing course that I was going to take. But I never got chosen, because my number was always two hundred. And the last time is was three hundred, and the last time it was four hundred. So I, by the third year, I decided I couldn't continue, that I needed to change. So I applied at University of Oregon. I applied at University of Seattle. I applied at, where else did I apply, I applied at different schools. But then I was back to family. I didn't want to leave my sister, didn't know if I could survive outside my brother. Ya know, the only ones I had were my brother and my sister. And so I just didn't feel I could survive outside the family. And so I got accepted to University of Washington or Seattle, University of Washington, and they told me I didn't even have to pay. Stipend, and they would give me stipend and all this other stuff. And I just was so at down. I couldn't think. I said, how can I leave the family, how can I live in Washington, how can I be by myself in another state I had never been in. And University of Oregon also accepted me. And I just couldn't go, I was so scared. I applied, I remember my counselor saying you can get accepted, you really can go. He even told me to apply at Willamette University for Lawyers, and I said I don't want to be a lawyer. But I said, I want to keep with what I'm studying. University of Oregon, I thought I'd be a biologist, or microbiologist, go out and work in the ocean. And University of Washington I applied for medical nursing, and it was just something I wanted to do. But at the end I thought it was just too hard to leave the family. So then I just got a job. My sister was working at State Farm, so I got a job there. Lasted only about eleven months there. Nine months I was the oldest working in this unit in State Farm. I was twenty-seven years old, not the oldest, but everybody else was eighteen or somebody who'd just graduated from school. And they were like little kids. To me they were like little kids. They didn't know what was going on outside the world. And there were a couple other Hispanic Mexicanas working there. So in the same unit I was in where there were about three other Mexicanas, no two other ones, so we were four. And then the three of us used to talk ya know, and we spoke in Spanish. When we had lunch we would speak in Spanish, and when we were working we'd speak Spanish and English and we would always mix it. Then one day my supervisor came and told me that they wanted to have a meeting with me. And I said, why? And he said, well you're going to have your first

taste of racism here, he said. And I said, racism? And he said, yes and I want you to be ready for it. Cause he was black, cause he said, if you've never had it you're gonna have to figure out how you're going to react to that. So I said okay. So I went to this meeting, and all the ladies were there. And the other Mexicana was there too, and then they said that they didn't want me speaking Spanish. That they didn't want me being in my group, that I was being too noisy, that they didn't understand what I was saying. They thought I was talking about them. That I was ya know, they felt that if I need to talk to my friends in Spanish, that I could call them over the phone at night. That if I wanted to say something to them during the day, then I should say it in English. And so I said, you want to know what I'm saying, you can just ask me and I can tell you. And they said no no no. All we want for you to do, is to just speak English because you're in America. And you need to speak English and so then I said, no I don't think. I said, I think I can speak whatever I want to, and as long as I'm doing my job, it shouldn't interfere with anybody. And then this girl that was also Hispanic, said the same thing. She even said, you saw my little Mexico over there. And then I said, why are you saying that when you're Mexicana too? Like you understand what I'm saying, so why are you saying it? So she says because I don't like to speak Spanish and I don't think you should speak Spanish either. And I said, well I can't believe you're doing that against your own race. I told her that, and so she ran out of the room. And everybody said, how cruel of me to talk to her like that. Ya know, and then they all went out of her. My boss stayed with me and said this is your first taste, you have to think about what you're doing. You have to decide whether you're going to speak English or Spanish, and I'm going to send you home. So he sent me home. Kind of going home, going into to talk. And I would talk to my counselor, cause I was going to school. I had just entered, and I would talk to him. And he told me, "No, no. You have to go back. You can't quit. They're gonna make you quit, but you can't quit." He said, "You're gonna have to fight it." and so I went back, talked to several people, went back straight to the ladies and told them that if they wanted to know what I had to say when I spoke Spanish, then I would tell. But I wasn't going to stop speaking Spanish just because they wanted me to. By that time, they had gotten a memo from the president saying that anybody could speak whatever they wanted to as long as they were doing their job. And so they just say, "Oh yea, well we know that. We got the memo from the President saying that you could speak whatever language you want to Maria. We have no problem with it anymore." Ya know. So I didn't like the situation I was in. but I continued working just to show them I wasn't going to quit. But then three months down the line, I did quit because I wasn't given a promotion. And they told me because I was a trouble maker, and that was one of the reasons they hadn't given me the promotion. And I told them that wasn't fair, that I did my job. And the thing is they were checking on me, my work was double and triple checked to make sure I was doing it right. I mean, they were stopping me from working and check what I was doing at that same moment, just to make sure I was doing what I was doing. So I

decided to quit. And so I quit State Farm, right before my vacation. Cause I thought I was going to get all this vacation, and I didn't get it. So I quit and I went to work at a migrant daycare. To take care of some of the kids. I was their nurse assistant. So I tried to take care of all their immunizations, make sure they got all their immunization. I remember taking care of all their lice's. Flushing their hair, taking them to the health department. So I took care of all the kids for three months during the summer. But at that same time I met my husband. Cause at that, same time I was going out again, cause I wasn't going to school anymore, so I started going out with my sister, and going out to dances. Ya know, to different parties. And so I met my husband. And then about, I continued working at the daycare. Went to work at a store. Then I went back to the daycare because I really liked it as a medical nurse assistant. And then I decided, my husband asked me to get married it was a year later, I went ahead and accepted to get married. He was from Texas also. He came from Wilco. But his mother is from Mission, Texas. And that was where the connection came back to me, that I met my husband. His mother's from Mission, Texas. And came from the same town. We lived really close by, like two miles away or five miles away from where I lived. And so we connected really fast. So we got married 77'. And my husband, his first year coming here was in 71' to Washington County, and working in the camps here. Mining camps. He was also work the fields. By the time I met him, he was working at Tectronix. And so he had moved out of working in the fields, and was working at Tectronix.

M: And your husband is Hispanic also?

L: Hispanic also. Yes. And so he came from Texas. So then came to Washington County. I hadn't really been out of the migrant fields. Only working with my own children in the daycare center, never going to visit the camps, never anything. Because the kids were brought into this daycare. Came to Washington County, and got a job with the Forest Grove school district in 1977. And they hired as a migrant Health Consultant, a migrant Education consultant. And so as migrant Education consultant, you're supposed to visit the camps and tell people about migrant education. And you're supposed to help the parent and the family meet the need of the children, so the children can go to school. And so I started doing that. And one of my jobs was to take kids for immunizations again. Ya know, make sure they were up to date. If they were sick take them to the doctor. So I started bring them into Virginia Garcia Clinic. At that time Virginia Garcia clinic was a little garage, on the other side of the street over Por Santos side. And so I took them there...

M: And you hadn't been going out very long?

L: No, we'd only been there two years, when I started.

M: And were you aware of the clinic before this time?

L: No, I was not aware of the clinic at all. And so I brought them there, and I talked to the doctor. Dr. Maclim, ya know. And then I talked to the nurse Rosaria, and I was talking to different people, and so I was giving them the children. And they would take them. And they really liked, I liked them and they liked me. so by the end of the school year, the clinic needed a receptionist because the receptionist had quite. So they offered me the job. They said, well can you work fro the clinic. I said, well I can work for the summer. They said, well okay and they hired me for the summer because I had some medical background by being a medical, going to Chemeketa. So I started working in the reception area. Did all the medical record, because their medical records were really messed up. So I did all their medical record, I did all their billing and then it came to August and they were ready for me to leave. And then I decided I wanted to stay at the clinic. So I stayed at the clinic instead of going back to the school. And I've been here ever since. (laughs) I've been here since 1977, so twenty almost twenty-three years. So I've worked in almost everything; from receptionist to medical records to supervisor, to billing supervisor, to front office or I should say clinic manager, clinic coordinator, outreach, just doing everything. Almost every job here being done. I was even the medical director one time. The executive director didn't have a medical director, so he appointed me his medical director. I didn't do anything, he just appointed me medical director. So but coming to the clinic was really something that sort of brought me back full circle because I started working in the camps again. Because I never had, I thought they were gone. Ya know, I was out of mind I guess. When you think about it. because I hadn't seen them for awhile, I hadn't worked for awhile. I'd been out of the camps for about four or five years. I didn't think they were there anymore. I didn't think people came to work in the fields. And to do picking, strawberries...

M: You'd thought things had changed in some way?

L: Yea, I thought they would have changed. But they were the same, and sometimes even worse. I think, at least when you're young, you don't see the bad parts of working in the migrant camps. I mean, you're young. You can stand working twelve hour days and come back, take a shower, and you're back to starting all over again. But as you get older, you get to see what's going on, you get to see how the camps are run, you get to see what the people need when they're there. I mean, the cabins are so small. How can ten or twelve people live in one cabin? Ya know, I remember when we came it was only a family per cabin, which was better than now trying to have two or three families in one cabin. I mean, that's hard for people. And to just see the camps here. I mean, the camps here were so bad from where we lived. So I don't know if it went from bad to worse? Or if it was always worse... I just didn't see them as bad. We lived in the camps when I came to Washington County.

M: Well it sounds like you did have at least one measure of them having more than one family.

L: Yea, I mean and that's a measure you can really look at ya know. And so when I came here and I saw the camps, I realized that it never ends. The migrant workers are always coming, even if you change from family to single money. To family again to single, camps are always full. And the medical needs are there for all of them. So I decided to stay here and work here. And every year I always think about leaving, sort of moving on to another job. I'm always offered job with the state, or somebody talks to me and says why don't you come on and work over here. And I always have to stop and well think a minute...

30 second tape lapse

Part one ends here

L: Just trying to figure out, just my life. Why, why am I here? And so, I made it here to speak for the people, my people. (laughs). And to try to voice their concerns, ya know. Cause they don't speak the language. And the things that I see. Ya know, I see people living, like even yesterday when I went to one of the camps, which I'm not sure if I should call it a camp, but I went to one of the sights that my staff had been visiting...

M: And what was your position here?

L: I am the health service director.

M: At this time?

L: At this time. And I am in charge of community service activities. I'm in charge of outreach, transportation, translation, referrals, home visiting, premiere classes, and other classes down here at the clinic.

M: So you do get out to the camps?

L: So I do get out to the camps.

M: And you were out just yesterday?

L: And I was out just yesterday. Because one of my staff, well several of my staff weren't here. And the person that was going was going by herself. So I decided to go with her since... well anyway I wanted to go. So I went with her and I visited this sight where three men or four men are living under a bridge. So they had tried. My staff is trying to take them out of there. So ya know, we get out here and go to one of the camps and one of the cabins or something. But they don't want to because they have no place else to go. And they feel that this man that put them there, put them there because he's gonna give them work. So they're living under this bridge. They have their little place where they're staying, ice cover like canvas. So they have this room that's