

Camille Chandler

Bracero Interview Translation  
With Ezequiel Garcia and Jenny Mota

Jenny Mota: This is an interview with Ezequiel Garcia on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 Oxnard, California. The interviewer's name is Jenny Mota the interview is part of the Bracero oral history project.

Ezequiel Garcia: I came to the United States in 1952 as a Bracero to work in agriculture. I worked for two gentlemen, who were my bosses, Thomas and Francisco Veavich, they were brothers. For six years I worked in many different cities for them. We picked beets, cabbage, tomatoes, lettuce and green beans. Sooner or later there was no more agricultural work available with the two brothers anymore. I started working for a gentleman picking flowers in Thousand Oaks, California. After that, a group of us went to work with a rancher named Ogata, he was Japanese, he had land out in Oxnard. Here we picked tomatoes and green beans. After that work was done we went to work for another Japanese man in Oxnard, also in agriculture. We only ever worked in agriculture, nothing more. After working for him for a long time, eventually they promoted me and gave me a team of men that I would be in charge of, known in the agricultural world, in Spanish as a "cuadrilla". After my promotion, I would simply drive the trailer which carried vegetables, such as broccoli or cauliflower. After I finished working there, a family member of mine, Nicholas, who at that point was the foreman

in charge of a ranch here in Oxnard, asked me if I wanted to come and work for him. I said why not? I ended up working for him for four years. At some point Nicolas left, but I continued working there. Later on, another distant relative of mine, Ruben, invited me to another ranch, where I was offered a better position. I drove heavy machinery, including caterpillars and tractors, there we sowed vegetables of every kind.

Soon after I went to work for Mr. Villasenor, who had worked for an American known as Mr. Brown, for many years. Mr. Brown was well off and employed many Braceros on his ranches. Mr Villasenor and I had worked together previously. He knew that I was a hard worker, and that apart from agricultural work, I had also worked in the plant industry. Mr. Villasenor recommended me to Mr. Brown. That was when I started working for him. I worked for him for many many years. As the years went by my children in Mexico were growing up, they started to express the desire to want to come to the Unites States. It seemed like a good idea, now that they were grown up.

Jenny: Do you remember the date when you first came to the north as a Bracero? Rather do you remember the cities you were in when you first crossed the Mexican-American border?

Ezequiel: You mean, when did I cross the border as a Bracero?

Jenny: Yes.

Ezequiel: I came to the United States in 1952. For the record, in 1956 one of my bosses decided that he would help me renew my American work permit, fortunately we were able to do it all in Mexicali. Another gentleman that knew my boss had seen my quality of work over the years. He offered to help me start my legalization process, I decided to go along with it.

I became legal in Tijuana. I would have had to have gone all the way to the Mexican embassy in Mexico City, but fortunately this gentleman who was helping me said that there was a good chance that I could avoid that trip. He had a good friend who worked for immigration in Chula Vista, he asked his friend if there was any possibility that I could go through the legalization process in Tijuana, in order to prevent such a costly trip to Mexico City. He pulled a few strings and I was lucky enough to only be in Tijuana for eight days, while they transmitted my legalization. I got my legal documentation and then in the blink of an eye, I was in the United States as a legal man with documents.

Jenny: How old were you when that happened?

Ezequiel: I was, ummm, let me remember, I was...21 years old.

Jenny: At that point, were you already married?

Ezequiel: My wife was back in Mexico. We were fortunate enough to have met the gentleman who helped me become legal. One day he asked me if I wanted to bring her to the United States, I said yes, of course. His wife got involved, and brought all the necessary documentation to my hometown in Mexico, where my wife was, and within one week, I brought her back to the United States with me. We flew into Tijuana, then crossed the border with my boss and his wife.

Jenny: Do you remember more or less how much you were paid for your labor back in those days?

Ezequiel: (laughs) Of course I remember what they paid me! Yes, they paid me 75 cents an hour.

Jenny: What would you do with the money you earned?

Ezequiel: Take care of the family, of course. I saved up some money to buy a house for my family here in the United States. I worked very hard to get

this house, where I still live to this day. I was going to pay it all upfront, but I was told that if I did it that way, that I would lose money by having to pay taxes, so I only paid half, and I eventually I paid it off.

Jenny: When you were a Bracero, what would you do on your days off?

Ezequiel: Well, our bosses would only give us one day off per week.

Jenny: What did you do on your one day off?

Ezequiel: Rest, just rest of course. That was all I wanted to do. The kind of work I did was laboriuos and that one day off was my only day to recuperate, and get ready to start working again, the next day.

Jenny: Did you ever run into any problems as a Bracero?

Ezequiel: No, I didn't run into any problems at all. I was a hard worker and all of my bosses knew it. They knew that I was very grateful for the work that they would offer me. In reality, I never had any problems at all, everything went very smooth.

Third Party: Did you ever witness anybody else get into any sort of problems?

Ezequiel: Actually no, the bosses had their workers on a tight schedule. All we did was work, work, work. I would get off work, and go directly to my house. Frankly, I never heard of any sort of problems that anybody got mixed up in.

Jenny: Where did you live while you were in the Bracero Program?

Ezequiel: I rented a place in Oxnard.

Jenny: Did you live alone, or with other Braceros?

Ezequiel: No I lived alone, just me.

Jenny: Before your wife came to the U.S., how did you maintain contact with her?

Ezequiel: Well as I said, my wife came to the U.S. pretty quickly, then we had our children here. In terms of my other relatives in Mexico, I would write them a card every now and then.

Jenny: Do you have any of those cards?

Ezequiel: Oh gosh no, I have no idea where those cards could possibly be.

Third Party: What did it mean to you to be a Bracero?

Ezequiel: I was proud to be a Bracero. I was content and satisfied with the idea that I was providing my family with a better lifestyle than they had, had in Mexico. I had hoped that the American government would bring a system like the Bracero Program back. If it weren't for foreign Mexican laborers, the agricultural industry would fall behind big time. Nowadays, in some parts, owners of land can't even find anybody to work for them, due to all the strict regulations on immigration. Let's say that maybe 100 illegals come into this country illegally on a daily basis, compare that to maybe one thousand illegals that are being repatriated to their homeland on a daily basis. I understand that immigration is beneficial, because if they didn't do their job, this country would be overflowing with illegals, there wouldn't even be room for all of us. It would be nice though if a program like the one that I was part of could be reintroduced. It used to be so easy. Our bosses would say, "Here take this identification card back with you to your country, meanwhile we will give the authorities your name, and that we want you to come back and work for us. That way you can legally work for us, without any problems. However, nowadays things are very different. I understand that immigration enforcement has its benefits, but there is a serious mortality rate in regards to men and women that cross the border and don't make it, for whatever reason, exhaustion, malnutrition, etc. . Immigration doesn't realize what is going on, I mean who can see these people dead in

the middle of nowhere? This really is a big issue. But that's the way it's going to be, people will always cross the border and find work in a factory, or anywhere they can, then eventually immigration will find them, and throw them back to Mexico by plane.

Third Party: How did being a Bracero change your life?

Ezequiel: Well, it didn't change my life that much. I never got into trouble or anything. While I was working as a Bracero everything went very smooth, actually. I give you advice when I say, don't get into trouble.

Immigration will always be faithful to the decree of deportation, and it will always be like that forever. If one day illegal workers were given some sort of a workers permit, maybe a system where their boss who hired them illegally could petition their documentation, in order for them to be in this country legally, things would be much better.

Third Party: As a Bracero were you asked to pass some sort of a physical examination or test?

Ezequiel: Oh, of course. One had to go through a medical examination before crossing the border. Then once one was in the United States one would go through even more medical exams.

Third Party: How did that go for you?

Ezequiel: Actually, everything went smoothly, one crossed the border with permission, so there were really no problems at all.

Third Party: Oh, I mean was it like uncomfortable at all?

Ezequiel: No, no, no! I mean it was something that one might not be used to right, but everything went smoothly, they examined us physically, then we passed their tests and that's it.

Jenny: Do you have anything else that you would like to share with us?

Ezequiel: No, that is it for today, thank you for coming.

