

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Ray Verzasconi

Using an oral history method, the author has recorded the life history of Rosa González Gómez, a Mexican woman who spends part of each year in the United States and part in Mexico. Comparing the story of Rosa's life, as told in her own words, with literature in the social sciences and the author's own experiences in Latin America, the author proposes that current anthropological models of the "safety net" function of the Latin American extended family are inadequate for describing the myriad experiences of Latin Americans today and, therefore, must be reexamined.

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Rosa González Gómez:
A Mexican Woman's Story

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Richard L. Browning

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Redacted for Privacy

Assistant Professor of History in charge of co-major

Redacted for Privacy

Chair of Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of Graduate School

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
I. Oral History	5
II. Mexico, 1940-1990	22
III. Rosa González Gómez	33
IV. Kinship Ideology and Practice	128
Literature Cited	145

Rosa González Gómez: A Mexican Woman's Story

Introduction

This work, unlike many theses and dissertations, did not set out to test the validity of a hypothesis. It is my own attempt to learn more about Mexican culture by recording the life history of a Mexican, and then to compare the results with literature in the social sciences and my experiences in Latin America. It was also a first attempt at using the oral history method. Consequently, the reader will likely find numerous aspects of Mexican culture upon which I have not commented. On the other hand, I have found a feature of the informant's family life which seemed to clash with certain popular assumptions about the Mexican family, and have discussed that characteristic in Chapter IV.

My initial impressions of Latin American family structure came in the form of "Cultural Notes" in Spanish language text books in the United States. They presented a simplistic portrait of a loving, protective extended family in which the provider-father held absolute power, which he wielded with compassionate firmness, and in which the mother fulfilled the traditional roles of wife and homemaker. We were made to understand that the two extremes of the age hierarchy, the grandparents and the youngest children, were provided for and protected by the economically productive members of the family. The

presence of these "unproductive" family members was extremely important in family life as the older generation provided for the passing on of cultural tradition to their grandchildren. Everyone was made to feel included, we were told, even to the point of including children in any and all festivities. This struck a chord with middle-class students used to being isolated with a babysitter during parents' parties, and to seeing their parents struggle with the prospect of sending a grandparent off to "a home."

Through my reading of a smattering of Latin American literature in college I realized, of course, that the family was far more complex than I had believed. It was during my two years in the U.S. Peace Corps in the mountains of Ecuador, however, that I was able to observe the tremendous variability in the household makeup and in the extent of the kin network in Latin America: One neighbor's household, which was burglarized more than once by her own sister and nephews, consisted of a woman and her illegitimate daughter; another neighbor's home frequently housed members of four generations in three rooms; and the mother of one family made clear to her husband and the entire community, through word and sometimes violent deed, that she was firmly in control of the decision-making processes in her seven-member nuclear family. I saw people throughout the class spectrum using kin, compadrazgo, and friendship ties to their advantage in private and public affairs. It was the exclusion of certain family members, and the inclusion of particular friends into the extended family network which fascinated me.

In recording the words of the informant of this oral history,

Rosa González Gómez, I was confronted once again with a person who was excluded to a great extent from the life of her family, this time in a small community in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico. Indeed, numerous people around Rosa throughout her life have been "forgotten ones." And yet Rosa has formed important extrafamilial bonds, while continuing to stress the importance of family and trying to establish functioning kinship ties which were nearly forgotten long ago, or which never existed.

One sees from Rosa's history, and from the anthropological literature, that today's Latin American family defies the attempts at schematicization by scholars of various disciplines. The theoretical base of the study of kinship ideology and practice in Latin America has gone through several major currents in the last one and one-half centuries, generally tending toward less rigid structural models by which to measure the status of the kinship network at a given time.

With regard to the extended family, over the last half century or so studies have concentrated on the effects of modernization on its structure, generally expressing a decline in the network's importance with a tendency toward the nuclear family model. There has been considerable debate on this topic, and now, while the debate continues, it is generally recognized that extrafamilial factors, and the recognition of and selection by individuals of alternatives to traditional lifestyles are overshadowing ideology in importance in network organization. This oral history, as well as the work of some family historians and scholars in other disciplines, point out the tremendous flexibility of kinship organization, through history and

class, allowed for in Latin American kinship ideology.

Perhaps of greater importance, the oral history portion of this document (Chapter III) provides raw material for scholars wishing to study Latin American culture. The focus of this document is an attempt to understand Rosa's life in the greater context of Mexican history and culture.

I. Oral History

The General Method

Oral history, the recording of a person's recollections, is not an exact method of documenting events, but it is one way of obtaining the highly subjective perspective of a participant in an historical event or era, or from a particular social class of interest to the interviewer.¹ Although historians and anthropologists are the most common practitioners of the oral history method, traditionalists in both disciplines have also criticized it severely for its inherent inaccuracies. Anthropologists have generally preferred more scientific observation of human beings,² while historians have valued written documentation of events by participants and observers as well as other more "official" written records.³

Many historians, however, have come to realize that oral history can be a valuable addition to the "traditional" information sources primarily because it can give voice to historical participants and observers who normally would not be heard.⁴ The inaccuracies themselves, along with the very topics the informant wishes to emphasize, add to our understanding of what is or was important to the person interviewed.⁵ The historian must realize that obtaining a valid report about an event in any given interview is unlikely. Many oral historians, therefore, assert that they are "oral archivists and that

the oral record is...a 'memory claim'...and as such, is simply another primary resource to be stored by archivists along with the more traditional items...."⁶

Oral history, besides building a bridge between the "official" record and that recollected and lived by certain members of society, also serves as valuable contact between scholars and the rest of the world: "The reconstruction of history itself becomes a much more widely collaborative process...."⁷ This collaborative characteristic makes oral history unique.⁸ Fieldwork requires the interviewer to experience and attempt to understand the informant's culture, as well as to reassess abstract theories.⁹ In studying oppressed peoples, fieldwork of this sort is absolutely necessary for the researcher who "truly wants to understand the oppressed people's history...living with the people, talking with them, gaining their trust are needed in order to truly comprehend the history of discrimination."¹⁰

A major factor in my decision to conduct interviews and write an oral history of a Mexican migrant worker was my desire to gain insight into Hispanic culture. The use of this method and my interest in Hispanic culture are natural outgrowths of my training in journalism and my service in the U.S. Peace Corps in Ecuador. I made clear to Rosa my goals when, at the beginning of several of our six interviews, she asked me why we were about to sit down and talk. She at first seemed confused by my explanation, but by the third or fourth time appeared more satisfied with my purpose. "It is necessary," I told her, "for (Americans) to learn more about Mexicans, to learn more about where they come from, what their lives were like before they came to the United

States, so that we can better understand them and live in harmony with them once they come here."

Thompson notes that the historian has traditionally given "most of his attention and quotations to those social leaders whom he admires," thereby imparting a social message:

Since the nature of most existing records is to reflect the standpoint of authority, it is not surprising that the judgement of history has more often than not vindicated the wisdom of the powers that be. Oral history, by contrast, makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now be called from the underclasses, the unprivileged, and the defeated.¹¹

Through oral history, the scholar can make social commentary and urge societal change; by giving voice to the voiceless he may encourage an alteration in the social fabric.

History should not merely comfort; it should provide a challenge and understanding which helps toward change. For this the myth needs to become dynamic... There is no point in replacing a conservative myth of the upper-class with a lower-class one.¹²

In choosing to interview a migrant worker, rather than a college student or a political refugee, I have made a conscious decision to contribute to the "voice" of one segment of the lower socioeconomic classes. I expected to hear stories of exploitation, but, with the exception of the discussion about race, I tried not to belie that assumption in my questions. I have not included or eliminated information because it might support any political or sociological theories to which I subscribe, or to refute others' theories, though I do discuss models of the Latin American family in the final chapter.

A popular use by anthropologists of oral history has been to examine the dynamic relationships of the individual to his culture or

social system. To the anthropologist, "the culture's internal perceptions of a specific activity's meaning are thus more useful than an external appraisal."¹³ Through oral history much can be revealed about how the system affects the individual, how the individual affects his society, and how the individual interacts with sociocultural orders such as the family or the community.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the individual, and perhaps potential changes in theory, are often lost as the scholar uses oral history to make a case for an existing notion.¹⁵

Anthropologists are frequently concerned with "culturally significant" behaviors, those that are not "random or unique." Thus, while a life history may be recorded because it is far from the assumed norm, the anthropologist "assumes that any individual, in some fundamental and inalterable ways, gives expression to, incarnates, the culture, and cannot do otherwise." The behaviors termed "anomalies," therefore, reflect that individual's unique reactions to his society within his cultural patterns.¹⁶ The ethnographer must deal with distinctions between "the personal, unique or idiosyncratic...and the culturally typical or normative...."¹⁷

Due to the nature of the interview process the difficulty faced by oral historians "arises not so much out of the interpretation of data as in its creation."¹⁸ There are numerous factors which may influence the material gathered and its subsequent evaluation: the interview setting; the relative importance and sensitivity of the topic to the informant and the interviewer; the time elapsed since the occurrence of events being recalled; the perceived purpose of the interview by both parties; the skill of the interviewer; and, perhaps most importantly,

himself from his past:

Shaw demonstrates that a person is, at every moment, everything he always was; his current role can eclipse his past but not deny it. Shaw remains his father's child though he is in his eighties and his father has been dead over forty years.²⁷

The Basis for the Present Document

Rosa González Gómez and I met for the first time when a group from a Forest Grove, Oregon church, of which I am a member, volunteered to help clean and paint a group of shelters occupied by migrant workers on a farm in Cornelius, Oregon. I participated in the work primarily for the opportunity to speak Spanish and in the hope of establishing some relationships with some migrant workers whom I might later interview. [I felt that the farm owner should have been responsible for maintaining the dwellings.] Rosa and I worked alongside one another for an hour or so. She chatted with me about religion, work, the weather and other topics. I met other people that day as well.

I had originally planned to interview several workers over the course of the summer, but after conducting three interviews realized that I would only be able to obtain superficial information at best since there was not enough time to establish trust between us. I decided to concentrate on one man, someone who lived in the same camp as Rosa. He was an eloquent storyteller, but after two interviews I did not feel that he was being truthful with me due to the interactions I observed between him and his brother during the interviews. I was thinking about moving on to other informants when he and his family moved without informing me of their new address.

I returned to the camp and asked Rosa and her husband whether they might be interested in talking with me. They agreed and decided that Rosa should meet with me first. Rosa revealed information about her life in Mexico in the first interview which led me to decide to concentrate on her. In subsequent interviews Rosa would mention that I would be interested in her husband's life too; I wanted to get as much from Rosa as I could, however, so I told them that I would finish with her before moving on to him. The summer ended and they moved on before I had the opportunity to interview her husband.

We conducted five of our six ninety-minute interviews while seated in the lawn about twenty yards from her cabin. We conducted one interview in a local restaurant because it was raining and neither of our residences was unoccupied. She was comfortable in the local McDonald's until a group of Hispanics sat down near us. She did not want anything she said to be heard by someone from the migrant community.

It is plausible that Rosa, by telling her story to someone, was attempting to put her life in perspective, put voice to her past and her feelings.²⁸ At first I was unsure as to why Rosa was telling me such very personal details about her life. It seemed especially incredible that she would reveal to me her life as a prostitute given that I am a man and she comes from a culture in which, as she says, "a woman who isn't a virgin isn't worth anything." It is possible that Rosa noticed in my Spanish, learned in the countryside of Ecuador, the accent of a rural worker, of the uneducated, of someone with whom she may have shared experiences. Perhaps she felt that I was someone with whom she

could communicate easily and yet was not a part of her immediate community; she voiced concern more than once that someone might learn about her life and gossip about her. Apparently, I was an outsider who volunteered to listen at a time when she needed to talk and yet did not feel that she could trust anyone from her community or family. She addresses this point directly in the final interview. During the second interview she asked that I turn off the recorder for a moment. She then told me that she had not told her husband about being a prostitute. During the final interview she addresses her need to purge herself of all of those memories, and compares my interviews to sessions with a psychiatrist. I found myself in a very privileged relationship with Rosa.

During that second interview Rosa began to use the familiar tú with me. However, she switched back and forth between the formal and informal verb forms; I did not know why. I decided in the third interview to switch to the familiar form with her. I did so and then realized that she had switched back to the formal usted; I was confused since such switching between the two forms was outside my experiences with the language, but I decided to stay with the familiar form. Later in the session she again switched to the familiar form. In the fourth interview I asked her about it directly. She said that she used the formal usted with me to show me respect. When I pointed out that she also used tú with me she laughed and said she did not know why.

Besides the distance that I originally expected to exist between us due to our respective genders, I also thought that Rosa might not confide in me because she might associate me with her white, American

farm bosses, and, later, with the males who exploited her in the brothels. Wyatt writes that it may be difficult to establish trust when the interviewer is from the oppressor class and the informant from the oppressed group.²⁹ However, I found in the course of the interviews that, while Rosa felt that she was exploited by men in the brothels, she seemed to carry much more animosity for the women who ran them. While she did find support among some women in the brothels and in other jobs, she appears not to have confided in them. I also found out that most of the foremen she has worked under in the U.S. have been Mexicans, so her labor conflicts have not usually been with Americans. She has also lived primarily in migrant labor camps and Hispanic neighborhoods in the U.S., thereby limiting her contacts with Americans.

The reader of an oral history, while benefitting from information concerning the interviewer-informant relationship and the circumstances of the interview, should also have some knowledge of the methods used to process the history, and of the criteria used by the interviewer in selecting material for inclusion in the final product.³⁰

In the oral history that follows, Rosa makes errors, some of which reflect her feelings, and some of which appear to be simple oversights. She volunteers, for example, early in one interview that she remembers very little about her father, that she recalls "only one, no two, no three conversations with him." She actually recalls four. It is interesting to note that they are fairly positive recollections, and that she tells rather humorously the only one that could be considered negative (when he chases her home with a stick). She also neglects to mention her eldest, and perhaps her most important, sister when she

lists her siblings' full names. She rarely mentions names unless I ask her to, and then she often has a difficult time remembering them. She makes other errors of the type to which we all fall prey when recalling events from the distance past. She is confused, for example, about her first trip to the United States. When asked to describe her first experience in the U.S., she says it was a trip to California where she picked grapes and later found work in a factory. She later tells me that it was when she crossed the border in an attempt to go to a brothel in California. She seems to forget when discussing her adult life that she went to Texas to pick cotton with her brothers and sister when she was about thirteen years old.

Following each session with Rosa, I listened to the tape and formulated questions, some to elicit more details concerning an event, and some to suggest topics for discussion. Regarding the latter, I always tried to lead Rosa -- she seemed to expect it -- but never insisted that she discuss something. I tried to nudge her with my questions, being careful not to put words in her mouth. I also tried not to reveal my feelings about the events she was narrating. When she paused I would often repeat her own words back to her in the form of a short statement or question. For example, during a long pause in her description of her father's funeral, after she had noted that all of the neighbors came out for the burial, I repeated back to her, "So there were a lot of people there." After such a nudge she would usually begin speaking again. If she seemed reluctant, especially in the first few interviews, I dropped the subject and waited for her to bring it up or to provide me with the opportunity to do so. Another tactic was simply

to ask her to describe the place or person mentioned.

For several reasons, we usually treated several topics in each interview. I usually began the interviews by asking for some clarifying information regarding a previous session, or by asking for a description of a place or a person mentioned previously. Twice Rosa began interviews by (1) telling me about her experience with the IRS and (2) by answering the question I had posed in the previous interview in which I asked what had been the saddest and happiest moments in her life. My requests for clarification were usually enough to get her talking.

Another reason for the variety of topics was Rosa's habit of frequently rushing to the present in order to compare her life today with what she had been describing from the past. Her mention of the present was usually quite short in these cases, but her narrative would stop, so I would pose a question to get her back to the topic from the past in order to complete the information. For example, when discussing financial arrangements in the brothels she mentioned that the money was quickly spent, and then told me about how her money is better spent today. I then had to ask her about the arrangements in another brothel to get her to continue the narrative. In a later interview, when we were discussing her relationship with her husband, I asked her about her present financial situation.

As our relationship progressed, I was able to press her more when I felt it necessary, when I needed a detail, noted a contradiction, or was simply confused. As we progressed, however, her monologues became significantly longer. It became less and less necessary for me to pose questions since (1) she was leaving fewer pauses and opportunities for

me to speak, and (2) she was providing more detailed accounts. In discussing her life in the brothels, however, she tended to recount simple episodes and then pause as though she did not want to discuss the topic further. I would usually ask for details then, or ask if something similar happened another time, or simply ask her what happened afterward. She would usually answer my questions easily and go on to describe another period or another episode. At one point in the third interview I asked her if she could talk about what life was like in the brothels. She asked if it was important. I responded that I thought everything was important, and she immediately began talking.

The content of the first interview contributed greatly to my deciding to interview Rosa further. In that session she made a ninety-minute dash through her life, as though she thought it would be the only interview: she described her hometown and the surrounding area; she mentioned in passing that she had been in a brothel and that she had tried drugs; she discussed in more detail life as a migrant worker and in her current home in San Luis, Sonora; she described her religious conversion; she told me of an operation she had undergone; she described her relationship with a husband who had beaten her; she talked of being a domestic and a food vendor; she mentioned that she had given birth to a baby who died very young; and she spoke briefly of the time she worked in a factory in California. I began the second interview by asking her to describe her house in her hometown. As the interviews progress one can see that they generally move forward chronologically, but with frequent returns to periods and episodes already discussed, and to the more recent past.

Within a few weeks of the final interview I had transcribed the material in Spanish. Many oral historians pay someone to do this tedious work, but I felt it necessary to do it myself in order to become that much more familiar with the text. I believe it also reduced the possibility of error since I would be likely to remember a word if it were unclear on the tape and would also be familiar with the current of the conversation.

After transcribing the tapes I set about selecting the material to be included in this thesis. I then translated the text, organizing it chronologically by including all information about a certain period or event from the six interviews. While the text is for the most part chronological, I have not hesitated to leave together information from distinct periods when Rosa herself made the association. I have included all of the events that Rosa described to me, and all information about those events, except for her recent brush with the Internal Revenue Service; not all of the information was on tape, and I did not trust my memory to provide the details, though I do mention the episode in a footnote.

Rosa has a tendency to engage in a repetition of words and short phrases. While these redundancies might be of interest to a linguist, they have for the most part been excluded from this translation in order to enhance the text's readability. For example, "My mother was rather short. She was rather short my mother."

During our interviews Rosa showed very little emotion. She has a quiet, soft demeanor. She usually stared off into the fields as she spoke as she spoke in a low, monotonous voice, broken occasionally by

a short, quiet laugh when she described something she thought humorous, or, more often, when she marveled at her "ignorance" as a child and young adult. In the testimony I use footnotes to draw the reader's attention to what I perceived to be Rosa's emotional or attitudinal responses. Although she seemed saddened often, I noted that she became visibly upset and shed tears only when she described the death of her baby and the dreams that tormented her for years afterward. She did not seem at all embarrassed about her crying, nor did she make mention of it.

Rosa is about five feet two inches tall and might be described as a bit portly. Her skin, which she describes in the testimony, and facial features are typical of Mexicans of mixed Indian and European blood. She usually wore to our interviews a blouse or T-shirt, slacks or jeans, and simple shoes or sneakers. She wore her waist-length dark brown hair pulled back. Most of our interviews were on Sunday afternoons and she often worked Sunday mornings, so I usually found her resting after having bathed. She was visibly sleepy during one interview which we conducted on a weeknight after she had worked in the sun all day. I suggested that we postpone the interview, but she insisted that we go ahead. We ended the session at around eighty minutes when we both found ourselves drifting.

Conclusion

It is not my intention to suggest that the story of Rosa's life is 'typical' of that of rural, lower-class Mexican women born in the 1940s. While I do feel that the text reflects one person's reactions to cultural patterns during a specific period of Mexican and U.S. history,

it should be stressed that this testimony represents only nine hours of interviews, and that the information was elicited in an artificial situation, and later filtered and reshuffled by the interviewer as noted above. The focus of this work is to try and reach an understanding of Rosa's life in the broader context of Mexican and Latin American culture, not to attempt a psychological study of her motivations. It is hoped that her reminiscences will provide raw material for someone wishing to study more closely that period's cultural patterns.

Endnotes

¹Michael Kenny, "The Patron-Client Relationship in Interviewing: An Anthropological View," Oral History Review 15 (1987): 79.

²David King Dunaway, "Field Recording Oral History," Oral History Review, 15 (1987): 32.

³William Lynwood Montell, "Preface to The Saga of Coe Ridge," Oral History, An Interdisciplinary Anthology, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History in Cooperation with the Oral History Association, 1984) 166; Charles Morrissey, "Oral History and the California Wine Industry," Dunaway and Baum 143.

⁴Macaela di Leonardo, "Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter," Oral History Review, 15 (1987): 1-2; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Southern Experience," Dunaway and Baum 190; Victoria Wyatt, "Oral History in the Study of Discrimination and Cultural Repression," Oral History Review, 15 (1987): 131-32.

⁵Saul Benison, "Introduction to Tom Rivers," Dunaway and Baum 129; William Moss, "Oral History: An Appreciation," Dunaway and Baum 91.

⁶Alice Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History," Dunaway and Baum 71.

⁷Paul Thompson, "History and the Community," Dunaway and Baum 45.

⁸Sherna Gluck, "What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History," Dunaway and Baum 225.

⁹Kenny 72.

¹⁰Wyatt 140-41.

¹¹Thompson 41.

¹²Thompson 49.

¹³Dunaway and Baum 306.

¹⁴Lawrence C. Watson and Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke, Interpreting Life Histories (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1985) 134.

¹⁵Watson and Watson-Franke 159; Susan A. McGuire, "Expanding Information Sets by Means of 'Existential' Interviewing," Oral History Review, 15 (1987): 58.

¹⁶Sidney Mintz, "The Anthropological Interview and the Life History," Dunaway and Baum 307-8.

¹⁷Mintz 309.

¹⁸Peter Friedlander, "Theory, Method and Oral History," Dunaway and Baum 133.

¹⁹Dunaway 21-25, 28, 31; Wyatt 134.

²⁰Michael Agar, "Transcript Handling: An Ethnographic Strategy," Oral History Review, 15 (1987): 219; Dunaway 38.

²¹Wyatt 134.

²²Kenny 74.

²³Dunaway 38.

²⁴McGuire 59.

²⁵Wyatt 129-32, 139.

²⁶Marianne LoGerfo, "Three Ways of Reminiscence in Theory and Practice," Dunaway and Baum 317-18.

²⁷Theodore Rosengarten, preface to All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974) xvi.

²⁸LoGerfo 317-18.

²⁹Wyatt 129-30.

³⁰Agar 211-219.

II. Mexico, 1940-1990

While the focus of this thesis is the life history of Rosa González Gómez, it is useful to keep in mind the general trends and salient features of Mexican history during Rosa's lifetime. While Rosa never expressed interest in or knowledge of politics during the interviews, her life, like that of any Mexican of the lower socioeconomic groups, was severely affected by the policies and practices of Mexican governmental and commercial interests. In addition, she has lived at least part of each year since 1981 in the United States, and now resides about six months per year in a small town in the state of Sonora on the Arizona border. Thus her life, indeed her livelihood, is affected by decisions made in the United States which might affect border life, and the life of the migrant worker.

Rosa was born in 1943 in the middle of the presidency of Manuel Avila Camacho. Although he had served as Minister of National Defense under the liberal and popular Lázaro Cárdenas, Avila Camacho would turn the policies of the powerful ruling party, what is today called the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), decidedly to the right and, in part, away from the Revolution's Marxist ideals. While Lázaro Cárdenas had, in keeping with the Constitution of 1917, increased the voice of the labor unions, Avila Camacho sought to limit their right to strike. While Lázaro Cárdenas redistributed to the nation's peasants

about 44 million acres, only eleven million acres were redistributed during Avila Camacho's six-year term. Perhaps of even greater political importance, Avila Camacho professed his Catholic faith in public.¹ While Cárdenas had ended the vehement attacks on the Church, thus allowing the states to modify restrictive anti-clerical legislation, Avila Camacho's declaration went a step further.² It not only helped undermine criticism from the right-wing pro-clericalist PAN party and its supporters, it also helped consolidate the traditional strongholds of the Catholic Church, many of whom remembered bitterly the violent anti-clerical, anti-religious policies of former president Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28), founder of the ruling party. Calles' policies had led to numerous armed conflicts in many parts of the country between 1926 and 1936.

Soon after Rosa's birth, Mexico entered into an extended period of economic expansion, initially based on the increased demand for its commodities during World War II, that would not end until the mid-1970s. From 1940 to 1960, for example, industrial production increased 120 percent and agricultural production rose 100 percent. Foreign investment, mostly directed toward new technologies, factories, and the reconcentration of agricultural holdings into a few hands, also increased significantly during this period: It doubled in the 1950s, tripled in the 1960s, and quadrupled in the 1970s.³ Through the 1960s the economy grew at an average annual rate of six percent.⁴

Along with economic growth, there was also relative political stability. As the party of the Revolution, the PRI managed to keep separate factions within the party, "while class/race/sex divisions were

blurred by the ideologies of populism, national unity, and class harmony."⁵ Increased state participation in the economy, in keeping with the ideology of the Revolution, further consolidated the power of the PRI in all aspects of Mexican life.⁶

But the years of political stability and economic prosperity merely served to obscure more pressing problems that desperately needed resolution.

Mexico has faced a population explosion since the Revolution. From 1965-1980 the population grew an average of 3.2 percent annually; about half of all Mexicans are under 15 years of age.⁷ The nation has been hard-pressed to educate its citizens since the days of Cárdenas and Avila Camacho, in spite of the fact that between 1934 and 1946, the amount of money (as a percentage of GNP) spent on education continued to increase. Literacy increased from 41 percent in 1940 to 55 percent in 1950, but the number of illiterates also rose. The centralization of educational authority in Mexico City led to a loss of interest and control at the local level, particularly with regard to financing; the exclusion of the Church in primary and secondary education denied many rural areas their only teachers. The 1950 census enumerated serious problems in the educational system. Only five percent of the nation's rural elementary schools offered classes through the sixth year and about half only taught three grades:

Of the slightly more than six million children in the six to fourteen age bracket, only 50 per cent enrolled in school, only 30 per cent attended class regularly, and only 33 per cent did sufficient work to earn a promotion to the next grade. In [1950], 1.4 million children enrolled in primary schools; 57 per cent were in the first year, 91 per cent were in the first three years, and only one-half of one per cent

in the sixth year.⁸

In addition to the failings of the educational system, the country has not been able to create enough jobs for the 800,000 people who entered the work force each year during the 1980s. The austerity measures of the 1980s carried out under President Miguel de La Madrid (1982-88), which included the privatization of numerous state-controlled industries, have further eroded Mexican buying power; by 1985 real wages were 40 percent less than their 1982 level.⁹ Today, about 65 percent of the nation's population, on "a strict comparative-income basis," would be considered "lower class"; 10 percent would qualify as "upper class."¹⁰ Between 1950 and 1969 the poorest tenth of the population's share of income dropped from 2.4 percent to 2.0 percent, while the richest tenth's share rose from 49 percent to 51 percent.¹¹

As well as a concentration of income, there has been a reconcentration of land ownership. Following a slow-down in the pace of land distribution beginning with Avila Camacho, the rate quickened again during the tenure of President José López Portillo (1976-82), but much of the land redistributed was uncultivable. Many peasants were leaving the land they had received since rarely was their newfound ownership accompanied by the needed infrastructure, such as credit and technical assistance, or irrigation construction. It was difficult for peasants not organized into ejidos (communal plots) to maintain more than a subsistence level of production. In addition, peasants received low wages for their labor, and intermediaries paid low prices for the farmers' products. The government encouraged the diversion of agricultural land from staple to export crops in order to earn foreign

credit. These farms generally meant larger land holdings and mechanization, thus requiring less labor. These agricultural policies, combined with the increase in industrial and manufacturing jobs in the cities helped to drive a "re-proletarianization" of the Mexican peasantry.¹²

Three million peasants migrated to the cities in the 1960s; by 1970 there were 1.2 million migrant farm workers in Mexico, about 20 percent of the rural population.¹³ By 1982, 1,600 people a day were moving to the capital.¹⁴ Most of these emigrants end up in petty commerce and the service or tertiary sectors. In Mexico City, about one in five employed women is a domestic, and there are about three million street vendors.¹⁵

During the economic boom years, Mexico had managed to keep inflation relatively low by maintaining an artificial 12.5 pesos to the dollar exchange rate. The currency proved to be seriously overvalued by the mid-1970s, with subsequent government devaluations, heavy borrowing, and state spending pushing up inflation rates. The nation's foreign debt increased dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s as the government, as well as private corporations, began borrowing heavily, principally against projected oil earnings, for expansion and infrastructure improvement. Soft oil prices in the early 1980s and again in 1985-1986, as well as the need to import food beginning in the 1970s, exacerbated Mexico's economic problems, leading to several foreign debt crises.¹⁶

These economic pressures also led to massive migration to the United States, as the Revolution (especially between 1910 and 1920) and the Cristero Revolt (1926-1929)¹⁷ had earlier, and Mexicans, along with

other immigrant groups, had helped build the railroads and mines of the western United States. Mexicans faced racial discrimination in the U.S., as well as periodic backlashes during downturns in the U.S. economy. Throughout the history of Mexican migration to the United States, U.S. labor unions have opposed the newcomers claiming that they have lowered wage and work standards while taking jobs away from Americans; growers and other employers have praised the Mexicans for being "docile, manageable workers," and for taking jobs Americans do not want. The employers frequently claim that restrictions aimed at Mexican migrant workers would be disastrous to their operations.¹⁸

The highly emotional debate over Mexican migration to the U.S. has involved the Mexican government. In 1942, when the U.S. needed laborers to replace those contributing directly to the war effort, the Mexican government entered into an agreement with the administration of Franklin Roosevelt to provide those workers, though thousands were already coming into the country illegally.¹⁹ Numerous agencies became involved in the effort to evaluate labor "shortages," and then to contract for workers, transport them, ensure proper living and working conditions, and arrange for their return to Mexico.²⁰ The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service was one of the agencies sending mixed signals to the involved parties. The INS was charged with policing the border and serving a law enforcement function regarding immigration. However, when, in 1944, the Mexican government, protesting racism and poor working conditions in Texas, prohibited Texas from participating in the bracero program, the INS acceded to the demands of the growers by letting thousands of uncontracted workers into Texas thereby helping to undermine the bracero

program.²¹ By the end of the war, about 300,000 Mexicans had worked in the U.S.²² Between 1954-59, U.S. recruiters contracted about 2½ million workers.²³

Several times in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s the U.S. government offered amnesty to illegal immigrants.²⁴ Congress passed the most recent program in 1986.

Many experts are at a loss to understand the massive increase in Mexican migration to the U.S. during the 1970s given the poor economic conditions in the U.S. and the oil boom in Mexico. The old "push-pull" theory did not seem to apply as the U.S. population of Mexican origin increased 93 percent in the 1970s. It appears that the previous three decades of migration had established strong social networks which served to sustain migration in the 1970s, and help maintain it today. These networks were based primarily on kinship, but also friendship, with friends often being from the same Mexican towns or regions. Massey notes that "the maturation of the networks after 1964 coincided with a wave of capital-intensive agricultural modernization in rural Mexico, giving rise to a massive upsurge in out-migration, most of it undocumented."²⁵ [In 1984 there were an estimated 2 million to 4 million illegal Mexican immigrants in the United States.]²⁶

In addition to the development of migrant networks, it seems likely that the workers' U.S. dollar incomes also allowed them more mobility. We also see a preference, voiced by Rosa, for the comforts of town life during the winters in Mexico, and for the conveniences of life in the United States, over life in the Mexican countryside. Apparently, for her, the added income is worth the obvious hardships of travel, the

difficult working conditions, and the at times uncomfortable living situations.

Contributing to the number of migrants, both legal and illegal, is the number of maquiladoras (manufacturing plants) established inside Mexico along its border with the U.S. By the late 1960s some "runaway shops" were established, with the number rising and falling with economic tides. The Border Industrialization Program begun in the early 1970s heightened the problem. The factories generally involve grueling working conditions, and do not provide the worker the opportunity to learn new skills. Wages are higher than in the rest of Mexico, but prices are relatively high in the border towns. The massive migrations to the border, and the preference by maquiladora operators to hire young women, have also disrupted family life: The migrations per se upset the family makeup, while the migrating males may find themselves out of work and supported by a female family member in the maquiladora town.²⁷

One final note must be added about changes that have taken place in Mexico, particularly as a result of the worsening economic situation. As in most traditional societies, Mexican women have always been held in highest esteem for their reproductive role, that is, for producing workers, both rural and urban. Moreover, Mexican popular culture effectively praises them for their willingness to be exploited. Today, however, given that a man's income is most often insufficient to support a family, women are also being encouraged by the state and the mass media to participate in the work force while also raising tomorrow's workers. Since women tend to be unskilled and to occupy lower-level jobs, they have become a "flexible workforce," pulled in and out of the

labor market as need be.²⁸

Against this backdrop, in which Mexico has attempted to rush headlong into an industrialized society, placing its hopes on foreign investments and an oil bonanza which did not materialize, while ignoring the more pressing problems of a burgeoning population, Rosa González Gómez tells her story.

Endnotes

¹Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, Modern Latin America (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 233-234.

²Charles C. Cumberland, Mexico. The Struggle for Modernity (London/New York: Oxford UP, 1968) 291-92.

³James D. Cockcroft, Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation, and the State (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983) 150-51.

⁴Skidmore and Smith 239.

⁵Cockcroft 147.

⁶Skidmore and Smith 238-40.

⁷Skidmore and Smith 245-46.

⁸Cumberland 291-92; Cumberland also voices here his concern over the definition of literacy and the reliability of census data.

⁹Skidmore and Smith 245-46; Cockcroft 223.

¹⁰Cockcroft 189.

¹¹Skidmore and Smith 239; Cockcroft 187.

¹²Cockcroft 167.

¹³Cockcroft 172-73.

¹⁴Ranier Fabian, "Mexico's 'Urban Wilderness': Life in a Sea of Emigres," World Press Review 29 (1989): 57.

¹⁵Cockcroft 231.

¹⁶Skidmore and Smith 241-42, 244-45.

¹⁷A series of reactionary uprisings, generally in the countryside, led by conservatives primarily seeking a loosening of controls on the Catholic Church, and desecularization of education.

¹⁸Elaine C. Lacey, "Mexican Immigrant Workers in the Southwest: The 1920s and the 1980s," Review of Latin American Studies 1.2 (1988): 104-5.

¹⁹Peter N. Kirstein, Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon (R & E Research Associates: San Francisco, 1977) 4-5.

²⁰Kirstein 12-14.

²¹Kirstein 53-55, 64.

²²Skidmore and Smith 234.

²³Kirstein 102.

²⁴Kirstein 56, 71, 76.

²⁵Douglas S. Massey, "The Social Organization of Mexican Migration to the United States," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, 487 (1986): 103-5, 107.

²⁶Lacey 106.

²⁷Peter Baird and Ed McCaughan, Beyond the Border: Mexico and the U.S. Today (New York: North American Congress on Latin America, 1979) 130, 139-42.

²⁸Cockcroft 148-49.

III. Rosa González Gómez¹

I am from the State of Hidalgo. The place where I was born is a rancho called El Pantano, Hidalgo. Well, the rancho is a small town. In those days, when I was a girl, I remember that it was a very poor town. I say poor because we didn't have the means to eat well. We ate very poorly. We ate tortilla, and beans, meat once a year because in those days the people celebrated there the Day of the Dead. The Day of the Dead is when one makes tamales, they make altars, what they call altars of a flower called compazuche. Then one places all of the offerings. Before they believed that. Well, I believed that before, but now I don't believe in that, that the souls are going to eat there.

I grew up in one house and another, wherever I spent the night and slept, because my mother died when I was very small. I didn't know her. My sisters, that is my eldest sister, raised me; and my aunt and uncle, where I once was at the point of dying from whooping cough. My father died when I was about ten years old. When I still had my father, I would somehow go about from here to there. But when my father died, I had to go wherever God might help me to survive, to learn to earn my bread.

¹The names of the informant, Rosa, her siblings, her husband and her hometown in northwestern Hidalgo have been changed.

I started to work in houses outside the rancho at that time; they paid me twenty-five Mexican pesos per month. Sometimes they paid me, and sometimes not, like that. But that's how I grew up. And then when I was bigger, a señorita, many things happened to me.² But, thank God that God helped me. There was a time when I was involved in many things. But thank God because He put very good people in my path who taught me the road, as it says in a book that I saw once, The Road to God. In the year 1980 I delivered myself to Christ.

When I was a small girl I went to school. But I didn't learn anything. My father was still alive. One day a teacher hit me. Because in those days they hit children with a stick. So my father said to me, "Daughter, if you don't want to go, you don't go. If you're not going to learn, don't go." I think that before parents were more ignorant. They didn't understand that a son or daughter has to have an education for tomorrow. So, I didn't continue going. But later, when I was much older, I got very interested in knowing the letters, in knowing the alphabet, and then reading stories because I liked novels very much. So I said to myself, well, I need to know how to read, because they would read me novels, and when I didn't like them I would say, "No, you're tricking me!" But, I did not like school, and when my father died I went less.

I suffered a lot because we had to go far to a spring to fetch water. I would go every morning to get water. I would go with my older

²Rosa seemed nervous as she mentioned these "things" during the first interview and, as she would often do, quickly jumped to the present to note how things have changed for the better for her.

sister, when she was alive, or with my other sister. We would get the water with a little boat that was tied there, and then we would put it all on top. We filled clay pots that have a small hole on the bottom and you would put them on your head. One or two buckets fit there. We had pots and we would save water. I would go get water and carry the water to other houses. Even though they might not have asked for it, I would take them water. And they would give me a sweet that they call piloncillo [sugarloaf], they would give me tamal, they call it, so I could grind it and make tortillas. They would feed me. I would go look for herbs called quelites too. So that I could eat, I would go to the fields where they sowed corn. Sometimes there would be an ear of corn left over. I would go look for capotes, tomatoes, beans, whatever I could find to carry off with my sister.

Later, at night, we suffered a lot. There wasn't anything; what we had to have just was not there. Sometimes we didn't even have coffee to drink, just sweetened water, or orange leaf tea. In one house for a while, in another for another time, like that. We just ate tortillas with salsa, or just tortilla with salt, or with chiles. Or when there were beans, with beans; and when there weren't, just tortillas. We ate twice a day: in the morning when there was something, very early in the morning, about seven; and later, if there was something, at midday, and if not, then later in the afternoon, whatever there was. Sometimes just tortillas.

My sister was married. But her husband was very irritable; he hit her a lot. So, one day my sister made some tortillas, thick ones and

she hid them for some reason. And sometimes I would get to taste her food. One time I robbed a woman who had made food for later. I robbed her because I was very hungry. She went off to take food to someone working in the corn fields. Soon after I saw her leave I opened the door, went in and ate the food. But we were too poor. There was nothing.³

There was nothing. There was a place very far off and you had to walk a lot. And I would carry my basket there. I would collect prickly pears, many prickly pears. And there was fruit there, plums, but more than anything prickly pears. I would go to a place where there were baskets and casseroles, and I would trade everything. Then I would sell the casserole pots. I liked buying and selling; even when I was very young I liked it.

I would walk a lot, and I never got lost. I also would help a señora cut coffee. We would go way out there, to some gullies. We would go down there, and of course, the descent is fast, but the return -- and weighted down -- no! We would cut the ripe coffee and bring a lot of it. I loved to eat it, the ripe beans. Then it would be set out in the sun to dry on a mat. Then you just pass your hand through it like that. Then the skin would fall off, and we would toast it in the comal [earthenware dish or pan in which tortillas are cooked], nice and golden, slowly, and we would add a little lard, and it takes on a very delicious smell.

³She says this with some amazement in her voice, which turns to sadness.

The rancho is a very small town. I haven't gone there for a long time, about eight years. I went once. There is a school. Cars couldn't enter there. The market was in Cuesta Colorada on Fridays. And then in Jacala, too, in Jacala and Jacalilla. There isn't any electricity, there isn't any gas. To light the house you make a bulb like this, and you put in it...one of those cotton things that they use to make blankets? A long one. You put it inside the bulb and the bulb has a lid. Then you make a little hole, you pull out the wick. The bulb is full of oil. You light the wick until there isn't any more oil. That's how one lights the house. To make food you have firewood, a pan, fire. But in those days there wasn't any gas, there wasn't any electric light.

The house was made of sticks, or boards. I don't remember if it was of boards or sticks, but more than likely it was made of the two things. Because there a house wasn't made of anything more than boards and sticks. There weren't any comforts. Above, it was made of straw. It was very small. Inside there was a bed of sticks. Long sticks, and a mat. Many people just have a mat to sleep on at night. And then when one gets up one rolls up the mat and puts it outside or behind the door. And sometimes for a pillow we used the firewood that we had collected to prepare food. There was a hearth on one side where you put your pot with a fire. You can put a large clay comal there to make your tortillas. There is another small space to put the coffee, or beans or whatever you are going to cook. They cook only with firewood there. It had a dirt floor. Above was where the corn was put to dry. There

is a table, and then another table on which to put the metate for grinding. There is a ladder made from a tree, and one goes up to the loft where the corn is left to dry, and brings down the corn. Only corn was stored there. Beans we almost always bought. Or, if we didn't buy them, we would trade for them. If some person had a lot of beans and a little corn, he would say, I'm going to exchange it for beans, or for eggs, or even a hen.⁴

We rarely used money. If we went to the plaza, to buy in the plaza, where the market is in Cuesta Colorada, we'd have to carry corn, beans, some hens in order to sell them to be able to get some money and buy something to take home. That is how you got money. For example, if one is anxious to eat a piece of bread, just pure white bread without any sweet or anything on top, one would exchange it for some eggs. In those days a small piece of bread cost 20 centavos.

But things from modern life weren't seen there. Everything looked the same all the time there; the same all the time, just people working all the time, harvesting their crops when there were any.

The wood was all eucalyptus. You locked the door or you tied it. There is a plant there, I don't know what it's called, that gives these tubes, wide ones, and that ends in a point. That's what they use to tie the door. There is another plant that they use to make mats. I don't know what it is called. I wanted to learn to make them, and I was learning to do it, but I never made one.

⁴Rosa rarely gestured with her hands as she spoke, except to gently indicate the positions of objects of discussion as in this case when she briefly waved a hand overhead to indicate the loft.

We didn't have a bathroom. We bathed inside the house with a little water. Each person would bathe alone. You close the door and bathe. You would bathe one after another. I think you bathed any day you wanted; every eight days or so. But sometimes there wasn't any water. Sometimes there was hardly enough water to make food. Sometimes the water would dry up. That place is very dry.

There, if it rains the corn grows. If it doesn't rain, it doesn't grow. The corn grows without irrigation, but only well when it rains. Because there are times when it rains. Sometimes it rained too much, and sometimes not at all.

I was the last one. First came my sister Juana, then Jesús, then Porfirio and Lucía. Juana is dead.

I didn't know my mother. I was very small, too small, I think, to remember her. I don't remember her. It was very long ago, and there was never a camera to take a picture. It was very difficult where I was born to have a photograph. I have never asked how old she was. "What was my mother like?" I asked. They say she was not very tall, sort of short. That is the only thing I remember. There wasn't a doctor where we were born. There wasn't any way to get someone to a doctor. There wasn't any of that. They just died, the people died. You never knew what from.

One time I had a vision. It was the Day of the Dead. At that time my father already had another woman. We were living there in the house, but they had gone out. We lived near a school and they had dances

there. My father went to the dance. "I'll be right back," he says. "I'll bring you peanuts." So, just my brother and I were there, the two of us alone. I remember that there was a bundle next to me, like a woman. And I said to my brother, who was sleeping next to me, "Light the lantern because there's a woman here next to me." So he lit the lantern and says, "There's nothing. Everything is closed up. We closed and tied the door and everything."

A little while later there was a noise outside the house, above the house. The hens were flying around a lot. When we got up the next day, all of the hens were dead. So when my father came home he said to me, "Why do you have all of the hens without feathers, and hanging there?"

"Because they all turned up dead this morning. So we cleaned them to eat them."

Then I told him everything that had happened and he said, "Ay, my daughter, it's your mother." Because at that time we lived in the same house in which she had lived. Nothing more was ever said about my mother.

I remember one time my stepmother had given me a slap, but I am not sure if it was so or not, but I went to look for my brother who was working and I told him and he went to look for my father and told him that he should go and tell her that she was not my mother. So my father arrived. I was scared. I thought that he was going to hit me. He said, "Come here child." He hugged me. "No one is going to come and give orders here." And he ran the woman out. He ran her out but after a short time she came back. But that time he sided with me. He said

that he did not want anyone coming to give orders like that, or hitting.⁵ But that was all. We never talked about my mother.

My stepmother had two more daughters that were hers -- they were not my father's daughters -- and she always favored them, for the food and for everything. They were, in the first place, very poor. There was almost nothing to eat. One time I remember that we were eating and her daughter was counting the tortillas. "No," she says, "she already ate so many tortillas." One feels it when one is loved, and when one isn't; when people like you and when they don't. Other people always treated me better than my stepmother. Who knows why she was that way. I was never much for talking. Because of that I always looked around for other places, with my aunt and uncle, my cousins, with other people who, well, who loved me, who I felt loved me, where I would probably eat better, eat something. Sometimes there would be an egg, they would fry an egg. Or there would be beans. When one doesn't have things one is always hungry. My sister, my other brother, almost all of us were never there. It was better for me to go out to other houses, to do chores, to carry water, to go to the corn fields to look for leftovers, to look for the many things that there sometimes are in the countryside. My aunt would not sleep with her husband, she slept with me.

One time my father went to bring me home from a house where I had spent the night; he came to get me with a stick. He said that he was going to hit me, but he never did. "Andale," he said. "Let's go!"

⁵There is only the slightest hint of pride in her voice. I had asked Rosa to describe her mother at the beginning of this paragraph.

They're going around beating little dogs without owners!" So I went in front and he behind me. He says it was because I wasn't at home with him. I think that sometimes he missed me.

At times I would say, "No, it's better that I go with my uncle, or my godmother." And I would go, because sometimes when one is little they baptize you and you have godparents and everything. That is the custom in the Catholic religion. I had a godmother and a godfather who loved me very much because they never had children. And they always wanted me to stay with them. And I think that I never would have suffered, because my godfather worked and had plenty of beans and all of that to eat. He planted his corn, he had a small piece of land. He planted his beans, squashes, and with that he lived. They had hens; they always had eggs; they always had prickly pears. They had some six or seven prickly pear plants right there in their house. They had plaintain. His cornfield always produced well, and since there were only two people to feed, they always had more. But I never liked to be with them. I would live with them for a time, sometimes for three months. And she taught me to make tortillas, and I was good with her. But suddenly I would say, "No, I am leaving." And later when my father died too, he told me to stay with them.

One time I was very sick, from a cough that chokes people that is called whooping cough. Very bad, I was very bad. But I wasn't in my father's house, I was with another family, with an aunt and uncle of mine who lived there. I was very bad. We were all sick there, all of my cousins had the cough. My aunt would pass by -- sas! -- hitting us

on the back because it was a very bad cough. My brothers lived there [with the stepmother]. They got along well there. And sometimes they would go to other houses. My oldest brother always liked to work in Texas, picking cotton. And when I was sick they notified him and he brought me some pills and I got better.

When one is young one likes to go around making mischief. One likes to walk around in the countryside, sometimes making swings in the trees, playing. I was very close to a niece. She always went around with me. Sometimes we would go look for things together in the fields. I was very bad with her. There is a plant there that grows up the trees that when it touches you it gives you a rash. And I said to her, "I wonder if it's true?" But I did it to her. Her arm got very bad, very bad. Sometimes I hit her. And then, when she was crying, I would cry too because I felt bad. My sister said, she was still living then, "You'll have to cure that child." Her arm got better on its own. But that niece loved me a lot. We looked a lot alike. She is in Mexico City now, married. I haven't seen her for seven years. Whenever I've dreamed about her, I've never dreamed about her as a woman with children, always a girl. I've always dreamed of her like that. I don't know why. I wonder what dreams mean?⁶

Of course, we didn't have dolls. When would we buy a doll? Much less cars. We just played in the trees making swings, sometimes cutting limes, oranges, or prickly pears. And nothing more. Or we would go to

⁶Rosa seemed to expect me to answer this question. I simply said that dreams can mean many things.

the water and entertain ourselves looking for little things that are there in the earth. There are little sweet potatoes that are taken out and the leaves are thrown away. They're white. And I liked very much to pull them out and eat them. That was how we entertained ourselves along the way.

Or we would wander around. There were some plains and there were some shrubs that gave a very small fruit that we called an apple. We would go a lot up there to the plains to look for those fruits. And then from there we would throw ourselves rolling down the hill. We loved to roll!

We all played together, we played Serpent of the Sea. Just that, in the afternoons. And then at night they used to say that the duendes would come out. Who knows what duendes are? They all come out at night, when everything is real dark, and then to go to the bathroom you had to go outside in the night, and then there aren't any bathrooms. There is nothing that might be a bathroom, even just made of boards. I remember that they used to say that the duende was with a small child, with a great overcoat. They said that he stole children, that he played with them and then stole them. And then everything would be dark, just a little light from a small petroleum lamp in the house.

First the men would sit down to eat at a table. Sometimes there were three benches or four chairs. The children did not sit there. Just men first, those that are working. And on the table the tortillas, many tortillas -- hot, they had to be hot, just out of the comal. And

a mortar of chile, beans, if there were any, if not, just chiles and salt and coffee. And after they finished eating the women and children would eat. The men would go outside with their cigars and then the other people would sit down to eat -- if there was something left. If there were beans the men wouldn't try to save any because there would be just a little.

I remember seeing the outline of the tortillas there in piles like little balls, in gourds. You would put the tortillas in there, around the outside until it filled up and there were some sticking out of the top. You put it on the table, and you put a little embroidered napkin on it.

When I was a girl I suffered a lot from lice. There were many lice on my head, black ones. And many white lice in my clothing, on my body. I remember that one time I took my blanket out into the sun, and it boiled a lot with the little animals. Then, in the night I remember that I would sleep and through here [indicates her sides] sometimes I would feel a stinging.

And then there is another type of insect of the feet. It is a tiny animal that digs in making a hole right in the middle of the toe. When that thing gets big it makes something like a little hair, very small. They call them niguas [jigger fleas] there. A lot of them would dig into my toes and they would start to grow and when they took them out I would be left with the hole. My sisters would help me take them out.[?]

[?]Rosa pantomimed the action of digging out the fleas and grimaced.

And then there would be another, very tiny, a nit making a hole. I had this in my toes, and in the instep of the foot. A horrible thing. I couldn't walk like that. There was a lot of this there, I wasn't the only one with it. It grows in the pigs there, and I walked around barefoot all the time. Later, a woman with whom I worked gave me some sandals, but they were the first ones. We always went barefoot.

I think that all of those plagues existed before when I was a girl because there wasn't any -- what do they call it? -- insecticide or anything like that. Pardon me because I don't know how to speak well. There wasn't any powdered soap, just that soap that's used to wash clothes. With the soap that one washed with, one also bathed. We never had a soap that would make us smell nice either. In some people there was a lot of this, and in other people none. I also think that they weren't clean. I wasn't, and I didn't have anyone to say to me, "You have to do this." Because when a child is young, if you don't teach him that he has to bathe, that he has to put on his socks and all that, he doesn't learn. What happens is that that person lacks parents. So, since I grew up alone, as they say... Let's suppose that your son lost you. Here he doesn't suffer because here you have a lot of help from the government. But there, no. There if your father dies, and your mother dies, there you are, and may God help you. So, there isn't anyone to tell you, "Go take a bath. Change your clothes."

In towns there are people who are rich, and there are people who are very poor. Those persons who have a little more have the means to buy themselves soap, to buy themselves something, to change clothes.

One time I went to steal corn from my sister's cornfield in order to buy myself a piece of cloth to make myself a skirt. I went and I stole it and I put it out to dry and I went to sell it and I bought myself a piece of cloth and I made myself a skirt. But I never could say, Sunday I am going to wear a new dress. Sometimes I went about for a week with one dress, two weeks, if I had two dresses, nothing more. And I went about with those for a long time.

I also had a lot of mal de ojos. You wake up and you cannot see because everything is sealed over. I would wake up and not be able to see. A lot of stuff would come out of my eyes like when you're bleary-eyed, but yellow, and a lot. My father would say that when one urinated one should throw the hot urine on the eyes in order to get rid of it, so that one could see. Then your vision is very red, and it hurts. This is called mal de ojo there.

Mal de ojo they also say when you look at a person and you want that person to agonize. I have heard people say, "He gave me an evil eye." I don't believe in this now, before I did. Those are the superstitions that people sometimes have. I used to hear people say that someone had given evil eye to their daughter, and they would say, "No, grab the girl and give her a caress so that they won't give her the evil eye." And then later they would say, "No, they gave this child evil eye. That's why he has a fever, that's why he is ill."

I believed then in limpias [cleansings] that they do too. They would grab some basil and with that and an egg they would clean the people. I used to go to those places. They would say, "Let's go get

ourselves a limpia so that it can free us, because you have very bad luck." And, being ignorant, we would go with people that we didn't know.

There were women who, I believe now, dedicated themselves to defrauding the people. They have their house, and a special place where they say that they clean you. And a lot of people go. They charged you 500 pesos, but 500 pesos was little in those days. And they have a pan of water there, and all of these things. They grab water and they throw it at you, or they start to clean you with plants, to clean everything, even down below. And then they make a fire, with a lot of charcoal. And into that charcoal they throw a small white rock that burns. And then they pass you over the fire; you jump. Then they start to sweep you with the herbs and everything. I believed in all of those things, because I was ignorant of everything else.

There is a green lotion that they call Siete Machos, that they would put on you too. They would put it on your legs. And with that they would start to clean you and to shake you.

One time I went and they read my fortune in the cards. There are people who read the cards. A woman says to me, "Let's go have our fortunes read." So after work we went. Well, I had a boyfriend. The fortune teller said to me, "This afternoon your boyfriend is not going to meet you at the bus because he knows some things about you and he is not going to go." And he didn't go! She guessed right! So, I believed a lot in that. I liked to have my fortune told.⁸

⁸She seems amused by all of this.

Near us there was a place that they called the cerro. Those people had a lot of cattle. They never suffered from anything. When they would come down to El Pantano when there was a dance, the girls would go very well dressed, very pretty, everything very nice, because they had a lot of cattle. I remember that the water where they lived would run out, and that they would bring the cattle down to the water, but it looked like when...have you seen the movies when the cattle go by? They had horses and everything. And we were very, very poor.

A girl, very, very young, from the cerro, was stolen by my cousin. He carried her off to Mexico, the D.F. And afterward, who knows what happened, but he made her his wife. He was very young. He must have been eighteen, and she was very small still, I don't think she was fifteen yet. He stole her and carried her away. That's a very common custom there that the boy steals the girl. People say, "Well, he stole her, even though she was out in front running!" A friend of mine says, "My husband stole me, but I was out in front running saying, 'Hurry, because my father is going to catch us.'"

People would leave to get married because there wasn't a church or priest. I never attended a wedding, but many times I went to where they make piloncillo [sugar loaf], where they grind the cane. There are many women grinding on the grinding stone. Or they work cutting the cane. The people planted cane in order to make piloncillo. There are oxen that walk in circles turning the stone to grind the cane. They have very large ovens where they are making the honey for the piloncillo. I liked to go there because they gave me what is called melcocha

(taffy). It's stretched. I would help them grind, and of course I ate well there. I never went to a wedding, but I did go to the mills. It's just that there wasn't a church there.⁹

Before, the young people would fall in love with just a look. Or they would send little gifts. But there wasn't so much liberty that they could talk together for very long, or at night. No, everything was pure letters. I have heard that the parents of the boyfriend go and ask for the girl, but I never heard of them arranging a marriage. And then once they are given, even though the boyfriend might go far away to work for half a year, the girl is engaged and there she is. She can't have another boyfriend, or go to dances or anything.

Cousins never married, not even distant cousins. I never heard of that there. Who knows if it's different now?

The only people with whom I could get close were my aunt and uncle, who had a little more so that I could, as they say, take shelter with them to eat. I spent time with them because there I had better means to pass the time well, to eat, even though it might be just tortillas, or beans.

I was very timid, very timid. I was never forceful. I was like people in the rancho, they were very bashful. They use a scarf, like this, all the time covered up to here. Because in that time everyone was bent over, like this. Even though you might be very hungry, if you

⁹I am not sure why, when I asked her whether she had ever attended a wedding in the rancho, she decided to tell me about visiting the women who make taffy and piloncillo.

arrived at a house and they invited you to eat, you wouldn't go to eat. No, you wouldn't want to go. I would arrive at a house and they would say to me, "Come in and eat." And I wouldn't want to; I wouldn't go. And with my scarf like this, bent way over like this, a lot of shame. I wasn't very friendly with the people.

But I saw women who had more possibilities of having more, and they weren't that way. They were more friendly, they spoke better. They had schooling and everything. But I didn't. It's as if one is ashamed around those who have more, as if you have respect for them. I don't know how to explain it. There are people who feel more superior, so that at times those of us who are poorer feel very ashamed.¹⁰

I would approach these people when they had children because I liked to carry the children, to take care of them, because there it's custom that an infant always be carried in the arms, taking care of him so that he doesn't cry, while the mothers go about doing whatever needs to be done, making tortillas, and doing the chores. So I would take care of them, or do some chore, or carry their water, and I knew that they would feed me. When it was time to eat they always said, "Come and eat, come." And of course I would always refuse a little. And sometimes, "Yes," when I felt more confident. That's how, at times, I

¹⁰Rosa seemed confused by my use of the words pobre (poor) and rico (rich) to describe the economic status of people in her rancho. She preferred the words alto, normally translated as "tall," or más alto meaning "higher up" or "taller." She used a variety of words to refer to those of lesser means, including: los que tienen menos (those who have less), la gente humilde (the humble people). She had told me about the cerro people being better off, so I asked her about such people in the rancho.

would approach people. We would all eat together, whatever there was.

The rancho was sort of big. There were, I believe, about two hundred houses. The only holiday is the 16th of September, when the people would have to put on their uniform. That's the only day, or if there was a dance there in the school for the adults. The 16th of September is Independence Day and all of that. I didn't have any schooling or anything. They required us to put on a blue skirt -- it was just a little piece of cloth -- and a white blouse, even though we might not be wearing shoes. In any case one would go with the uniform and a flag -- the national flag, the tri-color, the Mexican flag -- and one would get in line, and go marching. I think it's the same in all the schools. And sing the national anthem. At night there would be a dance for the adults.

Also the Day of the Dead, New Year's, but not very much. You did not hear much about Christmas or New Year's, much less Epiphany. We didn't know anything about Epiphany. They didn't have any type of party, and then there wasn't a church or anything where one might find out about it. There were churches, but far away in the towns. The people had to go very far to go to church.

It isn't like it used to be. It's more civilized. Cars enter there, there isn't any light, but there is gas. They don't cook with firewood like before; some people, but not everyone. They use stoves. The children are not the same. They are more alive, the people are more talkative, more communicative. It's not like it was when one would hide

upon seeing someone coming, and then look at them from far off.

Now they walk wherever they want to, and they don't walk barefoot. They have more, they're not as poor as before because their children have gone off to the cities to work. They're not dependent any more on what the countryside might give them there. Now they go off to work in other places. Now they have more possibilities; many people have left.

Before, even though the people were very sick, they wouldn't say so. They wouldn't say so until they were sure that they were dying. Why say that it hurts me here and it hurts me there; better to bear it. With what am I going to cure myself? Because there wasn't a doctor there, there was nothing, and then, there wasn't any money. Before they bore all manner of discomforts without knowing that they had them. No one knew what they died of. They just died. Or you wouldn't want to eat any more, and you were there just lying down.

Knowing how to bear things becomes something like pride, right? Like prideful people who don't want to "give a hand to cook," as they say. They want people to know that they can bear a lot. That's like pride. Pride is like when I fight with my husband. Later, I don't want to talk to him. And he doesn't want to talk to me either. So I say, "No, why am I going to talk to him if he's at fault?" That's pride. Before I was like that. That is called rancor; rancorous people, that don't want to talk to people. But the woman who talked to me about Christ -- I received much advice from her -- told me, "It's not good

that you sleep with your husband when you are mad at each other. You must turn the other cheek. It is not good to go to bed mad because you are siding with the Devil." So, when he and I have some fight, even though he is at fault, and I feel ugly -- one feels courage at times -- I speak to him. I say, "Come on, let's eat." I take off his socks. I always put on his socks, always. One time we had a fight and I did not put on his socks. I was very busy too, but I always put his socks on when I can, and when he comes back from work I take off his shoes, his socks and all. That's pride, if one doesn't want to talk to that person. That's how I was before, very rancorous. But now, thank God, God put me with that Sister who gave me a lot of good advice. But I was very rebellious, very badly spoken, I said many bad words before.

I think there's another pride too. We met a couple last year. They barely spent any time together. This woman came to work here three years ago, but alone, with her brother and sister-in-law. She met a man in California but they were only friends. Last year she came alone, but this man followed her. Finally I said to her, "I'm going to give you this mortar so that you can make salsa for Shorty." They called him Shorty. And she says, "Yes." So, this year she came with her daughter. They got together and married and had a baby. So, Shorty went out with his daughter and I looked at her. I thought that she would have a skinny, ugly baby, but the baby was pretty. And Shorty says to me, "I'm very proud of my daughter." So, that's a different pride.

When I delivered myself to Christ, I prayed for that ranchito. All the time I prayed. I would say, I hope that it rains there when water is necessary for the cornfields for those who sow. Because there isn't any irrigation there, just the water that falls from above. And I prayed to God for them. Because I suffered a lot there, that's why.

Indio.¹¹ Yes, there are times when people offend when they say, "You are an indio." Let's suppose in El Pantano... There are other ranchos farther away, and many men wearing their white shoes come down from there. They just made tied-on white shoes, long ones. And they brought things to sell, pots or something. So, they would say, "There comes an indio." Because they were less civilized in their speech. I don't think they know how to speak well. They speak Spanish very haltingly. When they say to a person, "You are an indio," many people feel offended because they feel very inferior, others see them as inferior. It was an insult. But now I know that indios are indigenous. If they were to say to me now, "You are very india," it wouldn't offend me because to me they are very natural words.

Also, people notice a darker person. They would say, "You're very indio." And they noticed the white person more too: "You aren't so indio."

I imagine a mestizo is a darker person. He would be mixed, or

¹¹Here I asked Rosa to tell me the meanings of the words indio, mestizo, blanco, and malinche (I also meant to ask her about la chingada, but we got off the subject and never returned to it). I also asked her what she would say if someone called her mestiza and whether it was better to be dark or light in skin color.

something like that. Like something mixed; a person who is darker than another. Let's suppose a black person with a white one. I think that's how it's mixed; that's a mestizo, right? I don't know that word well. In Veracruz they call a person who is dark, but who is not black, apiñonada. I know some little balls that are this color and we call them piñones [pine nuts]. That's why we say apiñonado.

If someone were to call me mestiza, well, I wouldn't believe them because I am not mestiza. I don't know what color I am. I am very burned now. I used to be this color, very similar. More white than this. Yes. I have turned very black with the sun. Because of the work in the field and all that. But one time I worked in the field, and I stopped working there and entered a factory to work. I met up with some women that knew me in the countryside. And they say, "You're working here?" I said, "Yes." They say, "Ay, but you're very white. You didn't seem so white when you were working there." I figured that since I was in the shade I was very white. But now for some time I've been dark.

White, of course, is when a person is white, like yourself. Very white. A white thing. They say, this señorita, this pretty one, is very white. Blanco is also what they say when they are going to shoot. They say, "Let's go target shooting." Or, "Let's go whitewash a house." Blanquear.

Well, for me it's all natural. We're all humans; that's what I think. Before, no. It would offend you if they said to you, "You are very indio." Or when a person that knows how to talk... Well I don't

know how to talk well because I lack schooling. The people who have had schooling know how to speak very well. They have a lot of words. They speak Spanish very well. The correct words. I do not.

In Mexico the people are very critical. They criticize a lot the person who doesn't pronounce the words well. Sometimes one is very critical. There's a man here...for example the word correcto. If you were to say "correto" he would say, "That's not how it's said. You have to say 'correcto.'" Then he would say, "You are still very indio." And since I grew up in the rancho, they would call me an india. In the ranchos, where there isn't very much communication, you're not very civilized. The people who live in the towns call all of those from the ranchos, indios. "You are indios. Very indio. You don't know how to speak."

In Mexico we are always criticizing the way of speaking, the way of dressing, because there you always have to put on shoes the color of your dress, your bag the same color too. Even though the people might not have anything in their house, even though they might not have enough to eat, they want to go well matched, men and women. They criticize how you dress. If you use a blue blouse, you can combine it with a pant with a little blue, right. If you put it on with various colors they criticize you. Here, no. Here you can dress any way you want. Here people are not very critical.

I have heard the word, "la malinche." It's a furniture shop. I know a furniture shop in Mexico that's called La Malinche. But I don't know what the word means.

The greatest happiness that I had in my childhood was when my father visited me when I was sick.¹² I remember very well. He was living with my stepmother. He was worried about me so he came to see me where I was staying at my uncle's house. There was a little hill and there was a woman there who sold bread. He brought me bread. He gave me a caress and says, "What's hurting you daughter?" "Nothing." Well, there wasn't any pain; it was the cough that bothered me. It was very nice when he gave me that caress. I didn't answer him. I just cried and cried. For me it was a great happiness. And the other, the saddest time in my childhood was when he died. To realize that I only had my father, and that he had died, I think was my greatest sadness.

I think I was sick for a long time because an aunt, whom I haven't seen for years, says to me one day, "I remember you well when you were sick with the whooping cough. I wanted to bathe you." But I would go hide. I was very thin, very skinny. I couldn't walk I was so thin because I wasn't eating due to the cough. My brother was working in Texas. They wrote him and he brought me some pills and I got better with those.

My father was sort of tall. Not very tall, more or less like my husband. And he was thin. And he smoked. He liked very much to smoke cigars because they make them there. I never found them to be agreeable things. He was very serious, peaceful. He wasn't very quarrelsome. He treated me well, it was just that he didn't want us to be there with

¹²She started off an interview with this story following up on a question that I had posed at the previous session. I had asked her to describe the happiest and saddest moments of her life in Mexico.

him because of the stepmother. We always preferred to go to another house with other people. I don't think that we loved her, or that she loved us. After my father died -- he died when I was 11 years old -- she was pregnant and died too.

My father sowed corn with beans, just for himself, for the house. It was a very small plot. Or he would go work in other places with people who had field work.

No one talked much about him. When I was eight I would grind the tamales, tortillas that weren't very well ground up -- well, I say that I made them well and my brothers and sisters say that I didn't. Well, because of that he loved me very much.

When he died we each took off in our own direction. My brother told us that he wanted to give us each a little land, to divide it among us, among the five, or four because my sister had already died.¹³ But, I told him no, not for me. For the others, yes, because they needed more since he already had his woman and his children. I found out that he sold the land about fifteen or twenty years ago. He sold the plot there and they went to live in Mexico, in the D.F. [Mexico City]. I didn't ask for anything; it was very little money. I worked and I didn't need it.

Before my father died he spoke with me. My father said to me, "Daughter, I'm going." And I said, "Where are you going?" "No," he

¹³Rosa's sister had not yet died at the time of her father's death. It is possible that she is confusing the time that the land became available, when there were five siblings alive, and the later date when the land was sold and her sister had already died.

says, "I'm going. I just want to tell you never to leave here." That is, from the rancho. "Never leave here. Stay here." "Where are you going?" "I'm going up above," he says.

He told me that he had lice on his head. A disease that forms on the head, lice. It was never known what he died of. I had many lice like that on my head, many. I remember that when I slept I scratched sometimes and that the lice would come out. Those were plagues that used to be; now, no. At times I have seen people there who probably have them. It still exists there in the people that don't bathe, that don't clean themselves.

I said to him, "I can delouse you," because he wanted a delousing sometimes, and he said, "No." And a little later, I think that it must have been two hours later, my father was dead, that same day.

And much later I saw a lot of people there and more nearby. I went to look for my brother -- I don't remember where he was -- to tell him that my father had died. My father wasn't living with my stepmother then. He died in the house of a brother of his. He was staying there. he wanted to go there, who knows why? At that time I wasn't living with my godparents, but with another family. I didn't find my brother, but I did find my sister.

So that night they had the wake. I don't remember it, but normally they would prepare food. My brothers were there, my older sister, and everyone was there the next day to carry him to the graveyard. I was just a girl, I think that's why I didn't feel so much. But I was crying because I saw that the others were crying, because my older sister was

crying. They said that we wouldn't see him again, but I didn't feel pain. When my daughter died I felt pain.

They say that a father has to give his blessing to his children before dying. Someone says, "No, here, he wasn't able to give you the blessing. You haven't been given the blessing." And I remember that they grabbed his hand, and with his hand, and then like that [crosses herself on her forehead], and they said it was his blessing. His hand was very white.

They carried him to be buried, around noon. There it's the custom that the neighbors also go to accompany the burial. A huge box came out, that's the way they are sold. They make them the size of the dead one. Each family member throws a handful of earth. We each threw a handful. There was just a man there who prayed. There are people who dedicate themselves to doing that when they call them to take away the body. They did an Avemaria, the Creed. There wasn't a church. There never was.

My brothers and sisters each went their own way.

People went to church in a far off town. Now I can understand the Bible, now that I read. I especially like to learn the Psalms. In the rancho I never saw anyone read the Bible. There, they never spoke of any of that, never.

I remember that at night my sister taught me the Creed, the Avemaria, the Our Father. The only thing that my sister taught me was to pray, but nothing else. She was very Catholic.

They almost never punished me. The only one who wanted to hit me - - and for some good reason -- was my oldest sister. But she almost never did because I would run away. Sometimes they order you to do something, and you don't want to do it, or you don't obey. I did not like to go to school and she always swore at me because I would arrive late and she would be waiting for us and would swear at me a lot. I didn't like to go to school. I don't think she ever hit me, she just swore at me. I think the first person to hit me was my stepmother when she gave me a slap. The one that really hurt me was the slap that the woman gave me, the one that I was with in that house [the first brothel]. I felt that one because this all split apart here [cheek].

One time I pretended I was sick with my sister, that I had a pain in my stomach. She wanted me to go to my father's house. I told her, "No, I want to stay here. It's just that I have a stomach ache." So, she made me a tea. I don't know what kind of tea, but she made me a tea, I think it was manzanilla, so that the pain would go away. But it wasn't true. What I wanted was to stay. She loved me a lot; she was always very good with us. She was the only sister that looked after me. My brother Porfirio, my brother Jesús, we all loved her very much.

I remember very little of my sister's appearance. She was very pretty. And she died very young. This was my oldest sister. She took care of us a lot. Mainly she took care of me; I was the youngest. She cared for me, she worried about me, she provided for me. I always liked to be with her because she always saved me a taco, a tortilla, she always saved something to give me. And since I was always hungry, I

always liked to be with her. Her husband was very irritable. He hit her a lot. For any reason he hit her. She was very serious. And she had a mole here [right side of mouth]. She died very young.

She had two daughters and two sons. But two of them died -- a girl and a boy -- when they were young. But two are alive. The niece that I told you about is alive. She is married and lives in México.

I also regretted it when my sister died. I wasn't living in [the rancho] then. I was living in another town; I was working. When they told me to go see her because she was very ill, I went to see her. She looked contented, but she was already very thin. I remember that her husband walked me to where you get the bus, and she told him to bring her a bone for broth because she was hungry for broth. She was very, very sick, worn out. And then I went another time, and soon after I found out that she had died. I didn't see her again.

One of her daughters went to work in houses, wherever they might give her food. And the other little boy went scavenging as people are accustomed to doing there. There wasn't any gas at that time, just firewood. He would carry wood to the houses so that they might give him food. After a while his own sister took him to Texas, to Matamoros. She was working near there in Brownsville, Texas with a local passport. But before she went to get her brother, she left him in a school. There the boys worked, and were taken care of, given their food, and those who could work, worked. The boy grew up there in that place; it was like a church. He became a young man in Mexico, near Nuevo Laredo. He married and has a family. His name was Simión. But it seems that he

changed his name. Yes, his name is Andrés now. His sister's name is Victoria, the little niece. My father's name was Lucas, Lucas González. It seems that his other last name was Flores. My mother's name was Luisa, but they called her Huicha. Luisa Rubio, but I don't know her other last name. My brothers and sisters are registered in La Misión: Jesús González Rubio, Porfirio González Rubio, Lucía González Rubio.¹⁴

It is the custom there to give a child the name that appears on the almanac the day he is born. For my daughter too, I gave her the name that appeared on the almanac. Sometimes one doesn't like the name. My name is not Rosa. The name that they gave me is Hilaria. But I didn't like the name. One time when I left there someone, I don't remember who, asked me, "What's your name?" and I said, "Rosa." Since then I have called myself Rosa. I registered myself in that name in Mexico. There is always a place where one gets registered. I went there so that they would register me in that name. You see, I wasn't registered. I had never been registered because I didn't appear in any book. My uncle Beto took me to look for the name in the book. He gave them more or less the year in which I was born, but I didn't appear in any book. So, that's how they registered me again, when I was already grown. I was twenty-two. Since it's been many years, my family calls me Rosa. But that registration wasn't any good because they put the same day that we went and they should have put a date from years before, otherwise it isn't any good for a passport.

¹⁴She does not mention in this list her eldest sister, Juana, who appears to have been to Rosa the most important of her siblings.

Now my name is Rosa González Gómez. I don't carry the name Rubio since we are married.

I used to think that one day I would leave this place [the rancho]. Many women, girls, left there and went to work in a nearby town. They would go to a restaurant or wherever to work. And then later they would return better dressed, especially with shoes, and of course I always noticed that. And I would say, "One day I'm going to work too, and I'm going to dress like that." Because I always walked around barefoot, without huaraches. They would go to Mexico, the capital. I think they would work in some house. Not like I worked [in brothels], no, no. Sometimes they would come back speaking differently. They had lost that ranchero way of speaking. And they weren't like before, they had lost a little of their shame. A lot of people made fun of them. The girls themselves sometimes made fun of the way they spoke because they spoke in a singsong. They were more lively. They weren't the same guilty, quiet little girls. People there were very quiet.

The first time that I left there, I went to where there were cars. I was helping a woman who made food to sell in the plaza in Cuesta Colorado, Hidalgo. On Fridays a lot of people would come to sell there, clothing and everything. This woman sold food, Mexican food: beans, mole, roast pork, all of that. And I stayed to help her prepare and sell the food. I was with her for a time, and then I returned to the rancho for a while.

But I soon left again in order to continue working, to continue living, to eat. My brother Porfirio said to me one day, "Let's leave here." And I said, "Let's go. Where are we going?" He said, "We are going to a place called Tamazunchale." That place is near the city of Manta, Tamaulipas.

So we went. We went walking up a hill and on that hill I became dizzy, as if I were going to faint. My brother said to me, "Eat a piece of tortilla; you're dying of hunger." I ate a piece of tortilla and it passed. We continued walking. We went to that place and I worked in a hotel making beds, and he in a restaurant helping do chores there. But we separated and we each went our own way because I went to work with another woman after that hotel. And he left and returned to the rancho. Later he came back again and we returned together to the rancho.

And then my brother Jesús told me that they were going to Texas to pick cotton around Río Rico, in Río Bravo, in Río Hondo. We went to all of those places picking cotton.

There was a woman -- "woman" because she already had children -- and I arrived at her house one day. I had recently had my head shaved because they had cut my hair because of the lice. She said, "I want you to come with me so that you can care for my children and I can work." So then she gave me some dresses, two dresses. She said, "Look, I'm going to give you these silk dresses." For me they were very beautiful, very fine. And I said, "Good." And she said, "So, you will come with me." "Yes, yes I will go." We circled a hill. It was very far to the

road, about four hours on foot, to where we catch a bus. We went along always hiding from my brothers. I went with her. I was fourteen years old. I had not yet turned fifteen.

But in the truck that we boarded there was my brother with my sister, Juana, and a cousin called Tolo, and my brother-in-law, whose name I can't remember. I had never been in a bus and when I was getting in I felt them grab me. My brother says, "Sit down here." I had been standing. They didn't say anything, but they were following me from the town. They asked the woman why she had taken me away. And she said, "No, she wanted to come." "From here on we will take care of her," my brother said. That was when we went to pick cotton in Texas. But I had been escaping.

One passes Tamazunchale; Ciudad Manta, Tamaulipas; Ciudad Valles, Matamoros. When we arrived at Río Rico we met a man. And we slept there under a wagon. The man said that we were going to pass over to the other side. I don't know how much they paid him.

I was coughing a lot. That night we crossed the river and the man said, "We will cross on foot." My brothers and sister started, of course, the people who were walking, but this man took me across on his back. He said that he liked me because his daughter was also bald! We arrived on the other side and there was a truck waiting for us. We got in that truck, one of those for hauling cotton that's like one for hauling animals, and he took us to a little house, isolated, and they put us there. And there we were. I was coughing a lot.

In the morning they got us up and took us to another place. They brought us sacks of flour and plates, always in a sack. We made flour tortillas and they brought us oats, powdered milk. I don't know who brought it.

We worked there in the cotton harvest. They give you sacks, canvas bags. And here I carry the bag, dragging it, and we go along throwing the cotton in. They gave me a small one, about five feet long, and I went at it. I also grabbed my place to harvest. Very hot, an enormous heat. And I sat down and cried and cried in the middle of the furrows. My brother said to me, "Why are you here? Who is forcing you to stay? Go to the edge of the field to see what needs to be done." They didn't take me with them to have me work. And I say to him, "No, I want to stay here."

There were a lot of people there, because I remember a night when we were in another place, like a camp. I remember because there were a lot of people there. But we all slept outside. I remember that I was kneading flour to make tortillas, when at that moment we heard them saying, "La Migra, la Migra is coming!" So right away we gathered everything, and since they told us that no more people would fit, they left, so we went into the night.

We passed some freezing canals, and then we plunged into the forest, a thick forest. I carried my dough way up there! And then we saw the helicopters, searching. But we were under the trees and there we slept. But when we awoke there was a rattlesnake there, coiled up like a pile of cow shit, rattling. It didn't bite anyone, but they

killed it. The rattlesnake is very poisonous.

And that's how we spent our time hiding from la Migración, having those adventures. We were there some four months and then we returned to the rancho. I don't know whether they saved money, but I remember that they paid 10 cents the pound of cotton.

I also had an experience during the return to the rancho. We arrived at a place near the rancho, but from there one has to catch a truck to Cuesta Colorada. We asked a man who had a coal truck for a ride. Well, those coal trucks have very slippery rails, like that, and they have a cab up front. It was late at night and my brother said he was going to ask the man for a ride. The man said to get in and we started to get in. There were just three of us since my sister and brother-in-law had already gone. It was just my cousin, my brother and I. They got in, but the driver took off and I was caught hanging from the truck. My brother had one of my hands, holding on with both of his. I told him that it would be better to let me go, because he could fall too, and we were shouting. And then those roads are very bad because they are very curvy, very bad. And he said, "No, no, no I'm not going to let you go." And the other one, my cousin, he went and banged on the cab where the driver sits so that he would stop. And we arrived there at Cuesta Colorada in order to go to the rancho.¹⁵

The truck just left us there at the road; from there to the rancho the trucks could not enter. We went to the rancho on foot, but it was

¹⁵She chuckles lightly when telling this story but, as is her way, she does not raise her voice even when recounting the people yelling excitedly.

very dark, very late.

I returned to the rancho for a short time. They were still living in my father's house. But from then on I left alone. I left for a long time alone. They didn't know anything about me for some seven years.

I went around to nearby towns working. And then I arrived at a place called Zimapán, Hidalgo. In that place, in a park, I met some girls, a whole family. There were five girls selling fruit to the buses. The mother sold too. They were selling enchiladas, they sold boiled eggs, and they invited me to their house. I went to their house with them and stayed there to live. So, I made enchiladas too, and sold them in the buses. I sold boiled eggs and fruit. Buses full of people passed through there. I was there for a time. Those girls and the owner, or that's the head of the family who was the girls' mother, were very good to me. She used to tell me to go buy myself clothes, to dress a little better, to buy myself shoes, because I was always barefoot.

We would get up very early, maybe six o'clock, because we had to carry the corn to the mill to be ground, and then return to have coffee and to eat something. We would make the tortillas by hand in order to make enchiladas. And then we would get ready to sell.

There was a park where the buses stopped, the second class ones. It was a park with little trees, with palms and benches where we would sit with our things. When the bus arrived, the one we called the Red Arrow, it would be full of people. So each one of us would grab what she had and walk around the bus by the windows saying, "Enchiladas,

enchiladas, hot enchiladas," or peaches, or boiled eggs, or apples, or prickly pears. And then when things were not very good we would go up on top of the bus to sell to the people seated up there. Then we would wait for another to come. For me it was a lot of fun. I don't remember how much money we earned. We liked to eat flavored ices. They have them in chocolate, lemon, watermelon and all that. It was a delight for me to eat.

The buses passed by about one an hour, or sometimes several at a time. The passengers were all Mexicans. There were other buses, great flat-nosed ones that were called aerocoches. We didn't go up to those because they stopped at a restaurant and they ate there.

We finished about four o'clock. At that time I would go buy my corn and we would boil it in order to be ready for the next morning. And then in the morning we would go to grind. We slept, all of us together, on a mat. There were three girls and the señora, who had a daughter, and I made six.

I left there because there were a lot of them in a small house. There was the mother; of course, they were alone. Her husband didn't live with them. I knew another girl and she invited me to go to Veracruz. I liked adventure very much. She said, "Let's go to Veracruz. Let's go to the cane harvest."

My brothers and sister didn't know where I was. They didn't know. One time they told my brother, the father of the nephew that I have here, that they had seen me somewhere. He went to look for me, but didn't find me.

didn't find me.

I would go to other places. One time I went to work in a hotel. They put me to work with a little broom cleaning everything that was wooden. I cleaned, made beds and all of that. I remember that it was very hard work. I left there and went with another woman to care for her daughter. This place was farther out of town. I was there for a good year.

In the state of Veracruz I helped a woman make tortillas to feed to the people who worked with the cane. It was a rancho. I left that family too, because there was a man who followed me around a lot; he followed me and followed me. He was the brother of that girl. Finally one time I said to her, "I am leaving here." "No," she says, "you're not going." A truck was passing so I went to stop it in order to leave. From there I went about to other towns, with other people. And I ended up with that woman who had that house in Martínez de la Torre, Veracruz.¹⁶

I don't go back to the rancho now. I don't have family there, only my uncle Beto and his wife. That's why I don't go back there.

One time I was in Mexico, in the D.F., working in a house. Those people were becoming Baptists. We made pastries there, chicken stuffed with apple. They sold everything. Then they said to me, "Let's go to church." And I said, "No, I'm not going to go. I go to another church, the Catholic church." "Well then, don't go anywhere." "Of course not.

¹⁶The house is the first brothel in which she later found herself.

I'll stay here." Later it was time for them to pay me. They paid me and the woman said, "Let's go shopping." "Let's go," I said. And I have never forgotten: Some yellow stockings. Next to the church she said, "Let's go in." I went to church with them. I remember well that they made me give an offering. When I left those people I never went to another church, except in California when people spoke to me about it again.

In those days they didn't talk about sex in the schools.¹⁷ That's why at times one does things that one shouldn't do. In those days there wasn't anyone to explain things. Parents even got mad when a girl got her period; they even hit her. They would think something else, or that she had given in with a boyfriend. One didn't know anything about it. When I was going to have my daughter, I didn't know where the baby was going to come out! I was very ignorant. And I was already a woman.

When I was about fifteen I was in the D.F. working in that house where they made pastries. One day a woman there said to me, "When did you have your period?" "No, never." In the rancho they never talked about it. But this was a city, and they were Sisters in Christ, so they asked me. that's something very sacred for a woman. It's one of those things that one should hide; I believe so. Before no one talked about sex, and now wherever you look, even in the school. It happened two days later. Now I know that it came late. When it did come it scared

¹⁷This discussion came about during a later description of her first relationship with a man.

me! It scared me a lot! I said, "Ay, let's go!" Because we were very ignorant. I was very ignorant. I don't even know how to speak. I lack a lot of schooling. In the school they teach one to speak, to unravel the tongue.

I was very ignorant, completely. I don't know why. For me what I was doing in that house [referring to a brothel] all seemed very natural. I thought it was natural and that everyone did it.

When I went to that house, I had already failed with a man. It was very strange; that was very strange for me. When I went to Mexico, I had already been with a man, in Zimapán where I sold enchiladas and all that. I'm telling this for the first time. There was a man who wanted me for his woman. I was living with his family in Zimapán [the woman and her daughters who sold food to bus passengers]. But I didn't really pay any attention to him. I remember that he would give me cloth so that I could make myself dresses. He gave me two pieces. He bought me some shoes.

He took me to visit his relatives in the rancho where they were from. His mother went too. They all liked me, his father, his mother. They told me that I was very pretty. He liked to drink and he would tell me that he lusted for me. So I said to him, "Well, if you don't love me as the woman that I am, then I'm going to go, and I'm going to leave you."

And so he wanted me to be his woman. One day I went with him, just like that, to be his woman. I had not yet turned fifteen and he must have been sixteen. His name was Laureano. He rented a room in which

to live. He wanted me to be his woman. I was living there with him, but, I cannot explain why, I don't know what happened. I have never talked about it, even with a doctor. He left me because he said I wouldn't do, that I wasn't worth anything. The man didn't believe that I was a virgin. He didn't believe me because I had never menstruated. He didn't want me because of that. He said that since there wasn't any blood or anything... As they say in Mexico, a woman who is not a virgin is not worth anything.

A cousin of his asked me about it. I said, "Your cousin says that I'm not a 'señorita.'" She said, "Was there blood?" I said, "I have never had any." She said, "But there had to be blood." And that was when he left me. He even got back at me. We had some plates, and down below there was a ditch where a little water crossed, and he threw my plates down there and he even cut up the shoes that he had just bought for me. He cut them with a knife.

I told him, "I'm going to go to the police and tell them that you don't want to marry me after I've already lived with you." He said, "Go. Let them come and check me." I was very stupid. And so we separated.

There is a story about this friend -- now I call him friend! Well, he left me. So I left there too. That was the reason I left.¹⁸ A lot of time passed and he went to Texas. At that time my two brothers were there. My brother told me the story:

¹⁸Note the contradiction: earlier she said that she left because it was too crowded living with the woman and her daughters, and that she wanted the adventure of going to the sugar cane harvest.

"I met a man and this man told me that he lived near El Pantano. And so I asked him if he went to the dances there. He said that he went to El Pantano, but not to the dances."

"I knew a girl from El Pantano," the boy said.

This boy was telling them that he had known me and everything. He told them how I had been, how we had lived, how he met me and why he left me -- everything. And then he stands up and my brother said, "What was the girl's name?" And the boy said, "Her name is Hilaria." And my brother says, "You know what? That girl is our sister." And since I had been lost to them for a long time they didn't know anything about me. So then they ran after him, but they couldn't catch him. They never saw him again. If they had caught him I think they would have killed him, because whatever I might have been, I was their sister. So they ran after him, but didn't catch him. And that's the way the story of that boy goes.¹⁹

I never felt desire for a man. I had a very low temperature. I thought it was all very natural. Later, when I was older, I did. In talking with women I have noted that I have been very different regarding sex, very different, very low temperature. Now I have had an operation. I need to take hormones that the doctor told me to take. But I almost never take them. Once in a while I take them. I was talking with some doctors once, asking them why I had never had a

¹⁹She was very amused by the story, and seemed rather proud to think that her brothers had defended her.

family. So, they gave me a lot of medicines and one doctor says to me, "Look, I'm going to give you the maximum strength medicine." This doctor and another were talking about it, who knows what they said? Maybe that I didn't love my husband, who knows?

I don't think I ever loved him (the sixteen-year-old boy, Laureano, in Zimapán). Because when you're young, you don't know what is just convenience, and what is love. The boy that I loved was Gregorio. I loved him very, very much. I spilled a lot of tears for him. But then it passed, and now I have my husband, now I know that he is my husband because I had never had a husband. He's good to me.

Things happen to one when one is young and doesn't know the dangers. I think that the lack of a mother, of parents, principally... When one is alone one doesn't have anyone who might give advice; one doesn't have anyone to tell you, "Don't do this because this could happen to you." One does as one wishes. So, at about the age of fourteen I was in a brothel. I don't know whether I was fourteen or fifteen.

I had a girlfriend in Martínez de la Torre. And that friend said to me, "I am going to invite you to visit a señora." She said that the woman was very rich and that it was a store. I said, "Yes. Let's go." I arrived at that house. The señora -- she was thirty-two or thirty-three -- didn't say anything to us about money. She just said that there was food, there was clothing, and there was a place to sleep and everything. They asked me, "Do you want to stay here?" And I said,

"Yes, I would like to stay." And then the woman says, "Here you obey me, or I will beat you." And I said to myself, but why would she beat me? Only if she is going to beat me for something that I didn't do. What could she order me to do that I wouldn't obey? I thought it was just serving tables and that. So I stayed. And the other girl stayed too. She was very young too, the girl. After a while I realized that there were many, many women. Outside it was a store, but inside there was a lot of vice: drugs, a lot of drink. There were women who were already older, and then there were regular girls, young ones.

That woman had many girls. And she exploited all of them. She hit them, beat them, and locked them in. And all the time she was doing business. I didn't leave because she would lock us in our rooms. She would go for little trips and she would lock us in so that you couldn't even go out to the street. It was walled in, and guarded. She said, "The girl who enters here doesn't leave." We were afraid of her because she said, "I will look for and beat any girl who leaves me." One time I tried to flee, but I was very stupid because I wanted to run off taking all of my things. So, she realized and she hit me with a bar that she had. She hit me on the back, and the wire.... And I said to myself, "Ay, if only my brothers knew." But they didn't know. I think I was there with that woman for three years.

Outside it was a store, then there was the kitchen and inside there was a large patio and then the rooms. And one slept there in those rooms. There was just a table, and a bed, that's all. And light. There was nothing on the walls; it was bare in there. The floor was

cement.

She would take the men to each room, to the women. Each room had a woman. The clients were all Mexican. And I thought that it was going to be only if one wanted to do it, not by force. So, she said that one had to do what she wanted, even though one might not want to.

A lot of people went there at night. That very night a lot of people went. There were about ten women there. The people would drink and everything and there was music inside. If you were with a man, let's suppose, drinking, she would come and say to you, "Come here." And she would take you over to another man. That's what she would do.

She didn't have any children. She had a husband. He was just there taking care of things. He didn't talk to us. She was the one in charge of everything. Who knows if she's still alive?

In Mexico there existed a lot of those places where they had many women locked in. That existed. I never found out where, in which place, but it came out in the newspaper that they had closed houses that had many girls locked inside. They were great nocturnal centers, with everything closed, tall walls and everything.

Women that died there they buried right there. They talked about those houses where women died of hunger, that they wouldn't give them food, or that they left pregnant. Of course, they didn't want pregnant women. They would give them abortions, and if the woman couldn't take it she died. And they would bury them right there. I think that the police discovered such places in the state of Guanajuato. Those places send young men, very handsome ones, to make the school girls fall in

love with them, very young girls. And they take them to sell there in those houses. These were very dangerous places, and girls who entered didn't leave. They were just lost; they were lost. So, we were in a similar kind of place.²⁰

During the day, we were just there in our rooms, or we would come out to eat right there in the house.²¹ When it was time to eat in the morning, they would call us. They charged six pesos per person per day. And then in the afternoon they started coming, around five in the afternoon, or six. They were all Mexicans; all kinds, rich and others.

The clients normally would arrive and sit down at a table and ask for drinks. And you would be ready, made up, and seated there. Then the client would look at you. If he likes you he tells the señora, "I want that girl." So she says, "Go on, they are calling you over there." Or she herself took you to him.

You talked and drank. She sold little glasses about half-full of Bacardí, and then with cola. Everyone would drink.

We would each see three or four clients a night. Some treated me well, and some very... Well, it's according to the extreme to which you

²⁰Rosa seemed very sad when recounting this. She spoke in her usual low voice, barely more than a whisper.

²¹The following information about the brothels, covering several pages, was gathered over several interviews. I began by asking Rosa to describe a typical day in the brothel, and then asked how the clients treated her, how the business worked, whether she had ever tried to get away, whether she had ever been arrested, whether there were men whom she liked, or who liked her, and, finally, what the sex was like. She usually responded only enough to answer the question at hand, except when she spoke about specific clients at which times she would go into longer monologues.

let someone go; or how you treat him, too. I think that if a man is hanging around with a woman, and if the woman is very crude, a flirt, then the man will treat you the way you treat him.

I was always very serious, very quiet. At times they didn't like my disposition because they said that I was very serious, that I didn't talk much. But that's the way I was, mainly because I lacked a lot of schooling. One doesn't want to speak at times because one doesn't want to make a bad impression, or say the wrong word. Sometimes they jerk you around, because when people are drunk they sometimes don't have any consideration for others.

I had a very low temperature. But, the men didn't complain. The man who goes to such a place pays in order to satisfy himself. To be at the point of paying to have sex shows that they really need a woman. What they want is relief. So the sex was commercial; like a business, nothing more. It was all very natural to me. I never felt any desires for those men. You wouldn't say that the sex was "good" for me.

You could refuse a client, but the señora couldn't find out, because she wanted everyone to leave the client contented. One time she hit me. It felt as though she had knocked part of my face off.

There was a banker. And she sent me with him; I have not forgotten his name, Ruben. She used to call him very sweetly, "Rubencito." She sent me to a hotel with him. It was the first time that she let me leave the house. He took me from there in a car. He was short, a little fat, and not too bad looking, but I didn't like him. But even if one didn't like the man, one had to go.

I went up to his room. But I didn't want to be with him. Sometimes one doesn't want to be with men like that. Sometimes you fear them, or they don't please you. I said to him, "No, no, I'm going." And he says, "No, don't go. Why are you going?" And I said, "No, I don't want to be with you. I'm going." So I left, wearing nothing but lingerie. But some men in the hotel gave me a shirt to cover myself.

So about two weeks or a month later he came again to the house. And he told the señora that I had left him, and of course he wasn't happy with that because he had paid his money. She called me and said, "Go to your room. I'll be right there." And when I entered the room, there was the man. In front of him she asked what I had done to "Rubencito." "He says that you left him there." I said, "Yes." And zas she gives me a big slap. It hurt a lot. And he got mad too. He got mad because she had hit me. He said, "No, you can't do that to a woman like that. You can't hit her. I told you that the woman that you gave me to take with me didn't attend to me, nothing more, not so that you could hit her. If you keep hitting her I'm going to call the police on you; I can report you." So, upon hearing those words I felt some courage. It happened not long before I escaped. But, I remember that she hit me and that he defended me. But he also told her not to send me to him again!²²

I don't know why I never escaped from there. I was afraid of her. We had moved, and I had my own room, I had my clothing and everything. She bought me a lot of elegant clothing: chains, jewels, a watch,

²²Rosa gave a hearty laugh here.

everything. There were about three of the women who went to their homes and returned each night. They were no longer like us; they were more lively. They were no longer there against their will. But the rest of us were; when everything finished for the night they locked us in. There was one ranchera, a young dark girl, whose name I remember -- Amalia. There were many girls there [niñas], young girls. I remember one girl that she would beat; she beat them.

One time I had been wanting to go out. I said to her one night, "Señora, let me go to the movies." I never went anywhere because I was afraid. She said, yes. But when I was leaving the next day, because I had her permission, she made me go back and said, "Come here," and with a lot of bad words. I got very mad. And she gave me a slap. I got very mad and said, "I'm going." She says, "No, why are you going to leave if you owe me so much money?" But why did I owe her money if she kept all of the money? We had an argument that time, and I said, "Let's see, take out the book to see how much I owe." She said it was 3,000 pesos and a little more. Then she said, "No, I'm going to treat you well. What are you going to do out there? You don't know anyone, and here you know me," and this and that. So, I stayed. For a long time that woman exploited me. And when I left there, I went again to the same thing.

One time I felt something, that I wanted to be with a man. It was the first time, although I had already been there for a long time and had been with many men, never feeling anything. I remember that time.

He was a client. For me it was something... I don't know. I cannot explain how it is in those places. One has to be with very handsome men, and one is with ugly men, by force. Some of them lived there in the town, and some came from the ranchos. Some disgusted me, because it's not very agreeable to be forced to be with someone. After all of this passed I came to be with men that I liked. In those places at times you see a person that you like, but the majority, no. One is there for business, not for pleasure.

But I never felt anything; I don't know why. But there were women who told me that for them it wasn't that way. But I think that more than likely they were telling me lies. Yes, because sometimes there are women who exaggerate.²³ One time I went a long time, some three years, without a man touching me. I never felt desires to be with a man. Then another woman says to me, "You are lying, because when my husband goes off to wherever men go, I have more than enough men around."

No, I've never felt like being with a woman! No!²⁴

There was one man, a very young man, Abel. He was the son of an army captain. He spent a lot of time there and he preferred me. You fell in love with him on sight. His father had a store. He would sell things on the sly in order to pay the señora in order to enter. But she didn't permit that, that a client went with just one girl. She didn't

²³I chuckled here so she seemed intent upon convincing me that there are women who do indeed exaggerate.

²⁴She laughed heartily when I asked, very seriously, whether she had ever wanted to be with a woman.

want a woman to fall in love with a man because then she could escape or something. She would put him with other pretty women, nice ones, so that he wouldn't pay me so much attention. Sometimes he would talk to me. One time she ordered me to give him a slap -- just like that -- because he was with another woman. I was very obedient and I hit him. He thought I was jealous. But she did all of that so that you wouldn't fall in love. She did all of that so that I would hate him. She would lock him in with other women. She made it easy for him to be with other women there.

I would have liked to have left with Abel, and marry him, but it was impossible for me. I didn't even dream of it. I was, as they say, in jail there. I don't think I ever dreamed because it was like being in jail.

There was another man there. I don't know whether you have heard mentioned the baseball team, El Aguila? It was a very well known team in Mexico. There was this black man who was very well known in that league. I don't remember his name very well. But he went there one time and told me to go away with him. He said, "Let's go. I'll take you. I'll make you my wife." So I said yes. If this man takes me from here, and says he will marry me, I'll go with him. What more could one ask for? She knew everything, that I more or less liked him. She wouldn't let him enter. But then one time she asked to have him brought there. She didn't want me to go with him.

She said, "They're looking for you over there." And I saw that he was seated there. I said, "Why would she let him in?" I think she

told him that she was going to let him in all the time. So I said to him, "It's been a long time since I've seen you." He said, "No, it's just that Rufina wouldn't let me in until today when she herself called me here." He told me that he would bring me a chain the next day, but I never saw him again. I just heard about him, Hilario Salinas. He was very well known on that baseball team.

The first time I got pregnant there the señora took me to see a woman. The señora said that she didn't want pregnant women there. I was very ignorant. "Let's go, so that they can get rid of that for you," she says. And I went with her. I was there alone at night in that house. They put into me a long thing, like a little intestine, a little thicker than this pencil. They say that they put this in where the infant is and -- I don't know how -- it produces the abortion. And then it comes out on its own. I stayed there; I felt a lot of pain, a lot of pain all through here. A lot pain when the abortion was occurring.

I was alone there. I didn't feel the thing come out of me, so the woman came and she started to pull me like this. I think I must have been about two months along because you couldn't see anything. But, in reality, I didn't know... I wonder whether it was my fault, or whether it was due to ignorance. Because I was very young, very young.

The señora still had a small store there. There were rooms but there were no longer any women there. That was closed. She took me there to work while I was recovering.

The señora was very heartless.²⁵ She had two nieces, one was very petite. I don't remember their names. She left them in that house where she took me for that first abortion. Those little girls didn't have enough to eat. They started to steal eggs, and to steal other things. They got to the point of stealing larger things, a lot jewelry, trinkets. They had a large pile of booty. They were 13 or 14 years old. Someone had burglarized my room and the señora became angry with me, cussing me out, saying that I was going to escape. But I told her, "I have not left from here. I have been here all night."

Then there was another woman who worked there too, but she worked in the store where I was. One day she said to me, "Will you let me pass through to get to the toilet out back?" "Go ahead." But this woman went to check on the fence. And the fence, of course, wasn't very good because the business wasn't there anymore. There was a baby's crib out there belonging to a girl who worked there. But those little girls had hidden that pile of jewelry, earrings, everything in the baby's mattress. And there it stayed; who was going to find out that there was something there?

Then those little girls gave everything to that woman. They told her, "We're giving you earrings; we're giving you whatever there is." And they told her where everything was. So this woman passed through

²⁵This story is from the last interview and came out of Rosa's telling me about how the women made themselves up and drank rum. She refers to the women as "muchachitas" (little girls), and so may be making the connection between the "muchachitas" working in the brothel and the señora's nieces. She also uses this story as an example of how "heartless" the señora is, and so may also be revealing her feelings about the way the señora encourages the young women to drink.

to make sure that it was true. The woman left, but then entered again from the back and took everything. I don't know how they investigated the girls and the woman and everything. Then I got better and the señora took me away again.

The señora of the house was already old, but she made herself up well. She was short and had a pock-marked face. She combed her hair back and used a small net. That woman was big, tremendous. She frightened all of us.

The police arrived and took her away once. I had heard that she had been robbed. So, they call me too. The señora says, "You" this, that and the other. I didn't know anything, I told her, "I don't even know what you're talking about."

The señora turned the girls over to the police. There was one of them of whom she was jealous because of her husband. They say that one time that man, the señora's husband, was going to abuse one of the girls; Reina was her name. One of the women who worked there defended Reina, and the señora saw it. From then on, the señora was always indifferent toward Reina. If she bought two rings, some gift, she always gave them to the other girl first, and last to Reina.

Then once the señora took them to a room where her business was. She hung them. Because there was a woman there, we called her "the Dove," who liked women. She liked the girls very much. So, the señora found out and she ground up chile. She had us all try it. "Try it." And it was very hot. She said to the girls, "I know that you're sleeping with that woman. I'm going to put this in your parte

[vagina]." That's what happened. She told the girls who had their rooms nearby to take care not to give the little girls water, not to go looking around in there.

That woman was very evil, very evil, and they were her nieces. How savage. She turned them over to the police and told them to do whatever they liked with them. A brother of the girls came and took them away. They say that they are from Puebla. Reina, the one the señora didn't love, became a nun. She went to a place for nuns.

Who knows what has become of the señora. I heard later they had turned her in to the police. Martínez de la Torre was part of Jalapa, and I think they jailed her there. She was very evil. Who knows whether God will pardon her? Who knows whether she is alive or not? That's all I can say about that woman. Her name was Rufina.

One time I went with a man to a hotel. This man wanted to be with me every little while, constantly. I said to myself that I was going to escape from this man. As soon as I get the chance, I'm going to escape. I don't know how that man got dressed so fast, because I went into the bathroom and put on my clothes little by little. When I came out -- straight for the door running! I don't know how this man got dressed so rapidly! He caught me downstairs in the lobby of the hotel and wanted me to go back. I said, "No, I can't go back." And "Yes," and "No." And finally they called the police. But they only took me away. He was, I believe, a sailor and had to leave. His ship was leaving at dawn, or something. They let him go, but they locked me up.

They didn't put me in a cell with bars, I was just detained there all night. The next day they came to take me out.²⁶

They arrested me in another place once, too. In the state of Veracruz, but in the town of Agua Dulce. It's a very small town, but it had cantinas. So, I went there and I said to a woman, "I want to work here with you." She said, "Yes, but you have to go to the police and ask permission." So, I went to the commandant and said to him, "I want to work." He asked me with whom and all, and I gave him the name of the person. And he says, "You can go. But there are rooms there, so that you can be with men and all. You go to your business, but you're not going to drink." "Fine." That was it. They didn't permit the women to drink because they would cause a lot of trouble. They just had rooms there where the men could go with the women, nothing else. It's that way in San Luis, it's prohibited for a woman to drink in the cantinas in town.²⁷

But once I was there... In the business of the house one has to drink. So, I was drinking beer when the commandant entered with his policemen. He had told me not to drink, but he was a little drunk, so he just looked at me. The policemen said, "Come here." They knew me because they had seen me there before. So, they took me away. But I said to them, "Yes, I'll go. But let me walk alone." Because I would have been embarrassed to go through the streets with them. "That's

²⁶She has a sarcastic tone in her voice when mentioning that the man had to leave and she was the only one detained.

²⁷I expressed my amazement at this and she eagerly explained it away as a precaution to prevent "trouble."

fine. We'll wait for you there," they said.

I was wearing a white skirt and white boots. The commandant said, "I told you that you weren't to drink. But you disobeyed. Lock her up!" And I got very mad and I kicked some boots that were there and well... So, they locked me up. Later a woman from there, with whom I had some money saved, came and said, "Let's go. I'm going to pay so that they will let you out." "No," I said, "I don't want you to pay because I'm not going to leave." Then the woman from the business came and said, "Let's go. Come on." "No," I said, "because I'm not going to pay. If you pay I'm not going to pay you back." "No, no, no, I haven't paid anything," she says, "let's go." I don't know whether she paid. Who knows?

The only thing I thought about in Rufina's house was being free, to get to be free some day. I saw other people who were free, who went to the movies, who went to the market, who went wherever, through the streets, and we just watched. "I hope my brothers figure out where I'm so that they can take me away from here," I thought.

I got pregnant again. So, I said to the señora -- Rufina -- that I didn't want her to make me have an abortion. "I want to have my child." She said, "No, I don't want to have it." That was when I left there. I got up the courage to leave.

Not everything was closed off where we were. She did lock us in at night, but there wasn't a guard. It was possible to leave, but since

we were all so afraid of her almost no one escaped. But I left and grabbed a taxi and said, "Take me to the comandancia." A policeman told us that if the commandant said, "With whom do you want to settle this matter?" we were to tell him with the president. We went to the president. I slept there and the next day she came and I said, "I don't have anything against this woman, I just want her to tell me how much money I owe her and to leave her house. I want to leave because I don't like it there, and she beats me." He said that we were misbehaving with the señora and that I owed her money. They had an agreement.

She gave me a very low amount. The first time I had a fight with her she said that I owed 3,000 and something, which was a lot of money then. But when I went to the police she said it was 300 and something. I said, "I will get the money, but I'll pay her from far away."

And that was when I left there. I was with that señora for some three years. And then my life went on just the same. I didn't think about good things, only about dangerous things. Because they said that I owed money, I had to go to another house where they might lend me money to pay the first house. No one took away my money there in the second house. You charged 50 pesos, which was very little in that time. You could buy many things with 50 pesos because things were cheaper then. Twenty pesos was a lot of money. Fifty pesos was the most that you could charge.²⁷ In the first house the señora made all of the deals.

²⁷Since she notes here that 20 pesos was a lot of money, it seems that she means to say that 50 pesos was a small number in those days given what one could buy with them, and given how many pesos it would take to equal their value today.

But in this house the señora treated us well. We were free. Free to do whatever we wanted because she didn't order us around like the other woman, Rufina. More liberty. I could leave if I wanted and if I wanted to return, I returned, if not, I didn't.

I was pregnant. I continued in the same thing. I worked in the second house until I paid the debt, and when my daughter was born I stayed there doing the same thing.

When I had my child, I didn't have her with a doctor, but with a woman who attended women. Of course, I never expected that someone would be there waiting for my daughter's birth. And the husband of the señora of the second house was there. They told me later that he came about six in the afternoon -- I don't remember his name -- to find out how I was and whether or not it had come out. One thing I won't forget is that at one minute before nine in the evening, on the eleventh of January, my daughter was born. I don't remember well the year.

I was living with a friend who also worked in that house. She had gotten together with a señor. Since I knew her, I went with her and stayed several days. But they fought a lot. One day I went to the bathroom and felt a pain, or something, and I got very scared. So I went to see a woman that I knew who had taken me every week or so to the midwife to be checked. So I went to that woman's house and I stayed there. After about three days I felt a lot of pain here around my hip. It was hurting and hurting. In the morning she said, "Do you want some gelatine?" And I said, "No, but since about midnight I have had a pain here in my hip." She laughed and said, "I'll take you right away so

that the woman can check you."

She took me and the midwife said, "It's time; you have to stay here." I stayed there with her and the other woman left. I noticed that the midwife had another woman there. But this woman had already had a baby and was on the second one. I walked and walked and I had those pains through here and here [from the back to the front of the abdomen]. I walked knitting a little blanket for my infant.

The midwife said to me, "You don't know what this is?" Then she crossed herself in front of a virgin that was there with many little boys. Then she said, "Go on. Eat and go to the virgin. This virgin is for the women who are pregnant." I just looked. Then she shouted, "Ay, you don't know what this is! Ah! It's going to be so ugly!" And that's how things were until I started to give birth.

I walked all the time, but after a while the woman said, "Come. Eat." "No, I don't want to. I want to go to the bathroom." She said, "Go on." And then I said again, "I want to go to the bathroom again." "Go to the bathroom," she said. I had just gotten back when I said, "I want to go to the bathroom again." "No! I don't want you to go anymore," she said. "It would be better to lay down." I lay down. "Ay, no. I'm going to get up." "Get up." And again, "Ay, I'm going to lay down." And I got up and lay down every little while until I couldn't get up. I tried, but couldn't. Then she gave me an injection. I don't know what the injection was, but she says, "This will help you.

I was yelling. There was a moment in which I could no longer breath; it was when my child was being born. I felt as though I were

going to die.

I had been scared because they were saying that I was going to have two because I had a huge belly. My daughter was born and she was saying "daughter." But then she said, "There's something else." "Another!" "No," she said. That one was all that I had. And I looked at my daughter; she was born sneezing. She was nice and fat.

I asked for something to eat. Later, I breastfed my baby. I don't know why, but my nipples split open. They were cracked wide, but I fed her like that. It only hurt when I fed her. They say that it happens to a lot of women. Sometimes one doesn't have nipples with the first birth. With me they split open.

I was there for some three days after the birth. They fed me well and I felt good when I left there.

I kept on working and I had my daughter right there in a crib. After a short time my daughter died from a cold. It couldn't be cured. And she died. When my daughter died I did feel pain. I was about nineteen years old.

I breastfed that daughter. The next day she couldn't take hold of the breast. She was very stopped up here in her throat. So I took her to the doctor. He gave me medicine. He told me, "Give her this medicine." I gave it to her. When my girl died I was carrying her here in my arms, like this, taking her to the doctor. And when I was about to arrive at the doctor's I caressed her little head and I said to her, "Ay, my little daughter." And when I caressed her my daughter made a

sound like, "Mmmm." And her head fell and she died. She was two and one-half months old.²⁸

Then a friend of mine told me that it was my fault that my girl had died because I had not given her the medicine correctly, or that I had poisoned her, because she vomited the medicine when she died. I don't know what happened, if it stayed in my mind, I don't know.

When my daughter died I took her clothing -- I had already buried her -- and buried it. There was a lot of it leftover. I buried it; I don't know why. Then I dreamed. But for many years, perhaps some twenty or twenty-five years, I dreamed that I had killed my daughter and I even saw the pieces that I had buried and, well, all the time, all the time. I could see the pieces, and I could see something buried there but I wasn't sure that it was her. I would look into the bottom of a box, but with a door and everything, with the door closed. And the door would become distorted. And I knew that there was a piece of her in there. I knew she was there even though I might not be able to see her.

My daughter was nice and fat, very plump. Very, very pretty. My daughter was very pretty. Hortensia Brígida. I think that two or three years ago I still kept a little something of hers, a shoe I believe, in a suitcase. But I'm not sure whether I still have it. I don't know where it is; it's lost. Whenever I found it I would say, "This is my daughter's."

²⁸Rosa is visibly upset at this point and tells the following story with a pleading tone in her voice.

Starting about a week after I buried my daughter, whenever I saw a pregnant woman, I would wish that I were pregnant. Since then I have always had sort of a hunger to have children. Many times I would go when they told me, "Look, that woman can cure you." Nothing. They would give me something to drink, or something, but I never got better. I don't know why.

I had the abortion, and after I had my daughter I got pregnant again, but it was outside the womb. I was about twenty-two years old. That was when they operated on me for the first time. They took out an ovary. Afterward they told me, "You can have children with one ovary." But that was all, never again. Later, when I was thirty or thirty-two, I went to a hospital, a clinic, so that they would give me a treatment to see if I could get pregnant. And they said, "No, it's quite impossible for you to get pregnant because of your advanced age. If you had come earlier..." That discouraged me, but I have always had the dream of having a child. All the time. Later, in California, they operated on me. I went to the hospital because I had signs of being pregnant. But, no. I had a huge tumor and many small tumors. They took everything out. Thank God they weren't malignant. And sometimes, now that I'm with my husband, I say, "I can't give him a child." I tell myself that he probably feels sad, but he never says anything. He has told me that we can adopt one. But living like this the children suffer a lot.

I would see many things in my dreams, men without clothes, I would see a judge. I don't know where you can see some of the things that

were revealed to me. Sometimes I would toss and turn not wanting to fall asleep. Why is all of this revealed to me? I also dreamed that I had killed other people as well. I would ask myself how it could be. Why did I do it? When other people talk and they say, "Why did Juan kill someone?" I say, "I feel sorry for someone who has murdered; it's awful, very hard, because I have felt that weight." "No," they say. But I tell them, "I have dreamed that I have killed a person; it's terrible, hard."

I had these dreams for twenty-five years. One day I told a Sister, a Sister in Christ, that I felt this way and that, and asked her why I was feeling all of that. She spoke with the pastor and he told her, "It is simply that since her daughter died she has been hungry to have a child, and she has never had more children." And my husband would say to me, "You should go see a psychiatrist." I was always, always dreaming that I had killed her and that I had seen her buried. The pastor also told me, "You can go see a psychiatrist who is a Brother. You can talk with him. He is at home." "I'm going to go." But I didn't go.

One day my husband came to Washington to prune and I was alone at home in California; it was dark and I began to pray, to pray to God and I cried and cried and I asked him to listen to me. It was a lot. Since I had delivered myself to Christ, I thought -- I didn't think, but rather I was sure -- that Christ erased all of my offenses, all of my sins. So, I say, if he erased all of this it should mean that I'm as I was before. So I asked God all night to pardon me because I have this

thing every day. The next night I did it again and that's how it went. Every day, alone at night so that no one would hear me crying. I spilled many tears. I felt the need to cry. It's like an infant who is asking his father or mother for something, and he cries and cries, even throwing himself on the ground, like that. I would talk with God about how I suffered, how it tortured me, and it went away, all of it, thanks to Him. And it has never returned.

I think that I had been offending God. I was supposed to communicate well with him, to ask it of him. I had asked before, but not in the right way. I had not dedicated myself completely to praying. I had done it one the run. I didn't dedicate myself to it completely in case he wasn't listening. Sometimes in Mexico the people swear to God, just to look good, to God, or so that you think they are telling the truth, like that. I had that habit of swearing in vain. Sometimes I would use God's name without it being true. That time I was alone, because they say that one should be alone to communicate with the Lord. And so I was alone and prayed and asked his forgiveness and asked why I had to suffer all of that. Sometimes when I have confronted everything praying and asking, I have felt a communication; sometimes I have even felt something like this [she runs the palm of her hand over the back of her head]. Sometimes I cry. I have felt very clearly that God has listened to me.

After my daughter's death I drank a lot. I thought that by drinking I wouldn't remember. I would buy bottles of wine and would

drink a lot with whomever, anyone who would invite me; or I would buy it alone. I think I stayed in that place for a year or so after my daughter died. And I continued doing the same thing. I worked in other places, in cantinas, and later I had my own, but no one forced me.

I lived with Gregorio Cortez in Veracruz for several years. He was the son of a woman for whom I worked; it was my third brothel and right in the city. Her husband had left her and they began to sell beer in little jars, and when I arrived she already had a large business. Her son was already big. When I met him, about two years after my daughter died, he didn't work; he was in night school. He was about sixteen or seventeen. He left school. He said that she was at fault for his having to leave his studies, because he had a lot of liberties there. His sisters were there, his mother, they all worked there.

He was very good with me because when they operated on me and took out my ovary he took care of me. He helped me a lot. If I had money he kept it for me. He would say to me, "Don't be stupid. Buy yourself some clothes, dress well," and this and that. "You are going to get some money together and buy yourself a piece of land," he says. He took me to buy the land and afterward said, "Now you have your land; now you're going to build your house." And I said, "Ay, when? And where am I going to get enough money for a house." "Well, you're going to do it." His father built me a small house.

And he worked; he had never worked before. He worked as a porter for the ships at the dock in order to bring me food to eat. He brought

me food. They would give him time to eat at midday. There was a market there where they sold prepared foods. He would go by and buy food and bring it to me. He helped me a lot and took care of me, although he wasn't in such a position that I could ask him for money, no. He helped morally. When one helps a person, even though they are not giving the person money, that's helping to care for the person. He cured my wound and everything. He would take me to the hospital for them to check me. For all of that I say he was good with me, though he did hit me sometimes.

He married a girl, a "señorita," as they say there, a "virgin." He loved me very much. He would cry because he loved me and he was ashamed of it. He loved me and at the same time was ashamed of me. He was ashamed of me because of the place I was in.

He was very jealous; that's why I left him. I still have here a bump that he gave me. Now, afterward, I understand that since he saw his sisters working there, and that some of them had husbands, he thought that that was how we would be, how I would be, too. He felt that he was better than me. One day he told me that if he married me, what would society say? But I don't know what society he was talking about because his family...you see how they were! Now I wonder what society he was talking about. All of his family were just like me.

Later he got a job in the telephone office, and he's still there working with telephones. I talked with his sister. His sister worked there too, and later became a Christian. She never liked me. But one day I wrote her and told her that I was a Christian and that I had

delivered myself to Christ. She answered -- I never expected her to write to me. She wrote me and said that we should forget the past and that she too had delivered herself to Christ and that she was a new child of Christ. And through her I found out that he still works there. When I went to Veracruz to get my visa I went to her house, but I never asked about him. He is in the past, and he has his wife and I have my husband.

When I was with Rufina I came to try drugs: marijuana, pills, I tried that powder too. I never became addicted, but I tried everything. I don't think it was good. I learned many things, a lot of bad habits, even how to steal. How to trick someone so that they would drink a lot; how to serve a bottle and be with a client and trick him into thinking that I was drinking when I wasn't; how to spot someone and then rob him. All of those things. I already knew all of these tricks so I could make money easily. But that money is not worth anything. You spend it just like you earn it. You don't have anything to show for it. And later I did it for fun. In those places you get up in the morning, bathe and go out to eat, and then return. You lay down again, you rest, and about four or five in the afternoon you begin to put on your makeup. You go to the bar. You're only thinking about what you're going to do that day, and to see which client has money and how to grab him. This is what one does all the time.

There are bars where people go to drink, with benches, and there you drink and drink and drink. There comes a time when you can't walk;

that's how I would drink. I would cry a lot, and cry and cry as if a large part of me had been cut away. I felt something in my soul and cried a lot. Someone would just put on music and I would cry. I think that my soul wanted me to leave all that. I never found anything good in those places. All of the men who hang out there are there to exploit you; if he can exploit you, he exploits you. Or they make fun of you, or they treat you like the person that you are, like someone in one of those places. I remember that I would even fall down into the filth in the spittoon. That's why I say that I had a horrible life, a very filthy life, during that time.

I feel better now; I feel well. I live a happier life now. I think differently. I don't think as I did before. Because now my goal is more ahead of me than behind me.

After I left Gregorio I put in my own cantina in Veracruz. Later I closed it and from there I went to Acapulco. I was in Acapulco for some three years in the same kind of house as before. I went from town, to town, to town. And I was doing dangerous things. And then later I came to San Luis, Sonora. And I did the same thing, but for a short time. Later I put in a business there too. I sold beer. I had girls that just waited tables, that was all. I didn't have rooms or anything. They said that the girls could wait tables but that they weren't to drink. But the girls would help me since I paid them daily for waiting, and since sometimes there wasn't any business. They would cheat. They would drink. During the times when it's cold outside they would wear little capes. When someone would come in they would say, "Have a beer."

They would get paid a percentage of the beer sold, so to help me they would drink, but without paying at the counter. They would hide the beer here under their capes.

But there was a hole in the window and the policemen, so clever, would go around spying. One came in and says, "How are you?" "Fine." He goes straight to a girl and says, "What are you carrying there?" She had the beer hidden. They didn't do anything. "Leave her alone," I said. The policemen already knew me.

In San Luis the clients treated me well. They would buy me a lot of beer there at the cantina. The clients would buy me many things. I was never bad with them. Sometimes I would roast meat for them. I would give them snacks. But I would earn a lot too. I would be clever with the beer. And I stole a lot.

I heard that when the girls left work they would go with whomever they liked, or with the one who would pay them. I didn't put in rooms for them, though I could have because there was a place a little out of town where there are houses with rooms and all, but I never thought about that. I just wanted the girls to work as waitresses, nothing else. And outside of work they could do whatever they wanted. I didn't treat them badly. I always gave them food. There was one little girl who worked with me...Prietita, I called her. My little chocolate doll. She was very young. She had a man one day who hit her. He hit her on the back and she turned around and looked at me as though asking for help. And I go running and I tell him, "You're not going to hit anyone here!" I always defended her and favored her because she was so young.

I think that it was because I remembered when I was young...they had me like that. She was always good to me too. She was never vulgar or anything. I had girls who, even when I couldn't pay them the commission, would make the clients spend money. They would make them dance, or whatever.

Prietita left. But she came back and said, "I can't be in any other place. I don't know why I'm so spoiled here with you." But I closed the business and I don't know what happened to her.

I had my own clients during that time, but not continuously. Only with people who paid me well, in a hotel. I had just three who wanted me to be with them, every week or so. It wasn't the same as before, all the time, all the time, no. I also had a Filipino friend, a señor, already very old. That man wanted me to go live with him. But I never wanted to. He also helped me a lot. He would give me money. Sometimes they wouldn't let him be with me, but he would give me money anyway.

I see those clients once in a while, but from very far off, people who, if they see me, don't know me. One man has come looking for me since I have been married. I saw him in the migración, just passing by, and I greeted him. I don't know why, but I really wanted to greet him, but not as he was for me before. I wanted to greet him in another manner. So, he said, "I have something to say to you." And I said, "That's fine. Come to my house." "Will you be long?" he asked. "No."

So, he came, and brought beer and all. Then María Luisa saw him and ran him off and said, "Listen, what are you coming around here for? Rosa is married, she has her husband." He stayed and waited in the car

anyway. I arrived and said, "What happened?" He says, "Will you have a beer?" "No. I wanted to know what you were going to tell me." So he tells me that María Luisa had tried to keep the house that I have there, that people had advised her that she could take it away from me because she had lived there for so many years taking care of it for me. So I said, "Oh, thank you very much for telling me." "You can go see a lawyer. I don't know what she is trying to do, to change the papers or something," he said. "She could do it," I told him, "if I weren't paying for the lot, but it's all paid for. I have the papers for the house." That was when he offered me the beer. "No," I said. "I don't drink anymore. You knew me in another kind of place. My life has changed. I delivered myself to Christ. I'm a child of Christ and the things of the past, of that life, I no longer like. I'm married now. I live with my husband. He is very good to me." I told him about an operation that I had, how they took out my uterus and everything. We talked for a long while. He told me that his wife had also had that operation. This man was about to leave his woman for me. I told him that it was awful to cheapen a marriage like that. I said, "Now is when you must love your wife the most, to love her because of all that you have made her suffer." He said that she didn't want the operation, and finally they operated on her.

Miguel, my husband, knows that I had a cantina in San Luis. He knows about that. I remember when I met him I told him about those things, when that woman mistreated me, how I lived with her. I told him about it when we weren't anything to each other yet. But he has never

mentioned it again. Also, I was in San Luis in another brothel, but I have never told him that. Never. He knew that I had my cantina and all there, but he doesn't know about the other things. I have never mentioned them to him again.

I told him that the woman had me there by force, that she locked me in, that she hit me, that there were many of us there. But I have never touched on that point again, and he has never asked me. I don't know whether he remembers or not. It's difficult for me to tell him about it; it would be painful for me to talk about. I don't know how he would react; and with us living right there. A lot of people didn't see me for a long time, and I think that those people wouldn't remember. Miguel knows about that man who came to see me.

My husband clearly knows what a woman who works in a cantina is up to. As he says, "What is passed is passed." He says, when talking about a woman, "Let's put her to work so that the man doesn't have to be reminding her of the past all the time." He himself has said that.

When I was in those places I always thought about saving money. That was my thinking. I said to myself, "No, I plan to save my centavos, to have a little money saved so that I won't grow old in this place." I told that to other women sometimes, because I saw some women there who were quite old. Because then the men make fun of you, and nothing else.

I think I was there [San Luis] a little more than a year. I earned money there, but I think that I was destined to come to the United States.²⁹ I left the business with another woman -- María Luisa, the one who lives in my house now -- and tried to come here. "If you like, I'll leave it for you," I told her. She said, "Yes, go on." And later it went under. She didn't know how to run it. Afterward she said, "No, I'm no good at business, because in reality when you had the business here they came to look at you. And I'm old and ugly. What are they going to come and see me for?"

In San Luis, not on the Mexican side but on this side, there's a church -- I don't know whether it's a Catholic church -- and below the church there's a canal. I don't know whether it's still there. Several of us crossed there, four women and the rest were men. But there was a great barking of dogs, and because of that I think they saw us. We kept going.

Then there were many huge tubes, many tubes. So, we were hiding in them. A huge storm came, a lot of rain, and lightning, and when the lightning would strike we would run to another tube. A movie! We would run to another. We did that until we got to a place where we had to pass an open stretch. It wasn't pavement, but more like a place where you plant something? It was cleared. It was a quagmire. The mud was gummy, sticky. Just as I would get up -- zas! -- we would fall again. We arrived at the car covered with mud from all of the standing up and

²⁹I asked her to tell me how long she had the cantina and why she didn't have it anymore.

falling down.

We made it to the car and it started out. I don't know where they grabbed us -- it would be near Yuma -- but they started to shine lights on us. "Now they've shined us!" they said. I don't know who; an immigration patrol. No one could run and they caught all of us. And that was when this man, the coyote, gave me the papers for the car: "Hide them. Take the keys. They don't frisk the women." I believed him and took the papers and gave the keys to other people. And then they come and frisk me and take out the papers. No! They took me over here and over there and "you know how to speak English," and "you are the one bringing the people. We're going to throw you in jail, six months in jail." And I told them, "They aren't mine. They aren't mine. They belong to this other man." I had a problem there, didn't I? They scared me a lot.

They took me to another office and started speaking to each other in English. And then they spoke with me, "You know how to speak English." "No, I don't know anything." They had me very scared. Well, they made me swear that I was never going to try to come to the United States.³⁰ Soon after that I arrived at my house covered with mud. I said to Maria Luisa, "Look at how I have arrived. They caught me again." She says, "Ay, Rosa, don't try to go again." "No, not again," I said. But I tried again. "This time I'm going to Tijuana," I told her.

³⁰She laughs heartily.

I was about 33 years old and had never been to the States since they grabbed me the first time, and there was a woman there who had worked in the U.S. She said, "Look, let's go to the United States; there they pay you in dollars and you're going to earn more, and it's not the same as here." I was very excited to come here too. The man who took us, the coyote, he knew a cantina, a brothel, in Madera, California. We didn't pay him. They paid for women that the coyotes brought them and then you had to pay them back. So, I went to Tijuana and in Tijuana we crossed. When we arrived in California we planned to work. At that time the grapes were beginning, and we started to work cutting grapes. One walks along the row cutting, carrying a basket. Later they said to me, "No, this work isn't good for a woman; it would be better if you looked for work in a factory." I applied at a factory and they gave me work. It was all very new to me because I had never worked like that, earning my money honestly. I went to work there with a false identification. They sold it to me for \$80. There no one ever asks if the I.D. is false or good. After about three months I returned to Mexico. I quit work. I didn't know yet how things were, the rules, how a factory is. I didn't know that one had to obtain seniority, or had to wait a certain time in order to get paid vacations. They had explained it to me, but I don't think I understood. When you come from there, you don't know much.

So I just quit work and left. I had bought a lot in San Luis, Sonora, and had started to build a house, so I went back there. In Veracruz I had also bought a lot and later had sold it. With that money

I bought the lot in San Luis. I stayed about two weeks in Mexico and then crossed over to the U.S. again through the hills. Later, I would return to Mexico, but when I had earned my vacations. I worked there for six years, very happy, without any danger or anything.

In California I lived with another guy. My husband knew him. He drank a lot, a lot. I helped him a lot so that he would get better, but he never wanted to. We separated primarily because we weren't married, and also because, although he was almost the same age as I was, he had a complex, something superior; he was worth more -- a monarchical complex. He felt that he was better than me, and later he married a chicana. He yelled at me a lot. He didn't want me to look at other men, but he had other women. He took me out very little; he abused me a lot.

In California I rented a small house. Facing it there lived an older married couple. I would see them going out with a Bible. And I thought, "They aren't going to a Catholic church; it must be another church." The wife said to me, "I want to invite you to my house." "Fine. One day I will go." One day I went downtown and I saw the book The Road to God. I bought it and I liked it very much. So I went to the woman and said, "Could you tell me where I could get a Bible." "Yes." She loaned me a book called The Pilgrim. And another book too; and the days passed by. One day she said to me, "Don't you want to go to church." I said, "Yes, yes I'll go." I went. I started going to

the church.

One day we arrived early to church and she said to me, "Let's go visit my daughter; she just had a child." I went. The child was barely three days old. But, I didn't realize that the dogs would bite strangers. She yelled, "The dogs!" The woman's husband yelled, "Close the door! The dogs are going to bite her!" But they were already on top of us. The two dogs spotted me and bit me. On my leg I still carry the place where they operated on me. They didn't bite her, just me. Then they grabbed the dogs and put them in the house.

Then they took me to the hospital and days passed. My leg was very bad off. The woman was very nice to me. She even wanted to give me her paycheck. I told her, "No. We're not going to do that." Then she asked me, "What do you think about what happened?" "You know, the Devil is not going to defeat me. I'm going to go to the church again." They worked a lot with me, and I was fine.

This couple was Christian: a true Sister, a true Brother. One day I felt the need to have the pastor call us, but he didn't make the call. I said to the woman, "When will the pastor call to us to go up front?" She said that she didn't know why he hadn't. But a crusade came to town; a preacher from Houston came. That was the night I delivered myself to Christ. Since then my life has changed, it has changed a lot. Because I'm happy. I didn't have a husband, and now I have a husband; he loves me very much. He is good to me. Never in my life had I had a true husband. We were married in 1985. I think that God gave him to me. God paid me, didn't he?

Before I delivered myself to Christ life wasn't the same. Before I would save a little. I would ask for things, but I never got them. But now that I dedicate myself to God, now when I talk with Him, when I have a need, or another person has a need, I tell Him. Of course He doesn't answer me right away, but when I least expect it, there's an answer. Now I tithe and my money goes a little further, it has a better effect. God has helped me transform myself little by little. Before my mouth was the mouth of Satan, because I spoke very badly, a lot of curses.

I don't like living in San Luis. I have never liked it as a place to live. But that's where we're living. I think that God perhaps sent me there.

When I was in California I would go out with a Sister to visit people. When I'm in Mexico I talk to the people sometimes, when there's the opportunity. I hand out leaflets. I go out into the street. I like to go to the park. It's a big park. When people are there with the newspaper I go and give them a leaflet. Sometimes I break down and get lazy. But there are some people who have delivered themselves to Christ, and learned to read and speak with my help.

At times I would go see a friend, to visit her because she was a friend in my youth, in that other life with that señora, and I wanted to win her over for Christ. I would go and eat with her, or to talk. Or sometimes I would go see another woman and tell her, "No, look, when a person doesn't have Christ, that just won't do. You need to have

Christ so that the day you die you will to be with the Lord, you will go to Christ." She always responded, "Who knows? Who knows?" She just wanted to make me happy. I continued to visit the first woman and she delivered herself to Christ.

I also visited a man whose name was Felix; I knew him before. He has a dried up hand, completely dried up. The other is okay but it doesn't have any strength. He has a little basket and goes about selling magazines in the street. He cannot even get on a bus or anything, and sometimes cannot walk well. I see him in the street and say to him, "Come to my house, if you remember who I am." "Yes Rosa, I knew you in that hell." He used to bring magazines and sell books to us. I said to him, "I would like to register you." "Sure, go ahead," he says. "But first I want to take you to the pastor to talk." "Yes," he says. We went to the pastor and his wife and we all talked. That's what I would do sometimes.

Well, since I delivered myself to Christ I have failed once. It was because I had a big problem with my husband. We were at the point of splitting up. He was going around drinking with another woman, a woman from a bar. I had many problems. Sometimes it was three in the morning and I would walk and walk in the streets, very angry, looking for him. Earlier he had told me, "I have already left that woman. I don't have anything to do with her." But it wasn't true. He was coming home very late. I knew. One day I went to look for him. I left work because a woman told me she had seen something. She gave me all the

information: "He is with her right now." On the one hand I don't thank her, but on the other I do. That time I got very angry and left work.

I became desperate and went to the extreme of drinking. I got drunk on just a little beer. I went walking through the streets. It was very hot. I was drunk. I saw the car from far off. "There he goes! But how am I going to catch him?" I went from alley to street, from alley to street, and I found the car. No one told me where he was. He was there in an apartment with the woman. I spoke to him. He came out and we had problems, big problems.

I said, "Let's go home; we can talk there." He said to me, "Look, she says she's going to have a baby. I already went to the clinic with her," and who knows what else. They had tricked him into thinking that she was having his baby. It wasn't true. I said, "I'm going to leave you because you don't want to understand. You're going around with that woman. I don't know; I can't take it any more." I cried a lot.

We had just bought a car, the one that we have now. I said, "I don't think I'm going to help you pay for that car so that some other woman can go out for drives sitting up front. This is not good; I'm not going to put up with it." Then I grabbed a hoe and said, "You're going to see what I can do now." I grabbed the hoe and went downstairs. We lived upstairs. He came running after me. I was planning to break the car. There was an empty lot there and I said, "I'm going to throw this car out there. I'm going to set it on fire. Why am I going to help you pay for it so that other women can go out for drives. No."

That was when he looked at me and said, "No, look. Think things over." I went to San Luis and took my things, some of them I left with people -- I still have a television there with a Sister -- and I said, "I am going to stay here." When he saw me like that he began to criticize himself. "How is it possible that I'm guilty for what you're doing to yourself. I don't deserve anything. Nothing. Because of me you're falling apart. I promise to be good. Look, let's get out of here. I promise you that I will change. I promise to be better with you." And he has been better with me. He has behaved well. But on that occasion I failed in the presence of God. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have turned to drinking beer. I talked and yelled; it was a desperate thing. I should have borne it because no one but God could have helped me. I lowered my head and asked forgiveness for that failure. If someone had seen me and knew that I was a Sister in Christ, I would have made a poor testimony.

I think that I also was at fault in all of this. I had that job, and then I made lunch for about four people; I charged them. They gave me fifty dollars a week. So I had to get up early to make them lunch and then I spent the whole day working in the factory. When I arrived home I would go to sleep. Ay, I would feel so tired that I didn't want him to touch me for anything. And, of course, there were times when he wanted to be with me, but I wasn't in the mood. He told me that I paid more attention to work than to him. He reproached me for that. Also, the men go out in the street and there are more than enough women there.

That was the first problem that we had. We haven't had problems like that again. Now we get mad over little things, but nothing of importance. Hopefully, if I should have another problem like that one I will try not to take the twisted path. When we would go to Texas I would see couples and I envied them. But God gave me my husband. I have a husband and he takes me everywhere.

Miguel has not wanted to be baptized.³¹ He has just become a teacher of text. But they call him a Baptist. When I say, "Let's go to church," he says, "Let's go." He is very intelligent, he learns everything. He learns very well.

In the end I left work in the factory because we came here.³² I said, "I am tired of being here every day, every day, working, working. It would be better to leave. And we're paying a lot of rent. The electricity and telephone are a lot. It would be better to go to Washington for the season and then to go to Mexico to live, to rest."

The first year we went to Washington, but we didn't know what we were going to do for work. But some friends there, in California, told my husband that working the strawberries in Oregon you could earn more, that's before going to the apples. A man that he knew in California said, "If you want, let's go. I'll take you." So we paid him and he

³¹Because of Miguel's pleas above, I asked her whether Miguel was a member of the same church to which she belongs.

³²I asked how they came to leave California and begin work as migrant laborers.

brought us here. That year, three years ago, went very well for us. But last year it didn't. The work was bad. Sometimes we earned fifteen dollars a day and the foreman would get mad because we would leave in the afternoon to work a little while in other places. He would say that we had to move out of the cabins if we were going to go around like that. We didn't move out because we continued working here with them, but we would spend the afternoons somewhere else; the work was very bad here. In other places they paid us more, and there was more fruit.

That first year I felt good, very contented because one gets acquainted with many places; it was like a vacation for us. Now when it's time to come here I say to my husband, "Let's go because we won't get a cabin."

Last year after the strawberries we went to Idaho to work the onions. The year before we went to work the apples in Washington. We went in September and quit work the 10th of October and went to Mexico.

In Idaho last year we didn't have a house. We did have a trailer but the owners took it away because they sold it. The American woman sold the house and they threw us out. My husband went, I don't know where, to complain and to say that we didn't want to leave because there weren't any other houses. All of the trailers were occupied. There were too many people there. Then this woman gave us our rent receipt, but the receipt, Angel tells me, was invalid. They said that we couldn't stay because we owed rent. But it wasn't true. But they wouldn't listen to us and threw us out. And there wasn't another house in which to live so we went to sleep in the field for about a week. My

husband bought a small tent; there were two couples who slept in the tent, and my brother-in-law and the other boys slept in the furrows of the onion field. We didn't have a place to bathe. To eat we would go and buy a small lunch in a store, and then back to work. We met a woman there and she gave us permission once to bathe. The work was very good, but we had to quit because we didn't have a place to live. Today my husband has gone to Idaho to rent a trailer. When we finish the strawberries we will work the blueberries and then we will go to Idaho. After that we will go to Mexico to rest a bit.

When we're in Mexico my husband works the broccoli in Arizona for a company. I don't work. Those jobs are very difficult to get because it's on the border and there are so many people, too many people. Everyone got amnesty, as they call it, so they are all crowded up on the border. There isn't enough work. So, in the mornings it fills up with people, like a fair. He got a job, but he's been working there for about three years. For me it's very difficult because I have never worked with a hoe, and the foremen want you to move quickly, to work fast. I stay there in Mexico waiting. This year I'm planning -- I'm not sure yet -- to try and get work in Yuma. But it's far from where we live, there on the border. There's a long line to cross in the morning.

We have our papers; we're permanent residents. But before he had papers my husband worked with another name: Miguel. I met him then so I'm accustomed to calling him Miguel. But his name is José Angel Gómez. He works about three months in the broccoli. He has to get up very

early. He crosses the border about three in the morning and takes his pillow and blanket with him. He sleeps in his car until it's time to go to work.

During March and April he works on our house. He's making a wall. He buys the cement and sand and makes blocks. He does this in the months that we're not working. Sometimes I help him turn the blocks over so they'll dry.

We make out all right because of his job in Arizona and because we don't pay rent. That's why we left California, because we paid a lot of rent. But things are very expensive on the border and they only want dollars. We get very angry with the people there because you pay with a twenty dollar bill and they give you change in pesos.

Sometimes they treat us rough.³³ There are workers who are Mexicans, who come from there, and are the ones who should help you the most and they are the ones who attack you the most. Some of them yell at you for no reason. For no reason they say, "I'm going to run you out of here! Don't bother coming tomorrow. If I don't want you to, you don't work here." A lot of threats and for any reason. For example, yesterday we were going to leave the field because we hadn't brought lunch. My husband says, "I'm hungry. Let's go." We were heading for the car when the foreman comes out and says, "You don't have permission to leave here." So I said, "My husband doesn't feel well, and we didn't bring lunch." He says, "But there's lunch here." "That lunch isn't any

³³I asked how the farm bosses treated them.

good," my husband says. "You don't have permission to leave; you have to finish here," he says. But we had already worked eight hours. We kept on working until they said that we could go because when you leave they have to tear your card. They give you a card and one part they keep and one part you keep. That's the kind of thing that happens. But the problem that we're having now is that they are taking out a lot of money in taxes. They just took out about one hundred dollars for one week!

I don't want to attack people, but I should say that sometimes the American people show us more consideration than the Mexicans we work with. They give you more consideration, they show you more affection, they treat you better. Most of the foremen are Mexicans; there are few who are Americans. Where you find more American foremen is in Washington.

Since I left my job in the factory I have not liked permanent work.³⁴ And there in Mexico we don't pay rent, we're very happy. And even happier now because we don't have any drugs. I also like living here, of course.

Sometimes, when I can, I help my brother; I send them money.³⁵ And

³⁴I asked whether she liked being a migrant worker.

³⁵This grew out of her recounting her meeting with the IRS which regarded her false claims for dependents on her 1986 tax return. She had been interviewed by the IRS a few days before this interview. She claims that a woman, who is now in jail, prepared her taxes for her and many other workers, encouraging them to fraudulently claim several dependents. As of this writing, I am not sure whether Rosa was required

when I can, I help my sister too, even though it may be a small amount. One time my brother went looking for me in Veracruz. He said to me, "I need you to lend me six hundred pesos." I said, "I don't have it." I was about twenty-two years old, and in reality I didn't have the money. Since then I have always remembered that one time someone needed something and I couldn't help him. But I sold a small house that I had there, and I told him, "I'm going to give you a few pennies so that you can finish your house." He was adding some rooms to his house. "If you can find a way, I could use twenty thousand," he said. "Yes," I told him, and I lent them to him. But I didn't lend them to him, because in reality what I gave him wasn't lent; I was giving it to him. I gave it to him, and I felt good. When I can, I send him a few pennies.

My brother Jesús went to Mexico City and looked after a store, or at least the cars because sometimes the workers arrive late and they just leave their cars and they give him the keys, and he parks them. And sometimes he is a watchman, with a policeman's uniform. So he has to work two jobs to sustain his family. There are five, six, eight in all. But now my nephew is here with me. So, Jesús works during the day parking cars and as a watchman at night. He goes to his house no more than one day per week, on Saturday. No more. He has to work two shifts so that his family can get ahead. So, I give him a few pennies when I can.

to pay any fines. Following her discussion of the IRS interview I went on to ask her about what her siblings are doing today.

The thing that held my brother back was the fact that he drank a lot. He drank too much. He had to get up at night and drink pure tequila in order to be able to sleep. He lost a lot because he would wreck his car, and had to pay, and the police would cheat him. His wife put up with a lot. She finally became so worried that she looked for something that would cure him because he drank too much; he drank a bottle a day. So she found Alcoholics Anonymous. Now I think he's been going there for five or six years, and he says he has not gone back to drinking. He says that he went to AA and the next day worked at a bar at a party pouring wine, and that people were drinking there in the party, and he says that he didn't drink anything. They meet once a week, or twice, the A.A., I don't know. Now things are a little better. He says, "Now people have more confidence in me than before. Before, at Christmas they would give me bottles and bottles to drink. Now they have more confidence in me." He is better now.

My sister was widowed. Well, not widowed because her husband didn't die. He went off with another woman and left her with all the children. I don't know how many they had, but there must be about seven. She was living with another man, the last I heard, a señor. She said he was an older man, but that it was going well. He left her too, but I think they got back together again. I don't know. She lives in the capital, in the D.F. She had a little baby boy the last time I saw her, his name was Javier. I put him down as a dependent in my report; I put down my dead daughter too.

If I had the opportunity to become a citizen here, I wouldn't.³⁶ I don't know why I wouldn't. I love my country. Perhaps because I was born there, because my brothers and sister are there, simply because of that. But, when I have gone to Mexico, I haven't wanted to be there for very long. I want to come right back here. When we left California and went to San Luis, after two weeks: "No! Let's go, let's go!" We came to California again, we returned again to San Luis and, "No! There's so much dust here!" One gets used to the good things. Sometimes, even though we live in the countryside here, it's better than living in the town where I live. Because there's a lot of sand there, it's pure desert. And it isn't paved yet, just the next street over is paved. We stay there in San Luis, but it's always the same, "No, let's go back again."

Here we eat better, we work -- too much! -- it isn't the same in Mexico, in many ways. There we work a lot, but we live better here than in Mexico. There are many comforts here too; in Mexico there aren't any. But I wouldn't like to become a citizen. But now, after discussing it, in reality yes, I like it better here because I have found things here that I never had in my life. I found my husband here. I found our savior Jesus Christ here, which is the most important thing to me.

But I love Mexico because I was born there. I'm Mexican, I think that's why. Even though I have suffered a lot there, even though you

³⁶I asked her whether she had thought about trying to obtain U.S. citizenship given that she liked the country so much.

go there and things are very different, even though today things cost one price and tomorrow another price. Because I'm Mexican. But that's the way it is.

There is something that I have been thinking about these interviews that we have had, something that I have felt.³⁷ For me these interviews have been as if you were my psychiatrist. They've served me in that way because there are times that we have something inside that we want to take out, and sometimes you don't have the confidence. I have people that I talk to. Yesterday, for example. The day before yesterday my husband began to drink. And yesterday he got up and drank again. So I went and told him a lie, "Look, I want you to take me to the store. I want to buy one of those things that cleans a VCR." "Yes, fine," he says. I saw that he was in very bad shape again. I said, "If you're going to take me, let's go." But then I thought no, if I just take him to the store, just take him out for a little while, he might commit some error driving, because he wasn't well.

I said, "You know what? I can prepare you something to eat. Some little thing. Yesterday I made pork chops and I saved you some chops. Should I heat them up for you?" "Yes, fine." I said, "Lie down to sleep for a little while and if you wake up and you still feel bad you can drink another beer so that you feel better." "Fine." I gave him his food and he laid down. But later he got up feeling a little better.

³⁷Since this was our final interview, I asked her what she thought about our sessions. She seemed more relaxed and happier during this interview than any of the others. It lasted one hour and 15 minutes.

I said, "Take a bath so that you feel better." He took a bath and everything and says, "I'm going to go to the big field." There's this place called the Big Field where there are only men. "A friend there owes me forty dollars that I lent him. I'm going to go so he can pay me." "Fine," I said. But that's not why he went. He went to see the ones with whom he was drinking before. So he stayed there again and got drunk again; they were drinking there.

A woman here said, "Come in, come in doña Rosa." I said, "I just came to see this man who spent the night here again." I didn't say anything else. But the day before we were talking about drinking and she said to me, "Look, I have my beer almost every day." Because she was drinking in the middle of the day. She said, "Come on, have a beer. Drink yourself a beer." And I stayed quiet. Then I said, "You know doña Elvira, I don't look down on you for drinking because I drank a lot, too much." She says, "No, I don't believe it." I said, "Yes, and I'm not lying when I tell you that sometimes I see the people drinking, and it's very hot, and I crave a beer, but no. It's good to resist temptation." But I never tell them about my life. No. If I were to tell them then they might go and say this and that, "look at that woman," to whomever they see. So I have never told. So these talks have done a lot for me because I have gotten something out. Sometimes one wants to get something out, but doesn't have enough confidence in people, even though they might be friends.

When one leaves the rancho one is very ignorant.³⁸ I would tell her not to let them trick her, because sometimes there are people that show you friendship, but it isn't friendship. They are nice to you to see how much they can get out of you. Even another woman, or the men too. Don't have too much confidence in people that you don't know.

I have had confidence in you, as though you were a psychiatrist for me. And the last thing I want to tell you is that, thanks to God, all of that dirty life that I had is in the past, and that now I'm happy. I feel that I have God's help and that he was the only thing that changed me. If there had never been someone to talk to me about God, I don't think my life would have changed. I don't feel that I'm perfect, but I'm not the same as before. He changes us little by little because, as the word of God says, we're the clay and he is the potter. He changes us little by little. And, of course, may God bless you.

³⁸I asked her what advice she might give a girl leaving the rancho today.

IV. Kinship Ideology and Practice

This chapter examines Latin American (with a focus on Mexican) family and kinship ideology and practice. The concept of the extended family is analyzed and then compared with the familial relations of the informant, Rosa. The major theme of this chapter is that Rosa's early rejection of, and by, her family is not necessarily indicative of a breakdown in the extended family structure and a change in ideology in a rapidly-modernizing Mexico as some authors suggest is occurring, but rather could be expected given the ideological underpinnings and history of Latin American kinship. I support the views of several researchers who believe that kinship structures must be viewed as a continuum, through both history and class, thereby giving a more accurate theoretical description of the variety of familial and personal responses to cultural and societal changes occurring in Latin America today. I propose that rather than heralding the breakdown of the extended family in Latin America, informants such as Rosa, those apparently left out of family life, help us to see a cyclical characteristic in the degree of importance of extended family relationships in Latin America, and to see that the extended family structure has always been, and continues to be, expanded to include non-sanguineal relationships.

The importance of familial networks to the Latin American mestizo individual and the greater society has been recognized for some time in

the scholarly literature of many disciplines¹ and in the popular literature.² These familial ties are seen by researchers as being essential to the integration of the individual into society, to his "adaptation to socio-economic and cultural environments, regardless of his community of residence or his class standing."³

The theoretical basis for family studies has gone through several stages, according to Smith, each period representing a generally more fluid interpretation of Latin American kinship.⁴

Beginning in the late 18th century, Europeans assumed that a family of parents and their children was a universal institution, providing for the reproduction of society, the socialization of children and a refuge for all. However, extended families did not fit the model, so it was recognized that new, extended groups were formed to serve "political, economic, and ritual purposes... All kinship is based ultimately on consanguinity and affinity (blood and marriage), or so the argument goes," with each society stressing certain links. As society becomes more complex, family and other institutions specialize, and social relations are systematized: "The systematicity of social relations is organized around the need for certain functions to be performed in order that societies may continue to exist." The function of each part of society was measured by the contribution it made to the whole. A major problem with such structural-functional anthropology was that it assumed that "societies would remain in, or return to, a state of equilibrium." This structural-functional theory was linked to evolutionary theory in the 19th century and, in the 20th century, there has been "an inherent tendency to fall back into [the evolutionary] mode of reasoning via the

elaboration of 'modernization theory.'"⁵

A major turn in social theory came in the 1950s with the elaboration of transactional analysis, a theory in which it is assumed "that individuals always act rationally in pursuit of profit, self-interest, or utility, making the most efficient use of means available for the pursuit of ends." This thinking obviously "leaves out of account (or greatly minimizes) the effect of influences external to the individual. Out of attempts to salvage transactional analysis came "recognition of the importance of meaning structures."⁶

Another criticism of structural-functionalism notes the theory's difficulty in dealing with change and is concerned with culture and theories of meaning, rather than following the path of transactional analysis. Structural-functionalism is biased in favor of well-integrated societies, the argument goes, and therefore emphasizes the functional over the dysfunctional. "When functionalists deal with change they tend to see disintegration." The incongruities that arise out of the failure of cultural patterns to fit perfectly the forms of social organization lead to social and cultural conflict, not to disintegration as structural-functionalists would argue.⁷

In observing these dysjunctions, one sees that "culture does not merely reflect social structure or respond to social and organizational change, nor does it simply emerge out of praxis," and that "meaning, like structure, must be produced and reproduced in the flow of action." The dysjunctions that arose out of the conjuncture of European and Indian social structures, and later the dysjunctions which arise during "modernization," produce new structural arrangements and cultural

meanings.⁸

Generally in Latin America we see a "creole" or "colonial" society which established a hierarchical order with European domination of the slave or native. An ideology of "relative worthiness" defined superiority in terms of race, "but increasingly substitutes 'civilization,' education, or achievement as the criteria of esteem." With the mixing of the races, classes and immigration we eventually arrive at a very complex "cultural continuum" in Latin America "in which creole culture contains variation within a set of shared beliefs about difference." The inherent divisiveness of the creole continuum "must be related pragmatically to the historical development of the society, a procedure that definitely precludes the 'schematicism'" of structural-functionalism.⁹

Smith states that kinship studies in Latin America have generally avoided the "creole continuum," and have focused instead on dividing society into "socio-cultural types" with the "prominent families" category added to try to tie together the other segments. He argues that the "whole" must somehow be kept in view since it is the "'pool of shared myth and experience' which gives meaning to the distinctions that are made among territorial, ethnic, class, and other categories." The next logical step in the study of social structure, therefore, is the analysis of meaning. The study of meaning would allow the researcher to go beyond the imposed "epistemological and ideological closures" and give us some understanding of how the studied peoples define race, kinship, and family. Through the analysis of meaning we are better able to see that "kinship concepts do not stand alone, but have to be

understood in their multitudinous relations with class and other bases of social differentiation," all of which will show some variation through history.¹⁰

The Extended Family¹

Since the late 1940s much of the research on the Latin American extended family has focused on the effects on the family network of the forces of urbanization, modernization and war.¹¹ One might question the breadth and depth of the literature for, as Smith notes, "most studies of kinship in Latin America have ignored...complex creole structures" and have dealt mainly with American Indians.¹² For example, Folbre points out that economists studying the household are only just beginning to explore the possibility that economic self-interest operates within the home, as well as the marketplace, thus their studies to date generally have not taken into account great variations in the Latin American family: "Although most scientists live in households, or perhaps because they do, scientific views of the household are based on little more than glimpses of a deck that is constantly being shuffled."¹³

While Das acknowledges the complexity of family structures in Latin America, calling the family "a dynamic, constantly evolving and emerging entity," he sees a general decline in the importance of the extended family network in Latin America with an inexorable drift toward the Western nuclear family paradigm.¹⁴ Smith, Gutiérrez, Keefe and others

¹The definition of the extended family network used here is one which includes the nuclear family, non-residential extended family and compadrazgo ties.

focus on the prevalence of the desire for the extended family among Latin Americans (Mexican-Americans in Keefe's case) and how those desires have manifested themselves through periods of modernization; they focus on changing meanings rather than attempting to pigeon-hole Latin American family structures.¹⁵ Rivera points out the difficulty of describing the status of the Latin American family, noting the tremendous variety of family organizations: "The reality is so fluid that it may defy classification . . . [for] the nuclear family is a knot in a network of blood relationships. There is . . . a continuing transformation of the nuclear into the extended family, and vice versa. It is not unusual for members to drop into other nuclear families for extended periods."¹⁶

De la Peña, in his study of kinship in Jalisco, notes that the major reason for this fluidity -- what Smith and Geertz refer to as a conflict between kinship ideology and kin group formation -- is that kin groups exist in Mexico, but that Mexican kinship ideology may not provide clearcut rules for their formation due to inherent conflicts in the four basic principles from which the ideologies are derived, or by which they are justified.¹⁷

The first of those principles is that "parents represent God on earth vis-à-vis their children." Parents have a "divine mission" in the raising of children and are therefore responsible for their children's physical and moral deficiencies. Compadres, aunts, uncles and other members of the kin network share in the parents' mission and responsibilities, and are therefore to receive from the children the respect and obedience they accord their parents.¹⁸

The second principle is that "commonality of blood demands similitude and love." This accounts for bilateral kinship tracing, which conflicts with the third principle which states that males are superior to females, a concept "deeply rooted in Catholic belief as well as in Spanish and colonial law." De la Peña states that in peasant and ranchero traditional families, there is a preference for patrilateral ties, a preference which likely emerged from the sharing of family labor power between male family heads, and was "in turn reinforced by the sexual division of labor and residence patterns." This incongruity continues to exist, he speculates, perhaps because land was never held corporately by male kin, and because of the continuing importance of relationships with matrilateral kin.¹⁹

The fourth principle, which says that all children are equal in their parents' eyes, also conflicts with male superiority. Males are to be strong and morally consistent, whereas females are to be weak, beautiful and inconsistent, and therefore protected. This led to inconsistencies in the inheritance rights of siblings. Males generally inherited productive resources, while women might have received a dowry, a house, furniture or other products.²⁰

Adding to the conflicts within the ideologies is the concept that one cannot always inherit the honor and status of one's family; the patriarch may pass property on to his sons, but they must still prove themselves with deeds in order to earn his trust. Thus a son's filial piety may be in turmoil with individuality.²¹

The individual, says de la Peña, picks and chooses among the four guiding principles depending on the situation. As a person perceives

alternatives to traditional network formation, alternatives brought about by, for example, the commercialization of agriculture, war, land reform, or increased mobility, the person may likely establish a mutual aid network along more liberal lines than those of the traditional extended family. The principles noted above make it possible for him to choose among those alternatives and still maintain a network.

The structure of the household itself -- and I might expand the following to include entire networks which include extrafamilial relationships -- may vary according to its resource base and its ability to tap other resources:

To understand the logic of household organization one must look at its operation diachronically, discovering the ways in which people are recruited into the household, the resources to which they have access, the goals toward which resources are pooled, how and when members are expected to leave the household, and how new households are generated.²²

It is this recruitment and exclusion of members into a household or a network, as well as Rosa's perceptions of the meanings of family and kin, with which I am most concerned in examining Rosa's testimony.

Rosa's Family

When asked to name the members of her family, Rosa responds with the names of her nuclear family. Then, as she relates the experiences of her childhood, other members of her kin network, principally an aunt, an uncle, a niece and her godparents, find their way into her narrative; she makes no mention of grandparents. The importance of the traditional family to Rosa appears to be found in the first of the four principles outlined above: her family was supposed to have educated her in the ways of the world, in how to live properly and healthfully, and was

supposed to have taught her the importance of education. The family's guidance, she implies explicitly and implicitly, would have kept her out of the brothels, would have saved her from her many years of ignorance.

But Rosa also blames herself for her plight. She saw the new ways of the girls returning from the city, she saw the money to be earned by migrating to the United States, and she also perceived that her rancho life was no longer her only alternative. As she says, she chose not to stay with her godparents in spite of their willingness to have her and her dying father's wish that she remain with them. Rosa says that her years of wandering from house to house, including returning at times to her father's home, was a customary thing for children in the rancho. She mentions the pervasiveness of the practice again upon her eldest sister's death, noting that the sister's son began to work for his meals. The children's wanderings seem to have their roots in the history of the ranchos of Mexico. The patrilineal kin of these frontier communities would share labor resources, with females and children moving to other family members' homes for months at a time.²³

The impetus for her migration around the rancho seems to have been her mother's death. Since the male is not expected to be involved in the details of childrearing, including discipline, Rosa lacked the guidance traditionally given by the mother. When a stepmother arrived, Rosa says that she gave preference to her own children, and made life difficult for Rosa and her siblings. While the father at one point attempted to assert some authority, the stepmother actually dominated the decisionmaking with regard to the children. Rivera and others point out the importance of the mother's authority, and say that the

traditional family is matrifocal; the mother is generally the disciplinarian.²⁴ The stepmother was fulfilling her duty within the household, and was trying to enhance the prospects of her own children over those of Rosa and her siblings, and the father allowed his wife to make those decisions.

The patriarch of the Latin American household is often portrayed as a benevolent dictator whose main purpose is to provide for the family, with the expectation of obedience and respect in return.²⁵ Rosa has a similar view of her father. She says that when her father died she was not particularly emotional about it. Her memories of him are almost entirely of a kind, ignorant man who did his best: he came to see her when she was ill, and comforted her when she had a vision of her dead mother; she does not blame him, it seems. When I asked at one point whether Rosa ever blamed God for what had happened to her as a child and young adult, she said no, that it was her ignorance, caused principally by her lack of parents, her lack of someone to guide her, and a lack of formal education that were to blame. It seems, then, that while she recognizes a deficiency in her upbringing, in the kin network's caring for her, she does not blame individuals, her father included, for her plight. In fact, in looking back from her current perspective, she often blames herself, noting more than once that no one was forcing her to stay in the brothels and cantinas after she left the first one, and, with regard to her work selling food, that she had always enjoyed business.

When her father and stepmother died, Rosa had the opportunity to gain in the community a material foothold, albeit small, through the

inheritance of his land. She says that she did not consider accepting part of the land, though she was entitled to it, saying that her brother's family needed it more. She makes no mention of whether her brother invited her to live with him on the land. And years later, when her brother sold the land, she once again did not seek any portion of the proceeds. De la Peña notes that this exclusion of women from inheritance, whether implicit or explicit, has waned over the years, and is especially disputed in the middle classes where women have become more involved in the accumulation of family property.²⁶

It appears that Rosa's eldest sister did her familial duty in trying to discipline and care for Rosa after her father's death.²⁷ However, Rosa says she was not welcomed into her sister's home by her brother-in-law, and so did not choose to stay with them after a time. She attributed her brother-in-law's hostility toward her to his being "touchy" and offers no other reason for his antipathy. In the case of Rosa's godparents, she appears to have made the choice to leave, whereas the option was forced upon her in the case of her sister's home. As noted above, when the sister died, Rosa says the woman's children began working and wandering as Rosa had been doing. She makes no mention of the children's father, her brother-in-law, at this point.

Rosa finally chooses to leave the rancho and seek employment elsewhere, going the first few times with siblings. Once she leaves, she rarely stays more than a few months with any employer. The migratory route is one taken by many peasants who perceive a lack of viability of the traditional life.²⁸ It is generally thought that rural women who migrate to the cities, and to the United States, are seeking,

besides economic opportunity, escape from the oppressiveness of the patriarchal extended family, the same family that is supposed to catch them in a safety net.²⁹ While those may be the reasons for migration, it is obvious that the economic gains are minimal in "legitimate" work, and that domestics are trading one family's oppression for another's.³⁰ Rosa, for example, notes how sometimes she was paid, and sometimes not. Also, it is common for a girl to migrate to the city in order to cook and clean for male kin who have migrated.³¹

Live-in domestics appear to follow a natural course set down for them by their origin families, their patron families, the state and the church, which takes them from one subservient role to another, and which urges them to accept these roles. The nanas (domestics) themselves feel that their patron families treat them as though they were family. Rosa, for example, praised the brothel owner who "allowed" her to continue working during her pregnancy and after the birth of her child.³²

The family with whom Rosa worked selling food to bus passengers, her fellow prostitutes, and the women of her Baptist sect, served as a series of extrafamilial mutual aid groups. They acted as her family, telling her to bath, to dress properly, and generally fulfilling the educational role Rosa ascribes to parents. She appears grateful for the help, noting, for example, the way the brothel manager's husband came to check on Rosa when she was giving birth. Later Rosa changed roles, taking on a motherly attitude with the muchachas who worked in her cervecería; she also has a friend who lives in and cares for her home in San Luis while Rosa and her husband are in the United States, and stays with them when they return to San Luis.

The prevalence of the inclusion of friends into households in Latin America is noted in several studies,³³ but some writers feel that these extrafamilial groups are the single most important factor in increasing the status of Latin American women.³⁴

Rosa eventually gained some independence through her oppressive work in prostitution, and later her work in a factory in California, but she seems willing to give up some independence in order to establish a family. She had several partners over the years and finally married. Her current marriage, in which she is relatively submissive, her yearnings to have children, her willingness to assist financially her siblings and their children, seem to indicate that Rosa is searching for her identity, and hopes to fulfill the traditional roles that society dictates for her. However, Rosa says that she does not go back to the rancho because she does not have any family there. Given the history of the rancho in Hidalgo³⁵ it seems likely that she does indeed have numerous extended family members there. The family members in El Pantano, however, seem to have lost their importance to her (if they ever had been important), whereas her nieces and nephews, the women of the church, and her husband have all combined to form a network which includes extended family and friends. Rosa seems to have crossed through a period in which extrafamilial relationships were most important in her survival, and into a time in which she has the means to pursue the family life that is of symbolic value to her.

Conclusions

The extended family network in Latin American mestizo kinship has always allowed for the movement of children between households. The

compadrazgo system has been one way in which friends could be included in the family network. A greater reliance on friends in aid networks, and the influx of young female workers to urban areas are not only the results of the forces of modernization; they also have their basis in the ideologies that govern family organization. Rosa's plight, then, could be expected given the family ideology and the economic situation of her rancho. De la Peña proposes that the ideologies of the family are slowly changing to de-emphasize hierarchical and authoritarian positions among kin in favor of mutual aid; there is a recognition of a wider range of "potential allies" by individuals.³⁶

In that selection of allies, however, certain people, I suggest, are de-selected, contradicting studies which "assume that the family works to maximize its benefits to all, and each, of its members."³⁷ Rosa was such a family member. Rivera notes the prevalence of prostitution and illegitimacy in Latin America, but focuses on the role of kinship in what might be called the "demand" side of the problem, that is the reasons for the acceptability of a male's use of prostitutes and concubines. I suggest that the family's role in supplying the prostitutes themselves must be further studied.

As we have seen, rigid structural-functional or transactional analysis approaches cannot be accurately applied to the study of the Latin American family. A continuum of familial organization through history and class, one which recognizes extrafamilial forces and allows for individual desires, might better describe Latin American family organization.³⁸

Endnotes

¹Manuel L. Carlos and Lois Sellers, "Family, Kinship Structure, and Modernization in Latin America, The Latin American Research Review 7 (1972): 95-124.

²For an example of this see Alan Riding, Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans (New York: Random House, 1984) 344-367.

³Carlos and Sellers 95.

⁴Raymond T. Smith, introduction, Kinship Ideology and Practice in Latin America, ed. Smith, (London: U of North Carolina P, 1984).

⁵Smith 5-7.

⁶Smith 8-9; and see Bruce Kapferer, ed., Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976) 20.

⁷Smith 9-10; and see Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," American Anthropologist, 59 (1957): 32-54.

⁸Smith 9-10, 14.

⁹Smith 15-17.

¹⁰Smith 17-20, 26.

¹¹Carlos and Sellers 95-98; Smith 27; Man Singh Das, "Introduction to the Latin American Family and Society," The Family in Latin America, eds. Das and Clinton J. Jesser (New Delhi: Vikas, 1980) 1-11.

¹²Smith 17.

¹³Nancy Folbre, "The Black Four of Hearts: Toward a New Paradigm of Household Economics," A Home Divided: Women and Income in the Third World, eds. Daisy Dwyer and Judith Bruce, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988) 148.

¹⁴Das 10.

¹⁵Susan E. Keefe, "Real and Ideal Extended Familism Among Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans: On The Meaning of 'Close' Family Ties," Human Organization, 43 (1984): 65-70; Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "From Honor to Love: Transformations of the Meaning of Sexuality in Colonial New Mexico," Smith 237-63; Smith 19-27.

¹⁶Julius Rivera, Latin America: A Sociocultural Interpretation (NY: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1978) 57.

¹⁷Guillermo de la Peña, "Ideology and Practice in Southern Jalisco: Peasants, Rancheros, and Urban Entrepreneurs," Smith 204-6, 225.

¹⁸De la Peña 210-12.

¹⁹De la Peña 210-212, 228.

²⁰De la Peña 210-12, 228.

²¹Rivera 55-56.

²²De la Peña 212, 216, 225-29.

²³De la Peña 218-19.

²⁴Rivera 54-57; Marilyn Thompson, Women of el Salvador: The Price of Freedom (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1986) 31-32; Oscar Lewis, "Family Dynamics in a Mexican Village," Anthropological Essays (New York: Random House, 1970) 281-82.

²⁵Riding 344, 358.

²⁶De la Peña 228-29.

²⁷George M. Foster, Tzintzuntzan: Mexican Peasants in a Changing World (New York/Oxford: Elsevier North Holland, 1979) 65.

²⁸Ilda Elena Grau, "Domestic Servants in Latin America," Latin American Women, ed. Olivia Harris, (London: Minority Rights Group, 1983) 17.

²⁹Riding 354.

³⁰Grace Esther Young, "The Myth of Being 'Like a Daughter,'" Latin American Perspectives, 14 (1987): 367-71.

³¹De la Peña 218.

³²Young 369-71; see also James D. Cockcroft, Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation, and the State (New York: Monthly Review P, 1983) 148-49.

³³Rivera 58-60; de la Peña 205-6.

³⁴Daisy Dwyer and Judith Bruce, introduction, in Dwyer and Bruce; for a description of these networks in one town see J. L. Olson, "Women and Social Change in a Mexican Town," Journal of Anthropological Research, 33 (1977): 75, 86.

³⁵For the political history of a rancho in Hidalgo State see Frans J. Shryer, The Rancheros of Pisaflores: The History of a Peasant Bourgeoisie in Twentieth-Century Mexico (Toronto/Buffalo/London: U of Toronto P, 1980).

³⁶De la Peña 229.

³⁷Martha Roldan, "Renegotiating the marital Contract: Intrahousehold Patterns of Money Allocation and Women's Subordination Among Domestic Outworkers in Mexico City," Dwyer and Bruce 229.

³⁸Smith 16-17; Rivera 57; Dwyer and Bruce 1-3.

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