TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

FELICITAS HERRERA

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Felicitas Herrera, was born in Pirindaro, Mexico in 1909. When she was 10 years old she came to the United States across the river between Mexico and Laredo, Texas. She came to work in Minnesota in 1927. Felicitas resides in St. Paul and has always worked as well as been active in the Guadalupanas.

In this interview she discusses her background and her life in both the United States and Mexico.

This is a transcript of a tape recorded interview in Spanish translated and edited in English to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.
This is Victor Barela interviewing Mrs. Felicitas Herrera, on August 5, 1975, at the State Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota. Mrs. Herrera lives at 284 East Baker in St. Paul. This is for the Mexican American History Project, under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society. Do I have your permission to interview you? Do you agree then that this interview will go on to the Minnesota Historical Society?

HERRERA: Yes.

BARELA: What is your full name?

HERRERA: Felicitas Lopez de Herrera. I was married twice. My first marriage was to Manuel Lopez in 1928. By coincidence, our last names were the same so my name was Felicitas Lopez de Lopez. Our marriage lasted for one year and ten months because my husband died. From our union, one son was born. I then went to live with my parents and remained with them for three and a half years. It was here in St. Paul that I met Trinidad Herrera and on February 12, 1934, we got married.

BARELA: You said that you had had a son from your first marriage. What is his name?

HERRERA: His name is Manuel Lopez.

BARELA: When was he born?


BARELA: Did you have any children from your second marriage?
I had three but they all died before we even named them. Consequently, I remained with only Manuel who now lives in Rochester, Minnesota.

What does he do for a living?

He and his wife work in a beauty shop. He has eight children, six boys and two girls. The oldest of his sons went to war in Vietnam and when he returned, he got married. He has a daughter, so I am now a great-grandmother.

What is your son's place of business called?

It is called Manuel's Beauty Salon, and it is located in the Silver Lake Shopping Center in Rochester. He has owned the shop since 1958.

Is his wife from St. Paul?

She is from Rochester so that is why they live over there.

What is her name?

Her name is Josefina Struckman de Lopez.

Where were you born, Mrs. Herrera?

I was born in Pirindaro, Michoacan, Mexico. It's a small Indian town.

Is it close to Morelia?

Yes, but it is closer to Patzcuaro. I was born in Pirindaro and we remained there for a few years. I have a few memories of the place. Then my father took us to Patzcuaro where we lived until I was ten years old.

When were you born?

On November 23, 1909. We left Patzcuaro and went to Morelia for two weeks while my mother worked things out so that we could come to the United States (passports et cetera).
HERRERA: My father had left six months before us and was in McKinney, Texas. When he sent for us, we left Morelia by train to Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, and there we remained for about a month. We had been accompanied by my father's cousin and his family, and when it came time to cross the border, he and his family crossed but we didn't. We couldn't cross the border because my mother couldn't read, so they sent us back. We returned to the family with whom we had been staying and the man of the house told us that if we wanted to cross, he would help us cross through the water, which is exactly what we did. We had been in Laredo, Texas for about a week when my father arrived to take us with him. He never took us to get our immigration papers. Anyway, we lived and worked here and were never bothered by the Immigration Department. My father who still lives, Thanks to God, and is almost ninety years old, has always been a very straight man.

BARELA: What is his name?

HERRERA: His name is Julio Lopez and mother's name was Jesusa Gomez de Lopez.

BARELA: And you say your father is ninety?

HERRERA: He will be ninety in April, 1976.

BARELA: What day in April?


BARELA: Do you remember when your mother was born?

HERRERA: My mother was born on August 22, 1890.

BARELA: Where was your father born?

HERRERA: He was born in a small town called Tiripito, Michoacan.
BARELA: Where was your mother born?

HERRERA: My mother was born in a small ranch called "Tres Mesquites, Guanajuato." Later, my grandfather, who was a man of wealth, bought a ranch in Pirindaro where he had a lot of ranch hands. It was there that my father met my mother.

BARELA: What did your father do for a living?

HERRERA: He was a farmer. He planted corn and the like. Later they got married in Pirindaro. The date of their wedding was January, 1909. Then I was born in November of that same year. We were there until four of us were born, two girls and two boys.

BARELA: What are their names?

HERRERA: Me, of course, my brother Jose Lopez, my other brother Trinidad Lopez, and my sister Maria Lopez de Molina.

BARELA: Are they all still alive?

HERRERA: Yes, all of them.

BARELA: Do they all live in St. Paul?

HERRERA: All except my brother Trinidad, who lives in St. Louis, Missouri. My father left in January to visit him, so he will be spending some time in Missouri. My father had been living with my brother Jose for some time, until he decided to go visit Trinidad. Getting back to Pirindaro, my sister and I were born there. My brother Trinidad was born in my grandfather's ranch. My grandfather's name was Dimas Gomez. Then my father came to the United States and we went to live with my mother's parents in Purandiro.
HERRERA: It was here that my brother Jose was born.

BARELA: Is Purandiro in Michoacan too?

HERRERA: Yes, my father returned from California and we were again reunited and we went to live in Patzcuaro until I was ten years old. Then in January, 1920, we came to the United States. My father went to get us in Laredo, Texas.

BARELA: How did you know where to meet?

HERRERA: My mother had informed him that we would meet him there. My father was still under the impression that we were in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, because he knew that his cousin Librado Lopez had crossed into Laredo, Texas but that we weren't able to cross. Anyway, my father talked to his cousin and then found out where he could find us. Then my father picked us up and took us to a hotel and we were all together again. My father then found a way for us to get to San Antonio and from there we took a streetcar to Waco, Texas. Since my father had been working for the streetcars and he had some passes, we used them to get to McKinney. My grandfather and two of my father's cousins were already living in McKinney, which is about thirty miles from Dallas. We lived in McKinney, Melisse, Farmsville, and Denton, many of them small towns, where we picked cotton.

In 1926, there was a terrible rain storm and all the cotton was destroyed. The owner of the ranch where we had been working told my father that it would be best if he moved on and found a job elsewhere. Then we moved to Seymour, a small town in West Texas, where my father again found a job picking cotton.
HERRERA: While there, my father met a man who told him about all the jobs in Minnesota and that interested my father very much. We returned to McKinney and then my father decided that we would come to Minnesota. So on we went and soon we were in Fort Worth where he signed a contract for all of us to come to work in Minnesota. This occurred in 1927.

BARELA: Did you come to work in the beet fields?

HERRERA: Yes. That year we worked in Round Lake which is close to Worthington. When harvest time was over, we lived in Worthington. In February, 1928, my father decided we would go to Chicago, where he had a cousin.

BARELA: What did your father and uncle do there?

HERRERA: They worked with the railroad. In November of that same year, I met and married my first husband. He was the foreman of the railroad. We were very happy for that year and ten months that we were married. Then he died.

BARELA: Did he have an illness or was it a sudden death?

HERRERA: He became ill and no one could cure him.

BARELA: Was he very young?

HERRERA: Yes. I was twenty-one when I was widowed so I went back to live with my family, where I remained for three and a half years.

BARELA: Was this in Chicago?
HERRERA: Yes, but after my husband's death my family and I went to work in the beet fields in Michigan. Later, we returned to West Chicago and in 1932, we came to St. Paul. When we first came to Minnesota, we went to Chaska to work in the beet fields, because that was where the factory was. From Chaska we went to Belle Plaine to work in a farm and from there we returned to Chicago. The reason for our going back to Chicago was that my brother Jose and his family were living there and since we are a closely knit family, we wanted to be together. In 1933, we came back to St. Paul and we brought him and his family with us.

BARELA: Did you always travel by train?

HERRERA: No, my father had bought a car so we travelled by car wherever we went. When we returned in 1933, we went to work in the farms in Belle Plaine. During the winter, we came to live in St. Paul. From then until 1940, we would go work in the farms and return to St. Paul for the winter. The small towns in which we worked were Belle Plaine, Jordan, Stewart, Fairfax, Hector and Bird Island. Then we decided to remain in St. Paul. In 1938, my husband was working with the streetcars in St. Paul, but my father was unemployed and he wanted to go work in the beet fields in Montana so off we went. My husband left his job in order to go. We stayed in Montana for a year only and returned to work in Hector, Minnesota. While there, I became deathly ill and my husband took me to a hospital where I remained for six months.

BARELA: What were you sick of?
Well, at first I didn't know except for the fact that my body ached all over and I was in pain. Finally, it was discovered that I had a tumor and it was removed. This occurred in 1939, and ever since then I have felt perfectly well. I didn't work in 1939 or 1940 because I was convalescing. In 1941, my husband began to work with the Swift Packing company and so we did not return to work in the beef fields.

When did he begin to work with the company?

He began in 1940, and worked with them until 1963 when he retired.

What was his job at the company?

He was a butcher. In 1949, he had a terrible accident, where he fell at the company plant, and was hurt pretty badly. He was operated on in 1950, but he never did recover completely.

Did he hurt his back?

Yes, he broke his spinal cord. From 1950 until 1958 he worked on and off with the company. From 1958 until 1963, he did not work. The company was paying his salary and hoping that he would completely recover from his injury, but he never did. Since he never did, he had to retire, and in 1969, he died. In 1942, I began to work at Armour's Packing Company and I worked on and off for two and a half years. On December 3, 1945, I began to work with the Swift Packing Company and on November 29, 1969, the company closed its plant so I lost my job and started receiving my pension. I was sixty at the time and aside from collecting my retirement, I was receiving my husband's, since he had died in June of that same year. I received my husband's pension until I became sixty-five and then I started to receive Social Security.
BARELA: Do you remember your life as a youngster in Mexico?

HERRERA: Yes.

BARELA: Was it a happy life?

HERRERA: Well, I have always been a happy person so my childhood was also very happy. I have always looked towards the future for my own well being and I have never liked the idea of having others worry about me. I have always like to work things out by myself.

BARELA: Was your family rich or poor?

HERRERA: We were very poor. Before I left Mexico, I used to go to the market place to sell tortillas which my mother had made. We had to do this in order to survive. In 1918, there was a plague which struck Mexico and killed a lot of people. At our home, everyone got sick except my grandparents and me. We took care of the rest of my family so they could recover.

BARELA: What would happen to your family?

HERRERA: They would become very feverish, lose consciousness, and hemorrhage through the nose.

BARELA: Were there any physicians to help out?

HERRERA: No.

BARELA: What could you give them?

HERRERA: We used remedies which some people would give us. Everyone is our family was cured except for my mother's brother Dionicio, who died while only twenty years of age. I remember that he was sitting and I was combing his hair when he passed away. At that time since there were so many dead people, the corpses would be picked up in carts pulled by oxen and then just dumped in a ditch in the cemetery.
None of them could get a decent burial. Well, we hid my cousin's body in a "petate" and quietly sneaked him off to the cemetery, where we gave him a decent burial.

Did you have a mass for him?

No, it was impossible because I tell you that there were too many dead people. Another reason was that the priests were sick themselves so they couldn't say any masses. During this time the revolution was still going on and there were a lot of people fighting. Once the revolutionaries came to the town where we lived and they began to fight. At that time I was selling tortillas at the market place. I remember that the people became extremely alarmed.

Where did this happen?

In Patzcuaro. We were a poor family but we lived comfortably. My father has always been a very hard worker and a good provider. One thing which we always had more than enough of was food. But when my father became ill with the sickness that struck Mexico, my grandfather had to sell everything and when my father was feeling better he decided to come to the United States. He brought with him the little money that my grandfather had saved when he sold his stock. After six months of being in the states he sent for us and that's when we came to the United States.

Did your father participate in the Revolution?

No, because in those times there was no draft in Mexico and so those that fought were volunteers. Now there is a draft just like here.

Did you see the troops and fighting in Patzcuaro?
HERRERA: Yes.

BARELA: Did the young girls have to hide from the revolutionaires in Patzcuaro?

HERRERA: Yes, we lived on land that belonged to a very wealthy woman and on her land the government troops had their headquarters, so none of the forces against the government would be able to come into the town. The troops that were fighting against the government were led by Ines Chavez Garcia, a very famous man. Though he was pretty small in stature, he was a very brave man and he had a lot of people fighting on his side. We were very lucky that nothing happened to us, but I suppose that it was because of the government headquarters. While my father was in the United States he began to think things out very carefully and decided that he didn't want his children to grow in an atmosphere of fright, robbery, etc.; in Mexico so that's when he made up his mind to bring us over here.

BARELA: While your father was in the United States, did you continue to sell your tortillas?

HERRERA: Yes, because we didn't have anything. At first, my mother would receive a daily allowance from the rich lady that owned the land where we lived. The money that the lady would give my mother had been sent to the lady by my father so that my mother would always have some income. So the lady distributed the money to my mother as she saw fit, but it was never enough so we had to do something else to bring in money. That's when I suggested to my mother that we make tortillas and I would sell them at the market place, which we did.
HERRERA: I remember that I used to carry my four year old sister around with me, especially when I had to go buy the corn so that my mother could make the tortillas for the following day. We did this until my father sent for us. Then when we came to the United States we went to pick cotton and by the time I was fourteen, I was the one who had complete charge of the house duties. I would rise at three in the morning and grind the corn, make the tortillas and then go out and pick cotton. All the cooking that I know, I learned from my mother.

BARELA: Have you always worked?

HERRERA: Yes.

BARELA: Did you ever go to school?

HERRERA: No, and neither did my brothers or sister. My sister Maria does not know how to read. I know I make a lot of mistakes in writing, but it's understandable. The reason I never went to school here was that my father did not believe that girls should go to school. While I was in Mexico, I went to school but just for six weeks. Aside from not going to school, I never learned English. My parents also prevented me from making friends so that also affected me. When I started working with the packing company, I got unbelievable jobs, but that was because I didn't know any English.

BARELA: What type of work did you do at the company?

HERRERA: I cut meat, packed pigs feet in jars, turned smoked hams, and worked with frozen meats without knowing any English. When I worked at Swift's, the woman foreman like me a lot. I consider her a person who ranks real high in my book. I learned to operate very complicated machinery.
HERRERA: What I did to learn was to watch someone else do it and then I would be able to do it on my own. I think that even though I was small in stature, because most of the women who worked there were very big, I did a very good job. In the twenty-four years that I was there I worked with my hands. When I retired, the superintendent called me and told me that they had been very satisfied with all my work, that I had a very good record. After I retired, which was in November of 1969, I decided that I didn't want to work anymore, so I could spend more time around the house. This lasted only a short while because pretty soon a butcher who used to work at Swifts and who was not working at a small meat market on Concord Street came by my house and asked me to work for him. After much debate, I decided I would work part-time for two dollars an hour. The reason I couldn't work for more hours was due to the fact that I was receiving my husband's pension. Sometime later, a union representative came around and talked to me and when he found out that I was not earning as much money as I should, he made them raise my salary to $3.65. After some years, the market moved to Minneapolis and I continued to work for them, but now, I was earning $4.00 an hour. I finally quit working in July of 1974, and they hired somebody else. I used to make 400 pizzas in eight hours and the girl who replaced me could not handle the job so they had to do away with it.

BARELA: What was the name of the company you used to work for?

HERRERA: Concord Distributor. It is located on Como and 38th Street.

BARELA: Do they distribute to the grocery stores?

HERRERA: Yes, they distribute meat. While I was with them, they used to distribute meat and pizzas. They distribute to six stores here and two in Duluth.
HERRERA: In October, Sister Giovanni called me and asked me to go work for her. Since I had made sufficient income for the year, I told her that I would, but that I didn't want her to pay me what I would be earning for the remaining months of the year until the following year. I didn't want to cheat the government, so she agreed to distribute my income from the last three months of the year in the months beginning with the new year.

BARELA: What kind of work do you do for Sister Giovanni?

HERRERA: I work with ceramics.

BARELA: Do you make them yourself or do you help someone?

HERRERA: We make them. Right now there are only four of us working there, but there are times when there are five or six women working. We make the molds, we remove them, we cut them, clean them, fire them, paint them and fire them again, and then they are ready to be sold.

BARELA: Is there a store there to sell the ceramics?

HERRERA: No, Sister Giovanni takes them to churches to sell them.

BARELA: They are very colorful, aren't they?

HERRERA: Yes, we make hundreds of all these things. Eventually, I decided that I would like to continue working for her. She began to pay me my backpay as soon as the new year started until we finally squared things away. I really enjoy doing this type of work.

BARELA: When you came to St. Paul, were there any families which you had already met?

HERRERA: No, I met them all here around October of 1933. My father rented a house on Indiana Court. We lived there all winter and then we went to work in the fields. In February of 1934, I married my second husband so each family went on his own to work.
HERRERA: In October of 1934, we returned to St. Paul and my husband rented a home for us on Conway Street in the East Side. In 1935, we all lived around the same neighborhood in the West Side, close to Robert Street.

BARELA: So all this time you worked?

HERRERA: Yes. I started working at the age of eleven in the fields together with my brother who was nine. My father worked in a separate place.

BARELA: What crops did you pick?

HERRERA: Cotton, onions, tomatoes, string beans, sweet potatoes, peanuts (in Texas). In Minnesota, we just worked in the beet fields at first and later with potatoes, and onions. We always worked with our hands. In Michigan, we worked with pickles, string beans, cabbage, and corn.

BARELA: Did you enjoy doing this?

HERRERA: Before I got married I really enjoyed it because I have always liked to work. When working really became hard for me was when my first husband became ill. I used to leave home to go to work at four in the morning and would return at ten at night. My mother would take care of my husband and son during the day. Many times I would just sleep for an hour so this period of my life was very rough. The following year was very sad for me because I was a widow and even though I was living with my family, life was not the same. Then I met my second husband, but I just couldn't think of getting married a second time. I have good memories of my first husband. Never did he get upset with me for anything.

BARELA: So your relationship with your first husband was a very happy one.

HERRERA: Yes. He used to say that I was a very good wife, but I also say that he was a very good husband.
I do admit that I was a good housewife but that was because I was used to it and I never found it troublesome to have to do it for my husband. We lived with my in-laws, and my father-in-law was very good to me.

What was your father-in-law's name?

His name was Felipe Lopez

Did your mother-in-law live at this time?

Yes, her name was Felipa Lopez. When my husband took me to live with his parents, he told them that my services were only for him, not for anyone else. He told them that if I wanted to do anything for them, it was my perogative but that no one could force me to do anything but him. Well, since I enjoyed housework and since my mother-in-law was kind of fed up with it (she never had any daughters so she always had to do everything all by herself) I decided that I was going to take over the kitchen. Every day, my husband would bring his father and brothers home to eat and sometimes my father-in-law would ask me if he could bring some friends over to eat with us. I would always tell him that I was more than glad to set a few more plates for his friends. My husband never minded that I did this.

My father-in-law was very proud of me and cared for me quite a bit. So you see, I was very happy during the time that my husband was alive. When my husband died, I had no choice but to go to work in the fields.

How many brothers did your husband have?

He had three brothers whose names were Rosalio, Ustasio and Tomas. My father-in-law died in 1930, a short time before my husband.

Did your father-in-law die in Texas?

No, he had gone to Mexico to spend his vacations and died over there.
HERRERA: A short time later my husband died, and my mother-in-law went to live with her other sons in Ohio, and I went to live with my parents. I remember that my mother-in-law wanted me to go live with her in Ohio, but my mother thought that it would be best if I returned to my family. So, when I returned home, I took on the same obligations that I had before I had been married. After I remarried, I was again under the obligations of my husband, so I never really knew what it was like to be free until now.

BARELA: Which families were already in St. Paul when you arrived?

HERRERA: The Saucedo's (Ramiro's father), Rangel, the family of Bernardino Ortega, Cirilo Cervantes, Arturo Coronado, Agustin Rodriques, Jorge Prado, Mr. Llanes, Florentino Hernandez, Cirilo Rocha, Manuel Martinez, and his sons Antonio and Espirion Martinez, Jorge Galvan and others.

BARELA: Did everybody live in the same vicinity?

HERRERA: Yes.

BARELA: Was it called the West Side?

HERRERA: Yes.

BARELA: How did you get to know all these people?

HERRERA: Mr. Rancisco Rangel was our neighbor. Mr. Leonzo Morales lived in the same house which happened to be a two story house. Mr. Eutemio, I can't recall his last name, and his family and Mr. Nicho Morales and his family lived in the same house that we did. Mrs. Rangel lived right across the street from us and then Mr. Coronado lived next to her. Ramiro Saucedo's father lived around the corner.

BARELA: What street was this on?
HERRERA: The street where Ramiro's father lived on was Eaton Street. The homes were very close together. We used to live on Indiana Courts at the time.

BARELA: Did someone come and introduce himself to you when you arrived?

HERRERA: Mr. Rangel, who was a wonderful person, did. Mr. Urbano Zamora also did. We also met a lot of people at parties, dances, dinners, baptisms, etc. Aside from that we would meet others through our friends. In 1943, Mrs. Rodriguez, Mrs. Cruz, and I began to take a picture of the Virgin from home to home. We belonged to the Guadalupanas and Mrs. Rodriguez called and asked me if I would like to help her. I told her that if she showed me I would and she did. She used to pray just beautifully and it was because of her that I learned to pray. I did know some prayers that my mother had taught us, because she brought us up in the Catholic faith. I had to ask my husband for special permission to join the Guadalupanas because he did not like the idea of coming home and not finding me around. He finally consented and I was able to participate more in the Society.

BARELA: When did this idea of taking the Virgin from place to place originate?

HERRERA: About the 15 of November of 1946. We would go in a procession and sing and pray and go to one home one night and then to another the following night and so on. It was kind of similar to a "Posada." We would ask the people if they would give us permission to come into their homes and say the rosary. At the end of each Our Father and ten Hail Marys, we would sing a hymn and do this continuously until the rosary was over. I think these hymns are beautiful so we still continue to have the same practice as before.

BARELA: Are there five hymns?
HERRERA: Yes. If you would like, you could come another day and listen to a tape that we have on the rosary. In later years, my husband helped me to carry out the tradition of taking out the Virgin. At this time my husband was already sick, but he would still get up to participate in the procession.

BARELA: Would all the families get together for the procession? How long would they last?

HERRERA: At first they lasted two weeks and then three. When my husband started, we would go on for the whole month, day after day. When my husband died, it lasted for fifty-three days. In 1973, it lasted for fifty-three days too. Last year, I had to start a lot later because of the problem of transportation. Therefore, a lot of people did not have the opportunity to have the Virgin in their homes. The Virgin has gone as far as Cottage Grove and also in South St. Paul.

BARELA: Do you start with the Virgin in the church?

HERRERA: No, I go to the church and the priest gives it to me. We sing a hymn and I bring it home. Then at seven O'Clock I begin to take her around. I make a list of the homes to which she is going to go and then see if it is in agreement with the people. She goes to a different home each night, we pray and sing the hymns and she remains in that home till six in the evening of the following night. Then I pick her up and take her to another home.

BARELA: Do other people go with you?

HERRERA: Of course, there are just a lot of people. The homes get full. This year we are going to start on the first of October.

BARELA: Do the people call you to ask you to bring the Virgin to their homes?

HERRERA: Yes, because that way they simplify things for me.
BARELA: Do the Anglo families participate in this too?

HERRERA: Yes. There are some who have a list for me prepared in advance for the days when I don't have anyone on mine. People who especially want for the Virgin to come into their homes are those who have recently moved into a new home, or if they have a new baby, or if they have some sort of worry. These people have a lot of faith. There is a special case where a lady's son was killed and the lady could not find peace in herself. She didn't even want to go back to work so we took the Virgin into her home, and you should see her now. She has restored herself and ever since, she has found peace in herself. There is still another case of the son of this friend of mine who was going to the seminary. His name was Kevin Freyer and he asked me if I would take the Virgin into his home. The boy spoke very good Spanish but I was hesitant about saying the rosary in English. I told him that I could only do it in Spanish, to which he strongly agreed. His home was completely filled with Anglos. I remember that there was this very old couple right behind me and at the end of the rosary, the old man called me and told me that even though he did not understand a word I had said, it had all reached his heart. Would you believe that they know how to sing the hymns in Spanish? That's why I don't want for the hymns to be translated. Then Mrs. Freyer had an article printed about me in the paper. Before I knew it, Mr. Oliver Towne, the newspaper editor was calling me and informed me that a certain man wanted me to go to Mexico City to listen to the Novena for ten days. He was willing to pay for all my expenses, including a jet flight. I was left speechless for a few moments and he asked me to make a decision within an hour and call him back.
HERRERA: I just didn't know what to do. Both my son and my sister thought that it was a marvelous idea and that I should take advantage of the opportunity. My sister took me to buy a complete wardrobe, including new suitcases, and off I went. I arrived in Mexico at eleven at night and spent the night there but decided that the next morning I would go visit some friends in Morelia. After I got there I told my friend Lupe why I was in Mexico and she said she would go to Mexico City with me. I also met Tom Sexton from Sexton Printing in St. Paul, in Morelia. He happened to be a very good friend of Lupe's and went to Mexico City with us. Tom took care of getting us to a hotel and then thought it was time for him to go back to his place but I convinced him that I wanted him to stay with us, even if I had to pay for his hotel accommodations. While in the capital, Lupe called her cousin who also lived there and told her that she wouldn't be able to visit her because she was going to be spending her time with me. The cousin told her husband about it and he said that he would take me wherever I needed to go and he did. I had never met these people before and yet they were extremely nice and went out of their way to help me out. He didn't even accept a dime for his trouble. Then after some time, I suggested to Lupe that we go back to Morelia and I would assist at the Novena for the last three days over there. Anyway, it would be the same as the one in Mexico City. So we left the capitol city and went back to Morelia on the 7th. We arrived in Morelia on the 8th in the evening and I decided that I wanted to go to Patzcuaro to attend the feast of Our Lady of Good Health that day.

BARELA: What is the festival like?

HERRERA: It is a big celebration somewhat like the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City.
When we arrived at Lupe's home, she told her father the reason we were back. Since her father owned a car and used it like a taxi, Lupe asked her father not to go to work so that he could drive us to Patzcuaro. We left Morelia about ten in the morning on the evening on the 8th and on the way to Patzcuaro, a car passed us up. Well, who should be in that car but the Bishop himself! We reached Patzcuaro about 11:15 and we went to the high Mass for the feast. Who should say the Mass but the Bishop who passed us up on the road. We stayed at the Fiesta celebration for a while and then returned to Morelia because I felt kind of tired. Then for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Morelia, I prayed the rosary with the rest of the procession until we reached the entrance of the church. When one reaches the door to the church, the rosary is completed, so you can imagine the long walk we have. The street that leads to the church is divided in such a way that the cars go on the sides and the center is for the people in the procession. Before I forget, I met the man who sponsored my trip before I left and I asked him if there was anything special he wanted me to do while in Mexico. He replied that there were two favors which he hoped I would do. One was to have a Mass said for my deceased husband, myself, and my family along with all the people who went on the pilgrimages with me. The other favor was to have another Mass dedicated for the man who sponsored me, his family, and all the people in the world who don't pray, and I did. I would go to the Basilica and pray the rosary everyday. When I was in Morelia, I said the rosary in the church called San Diego. The picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe is set way in the front of the church and it is just magnificent.
BARELA: Is San Diego the Cathedral in Morelia?

HERRERA: No, it is just a church, in which the Virgin is in the center. In the cathedral, God is in the center of the altar.

BARELA: When did you make your pilgrimage to Mexico City?

HERRERA: In 1969.

BARELA: Who was the person who sponsored you?

HERRERA: Just Mr. Wonderful, because he didn't want his name mentioned. His first name is Juan but he did not want for anyone to know who he was. All that he wanted was for me to remember him in my prayers.

BARELA: Is he still alive?

HERRERA: I believe so. He used to come visit me but I haven't seen him for the past two years.

BARELA: Did he speak Spanish?

HERRERA: No, but he used to like to come and talk with me.

BARELA: Let's continue talking about the boys.

HERRERA: There have been many young boys who come to me because they feel nervous and uneasy. You could say I counsel them and they find some relief when they come to talk to me. Before they leave, they embrace me and thank me.

BARELA: Have they found out that you are a good person who can give good advice?

HERRERA: Maybe. They want to talk and let out their problems.

BARELA: What was it that made you have such a great devotion towards the Virgin?

HERRERA: I have always had her very close to me. There is a prayer which I hold very deep in my heart. It says "I have loved you ever since I was a child. I learned to love you from what I heard my mother's lips utter." My mother was a very devout Catholic and she had a great devotion for Our Lady of Guadalupe.
BARELA: What did Mrs. Rodriguez say to you to make you a part of the group that took the picture of Our Lady from home to home?

HERRERA: Both of us were members of the Guadalupanas. I guess that you could say that she found a lot of trust in me. It's hard for me to say why, but everybody knows me and everyone has a lot of trust and confidence in me. Also, whenever there were function or festivities, I was always her right hand man. Another thing was that I wanted to learn how to pray and she was the ideal person because she would pray beautifully. She encouraged me to pray a whole lot and once at a wake she told me to say the rosary, because she wanted me to say the rosary at her wake when she died. That was exactly what I did. Her sons say that every time they hear me saying the rosary, they think it is their mother saying it. Her youngest son is the one who takes me to work every day. They have all been wonderful to me.

BARELA: Did she use a book when she prayed?

HERRERA: Everything she said was through memory, just like I do it now. Once in a while I take notes but just to remember what I plan on doing.

BARELA: Did you learn all this from Mrs. Rodriguez?

HERRERA: Yes.

BARELA: It's very interesting that now there seem to be more people who participate in your pilgrimages.

HERRERA: Oh, yes. I tell you that this coming year, I will have two months to take the Virgin around, and even then, that will not be sufficient time to take it to all the people who want her in their homes. I have a lot more people now. Ramiro and Rudy Saucedo's wives would always ask me to take the Virgin to the home where they grew up and still, I take her now.
HERRERA: It's really unbelievable how the people consider it a special occasion when the Virgin comes to their homes. There are always cars and cars of people who go to participate. The people feel that since it is such a special occasion, they should have some sort of treat like coffee and cookies for those who join them. The Virgin has done wonders for me. When my second husband was still alive, he used to go off for days and run around, and he did this for a great number of years. As time went by, he realized that I did not deserve that type of life, so he decided that it was about time that he did something about it. He had always been a very religious man and knew a great deal about the church and its beliefs. Anyway, he went and prayed to the Virgin to help him get rid of his bad habits and before long, he became a different man. He wouldn't even go to the bar to buy a pack of cigarettes. The same with my son, he had many of the same bad habits as my husband but he also changed. My son had been married to a Mormon the first time he got married, and her family tried to convert him but he would not give up his Catholic faith. They had six children but since they had a rough life together, they decided to get a divorce. In later years, my son married another girl, but she was not Catholic so they just got married in a civil ceremony. They had a son first and they baptized him. While the child was being baptized, the priest told my daughter-in-law that they could get married through the Catholic church even though she wasn't Catholic, but she said she wanted to receive her Catholic training before she did anything like that. They had their second child, a girl, and the little girl was also baptized. Two weeks after that, my daughter-in-law was baptized. Then one day they called me from Rochester and told me that they were going to be married.
by the Catholic Church and wanted to know if I could attend, which I most
certainly did. My son's life changed a lot with his second wife. He be-
came a real man who had a good wife and two children and a good home.
He used to gamble quite a bit, but he soon got rid of that bad habit. The
winter after my husband died, my son called to ask what I thought of the
idea of sending his son to a Catholic school. I told him that that was
his affair and it would be best if he decided himself. He then responded
that he had a feeling that probably his deceased father had been telling him
on the previous night that he should send his son to a Catholic school.
Well, he took his son to the Catholic school and he really like it. Now
both of his children go to Catholic schools. There have been years when
the tuition has gone up very high and my son has told his children that he
will not be sending them to Catholic school anymore and instead, they will
be attending a public school. My grandson, who is now thirteen and spends
his spare time working on a farm, calls me up right away to tell me his
father's intentions. When I talk to my son about this, he says that he
tells his children that tale just to see their reaction. They just beam when
they learn that they will be going back to the Catholic school. The
thirteen year old will be attending junior high this year. My son says that
his son reminds him of me. My daughter-in-law is a very hard worker,
uses and spends her money wisely. My first daughter-in-law came from
a pretty rich family and we've always been poor so that was probably one
of their conflicts. My present daughter-in-law also comes from a very
poor family but they are just wonderfully good people. My son says that
if God were to ask him to choose some persons to be his brothers and
sisters, he would choose his in-laws, because they care for each other.
HERRERA: This devotion that I have, I will bear until I die, and I will constantly share it with everyone.

BARELA: Did you and your husband participate in other community activities?

HERRERA: Many years ago, we would put up a program with the Rangels similar to the bible story of the Prodigal Son. The story was about a very rich man who had two sons. One of them was a very good son and the other wasn't so he was the prodigal son. One day the prodigal son asked his father for his inheritance because he wanted to go off on his own. The father tried to discourage him but the son would not give in so the father gave him his share, and left the other part for the good son. The prodigal son left and went to roam around the world. Soon his money was all gone and he returned to his parents home, but both his parents were already dead. The good brother took the prodigal son into his home and he repented for what he had done. My husband would play the part of the prodigal son; my brother Jose would be the good son; I would be the mother; and Esequiel Moreno, a good friend of ours, would be the father. The people just loved watching this program.

BARELA: Was this done for a patriotic feast?

HERRERA: I don't remember what the occasion was, but it was performed at the Neighborhood House. My compadre Esequiel, who was a Baptist, told his congregation about the program and they had us go over and perform for them. The people just loved it! With the Rangels, we put up a program on the Passion of Christ, for Holy Week at church. We did this three times and everytime, it turned out beautifully.

BARELA: When did this take place?

HERRERA: In 1937, 1938, and 1940.
BARELA: Did you participate in patriotic feasts?

HERRERA: Just in the kitchen, because the Guadalupanas always took care of the cooking while others did other things. My husband and my brother did participate in the acts of some programs.

BARELA: Do you remember who the promoters of the big festivities, like the 5th of May, were?

HERRERA: I would say that the person who was the key to all the festivities was my compadre Francisco Rangel. The others who helped him were Mr. Martin Aparicio, Florentino (I don't remember his last name), Mr. Saucedo (Ramiro's father), my husband, my brother, Mr. Zamora (who moved to California many years ago and died over there), and others.

BARELA: Was there something special for Christmas?

HERRERA: Oh yes, on December 3, I finished taking the Virgin around from home to home. On the 4th the Novena starts and when they are over, the Posadas start. I don't participate in those anymore because I am too tired, and aside from that, all the time that I had been saying the rosary, I would not have a chance to go visit my son. I can't go off and leave someone else to say the rosary because the people aren't pleased. They want only me to say it. I have to take very good care of myself during the cold weather because I am very susceptible to sore throats and I don't want that to prevent me from saying the rosary, which I just love to say. When my mother died in 1965, I decided to say the rosary for her. My sister kept telling me that it would be impossible for me to say it, but I set my mind on it. I was very saddened by her death, but I felt that who would be better than me to say it for my mother? When my husband died in 1969, I said the rosary at his wake and held the Novenas at my house.
BARELA: Is the "Novenario" the rosary that is said for the deceased for nine days after his death?

HERRERA: Yes, we say the rosary and some prayers for the dead. The homes are just full of friends and relatives.

BARELA: Is the "Novenario" said at the home of the deceased?

HERRERA: Yes. A candle is lit and stays like that for the nine days. There is a rosary said every night, just like a Novena. I could never finish counting all the Novenas that I have said. Nowadays, though, I wait for the people to ask me to say the Novenas for the deceased relatives, because recently I have had experiences where I have been embarrassed because certain persons don't want me to say the rosary. A lot of people from Minneapolis also ask me to pray the rosary for their deceased relatives. My only problem is that I don't own a car and so I have to rely on people to come for me and bring me back.

BARELA: Do you like to pray and do the people like the way you pray?

HERRERA: Oh yes. People find comfort in what I say. Sometime ago, there was a close friend of mine who was at her deathbed. She had cancer and had only a few weeks to live. My friend's sister began to have her doubts about God, because of her sister's illness. I got very upset with her and told her that we all had to die at one time or another. After her sister's death, she asked me if I would say the "Novenario" for her departed sister. I told her I would, but I didn't bring up what she had told me in the past about her doubts. I do the best I can to fulfill my obligations of saying the rosary; neither snow, rain, or heat or whatever the circumstances are, prevent me from doing my duty. Once I had to walk twenty blocks during the summer heat to say the rosary at this lady's home.
Last year Mrs. Coronado was sick in the hospital and her daughter pleaded with me to take the Virgin to the Hospital to her mother. We had a few problems at first because this was the first time that anyone in that family had ever asked for the Virgin, and then I had to see if there was anyone who would give up their day with the Virgin so we could take it to Mrs. Coronado. We finally got everything straightened out but the day that we were to go we had a real bad snow storm. We were quite a few persons that showed up at a home to go to the hospital and there were only two cars to take all of us to Minneapolis. God helped us some way because all of us fit into the two small cars and when we arrived at the hospital, the head attendant told us that we had his permission to carry out our pilgrimages just like we did elsewhere. So we sang and prayed as loud as we could and there were others in the hospital who also participated with us. When my husband died, many people asked me why I continued to be so devout when my husband's life had not been spared. My response was that all of us come to this world and must also leave it at a certain time. We are here for a certain length of time only and I am not going to have doubts in God because my husband died. Even doctors who know about medicine more than anyone else die. My faith in God is still very strong and I pray that He will look upon my goodwill towards others. Up to now, I still work, take care of my house, help a lot of people, et cetera, and my health is very good.

Does your family continue to practice the language, customs, and traditions of Mexico?

Yes. My son speaks Spanish as best as he can. My daughter-in-law does not speak Spanish, but understands it a little.
HERRERA: Whenever my son and his family come to visit me, my daughter-in-law leaves us alone and tells us that both my son and myself have to have a heart to heart talk. I suppose that she is right because my son and I feel a lot better after we've talked a while. I still speak Spanish with the rest of my family. My father only speaks Spanish. We still eat a lot of Mexican food. I make beans, rice, chile (pepper), tamales, tacos, tostadas, and other things. I have my own garden, so I just gather many things from there. For the Christmas holiday, I make a lot of tamales and even sell some.

BARELA: What is it that has affected your philosophy on life or your way of living it?

HERRERA: As far as suffering is concerned, when my husband was very ill, I had the greatest tragedy in my life. For three years it was this and I could not find any peace in myself. When my first husband died, it was very quick so it wasn't as hard on me. When my mother died it was a very quick thing because she became ill at three in the morning and died at six in the afternoon. We didn't see her suffer much. But, when my second husband died, he had been ill for three years and all this time, I was dying with him.

BARELA: What made you relive or want to live after this experience?

HERRERA: After my husband died, I did not want to go or do anything. I was constantly wearing black dresses because I did not feel comfortable in anything else. I suppose that one of the things that helped me was the fact that I began to take the Virgin around from home to home again. This helped me a bit. Another thing was that I had started to work again, and this also helped me to recover. On my birthday of that same year, my brother threw a surprise party for me, and was it ever a surprise.
HERRERA: My brother explained to me that the party was not so that I could forget my husband, or that he himself did not feel anything for him, but so that I could have a new outlook on life, so that my life wouldn't be so full of sadness. For the next full year, my brother did not try to change me. He would take me to eat at his home, or bring some food to mine, and he would take me for rides but he never mentioned taking me to a dance. Then on my following birthday he took me to a dance and things began to change for me. Now I go everywhere. In 1972, I went to Mexico to visit my husband's family. They are just so good to me. I stayed over there for two months and they wanted me to stay indefinitely, but I couldn't because I'm happy here and my son lives here too. My son had also spoken to me about the fact that it was no good for me to continue living like I had been, so with time, and with the help of my family and friends, I began to change. I think that if I put all the things I mentioned together, those would be the ones which helped me recover.

BARELA: What advice would you give to the younger generation on leading a good and happy life?

HERRERA: In the case of a married couple, I would say respect for each other. There is a special case of this one couple where the husband was running around with another woman and as a result, his wife left him. She did not run off with another man or go to her family, but went to stay with his family. The man came and spoke to me and I told him that he should always remember that God gave him his wife and that he should not do things like what he had done so openly. Well, after awhile he and his wife got back together and now they are very happy.
HERRERA: As far as money is concerned, I have been able to make it very well. Many times, I wish I were very rich, but not for my benefit, instead so that I can help those that need it. I share what I have with those who need it. I do the same with my son. I save some money for him because there have times when he has needed it. I recall the once my son mentioned that he wanted to buy a camper for the family. I managed to save some money and after a few months, I told him that we should go see them. We wound up buying one, my son and his wife had saved $700 and I put up the rest. I told him that it was my gift to them, because I would rather see them enjoy something while I'm still alive. You should see how proud he is of it, and my daughter-in-law is something else. That woman takes care of her family and her possessions beautifully. She tries to please me so much. They are very happy and that makes me feel very happy.

BARELA: Mrs. Herrera, I would like to thank you for a most wonderful interview and for informing me about so much. Thank you. We really appreciate it.