TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

CARLOS AND MARCELINA R. URVINA

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

Carlos Urvina, was born in Piedad, Michoacan, Mexico in 1922. He came to the United States, at the age of eighteen, under a railroad contract. He has also worked for the street car company and for Mason Booth.

Marcelina R. Urvina, was born in Dallas, Texas in 1918. She came to Minnesota at the age of twelve and has worked in both the rural and urban areas of the state.

The Urvinas discuss the importance of education and being good parents. Mr. Urvina talks about his family history, employment history and the beauty of knowing two languages. Mrs. Urvina discusses her family history, personal experiences and the Mexican customs still practiced in their home.

This is an English translation of the tape recorded interview in Spanish. The original cassette recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.
INTERVIEW WITH CARLOS URVINA AND MARCELINA R. URVINA

JULY 8, 1975

INTERVIEWERS: VICTOR BARELA AND GRANT MOOSBRUGGER

Barela: This interview is with Carlos Urvina and his wife Marcelina R. Urvina. They live at 2108 5th Avenue North, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55405. The interviewers are: Victor Barela and Grant Moosbrugger. This interview is for the project of the Minnesota State Historical Society. We will start with Sr. Carlos Urvina.

Urvina: Where were you born?

Barela: In Piedad, Michoacan, Mexico. November 11, 1922.

Urvina: Who were your parents?

Barela: Jesus Urvina and Soledad Avila.

Urvina: And the rest of your family?

Barela: One sister but she died, there were six brothers. One brother died. There are five of us left. One lives in Mexico, two in California, and two of us here in Minnesota.

Urvina: Mrs. Urvina, where were you born?

Mrs. Urvina: I was born in Dallas, Texas, February 1, 1918.

Urvina: Who were your parents?

Mrs. Urvina: My father was Eligio Mora and my mother Carolina Tobias. My father was from Zamora, Michoacan and my mother was from Coahuila, Tamaulipas.

Barela: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mrs. Urvina: I had five brothers and four sisters. All of the girls are living, and all except my oldest brother who died in Dallas, Texas.

Barela: Do they all live in Dallas, Texas?

Mrs. Urvina: No, Juan Silva, lives in St. Paul. Rafael Rangel and Jose live in Minneapolis. My sister Jesusita, the oldest, me, Maria and Esther all live in Minneapolis. Aurora, lives in California.
Barela: How many children do you have?
Mr. Urvina: We have five. Susana Soledad, Leonor, Cynthia, Anita, and Victoria.

Barela: How many are married?
Mr. Urvina: Three are married and two are still at home.

Moosbrugger: What are the last names of the married ones?
Mr. Urvina: Leonor Aguirre, Susana Reyes, Anita Saline.

Moosbrugger: Do they have children?
Mr. Urvina: Only Anita. We have one grandchild.

Barela: So you were born in Mexico. How long did you live in Piedad, your home town?
Mr. Urvina: Until I was 18 years old. Then I came under government contract as a "bracero." Here I met my wife and I fixed my papers to stay here.

Barela: Did you come with the "braceros" to work?
Mr. Urvina: I came to work with the Chicago Burlington. From there I came to St. Paul. We worked in So. St. Paul, La Crosse, Wisconsin, Winona, all over that area.

Barela: What kind of work did you do?
Mr. Urvina: I worked for the railroad.

Barela: Did you then come directly to Minnesota?
Mr. Urvina: Yes, we came through Laredo, and then directly to Minnesota.

Barela: So you came to work?
Mr. Urvina: Yes, I came to work in the railroad under contract.

Barela: How much did you earn?
Mr. Urvina: I don't remember if it was 38 or 40 cents an hour at the railroad. But after I fixed my papers I left the railroad and started to work for the Transit Company in Minneapolis. I worked there for twelve years. Later I worked at the junk yard and now I'm with Mason Booth.

Barela: Mrs. Urvina, you were born in Texas. How did you come to Minnesota?
Mrs. Urvina: Yes, I was born in Texas. My mother was a widow. My oldest brother and my sister Jesusita, stayed in Texas while we came to work in the beet fields. I was twelve years old when we came under contract to work in Mankato. At that time there were companies that brought the people from Texas to other parts of the country to work in the beet fields. My mother thought we could make more money by having the whole family work. At that time they brought us in the train. When we got here they put us in houses and then they would separate us into different groups to go to different farms. We were assigned to go to a farm in St. Clair, Minnesota. My mother and five of us children. I was the oldest at twelve years old. The farmer gave us twenty-five acres to work. I worked the beets until I was 16 years old, and then I got married. I thought that if I got married things would be better, but it was worse. I had my oldest daughter, Patry, and my son Alfonso. When I married Carlos, he raised my children. My boy was seven years old and my little girl was ten years old. This was in 1943.

Barela: So, how old were you when you first got married?

Mrs. Urvina: I was 16. That was in 1934.

Barela: What was your first husband's name?

Mrs. Urvina: Pedro Alvarez. He was from Veracruz.

Barela: Does he live in the United States?

Mrs. Urvina: No, he died of a heart attack about a year and a half after we were married. So I was a widow at a very early age. After being a widow for about two years, I married Alfonso Orosco, but he got into trouble and landed in Stillwater and I was left carrying a baby which I had later. Alfonso was told that he would be freed if he would go to Mexico or else he would be on probation. But since he was from Mexico, he decided to go back to Mexico. I did not want to go back to Mexico because I had my
Mrs. Urvina: children so I stayed with my mother. I lived alone for seven years. Then I met my husband, Carlos, in Minneapolis.

Moosbrugger: At that time did your mother lived in Minneapolis, too?

Mrs. Urvina: Yes, my mother lived here. We all did except for the first year that we came to St. Clair. We did not want to work or live in the farm, so, we came to the Twin Cities. But they did not want us here because they said we were not residents, and that they could not help us with anything; that we would have to go back to where we came from. We did not what to do. We went to the relief office because we did not have anything, and we needed help. They did not want to help us. They came at night and put all of our things into a truck and took us back and left us there. And then we came back. My mother said that they had no right. My mother was very energetic. When she wanted to do something, she did it. She was not afraid. She did not speak English, but she could still make herself understood. We came to St. Paul at night and she insisted that we stay here so her children could go to school to learn to read and write. She did not want them to be like her. She decided that we would stay here and no one would throw us out. We came to St. Paul and we lived on Grove Street near the capital. My mother took the children to school. We liked St. Paul, but we moved to Minneapolis to see if it was better. And this is where we stayed. She died eight years ago.

Barela: Did you go to school here in Minnesota?

Mrs. Urvina: No, I only went to 5th grade in Dallas, Texas. And then I started to work in the beet fields. Later I was ashamed to go back because I was so much older. And also because I knew they would put me back to 3rd or 4th grade. I should have gone back. My brothers went to school here. They went to Blaine School, Grant School, and then to Franklin and North High.
Mrs. Urvina: My brother Juan and Jose graduated from North High. But since my sisters were older, they did not get a chance to go to school. They had to work.

Barela: Mr. Urvina, were you educated in Mexico?

Mr. Urvina: No, I did not have any schooling. I went for two or three months only. So, I did not learn anything.

Barela: How did you come to be interested in working as a "bracero"?

Mr. Urvina: My will to work. We did not have much need but never the less I came. Also because the dollar was worth much more. Others are still coming because of the value of the dollar.

Barela: Were you thinking of going back to Mexico?

Mr. Urvina: Yes, but after I met my wife I decided to stay.

Barela: Have you lived in Minneapolis since then?

Mrs. Urvina: Yes, we have lived here all this time. Thirty years.

Barela: Did you buy a home right away?

Mr. Urvina: No, we rented for a while and then we bought a house in 1958, on Morgan.

Barela: Since you came to Minnesota you have worked here, then?

Mr. Urvina: The whole time, thirty years. In the thirty years that I have been here, there were only two months that I was out of work. When the street cars stopped running and they took out all the rails and replaced the street cars with buses. In the whole thirty years only two months out of work. We have had a good life.

Barela: When you settled in Minneapolis, was there a Mexican community that you could rely on?

Mr. Urvina: No, there wasn't anything like that. There is supposed to be a program now to help the Mexicans, but I don't think there is one. Unless, maybe, we have not investigated it. Some are on welfare, but I don't think there is a special program like that for the Mexican people.
Mrs. Urvina: The first program that I heard of was at the University for students because we were interested in having our daughter Anita go to college. We have a community council and through Metty Clark, who works at the University, I belong to a program where I can go and display whatever we have. About a month ago we had an open house and I took all my Mexican things and put them on display for people to admire. I also tell the people about them. We don't have too many Mexicans and the ones that we have are scattered all over. We don't know. Maybe because we are not informed.

Mr. Urvina: But regardless of whether there is help or not, I'd much rather work for my money, instead of having the government help me. As long as I am in good health. If one is sick it is different, but as long as I am healthy I want to sweat and earn my money.

Barela: When you first came to the United States did you have any trouble coming into the country?

Mr. Urvina: No, not really because we were coming to work for the railroad, laying tracks, so we did not have any problems. After I married I left the railroad and worked twelve years for the streetcar company, laying rails, but it wasn't any problem learning the work.

Barela: What was your greatest personal problem when you came to the United States?

Mr. Urvina: It was not because we did not have enough to eat in Mexico, but sometimes you wonder what it is like in other places. They would say that you could earn a lot of money here, but it wasn't true. The only problem was that you spend the money that you earned before going back to Mexico. You can always earn money where ever you work. Like I said before, because of the difference in money we would think that 100 dollars would be about 500 pesos and in those days you could buy a ranch with 500 pesos. And this was the
Mr. Urvina: problem, because we would go back to Mexico and spend the money, and then come back to earn some more money. A lot of money was spent paying for transportation to and from Mexico.

Barela: So the riches were not like people thought?

Mr. Urvina: No, it is difficult for a poor person to become rich, unless he gets help from someone.

Barela: How did your family react when you went back with money from the States?

Mr. Urvina: The same as when I left, because we did not take much. We did not have much to take. We would take 200 or 300 dollars and the little that I would send them, fifteen to twenty dollars a month, because we earned about twenty-five to thirty dollars per week. Even when things were cheaper, we did not have much to spare. Those that would accumulate $2,000. or $3,000. dollars probably did not eat or drink. Those who had a wife in Mexico, once they got there they had to buy clothes for the children, so they would end up with nothing. It is still pretty much the same thing now. Don't think that they take a lot of money, for whatever they take, they already owe to the people that helps them, and after paying, they are broke again. It is better for the man who stays in Mexico to work the land and stay with his family. Those people who come in illegally are the only ones that save any money, and that is because they are afraid to go out where they can spend their money. But when they go home the money goes fast, because they may owe a lot of money, if a child gets sick, paying debts here and there. Of course, some come because they don't have a job, and others leave their jobs just to come here because of the value of the dollar. This is the problem of the dollar. If the money was worth the same, they would not have that problem. There are only very few people that can go back to Mexico and make something of themselves with the money
Mr. Urvina: they earn here, which is not much.

Mrs. Urvina: The ones that are coming now are the young men. A lot of the boys that were little when we knew them have now grown up and they come up here to work and then go back. Some of them stay here and get married. Once they have lived here, they get accustomed to things and they don't want to go back because they don't like it. Even my husband Carlos, when we go to Mexico, thinks three weeks is too long for him because he is so anxious to get back to work. He doesn't like it anymore.

Mr. Urvina: That is because you get use to working all the time. But no matter where you go, you can live comfortably if you have a job. The farms of Mexico, are pretty much the same thing as here. The work is temporary like it is here.

Barela: When you came from Texas, to work in the beets, was it hard work?

Mrs. Urvina: Yes, beet work is very hard, especially for the children. The whole family works at the same thing. The children are not given different jobs from the others. The first time we came they gave us good housing, but after that it got worse. At first we even had a stable for the horses and cattle. There was a division and we lived on the other side. My mother would cook for the whole family. At that time it was very hard work. I don't know what it is like now. We worked in the onions in Northfield, Minnesota. In between the beets we would go and pick radishes, green beans, potatoes and onions. We went from farm to farm. I used to dress myself as a boy, and worked with a group called The One Hundred Men. I would work with them without their knowing that I was a girl. I would put my hair under my hat and they assumed I was a boy. One day they found out I was a girl and my mother would not let me go to work with them anymore, because they were all men. We had to work, and the rows were so long, and sometimes we would
Mrs. Urvina: Some itchy dirt, "pit dirt", and we would itch so badly from the dirt and the sweat. It was very hard work.

Barela: What year did you come to Minnesota?

Mrs. Urvina: We came to Minnesota in 1930. We went back to Texas after finishing the work here, but we came back in 1931. Like my husband said, we just worked. We did not have anything to take back with us. Because you had to buy your own hoe, your clothes, shoes, hat and food until you could start work. By the time we got our checks to return, we would owe so much for the food and clothing. As I recall we did not take much money back. We always came back the next year. When we got back to Texas we started working in the cotton fields. And that is where we would stay.

Barela: Did you get credit from the farmer?

Mrs. Urvina: Yes, the farmer would go and open a credit account for us. We would take out anything we wanted to. At one of the stores, like a company store.

Mr. Urvina: By the time you received your check for your work, you would owe so much money, especially for the days when it rained and we did not work. They would have to pay for their food, so whatever you were left with was probably about two or three hundred dollars at the most. Sometimes this would not be enough money to get back with.

Mrs. Urvina: But we were contracted, so that even if it rained, it was work that had to be done by a certain date. Because under contract we would have to complete certain work whether it rained or shined, and if you did not finish they would bring six or seven men to finish the work and that money came out of your earnings.

Moosbrugger: Would you work with a group of families or friends who would seek out work for you, or would the farmer do this contracting with you as individuals?

Mrs. Urvina: There was a Mexican man from Texas who would do the contracting for us and
Mrs. Urvina: I suppose they would pay him to contract the people.

Moosbrugger: Would he bring a large group of people?

Mrs. Urvina: Oh, yes, from Dallas, Texas, I used to know a lot of people who would come to the sugar beets.

Moosbrugger: Would he sign them up individually or by groups of families and relationships?

Mrs. Urvina: Individually, we had our own. Each farmer had their own family, one family. We would go together to Montgomery, Minnesota and we would pick corn. I picked corn in the fields too. And believe me it is hot when you have to walk behind a truck, corn-husking and throwing it in the truck and trying to keep up with it. But my sister and I did it. We had to earn our living and money to help our mom and daddy, so we had to do it. It was hard. Then we worked in a factory from 3: p.m. to 1: a.m. They would let the Mexican people work only that shift. Green Giant Company, in LeSuer. We separated the good corn from the bad corn. They had a big binder going. You would get all wet because you would have to stand and wash the corn. We wore big rubber boots and stood in water was up to our knees. My sister and I would get out at 2: or 3: o'clock in the morning because we would have to work overtime. The other shift came in after we were off. We also picked peppers, the type they use to add to the corn, "Mexi-green", we used to cut that. If you were not careful, your hands would get all hot, so we used rubber gloves. If you did not have rubber gloves, well, that was too bad. That was hard work at that time, I don't know how it is now. I worked harder than my husband did.

Mr. Urvina: It is not possible now, because there have been a lot of changes and they pay a lot more money because everything is so high, of course. But in some areas I don't think they pay them well.
Mrs. Urvina: And this is why my mother said that there had to be something better for our family than doing that kind of work, and she was not going any place because no one was going to tell her she had to move out of Minneapolis or St. Paul. She was angry.

Barela: So they kicked you out at night and you came back on a bus or what?

Mrs. Urvina: No, she paid a man who owned a truck to bring us back.

Barela: Where did you live then?

Mrs. Urvina: We lived on 5th Street.

Barela: From 5th Street they took you to Mankato?

Mrs. Urvina: Yes.

Barela: Who took you?

Mrs. Urvina: I don't know who it was. All I know is that it was an "Anglo" in a truck and he said that we had to move and that he would pick us up and take us. We did not know what to do. I was very young and my mother could not speak English. They put us on a truck and took us back to the county we belonged to because this county could not help us.

Barela: So you did not know who the person was and who he worked for?

Mrs. Urvina: No, he said he was sent. My mother was angry and she said that we would be going back because we were born here and she felt she did not want this kind of life for us. She had worked in Texas preparing food for the railroad workers. She also worked in the field, picked cotton. She thought that if we came here it would be a different life, but the beets were much harder. We could not go back to Texas. She paid a man to bring us in a truck to St. Paul. And after they threw us out, my mother wanted us to stay here and go to school, because in the farms we would miss a lot of school. After they threw us out she would not give up and insisted that we come back, but this time she would not ask them to help us, instead she
Mrs. Urvina: went to work herself. She worked at a pie factory. She worked in the laundry and every place she could find work. And my brothers went to school.

Barela: So with your family it was only work. You did not have time to celebrate any of the holidays?

Mr. Urvina: We did celebrate, but work was always first.

Mrs. Urvina: We did not celebrate. We couldn't.

Barela: Did you go to church?

Mrs. Urvina: We went to church. The first church that we went to was in St. Paul. The priest spoke a little Spanish and he did help the people. I don't know the name of the church or the priest, but he had a little room where he had tables full of clothing that people donated to him. We went and he gave us clothing for my mother and us. We would walk across the bridge to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in the West Side.

Moosbrugger: When did you move from St. Paul to Minneapolis?

Mrs. Urvina: 1935.

Moosbrugger: What was the reason for your moving? Was it because of your work or what?

Mrs. Urvina: No, I don't know. Maybe it was because my stepfather started working for the railroad here in Minneapolis and maybe it was because of the transportation. We did not have a car. So we lived on 5th Street by where the Wholesome Bread Company is now. It was a Mexican "barrio" (neighborhood) then. We were all together.

Barela: About how many people lived there?

Mrs. Urvina: There must have been about 15 or 20 families there. We all lived there. It was a red brick building. We lived in those apartments. It was very hard at that time to find housing for the Mexican people, especially if you had young children. There are still some red brick apartments there, and every time that I would look at them I would envy the people that lived
Mrs. Urvina: there, because they looked so nice. There were also some smaller homes. Now it is nothing. But at that time I envied them. There was a Jewish man who owned a store, his name is David Steinberg, and he would help out the Mexican people. When we first got here, he didn't even know us and we went to him to ask for credit. He said, "Sure", but when you get work, be sure to pay me. The first job my father got he went and paid him right away.

Barela: Was there some one that helped you, Mr. Urvina, when you first came?

Mr. Urvina: No, not really. Like I told you I left the railroad and went to work for the street car company the next day.

Barela: When did you leave the railroad?

Mr. Urvina: After I got married. Before this I lived in St. Paul, but after we were married we came to Minneapolis. This is when I started to work here, 1937.

Mrs. Urvina: He left his job after the street cars stopped running.

Mr. Urvina: I only worked a year and six months for the railroad. Since they paid more money in the street car, I left the railroad because they were paying 2¢ more at the street car company plus they also gave you free transportation.

Barela: What did you do in the railroad?

Mr. Urvina: Laying rails for the railroads.

Barela: And in the street car company?

Mr. Urvina: The same except that it was on cobblestone and sometimes cement. It was a little different but nevertheless similar work. You just had to learn to lay track on cobblestone.

Barela: Were you in the same railroad camp when you met your wife?

Mr. Urvina: No, I was the one that was in the railroad camp.

Mrs. Urvina: We met at a New Year's dance. A lady invited my mother and all of us went. We went over to the West Side. First we said the rosary and then they passed around some candy. They were having some religious services. My husband was
Mrs. Urvina: there with his cousins. I was dancing and he asked me to dance with him. We were talking and he told me I was going to marry him. I did not even know his name but he said that we would get to know each other and up to now I am still getting to know him. He did not ask me if I wanted to be his girlfriend or anything like that, but right away he said I was going to marry him. But he did ask me my name. He told me his name was Felipe.

Barela: Did you go by that name at that time?

Mr. Urvina: Yes, because that was the name that was on my "bracero" card. When they were contracting there was a Mexican law that they could not bring people from Michoacan, only from other states. At this time they were contracting people in Uruapan, Michoacan, but only for Indians. We lived close to the state of Jalisco and Guanajuato. They did not allow any of those people to sign up because many would leave their lands. This is why they had the law. But I still wanted to join, so I took out a card in Queretaro and they signed me up in the state of San Luis Potosi. This is why I had a different name.

Mrs. Urvina: Felipe Rodriguez.

Barela: You even used a different last name?

Mr. Urvina: Yes, different last name, too. But when I got my papers I had to tell the immigration about it.

Barela: Then did you have to take out a passport in Mexico?

Mr. Urvina: The immigration helped me, Mr. Chaplain (the inspector here in St. Paul), was the one that helped me get my papers. I told him how I had taken out the card in Mexico and all we had to pay was 18 dollars.

Barela: How much did you pay to come here?

Mr. Urvina: We only paid for transportation in Mexico. The government paid for our transportation here by train because we were under contract.
Barela: Now that I see your home, I see that you uphold the Mexican traditions?

Mr. Urvina: Very much so.

Mrs. Urvina: For my part I would have gone back to Mexico, but my husband does not want to go back.

Mr. Urvina: The reason for that is that even though Mexico is much better off than it was when I was a child, there were so many poor people. Our family at least had some animals and I don't remember having to go to bed hungry, but there were many poor people. Now you still see some of it, it is not like in the United States. The reason is not that I am ashamed to work the land because that is where I was brought up, but the things you miss are the modern conveniences. Like running water, hot water, et cetera. But the way I see Mexico it has changed. Now the farmers have running water and those that are a little intelligent can buy and install water heaters. Now the people have a better life, even if things are very expensive. Whatever they harvest, they have a higher standard of living. You can tell by their dress. But there are still some that are poor and I am sure there are those that do not want to work. But then, you find this in every nation. Here you don't see it as much because the government helps them. But in Mexico the government does not help them. Nevertheless the people survive. God sees to it that they make it.

Barela: What are some of the Mexican traditions that you still maintain?

Mrs. Urvina: We still eat Mexican food, like tortillas, chile and beans. Since I have my husband, I have to have those things in the house. I love him, so I have to do the things he was used to. My daughters too, they are used to eating Mexican foods and like eating Mexican foods. When we go to Mexico they eat everything and they don't get sick.

Mr. Urvina: My family has been very lucky because we are very healthy with the exception
Mr. Urvina: of a few cuts and bruises. For several years we have gone to Mexico, even though it has cost us a lot of money to go. We go to see my father who is still alive. My mother already died, that is why I go every year, to see my father. I have a little home and my wife wants us to go to Mexico, but if we did things would be very different. Even though things are very expensive here we are making a living. In Mexico we would not have that weekly check coming in. Of course we would look for work, but it could never be the same as the United States. The moving from one place to another is not always the best, and since I have been here for over 30 years, it would be hard to try to find a job. Things have changed so much.

Mrs. Urvina: I would like to go back to Mexico so the girls could learn to speak Spanish and also to go to school there because the educational system in Mexico is very good. My husband opposes the idea because he thinks the girls should learn English first and when they are older they could learn Spanish. It is my fault that they did not learn to speak Spanish, because my husband did not know how to speak English and I wanted him to learn so I would speak to him in English all the time. So when the girls were born we only spoke English. They understand Spanish and they also know how to cook Mexican food. I saw to that because that is one of the things you can teach your family how to survive. So when they get married their husbands will not think they are good for nothing. If they get married to "Anglos" this training will come in handy because they also like Mexican food. My oldest daughter got married to a Mexican fellow, Luis Reyes, she met him in Mexico. He came here and they were married in St. Joseph's Church. Leonor also married a Mexican fellow, Roberto Aguirre. He was also from the farm and they get along very nicely because she knows how to cook Mexican foods. If they hadn't learned, it would have been difficult to learn how now. Anita
Mrs. Urvina: married an Anglo boy from school, but he has always been around Mexicans. It seems as though they will be happy. They just got married in April. I still have Cynthia and Victoria; only God know who they'll marry. We thought them our customs and took them to Mexico every year and we hope they remember all those things and never forget them. When they have children they can also teach their children and continue on.

Mr. Urvina: It is beautiful to show people the different customs of the Mexican people. There are a lot of changes going on. The young people are changing but the older folks do not want to change. They want to hang on to the old ways. They want to do the same things as they did 20 years ago, like work in the fields. The younger generation is being educated and they no longer want to do that kind of work. They want to change it and I am sure they will change it.

Mrs. Urvina: The respect that sons showed their mother regardless of their ages. In my husband's family, the mother directs her sons to do something and whether they want to do it or not, they do it. When company comes the children are instructed to go outside to play. In Texas the same thing. My mother used to have us go outside when people came to visit and if we walked in front of someone, we excused ourselves.

Barela: Is this the same kind of thing you teach your children?

Mr. Urvina: Yes. This is very good. Many times I thought of having my wife go to live in Mexico and I would stay here to work for three or four months until they could settle down. When you are younger it is much easier for you to learn Spanish. I remember in Mexico when we used to go, and the children were younger, they would play with other children and they would speak Spanish right away, too, even though they did not know how. I don't know if they knew what they were saying but they were talking to them and it was very
Mr. Urvina: easy for then to learn words. I often think that when you are young, regard1ess of what language you speak, you understand each other. When you get older, it is much harder. My wife wanted me to go to school but I never wanted to go. She gets very upset, even now.

Mrs. Urvina: I still get angry with him because I want him to learn, because he is a very intelligent person he knows a lot. They say that the person who does not read has a blank mind, but he listens and looks and learns. He is very clear, he knows what to say. People that study still have a hard time expressing themselves and he doesn't. Like they say, he tells it like it is.

Mr. Urvina: One has to know what he is going to say. You don't talk just to talk. There are things that are not worth mentioning. If you see something that you don't agree with, you have to speak up. If you have a stand, and you do not say anything, you are useless. There have been certain occasions when we don't agree with Anglos and right away they think we don't know anything. But I tell them that just because I don't read, it doesn't mean I am a savage, like they think we are. Even if you do not have an education, but if you know what you want to say, and understand what is going on, they have to listen to you. Not only the Mexicans, but anyone else. Where I work there are many Anglos from Minnesota that sign an "X", where as I sign my name. There are some things that I can write and understand. Like you say, I learned English within a year, but regardless of how many years you live in the United States, if you come from another country, you mix in your Spanish words. Sometimes I have to repeat some words two or three times so people can understand what I am saying. At work I have been a shop steward for 18 years even though I don't know how to read. I have told them that many times, but they still want me. Everytime the new
Mr. Urquina: Sometimes a contract comes up and I sometimes don't want the position, because it is a lot of hard work. Whenever anything happens with the company or the foreman, people come running to me and they want me to do things for them because they figure they pay their dues. When the foreman or the boss goes to talk to them, they are afraid to talk to them, and you are the one that looks bad. But now, like the Anglo says, you have to be wise. Whenever anyone has a complaint, I take them to the person directly. Sometimes I have trouble pronouncing some of the words, but since people know me they don't pay too much attention to that anymore. Sometimes during the negotiations they bring their lawyers. I know what I am saying and I understand, but in English there are a lot of words that you have to hold your tongue. The people in Mexico say that the people in Michoacan speak very fast. One time, about eight years ago in Mexico City, I went to get a haircut, and as soon as the barber saw me he said, "Come on in 'paisano', what part of Michoacan are you from?" They spot us right away because they say that we speak fast, but we don't think we do. I never had any problems. Like I told you, in the thirty some years that I have been here, I've only been unemployed for two months, at the most. I bluff my way to higher wages, and sometimes it works. If not, I can always find another job. Now I am getting older and I think it is best to stay where I am. But even now I am not afraid to go and work for the railroad or wherever they offer me a job. Especially now, or at least a couple of years ago, they would train you for a specific job like bench press. Now they don't do that anymore because there are plenty of people that already know how to do the work. I went to Vocational here and they taught me welding. I got two diplomas from there. I took up the torch, because in welding I would burn myself often, all the gas. I thought the torch would be easier.
Barela: If you could give the younger generation some advice, what would you tell them?

Mrs. Urvina: I have five girls and the only thing I tell them is that I don't want them to lead the same kind of life I did because I did not have an education. So in order for them to better themselves they have to learn to read and to learn a skill. So that if they ever have to support themselves they won't suffer. Right now there are no excuses for them not to learn. If they don't do it it is because they don't want to, not because they say they don't let me. I know I am trying. I am 57 years old and I am still going to school and I am learning, it might not be good, but I like it.

Barela: You work at the school?

Mrs. Urvina: Yes, and I love it because I am learning all the things I should have learned before. My husband often asks me why I need so many books. I like to learn. I never had an opportunity to learn. If I could have had the opportunity that the young people have now, I would have learned. I would have been a nurse or something good.

Barela: What school do you work at?

Mrs. Urvina: At the Harrison School, Harrison Elementary School. I was a nurse's aid for nine years at a nursing home. But I decided to change to see what would be more difficult: the older people, or the children. The children are more challenging because the older people are already set in their ways, whereas the children are not. You have to work hard to make them learn.

Mr. Urvina: I would give them the same advice that my wife did. Right now there are a lot of possibilities, there is no reason why the young people cannot learn to read, like there was in other years. There were some possibilities for the Mexican but the parents or the mother could not afford to send them because they barely had enough to live on, working in the farms. They didn't
Mr. Urvina: have the possibilities that we have now. Now regardless of where you work, my advice for a young Mexican boy would be to go to school, because now if the father does not have enough to live on, the government can help him so that his son can go to school. A long time ago there wasn't that possibility, and if there was, we certainly did not know about it. Because as I understand it, it hasn't been until Kennedy or from the Rockefeller Foundation, I don't know for sure, but I have asked, and this is what people have told me. If they don't take advantage of the opportunity, it won't be the government's fault. Or say that they discriminate against you, if they don't take advantage of it, it is because they don't want to. My advice would be to get an education and also to learn a trade. Not just one trade but as many as possible.

Mrs. Urvina: What are we parents for if we are not going to push our children?

Mr. Urvina: When they are young, we push them.

Mrs. Urvina: But if you teach them to obey you as children when they grow up they will obey you. But if you leave them alone, they won't listen to you.

Mr. Urvina: Not everyone teaches their children the same. We have to have everything in this life. Not everyone is going to train their kids to show the same respect to the family. Many times those that say they don't know how to read and those that have studied, they don't respect anyone either.

Mrs. Urvina: My husband is very good with his daughters. He has never hit them. Once in a while he scolds them. Sometimes when I get angry I tell him to hit them with his belt. I tell him we are parents and we have to guide them. God did not give them to us only so we could watch them come and go and sometimes we don't even know where they are. The duty of the parents is to see that their children go to school to learn, even if they don't want to listen to you. There are some children who listen to advice and some
Mrs. Urvina: that only understand a stick. My mother gave advice to me, and I say what is good for me is good for my girls.

Mr. Urvina: If you have a child and he does not like learning you can send him to school and he will not learn.

Mrs. Urvina: But then he can't say, "My mother didn't want me to get an education, or my father could not help me." When he gets to a certain age, he will say, "At least they tried". There are some kids that say, "My mother did not help me. My mother tried to help me but she couldn't because we had to work at that time. We did not have the opportunity to go to school." I was twelve years old and I was still in the third grade. Coming and going to the beets.

My girl Vicki, did not want to go to North High because of fights and I told her to mind her own business and go and learn to read and write. I talked to the counselor and I told him to guide her and if she was absent, I wanted to know about it. I always went to the counselor. If she is not at school, I want the counselor to call me and tell me why she is absent. She left home and told me she was going to school and I think that is the duty of the mother.

Moosbrugger: With this kind of support the children can't help but to succeed in school, but this is a rare thing.

Mrs. Urvina: Among the Mexicans, the children know they have to go to school to read and write. The teachers have often told me at school how the little Mexican kids are so good, and they like to study. I tell them they are supposed to, because that is the way they are brought up. They go to school to learn to read not to answer back because if they don't do that at home, why should they do it in school? They teach you to respect the other people. Not to laugh at the older people because they are going to look like that someday.
Mrs. Urvina: My mother taught me like that. It is hard. I raised six girls and one boy and that was hard. But I am glad I did it because some day when they get older, if they are going to suffer it is their fault and not mine. My conscience is clear because it is up to them now. Like my mother used to say, "When you have a small tree you can put a stick next to it to straighten it out but when it gets older you can't straighten it out unless you break it." I know this is true. I don't say that my girls are angels because they have their problems, but I am there to see what is happening. So if they do something wrong it is their fault.

Mr. Urvina: In this world there has to be a little bit of everything. As I notice the students from the University there are many from other nations but we don't have many Mexicans. We don't have anyone, like the Anglos say that want to be a lawyer or a dentist or any other kind of good job. There are very few. That is because things here look very different than they do in Mexico. In Mexico 90 percent of the students want to learn something to better themselves. Here maybe it is because of their parents and also because they grew up doing beets and that is the way they want to live. They know how to read but, I don't know.

Mrs. Urvina: In Texas a lot of people can read and write in Spanish and they also know English. These are the older Mexican people. The only thing is, that there you don't speak English unless it is an emergency. You don't show off by speaking English. I know because I came from there. I am a Mexican and I don't have to speak English. When I came to Minnesota and got married I had to speak English. When my cousins came up to visit they teased me because I spoke English. They asked me if I was not a Mexican. This is how we were brought up. At home we never spoke English.

Mr. Urvina: I don't agree with her. It is good to know both languages, but you do not
Mr. Urvina: live in Mexico. You are in the United States and you need to speak English for everything. When you are conversing with another Mexican that speaks the language, fine. But for the people that live here, it is better for them to speak English. And they can always learn Spanish at home. It is also a good thing to have your children go to school and learn in English and in Spanish. It is a beautiful thing to be able to speak four or five languages. But since you live in the United States it is better to educate them in English because this is where they make their livelihood, not in Mexico. It is a thing of pride to say that you are Mexican but if you were born in the United States, then they are American Citizens. The Mexican government does not recognize you as a citizen, only as a person of Mexican heritage. It is good to have them know both languages but it is best to have them know English the best. Both are needed. The education for them is better here because this is where you have better opportunities for jobs. This is where you can get a good job and make more money. The same in Mexico, if you know both languages you can get a good job. But there are very few who know both languages well enough to read them and write them. The Spanish language is a beautiful language and it is good to speak it when you are among Mexicans.

Mrs. Urvina: But I am telling you that in Texas they did not let us speak Spanish in school. At home we did. I was born speaking Spanish at home. It wasn't until I went to school that I learned how to speak English and it was very hard. This is how I was brought up speaking only Spanish.

Barela: Thank you Mr. & Mrs. Urvina for this interview.