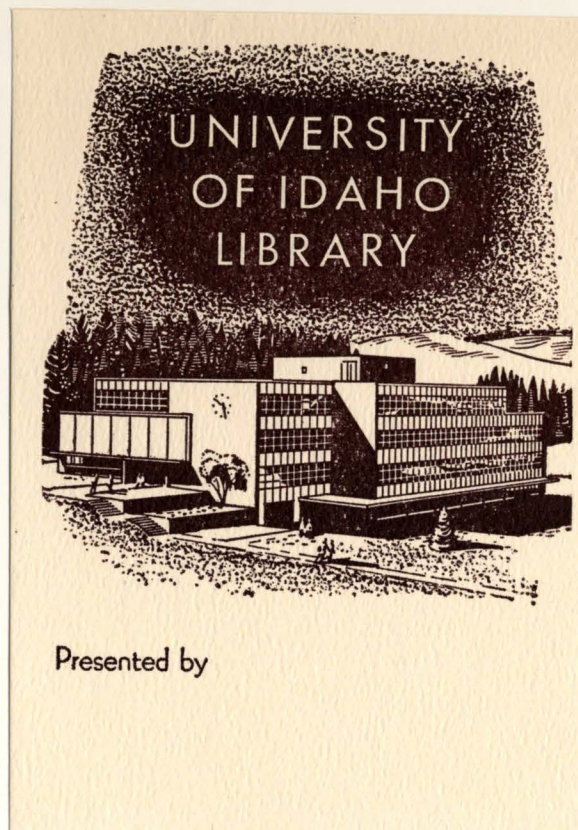


# VOCES HISPANAS

HISPANIC VOICES  
OF IDAHO

Written and edited by Erasmo Gamboa

Excerpts  
from the  
Idaho  
Hispanic  
Oral  
History  
Project



Copyright ©1992 by the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs and the Idaho Humanities Council

The conclusions or opinions in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of either the Idaho Humanities Council or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Cover photographs: Wilder Labor Camp parade float (photo #76-102.63/Y) courtesy Idaho State Historical Society; Wilder hops worker courtesy the National Archives; Victoria Archuleta Sierra as a U.S. Army nurse courtesy Victoria Archuleta Sierra.

# VOCES HISPANAS

## HISPANIC VOICES OF IDAHO

Written and edited by Erasmo Gamboa

Excerpts  
from the  
Idaho  
Hispanic  
Oral  
History  
Project

A project of the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs and the Idaho Humanities Council



**Idaho Commission  
on  
Hispanic Affairs**

IDAHO  
*Humanities*  
COUNCIL

## **The Idaho Hispanic Oral History Project**

**T**he Idaho Hispanic Oral History Project was undertaken to help preserve, document and encourage further research on the rich heritage of Idaho's Hispanic community. It was jointly undertaken by the Idaho Humanities Council, a state-based affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs. The project was funded by the Council and the Ethnic Heritage Committee of the Idaho Centennial Commission.

The project involved six oral history interviewers—Ángela Luckey, Martha Tórrez, Rosa Quilantán, Patricia McDaniel, María Talamantes, and Marie Sánchez Anderson—who together interviewed 22 individuals from Inkom, Pocatello, Idaho Falls, Rupert, Twin Falls, Caldwell, Nampa, and Emmett. Under the editorial supervision of University of Washington Associate Professor Erasmo Gamboa, seven of the taped oral histories have been completely transcribed, excerpts from which comprise this booklet. Although many people contributed to the success of this project, the Council thanks the staff of the Idaho State Historical Society Oral History Center for training the interviewers, and wishes to extend special acknowledgement to Dr. Gamboa and the interviewers, without whom the project could not have been completed.

Copies of the 22 interviews and seven complete transcripts are available for review in the following repositories:

The Idaho State Historical Society Oral History Center,  
210 Main Street, Boise, Idaho 83702;

The Idaho State Library Media Center, 325 W. State  
Street, Boise, Idaho 83702;

The Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs, 417 N.  
Curtis Road, Boise, Idaho 83706; and

the research libraries of all Idaho colleges and universities, including Idaho State University, Pocatello; University of Idaho, Moscow; Lewis-Clark State College, Lewiston; Boise State University, Boise; Albertson College, Caldwell; College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls; Ricks College, Rexburg; North Idaho College, Coeur d'Alene; and Northwest Nazarene College, Nampa.

Idaho  
E  
184  
S75  
G25  
1992

## Contents

- 4 **Notes Toward a History of Idaho's Hispanic Elderly**  
by Erasmo Gamboa
- 9 **The Spirit of Womanhood**  
An Interview with Felicitas Pérez García  
Interviewed by Martha Tórrez
- 11 **World War I and the Making of the Mexican American Community in Eastern Idaho**  
An Interview with Juanita Zazueta Huerta  
Interviewed by Ángela Luckey
- 14 **Learning English**  
An Interview with Victoria "Vicky" Archuleta Sierra  
Interviewed by Ángela Luckey
- 17 **Facing Reality**  
An Interview with Abel Vásquez  
Interviewed by Martha Tórrez
- 20 **How My Parents Came to Idaho**  
An Interview with Rita Pérez  
Interviewed by Rosa Quilantán
- 24 **Profile of a Distinguished Citizen**  
An Interview with Antonio "Tony" Hernández Rodríguez  
Interviewed by Patricia McDaniel
- 29 **For the Sake of Family**  
An Interview with Mary Rodríguez López  
Interviewed by Patricia McDaniel
- 32 **The Idaho Hispanic Oral History Archive**

# Notes Toward a History of Idaho's Hispanic Elderly

By Erasmo Gamboa

Associate Professor  
University of Washington

For more than a hundred years, the voices of Idaho's Hispanic people have reverberated from the mountains and valleys of Idaho. *Voces Hispanas* introduces some of the stories of Idaho's Mexican American *ancianos* (the elderly). Their stories, albeit highly personal, are important to all Idahoans because they tell us about the state and reveal so much about this little-known cultural community.

As the keepers of tradition and vessels of culture, the *ancianos* have much to teach us. Their stories offer, among other things, an invaluable insight into the virtues, beliefs, and tragedies of these plain but extraordinary people. Back-bent but wise and nimble of mind, the men and women offer their life experiences in the valleys, the mountains, labor camps, and urban areas of Idaho. Some stories attest to the bitterness and resentment for what was felt to be the insensitivity and indifference of non-Hispanics. There are many lessons to be learned from the culture, strength, and wisdom that these aged men and women managed to acquire over the many years of their lives.

Cultural change is inevitable. Culture is constantly in a state of flux, even though people often wish it to remain as they have experienced it. As life presses on everywhere, people change as new attitudes and values replace time-worn traditions. There is a wonderful and useful paradox in the stories of these men and women. On the one hand, they adhered strongly to their culture and still they were nonconformist. That is why they decided to make Idaho their home, so distant from the center of their universe in Mexico and the Southwest.

In many instances, however, the process of cultural change is stressful, if not painful, for many Mexican Americans. For the younger generations in particular, confusion often reigns as they try to cope with their sense of identity and self-esteem in a Hispanic and Anglo world. In this regard,

**Idaho has never been  
and never will be  
entirely Anglo-Saxon.  
Instead it is a  
composite of the  
contributions of  
many people,  
Hispanics included.**

Idaho's *ancianos* provide wonderful insights into the complexity of acculturation and cultural ambivalence.

Life was difficult; it still is today for many Hispanic people. Hard work, self-reliance and perseverance are the cornerstones of these stories. Against all odds, Mexican Americans fell back on the tradition of relying on their sense of self in order to make life better for themselves and other Hispanics. All the while, they exhibited an inordinate amount of stoicism and pride. Transplanted from Mexico and Southwestern states, Idaho's early Hispanics were railroad workers and migrants; men and women who spent a good portion of their lives thinning beets or picking potatoes under the Idaho sky. Here too, are self-made Hispanics who became community leaders and teachers, each in his own way. Not one ever took life for granted.

The reader will find no shattering discoveries in these taped interviews, no settled truths in these pages. Instead there are elements of Idaho's past that are of value to all people. For example, Idaho has never been and never will be entirely Anglo-Saxon. Instead it is a composite of the contributions of many people, Hispanics included. Put another way, Hispanics have been and continue to be important to the state's development. Yet Idaho's heritage and history is rarely, if ever, discussed from the perspective of Hispanics. Keeping this thought in mind, I hope that these stories, cast through the prism of Hispanic people, contain a kernel of truth and knowledge for all who read these pages.

**T**he men and women who share their life experiences in the following taped interviews and transcribed pages began to arrive in Idaho in the early 1900s. Yet, they were not the state's first Hispanics. Other Spanish-speakers had preceded them decades earlier.

The first Mexicans and Mexican Americans came to Idaho at the start of the 1800s. At first, they were generally single men, trappers and adventurers. As a group, they were similar to other pioneers. They were motivated by the common human desire to go to the remote areas of the West where others had not been or moved by the expectation of material reward.

In the decades after the Mexican American War of 1846, a distinct generation of Hispanic men and women with varied occupations ranging from miners, mule packers, saddle makers, vaqueros, and housekeepers started to arrive in Idaho. The majority were born in Sonora, Mexico, although a few were born in California, Latin America, and Spain. Individually and collectively this generation brought many years of

practical knowledge and technical experience crucial to the development of Idaho's unfolding frontier.

It is impossible to determine how many Hispanics came to Idaho during the 1800s. Undoubtedly, the numbers were small, but at the time very few non-Indian people lived in Idaho. For complex reasons that can not be addressed here, very few Hispanics made their homes in Idaho at the end of the 19th century. The majority of them returned to the Southwest or Mexico while others moved on to other promising frontier regions including British Columbia, Canada.

The next turn in Idaho's Hispanic history began in the early 1900s. At this time, an oppressive dictatorship, followed by a protracted, violent, and destructive social revolution, gripped the Mexican Republic. When the civil strife ended, nearly one tenth of the Mexican population had been forced to flee to safety in the United States.

Even as Mexico was in chaos, the southwestern part of the United States developed through a series of federal initiatives that accelerated railroad, irrigation, and agricultural development. The economic growth also resulted from an expanding market demand from eastern cities such as New York and Chicago for western agricultural and mineral products. World War I further quickened the pace of development until the Southwest went from a minor producer of fresh fruits and vegetables to supplying over 40 percent of the national consumption. In addition to foodstuffs, the production of fiber and minerals was particularly significant to the expanding national economy. This kind of large-scale regional economic development produced a labor market that absorbed all of the immigrant workers that Mexico could supply and more.

Later, and much smaller in scale, Idaho and the other northwestern states experienced a similar pattern of economic development. Miles of new railroad construction linked the region to itself and to the rest of the United States. Irrigation made highly productive farms possible from Idaho's fertile but previously arid soil. From the start, the proportion of economic growth provided far more railroad and farm jobs than could be met by the state's sparse population. Worse yet, Congress restricted southern and eastern European and most Asian immigrant labor from entering the United States after 1924.

While still in their youth, today's Hispanic *ancianos* were drawn by this combination of an expanding farm economy and its corresponding labor market. Well before World War I, labor agents began to recruit Mexican immigrant families from Colorado and Wyoming and as far away as New Mexico



*Mexican nationals harvesting hops near Wilder, Idaho, during World War II. They were among several thousand Mexican men contracted to meet Idaho's wartime labor shortage (photo courtesy the National Archives).*



and California for railroad and sugar beet employment in Idaho.

**T**he people who migrated to Idaho at this time did so eagerly with the hope of improving their station in life. Rather than stay in troubled Mexico or compete with other immigrants like themselves in the Southwest, they answered Idaho's call for workers. Initially, Idaho's cold winters, unfamiliar surroundings, and distance from Mexico and the American Southwest isolated the people from their "world." Yet at the same time, Idaho provided all the resources to begin to create a unique way of life centered on Mexican American culture. In a relatively short period of time, a strong sense of community developed. It started with the family as the center of an extended circle that included parents, children, grandparents as well as other interrelated families and neighborhood friends. A shared cultural identity together with a similar migrant experience brought families together. Through this process, Hispanic communities emerged to replace smaller clusters of transient family groups in such places as Pocatello and Idaho Falls. This generation of families unconsciously laid a strong foundation for today's Hispanic communities by introducing a wide spectrum of Mexican American culture, from traditional values, social and spiritual practices, music and food.

As they were beginning to grow, Idaho's Mexican American enclaves were stymied by the Great Depression. On the one hand, Mexican immigration which had fed Mexican communities in Idaho and the United States for nearly two decades stopped. Secondly, the severity of the Depression forced many of Idaho's citizens into a migratory search of employment along the breadth of the Western states.

Record-setting agricultural production during World War II and the post-war years, however, caused Mexican immigration and Mexican American interstate migration to resume once again. Between 1942 and 1947, approximately 15,616 Mexican men (*braceros*) were contracted in Mexico for temporary farm employment in Idaho. Under the terms of their contract, the men were supposed to return to Mexico at the end of the work period. In practice, however, some of these same men eventually immigrated as free wage earners with their families. Many more Mexican American families came to Idaho in these years. Over time, many of them settled and added to the cultural matrix of Idaho's Hispanic communities.

Today many southern Idaho communities have clear Mexican American areas where businesses cater to a predominantly Hispanic clientele. No one in Caldwell or Idaho



*Mexican American migrants and Mexican braceros [contracted laborers from Mexico] lived in migrant labor camps while working in agriculture near Twin Falls during Idaho's agricultural boom of the 1940s and 1950s (photo courtesy the National Archives).*

Falls can mistake the Mexican foods, movies, dances, and celebrations of customs and traditions or ignore the Spanish that sometimes dominates the conversation at sports gatherings, school campuses, restaurants, churches, and other everyday activities.

Still, the decades following World War II have seen many changes in the traditional culture of Idaho's Hispanics. Of the numerous factors that have hastened the pace of change, none has been more important than the ubiquitous pressure of acculturation. In most cultures, language is its lifeline. Implicit in the spoken word are the cultural values and the spirit of the people. Every time a person forgets the language of his or her ancestors or grows into life without learning Spanish, another page turns on the culture of Idaho's first Mexican families.

Often we wish conventional customs to remain as we knew them. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that traditions will endure. For this reason alone, *Voces Hispanas* is a fitting testimony to the assortment of past and present cultural values and other life experiences among Idaho's Spanish-speaking people. At the very least it is an opportunity to view the world through their eyes.

In editing the interviews of the Idaho Hispanic Oral History Project, I have made an attempt to preserve the integrity of the spoken language. Where there was a propensity to repeat words or information, I deleted to enhance the narrative. In the end, the primary concern was to convey the thoughts and overall story as it was told.

Mexican Americans are fond of saying "people make the place," and one of Idaho's strengths is its diversity of cultures and people. After reading *Voces Hispanas*, Hispanics should brim full of pride in knowing their ancestors established strong roots and have made Idaho their home for so many years.

A brief biographical sketch of each contributor precedes each story. The complete list of all the interviews collected by the Idaho Hispanic Oral History Project appears at the end of this catalogue.

I want to give special thanks to the Idaho Humanities Council, the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs, and to the interviewers who worked on this project. They are among the important people of our community who work very hard to save elements of our history and heritage. ■

# The Spirit of Womanhood

**Felicitas Pérez García**

**Pocatello, Idaho**

*The strong character of Mexican American women stands out in the following interview with Felicitas Pérez García. It challenges the persistent stereotype of Mexican American women as subservient, frail persons lacking in resources. Born in 1895 at Rincón de Romos in the state of Aguascalientes, México, Felicitas Pérez García was 96 years old at the time of this interview, conducted by Martha Tórréz in Pocatello, Idaho. At the onset of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, Felicitas emigrated from Mexico to Pocatello. She raised her family in Idaho.*

**“I made my bed out of boards and I made the covers out of corn sacks. I would sew four together. Then I got some grass, or whatever there was, and put it in the middle. I would have a very soft bed.”**

I was born in Rincón de Romas, México. I got married when I was 14.

We came to work in the sugar beet fields, to work in the harvest and thinning in Shelley. My husband worked for the sugar beet company, for a short time, I think it was the end of 1910. The year was ending. And then he started to work in the railroads. He was a railroad worker until he died.

At Shelley, there was a sugarbeet processing plant, with housing for the workers. That is where I lived.

When we got there, we could not find a place to stay. There was a big lumber mill. We would go there and get wood and boards. We built a house, not very well done, but a house nonetheless.

The weather was cold, but there was a lot of firewood and coal next to the locomotives. We would fetch a lot of firewood and coal when it started to get cold.

I made my bed out of boards and I made the covers out of corn sacks. I would sew four together. Then I got some grass, or whatever there was, and put it in the middle. I would have a very soft bed.

I would do everything possible. We would find houses that were left empty, and we would get things. I made curtains from the flour sacks. I would fix the place up.

My stove, well it was a hole outside. It had to be deep with two openings on the side. I made an opening here and another one there. I put the firewood in this side and the smoke came out this other way. In the middle, I would put the pots to make the food.



Shortly after her marriage at the age of 14, Felicitas Pérez García moved to Shelley, Idaho, where she and her husband worked in the sugar beet fields prior to World War I (photo #P1984-102.15 courtesy Idaho State Historical Society).

I remember there were a lot of rabbits. I found an old discarded basket, and reweave it with grass. Then I got two sticks and I tied them together. I raised the little basket with one stick and that was the trap. Well, shortly, the rabbits would come, they were hungry, and got in. As soon as they got in, I pulled on the other stick, the basket would come down and then I had them. I grabbed those rabbits, killed and cleaned them, took out their ribs, leaving pure rabbit's meat.

There was this Mexican from New Mexico who had some old pots and pans. I asked him, "What are you going to do with that pan?" He said, "Well, it's going to the trash." "Don't," I told him, "I'm going to take one." "Take them all," he said. I took two and used them as a pot. I would take the rabbit meat, place it in the pan, and cover it with another. My meat would cook so nicely.

I did not go out anywhere. I made my own dresses. There was this place that sold fabric very inexpensive. It cost a dime for ten meters. I made a large *malacate* [spinning wheel]. Well, I would wash my cotton, disentangle it, and spin it in the *malacate*. That's how I made the thread. I would sew, that was all that I did.

## Working at the Railroad Commissary

*In the early years of Mexican American migration to Idaho, many workers were hired to maintain the railroads. Felicitas Pérez García found work as a cook preparing traditional dishes for the large Mexican work force.*

The railroad company had a big commissary and a Chinese cook. He asked me if I knew how to make tortillas. I told him yes, "¿Pero cuáles tortillas?" ["But what tortillas?"] I did not really know how to make tortillas. "Tell your husband that if you come and work for me I will pay you a dollar per day." The pay seemed to be reasonable and I took the job.

The railroad company had some men who came from Mexico and had just barely started working. They did not want to eat bread, they wanted tortillas. I would go into the storage shed and would get sacks of flour and prepare a batch of dough. I made the tortillas. I also cooked beans and soup, whatever was there. The company's commissary had everything. I would make the best pots of food. I cooked *frijoles* [beans] and all that. All for a dollar per day. ■

# World War I and the Making of the Mexican American Community in Eastern Idaho

**Juanita Zazueta Huerta**  
Pocatello, Idaho

*The Mexican American community in eastern Idaho appreciably grew during World War I. For a time during the war, Mexican workers were temporarily contracted for work in the United States. Following the end of the war, some people returned to Mexico, while others stayed. All the while, an increasing number of families arrived, transforming the small Mexican American enclaves into established communities. The traditional cultural patterns developed as the first to arrive welcomed new families. In turn, they reached out to those who followed. Once in Idaho, Mexican Americans experienced the end of World War I, an event far removed from their world. They also lived through the Great Depression, an extraordinary event that affected them directly.*

*Juanita Zazueta Huerta was born in Shelley, Idaho, in 1918, as World War I was ending. Her father immigrated from Sinaloa, and her mother from Zacatecas, Mexico. At the time of the interview, conducted by Ángela Luckey, Juanita was 73 years old and residing in Pocatello.*



*Juanita Zazueta Huerta at home in Pocatello, 1992 (photo by Ana Peña).*

**M**y family came in a train, in a *renganche* [contracted workers] with a lot of other Mexican families to work in agriculture.

The First World War was on at the time. They brought my parents, along with the other people, to Lincoln, near Idaho Falls. The sugar factory had little houses where they would house the Mexicans. From there they would send them to small agriculture towns around Idaho Falls and around Firth, Shelley, Preston, and Basalt. They planted a lot of sugar beets and potatoes in these small towns. I guess the farmers would come and take the workers they wanted.

Firth was where we would go most. I remember my

**“Every Christmas these same women would always bring us presents. As children, we were puzzled because they would say, ‘Santa Claus left this at our house.’ We asked, ‘How come he never comes here? He could very well have brought those presents here.’”**

mother and father had friends in Idaho Falls. Whenever there was a circus or something in town, we would stay with these friends. We went on the Fourth of July. When we really wanted to be with a lot of Mexicans we would come here to Pocatello on the train. My father worked with the railroad and had a pass. At that time there were a lot of Mexicans in Pocatello on account of the railroad. If we wanted to socialize this is where we would come.

Often, we walked to Shelley, about six miles. It didn't seem like it was that far to us, I remember on Sundays my father would fix us a lunch.

Maybe we ate on the side of the road, I don't remember. We would visit the Hernández' home and they would take us home. Their names were Nicolás and Rosarito Hernández. They were from Blackfoot. But if we went far, then we would go on the train.

I always remember one lady who spoke Spanish and lived in Shelley. She was the interpreter for the Mexican workers. When the war ended in 1918, there were loud whistles and people making a lot of noise. She went to the Mexicans and explained to them "We are real happy now because our war has ended, that is why we are all so happy."

My mother used to tell me that some of the contracted Mexican families went back after the war. Others did not. After my Dad got a job on the railroad, we figured that was a steady job, so we just stayed in Firth. That is where we were all born and went to school.

I know I did not want to go to school with the clothes that I had. We were real self-conscious. Now the kids squirt clorox on their Levi's. You wouldn't be caught dead with a pair of pants like that, not in those days. It was the Depression and still you felt that you needed to be better dressed as you got older. So you were real conscious of how you were dressed to go to school.

**W**hen my younger sister was born, the ladies at the relief society came to our house. They checked on my mother and asked if there was something they could do for her. They asked if they could do our laundry. They were very kind to us. My mother did not speak English.

Every Christmas these same women would always bring us presents. As children, we were puzzled because they would say "Santa Claus left this at our house." We asked, "How come he never comes here? He could very well have brought those presents here."

There was a little store there in Firth, Di's Merchandise. I reminisce when I see those old country stores. Everything



Juanita Zazueta Huerta recalls her family visiting other Mexican families in Idaho Falls to attend Fourth of July festivities and other special celebrations (photo #72-205.29 courtesy Idaho State Historical Society).

from shoes, stockings, dresses, groceries was in that store. When my Dad got his railroad pay we would go there and buy our clothes, shoes and stuff. When we were going to go to the Fourth of July in Idaho Falls, they would take us and we would get a brand new pair of shoes. You had to take care of them during the summer months.

**M**y mother made cheese with her cherished *metate* [a heavy three-leg grind stone]. She also made flour out of grain. I remember my mother would say, "I am going to give my *metate* to Doña Luisa, I do not use it much any more." She gave her *metate* to Doña Luisa. Whatever happened to it I just do not know. I do have my mother's *molcajete* [smaller grind stone]. It is deep. Mine grinds garlic and *cominos* [cumin] and all spices. The *molcajetes* now are not as deep. Mine has been used for years and years. It is worn smooth.

The Mexican American community celebrated *El Diez y Seis de Septiembre* [Mexican Independence Day]. I cannot tell you when the celebrations stopped and people went their own way. The celebrations were nice in those days. The people would give speeches on the *Cinco de Mayo* [Mexican National Holiday] and *El Diez y Seis de Septiembre*. Especially the very old proud men and women who were real patriotic with their pictures and pins and red, white, and green ribbons. They always had a man and woman who were leaders. My *comadre* [family kin] was *la presidenta* [the president]. For years they called her *Doña María la presidenta*. Everyone knew her. She gave her speeches in Spanish. She read a lot and was real intelligent.

When I was young, I did not really keep up with the speeches. We were itching to start dancing. It was nice, we enjoyed all of it. I cannot say when the celebrations fizzled out. ■

# Learning English

## Victoria “Vicky” Archuleta Sierra Pocatello, Idaho

*Sometimes, life was as hard for young Mexican Americans as it was for their parents. Education, the nemesis of Hispanics, was especially difficult because Spanish was their first language. Victoria Archuleta Sierra, born at La Junta, Colorado, in 1924, came to Idaho with her family by way of Chaperito, New Mexico, Grand Junction, Colorado, and Nyssa, Oregon. The family settled permanently in Pocatello in 1942. Victoria has raised her family in Pocatello, where she was interviewed by Ángela Luckey.*



*Victoria Archuleta Sierra at home in Pocatello, 1992 (photo by Ana Peña).*

**M**y brother and I could not go to school until after the beet harvest when we had money to buy school clothes. So we started in October. We walked about a mile or so to school.

At the time, I did not know how to speak English so they thought I was a novelty. They talked about me but I could not understand too much. There were two more Mexican kids who I knew but they had been in school before.

The first day, the teacher sat us in a circle. She handed me a book and I opened it. But I could not imagine why the little bird was hanging upside down from a tea spout. After the other kids showed me how to hold the book, then the bird was sitting right.

Anyway, I had a beautiful day in school. But the teacher wrote a note to my mother, telling her not to send me back to school until I learned English; nobody taught me, and, I guess, I just never asked.

I taught myself to read when I was about seven or eight years old. We moved into town to a tiny two-room house during the bad part of the Depression. I guess it was in 1936. The house was terribly dirty from smoke because bums had lived there and cooked in the middle of the floor. Behind the door there was a great big stack of *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's* magazines. My mother made some paste out of water and flour and papered the walls with pages from the magazines. That is how I learned how to read and write English. I would dope out the letters until finally I was able to figure out the meaning of the letters.

## Cultural Adaptation in Idaho

*Mexican Americans brought many cultural traditions, including*



food, music, and religion, from the Southwest to Idaho. Some survived in this new element, others underwent subtle changes. Still other cultural practices did not survive at all. In the process, however, a distinct Hispanic Idahoan culture emerged.

Many of the Mexican Americans were called *manitos* [brothers], because they were mostly from Colorado and New Mexico. They worked largely in the fields, picking peaches, topping onions, picking green beans, topping beets, thinning beets, and picking apples.

When we were young, my parents used to make prune and raisin pies. Of course, down in New Mexico that is about the only fruit they could preserve for the winter. They also made *quesos* [cheese] from milk and *atole* [porridge] from dried corn. The *atole* had finely ground corn, boiled with milk and cinnamon. It was so delicious. I tried to feed that to my kids but they do not like it.

The Christmas holidays were celebrated differently than now. Neighborhoods would stage plays and *posadas* [processions]. They had a play called *Los Matachines*. It was quite a pageant and quite colorful. The participants would oust Satan from heaven and throw him to the ground. My father used to remember all those lines and would recite them to us. It was really fun to listen to him.

We were taught to go from house to house and say *mis Crismas* [My Christmas] and the people would give us all kinds of goodies at each door. This was mostly the people from Colorado, because the people from Mexico did not understand the custom.

I also remember *velorios* [wakes] in Grand Junction. They would set up an altar in the corner of the room. My mother used to love to decorate it. My dad would make *lata* [thin sheet metal] and my mother would put linen scarves on it and then decorate it with crepe paper. Then they would bring all their images and statues of the Virgin Mary and all other saints. Lots of them, big ones and little ones, from the neighborhood. They would spend the evening and the night praying the rosary and singing *alabados* [hymns].

I always enjoyed singing. I messed around with a little guitar my dad had brought me and learned how to play from my old Lydia Mendoza records. I learned how to make it sound like it did in the records. I could sing "El Noviero" just like Lydia Mendoza. I could chord and play "Las Mañanitas" like she did. I went on experimenting with my fingers and watching people. For example, I learned a lot from this man who used to come and sing on occasions. I used to really watch



Victoria Archuleta Sierra enlisted in the U.S. Army at Pocatello and served as a nurse during World War II (photo courtesy the narrator).



*In addition to agricultural work, Mexican Americans also were employed to work in the railroad yards in Pocatello.*

**“Lots of times we made our own dances out on *el patio*. We swept the ground and watered it until it got hard. You should have seen the dances we held outdoors. We were about 14 or 15 years old and practically everybody in the neighborhood knew how to play the guitar and sing.”**

him play his guitar until I learned “*Atotonilco*” [a traditional Mexican song].

When people asked him to play at different house dances, he would ask me to play with him. I thought I was really neat, I was about 13 years old. I played quite a bit for \$2 a night.

Lots of times we made our own dances out on *el patio*. We swept the ground and watered it until it got hard. You should have seen the dances we held outdoors. We were about 14 or 15 years old and practically everybody in the neighborhood knew how to play the guitar and sing.

Later, when I got older, I went to work for the railroad. After work we’d go to the neighborhood store to see who was there. Almost everybody was there all the time. That was where we talked, giggled, laughed, and had lots of fun. Down the street there was another little store run by a Greek couple. They were always trying to teach me the Greek alphabet and how to speak Greek. Frequently, we would all go to the movies.

## **Prejudice and Discrimination**

*Idaho’s need for labor sometimes lessened the degree of discrimination in employment. This provided Mexican Americans and braceros with the opportunity to secure better and higher paying jobs not available in their home states or Mexico.*

There was no job discrimination on the railroads. In Colorado, the only railroad jobs that Mexicans got were the “extra gangs” that fixed the tracks. The Italians could work as hustlers and wipers in the roundhouse, cleaning and washing the engines. In Idaho, Mexicans had these jobs. In Colorado, a Mexican could not get a job like that.

The Mexican American people from here did not like the people from Mexico because they worked for less. The *braceros* worked for the railroad, rather than in the fields. But Mexicans were employed in the ice plant, providing ice for the trains, or on the “extra gang” for 25 cents an hour. The Mexican Americans refused these jobs at that wage. ■

# Facing Reality

## Abel Vásquez

### Nampa, Idaho

*Adolescence alone can be particularly stressful. Adjusting to education and the social process of going from childhood to manhood was especially difficult and pressure packed for many Mexican American youth.*

*Abel Vásquez was born in Monterrey, California, in 1930. His family migrated from Grand Junction, Colorado, to Preston, Idaho, in 1938. He was interviewed at his home in Nampa by Martha Tórrez. Abel Vásquez is a Canyon County Commissioner, appointed by Governor Cecil Andrus.*



*Abel Vásquez in his office as a Canyon County Commissioner, 1992 (photo by Rick Ardinger).*

I started school in Grand Junction, Colorado. We used to live in a place called "La Colonia" [the neighborhood]. I remember walking to school bare footed, we didn't have money sometimes.

At that particular time, they wanted you to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic. You did not have all these other things that we have today. I came to Idaho and the system was the same. I started third grade in Marsing.

One of the teachers who really stands out was in the third grade. Nobody stood out like she did. She really made an impression on me because she used to go the extra mile to help me. She knew that the other kids did not need that much help or I needed more than they did. So she would always take me by my hand and teach me. That is what teaching was about to me.

When I was in junior high school I wanted to go out for basketball. They said, everybody that wants to play basketball come on down. Needless to say, I was one of the first ones with all the other *gringitos* [white kids]. I looked like a *mosca* in the *leche* [a fly in a glass of milk]. In order to play you had to furnish your own sneakers. Well, I didn't have any. The first day, I was real good bare footed.

The second day, I got blisters from playing on the hard wood. So I couldn't play basketball. My grandparents could not afford to buy me sneakers so I didn't participate because I didn't have shoes to play in.

I liked school too. When I was fourteen years old it got to be more of a hassle going. I felt out of place, but not because I didn't think that I was adequate. I felt out of place because material things were entering into my life. I didn't have nice

**“I wish that I had insisted that my kids speak Spanish instead of having them make a choice. I wish that I had insisted because they even say it would have been beneficial to them now.”**

jeans, nice shoes, or nice shirts to be able to go with the other kids. I knew that there was something wrong somewhere. Not that kids made me feel that way, I was my worst critic in that respect. Rather than go through all that hassle of having my folks buy me nice clothes to go to school, I quit school. I was in the ninth grade—I finished in ninth grade.

My grandmother, if it would have been possible economically, would have insisted that I go to school. She was caught between a rock and a hard spot. If I went to school there was less money coming in. If I quit school there was more coming in. She took the easy way and I was glad that she did because I was getting older and I felt that I did not fit in socially.

Now, I was the man of the house. I could speak Spanish and English. I used to do all the figuring when we worked in the fields. At that time we had to do our own figuring or the farmer did. How many rows you made. How much per acre. How much an hour, and how much per sack. I used to be more or less the family bookkeeper.

I knew that my grandmother had to have someone to rely on and I was the one that was chosen to do so. It was not really that difficult for me to quit school. I knew what was needed at home.

### **Growing up “Gringoized”**

*Cultural conformity in a White world came at the expense of Mexican American culture. However, complete assimilation rarely took place. In spite of the pressure to adapt, the Mexican American culture survived, even if its value was sometimes not recognized until later in life.*

I think that we ought to know a little bit about our culture. But it is not important to me. I figured I got by without it so I thought it is not that important. I didn't instill it in my kids. I didn't push it.

I wish that I had insisted that my kids speak Spanish instead of having them make a choice. I wish that I had insisted because they even say it would have been beneficial to them now. But at that time there were too many other things that took precedence over teaching them how to speak Spanish. They went to an English-speaking school, we went to church *con los gringos*, we lived with *los gringos*. We moved from the north side of town to the south side of town *con los gringos*. We were “gringoized” and consequently culture was not a priority.

I think that if I had been raised in Southern California or Arizona or Texas it would have been more important to me

because I would have grown up with it, but I wasn't. I grew up "gringoized."

It is more of a priority now, than it was then. Simply because society now deems it. There are so many people out there who can't speak or can't understand any English, so there are a few of us, and more coming along who can read, write, and speak Spanish and English who can help these other people who can't communicate in this country. ■

# How My Parents Came to Idaho

**Rita Pérez**

**Idaho Falls**

*At times, families traveled to Idaho under unusual circumstances. Once in the state, however, people joined other Mexican Americans and the process of adjustment was on.*

*Rita Pérez was born in Idaho Falls in 1930. Her parents had emigrated from Jalisco, México, and eventually settled in Idaho well before the Great Depression of the 1930s. Rita lives in Idaho Falls where she was interviewed by Rosa Quilantán.*



*Rita Pérez sits second from right on her father's knee (photo courtesy Juanita Castillo).*

**M**y mother said that my father had only enough money for one fare. My father proposed putting her on the train and then bumming himself and meeting her here. She was petrified at the thought of traveling alone not knowing the language, so when he left to take care of final business she cut her hair, pulled a cap over her ears and put on his overalls. When he returned, he was aghast to the point of tears. She just gave him two alternatives. Either she would accompany him or he could take her back to her parents' home.

They walked to the outskirts of San Francisco where they boarded a train in the dark. They had no problems until they got to Utah where a conductor caught them. He was not about to believe that she was this man's brother and told my father to tell it to the authorities in Salt Lake. It was a good thing that the conductor had to tend to his work; it gave them a chance to get off the train and hide under a bridge until dark. When there was no sign of life or danger of getting caught again, they walked clear to Ogden walking at night and sleeping during the day time. They were afraid that if they tried to catch a train again in Salt Lake, the conductor might have warned authorities and they would be looking for them.

My father spoke broken but very understandable English. He was a farm worker. He started the year thinning beets. Then we would go to Driggs and pick green peas and come back about mid-September. After that, the potato harvest. If there were any sugar beets to harvest, we would also work at that.

At Driggs, there was a clearing in the forest where we were allowed to either pitch tents or build shelters out of bark. There were three or four families that we knew quite well. But

**“My parents would take us in the car and park it at the end of the field. My mother could come at intervals to check on the baby and nurse him. The first time I was left in charge, my younger sister was about six weeks old and I was not quite five.”**

there were probably eight other Hispanic families.

Labor contractors would provide all the workers necessary for the pea harvest. They also made arrangements so we could use the camp grounds. At Driggs you did not have to dig very deep to get beautiful clear, good water. So they dug a well and we had to dip a bucket to bring the water up. My mother built a fire outside and placed stones to hold an old galvanized washing tub. That was where we heated the water. About six families shared that well. Then somebody else dug a well farther on. There were also Filipinos and Anglos, but they went off from the Mexican Americans to different corners.

My parents would take us in the car and park it at the end of the field. My mother could come at intervals to check on the baby and nurse him. The first time I was left in charge, my younger sister was about six weeks old and I was not quite five.

The first time I worked out in the field, I was about eight years old. We worked from sunrise to sunset. Thinning beets could be from four in the morning until nine at night. Picking green peas, because the contractor set the hours, was from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. I believe we got paid three cents per pound.

A man who used to work with my father told him that there were lots near the river he could buy and did not even have to make a large down payment. The owner would settle for \$5 down and property taxes. That's how we got our first home.

Our original house was 10-by-16 feet. My father added some before I was born. I can remember it was made of railroad ties, kind of like a log house with wood on the top and then dirt in the walls for insulation. Then in 1939 he added another addition to the front of the place that was about 12-by-24 feet so that was the size of the house, very crowded but we managed.

## **Surviving the Depression**

*The Great Depression itself did not discriminate. Everybody was affected by these terrible years. Federal and state relief, either in the form of jobs or emergency assistance, was not always an option available to persons of Mexican descent.*

During the Depression my parents raised chickens. We had one neighbor who wanted my father to give him a hen. My father said "No, you're getting help (relief), we're not getting any."

We were Mexicans and there was no relief for Mexicans, during the depression. So here this neighbor who was getting

**“So here this neighbor who was getting welfare wanted my father to give him a chicken. My father said, ‘Why should I give you a chicken when you’re getting welfare and this is all we have.’ So he burned our chicken coop.”**

welfare wanted my father to give him a chicken. My father said, “Why should I give you a chicken when you’re getting welfare and this is all we have.” So he burned our chicken coop. The fire had been started in a tire and there were rags with gas on them. Another neighbor across the street called the fire department and helped my parents carry buckets of water to keep the fire from burning our house. The fire department came but they would not do anything, they just sat there visiting.

Before 1934, we went to find work in California. My parents sold everything they could sell except the house. When they came back, the house had been wrecked because my father left it open so that any poor people that had no place to stay could use it. They had knocked off all the plaster. The walls were all greasy and dirty and filthy. We had to scrub with lye and even that wouldn’t bring the grease off the wooden walls.

**T**he winter of 1936-37 was terrible. I remember there was not any money. We just had vegetables from the garden, potatoes, turnips, carrots, and onions, but no money for flour not even for oats. A nine-pound bag of oats cost nine cents and we did not have any because my father did not have nine cents.

One of my brothers was born the day after Christmas during the winter of 1936-37. We had nothing. We did not even have beans. My father used to go to the butcher shop and ask for bones for the dog, which we did not have. He would boil the bones in with the vegetables which gave them a little more substance. He would swallow his pride again to go and ask for more. Then a Mexican farmer who was leaving Idaho and had planted Mexican corn came and offered it to my father. My father said, “Yes, I can use it but I do not have any money to pay you for it.” The man said he should just as well use it as leave it for the mice to eat. “If I come back next year, you can pay me.” So we had corn bread and corn porridge [*atole*] that made life a little better.

A neighbor across the street had pigs and he hired my father to go and clean the corral. A dollar for a whole day’s work. My father was delighted, he came home with a bag of flour and a bag of oatmeal.

## **Being Mexican and Speaking Spanish**

*Prejudice against Mexican Americans took many forms. Being of Mexican descent was enough to trigger deep seated fears and*



*assumptions among many Whites. Speaking Spanish in the presence of English speakers was equal cause for upbraiding.*

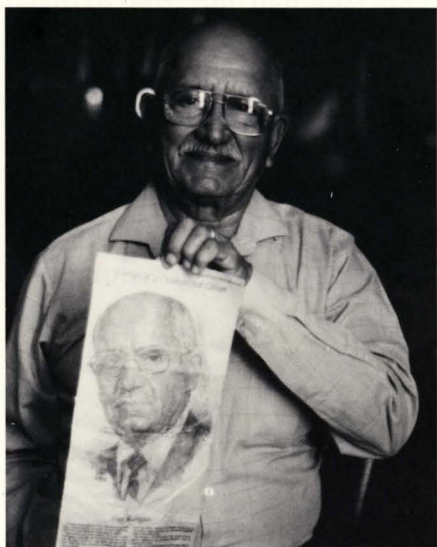
Much later, I went to work in a nursing home because they had such a shortage of nurses. I studied, took a test, and passed it. One of my classmates had avoided me like I had something contagious. I learned later in a psychology class that she had grown up around the sugar beet factory in Lincoln. She remembered the camp of the Mexican families who worked in the sugar beets. The anglo children loved our music and were very curious about the coming and going of the Mexican people. She recalled that their parents warned them to stay away because Mexicans ate children. So she always had that fear and apprehension of being around Mexicans. I then understood her reluctance to be anywhere near me or accept me. Eventually, we worked together and got to know each other. We became good friends.

While I was working there I took time off to help with the harvest and then returned to work. Once when I returned to the nursing home, they had admitted a lady. They were having problems with her. She was Swedish and tried to insist that she did not understand English and was refusing to cooperate. I was assigned to take care of her. I walked in and greeted her "Good morning." Sure enough, she "jabbered" off something to me that I did not understand. I responded to her in Spanish. Immediately, she shot back to me in English. "Why don't you speak English?" So the cat was out of the bag. She could understand English and spoke it. We got along fine after that. ■

# Profile of a Distinguished Citizen

## Antonio "Tony" Hernández Rodríguez Nampa, Idaho

*Leadership is a quality that displays the strength and character of the individual. The following account serves to contradict the stereotype of Mexican Americans as apathetic and tractable individuals. Antonio "Tony" Hernández Rodríguez was once honored by The Idaho Statesman, Idaho's largest newspaper, as a "Distinguished Citizen" because of his work to end discrimination in Idaho. Born in Karnes City, Texas, in 1920, Tony Rodríguez migrated with his parents to Aberdeen, Idaho, in 1941. He has spent the greater part of his life living with his family in Nampa, Idaho, where he was interviewed by Patricia McDaniel.*



*Antonio Hernández Rodríguez owns El Charro restaurant in Nampa (photo by Rick Ardinger).*

He fought hard against discrimination and to take down the "No Jews," "No Mexicans," "No Negroes," "No Indians," "No Japanese," signs in Nampa.

The signs had started around 1958 or 1959. They appeared first in a small restaurant called The Blue Bird. The first signs were against the Japanese. They did not want them in the barbershops, restaurants, and other public places. Then "No Mexicans" signs appeared. They were common in Nampa in 1961.

One day, my nine-year-old daughter came crying. Her class had been on a field trip to the Nampa train station where "No Mexican" signs were. A classmate told her, "My father can enter here, but yours cannot." When she stood here crying, I also felt tears in my eyes. Then I got very angry.

I consulted with Archbishop Shriver. He told me not to get angry against anybody no matter what they might do or say, but to organize. We called a meeting of Mexican American parents from throughout Idaho. At that meeting, the archbishop and I explained my intention to do something about the signs.

Then I went to the fraternal organizations. At the time, I was a member of the Eagles, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Knights of Columbus.

We followed with letters to the state senate and house of representatives. The next year, we started a campaign to pass legislation to ban the signs. I worked hard and provided photographs of the signs as evidence. The bill passed in 1962

Antonio Hernández Rodríguez was instrumental in organizing committees in southern Idaho migrant labor camps to celebrate traditional Mexican fiestas and other cultural events. During the late 1950s, this Twin Falls committee of volunteers helped organize Mexican Independence Day festivities (photo #76-102.65/A courtesy Idaho State Historical Society).



and the signs came down.

After that, I continued to work with schools and hospitals on behalf of all people in the community. I raised money for the sick. All the time, I was not aware that anybody was taking notice of the work that I was doing. I was simply helping people who needed a hand.

One day, while I was in Boise, someone informed me that because of my work against discrimination, I had been selected by *The Idaho Statesman* to be profiled as a "Distinguished Citizen." I got congratulatory letters from throughout Idaho and as far as Washington, D.C. Senator Frank Church wrote to praise me. In addition, the mayor, the Canyon County Sheriff, and others came to congratulate me.

I continue to be socially active. Sometimes people would ask me why Mexican people in Idaho were so uneducated and poor. My response was that among migrants there were white-collar workers, lawyers, or doctors. The migrants are largely poor people who cannot find jobs elsewhere. They come to Idaho looking for a job from Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California.

My present fight is to educate children. I want them to go to school and learn to fight for their rights within the law. When I was young we always put those things aside and behind us. But, there is more opportunity today and nobody has the right to discriminate against anybody.

## Organization of Cultural Events

*People had difficult times and worked hard to support their*

## **Las Mañanitas**

*Que linda está la mañana  
en que vengo a saludarte  
Venimos todos con gusto  
y placer a felicitarte.*

*Ya viene amaneciendo  
ya la luz del día nos dió.  
Levántate, amiga mía,  
mira que ya amanecio.*

*El día en que tú naciste  
nacieron todas las flores  
y en la pila del bautismo  
cantaron los ruiseñores.*

*Quisiera ser solecito  
para entrar por tu ventana  
y darte los buenos días  
acostadita en tu cama.*

*Ya viene amaneciendo . . .  
[Repeat verse 2]*

*Quisiera ser tesorero  
y tener muchos tesoros  
para sacarte a pasear  
en una carroza de oro.*

*En la puerta de tu casa  
te pinté un número tres,  
una flor americana  
y un clavelito francés.*

*Ya viene amameciendo . . .  
[Repeat verse 2]*

*De las estrellas del cielo  
tengo que bajarte dos;  
una para saludarte  
y otra para decirte adiós.*

*Ya viene amaneciendo . . .  
[Repeat Verse 2]*

*As stated by Antonio Hernández Rodríguez, "Las Mañanitas" is one of the most popular traditional songs among Mexican Americans. It is sung on birthdays and other special occasions, such as the annual December 13 celebration for La Virgen de Guadalupe.*

## **Las Mañanitas**

How lovely is the morning  
in which I come to greet you.  
We are glad to come  
and joyfully wish you well.

The dawn is approaching  
now the light of day has arrived.  
Wake up, my friend,  
look, it's already daybreak.

The day that you were born  
all the flowers bloomed,  
and by the baptismal font  
the nightingales sang.

I wish I were a ray of sun  
to enter through your window  
and greet you good morning,  
while you lie in bed.

The dawn is approaching . . .  
[Repeat verse 2]

I wish I were a treasurer  
and had many treasures  
to take you for a ride  
in a golden carriage.

On the door of your house  
I painted a number three,  
an American flower,  
and a little French carnation.

The dawn is approaching . . .  
[Repeat verse 2]

From the stars of heaven  
I'll bring you down two;  
one to greet you with,  
the other to bid you farewell.

The dawn is approaching . . .  
[Repeat verse 2]

families. Through it all, they still found time and energy to become involved in community affairs. Very often, the example of one individual galvanized the collective action and spirit of the Mexican American community.

Every December 13th, we have a big celebration beginning at 5 a.m. for *La Virgen de Guadalupe* at St. Paul's Church. We decorate the church with flowers and sing "*Las Mañanitas*" to *la Virgen*. Sometimes, we take the *mariachi* to sing at church. This is a very special day that makes everybody happy.

I first started to organize cultural events in 1957. I began by encouraging people at the different labor camps to celebrate the 16th of September [Mexican Independence Day]. I listed the names of all the little labor camps in Caldwell, Nyssa, Ontario, Weiser, Homedale, Nampa, and the Franklin labor camp. I don't remember if I included Mountain Home. I told farm labor employers that the people had talent to hold a fiesta.

Then I selected a representative from each camp to

*By the late 1950s, fiestas were commonplace throughout southern Idaho. They brought Mexican Americans together to celebrate their common heritage through parade floats, dances, traditional foods, and music (photo #76-102.63/Z courtesy Idaho State Historical Society).*



organize a big fiesta. Each person was responsible for organizing in their own town. I also convinced the Amalgamated Sugar Company to provide some money for prizes and to cover part of the expenses.

Once the local fiestas were organized, each camp could also participate in celebrations in other communities. It was all so beautiful. Each camp had their own Mexican float. The people prepared food and held dances and other musical events. We provided dresses for the camps that could not afford them. Some of the Mexican women offered their skills as seamstresses. Others embroidered. Together they made the best *china poblana* dress [a traditional Mexican dress]. Later, I asked each city mayor for permission to participate in public parades and hold Mexican celebrations and fiestas. You talk about people, everybody came to the fiestas.

In Caldwell, for example, the people put up small food stands selling tamales and tacos in a big parking area between the Safeway and Sears stores. All the different community floats participated in a grand parade. The evening ended with a large public dance. This was one of our largest fiestas with as many as 7,000 persons attending.

At the time, everybody was eager to help with these cultural events. Over time, however, the celebrations have lost some of the spirit and public involvement. ■

# For the Sake of Family

**Mary Rodríguez López**  
Nampa, Idaho

*Among traditional Mexican Americans, the family took precedence over everything else. While the family structure sometimes weighed upon its members, it was also nurturing and provided direction in times of anxiety.*

*Mary Rodríguez López was born in Pharr, Texas, in 1920. She came to Aberdeen, Idaho, in 1945, the last year of World War II. Mary was married in Aberdeen and has made her home in Idaho ever since. At the time of the interview, Mary was residing in Nampa, where she was interviewed by Patricia McDaniel.*

**“There was a sign that said ‘No Mexicans.’ By then my cousin Pablino knew the person who ran the place and he took the sign from the door. He went in and told him, ‘You don’t need that anymore. We are already here, so what are you going to do, are you going to throw us out?’”**

**M**y father and mother were born and raised in Mexico. The first year my father came to the Texas Valley was 1913. He worked as a rancher, and I don’t remember how long he was there, it was about two or three years. Then he went and got my mom.

I only made it to the ninth grade, I finished the ninth grade, and I was done.

Then, I worked in the canneries packing fruits. Later, I was in a tuberculosis sanitarium for about nine months. So was my brother. They had us in different dormitories. On Sunday they gave us time, about half an hour, to visit each other. We had to be there nine months because of the illness. At about three months, the doctor told me that I could return and I told my brother that the doctor had told me that I could go home because I was well. He said “No, stay here the nine months, so we could leave together,” and I stayed. We got out in December of 1942.

In the spring of 1943, I got a letter. They wanted to know if I wanted to work in the sanitarium as a nurse’s aide. I only stayed three months. One reason was the pay, only \$20 per month, with room and board. Who knows, I could have stayed longer because I had everything, but they put me in the nursing area with the most serious cases. Back then they did not give you a mask, not even gloves, nothing for cleaning, and I had to do everything. I became a little afraid and I left the job. I wrote my mother and father. My father said, if you are not comfortable and you don’t want to stay, then come back.

## Guarding the “Enemy”

*During World War II, German prisoners of war were used to augment the farm labor force in Idaho and other Northwestern states. One camp of prisoners was located at Rupert. In and out of the camp, the prisoners of war were under constant guard.*

My husband and I were married by a justice of the peace. Our godparents went with us. He had to carry me to the justice of the peace's house because there was a lot of snow.

My husband was in the service. We had just gotten married and the following week he was sent to Rupert, to guard German prisoners of war.

The prisoners went out in the morning to work in the sugar beets. My husband would tell me, that they used something like *machetes* [a large knife] to cut the sugar beets. They were on their knees, the poor souls. Sometimes it was cold and they would make some fires to cook sugar beets to eat. When the potatoes came they would also make them pick the potatoes. Back then they used a picking belt.

He said there was this funny prisoner; he spent all of his time telling jokes. For example: "Hitler would tell us that we had to go to America but he didn't tell us that we had to be on

*In 1945, Mary López' husband was assigned as a military guard in the German prisoner of war camp in Rupert (photo #79-2.40/B courtesy Idaho State Historical Society).*





our knees!" Such a jokester. My husband would laugh a lot with him. And then, I tell you, the war had finished and they sent them back. We were there for about a month, in Rupert, and then he was sent to California.

## **"No Mexicans Allowed"**

*Discrimination and prejudice towards persons of Mexican heritage was commonplace in Idaho. Businesses and other public places displayed signs warning Mexicans and Mexican Americans to stay away.*

The businessess that had them, well, we would not even stop. Somebody who went in was my cousin, Pablino. He started out as a contractor, contracting people for work. He knew the farmers and the places, and he liked to go a lot to Gene's Lounge. There was a sign that said "No Mexicans." By then he knew the person who ran the place and he took the sign from the door. He went in and told him, "You don't need that anymore. We are already here, so what are you going to do, are you going to throw us out?" He said, "No, the only reason we have that sign is because of all the *braceros*. Many of them start to drink and then want to start fights, and they pull out knives and guns, and we are afraid." That's why they started to put signs up saying that they didn't allow any Mexicans in.

But the Mexican Americans also had to face discrimination. Finally they did something to stop that. ■

## The Idaho Hispanic Oral History Project Archive

The following is a list of the 22 individuals interviewed for the Idaho Hispanic Oral History Project.

<b>Narrator</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>
1. Antonio A. Aguilar	Inkom	Ángela Lucky
2. Pablo Barbosa	Caldwell	Martha Tórrez
3. Celia Herrera de la Garza	Idaho Falls	Rosa Quilantán
4. Felicitas Pérez García*	Pocatello	Martha Tórrez
5. Óscar García	Rupert	Martha Tórrez
6. Juanita Huerta*	Pocatello	Martha Tórrez
7. Mary R. López*	Nampa	Patricia McDaniel
8. Thomas Murillo	Pocatello	Ángela Luckey
9. Henry Peña	Nampa	Martha Tórrez
10. J. Asunción Pérez	Idaho Falls	Rosa Quilantán
11. Rita Pérez*	Idaho Falls	Rosa Quilantán
12. Ofilia Ramos	Idaho Falls	Rosa Quilantán
13. José R. Rodríguez	Rupert	Martha Tórrez
14. Antonio (Tony) Hernández Rodríguez*	Nampa	Patricia McDaniel
15. Epigmenio J. Rosales	Pocatello	Ángela Luckey
16. Jesuscita Salazar	Emmett	Patricia McDaniel
17. Librado Salinas	Twin Falls	María Talamantes
18. Leonel Sánchez	Twin Falls	Marie Sánchez Anderson
19. Victoria Archuleta Sierra*	Pocatello	Ángela Luckey
20. Alfredo Valenzuela	Nampa	Patricia McDaniel
21. Elvira Varela	Pocatello	Martha Tórrez
22. Abel Vásquez*	Nampa	Martha Tórrez

(\*) = transcribed

### **Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs**

Rudy Peña, Chairman (Pocatello)  
Natalie Camacho (Nampa)  
Floyd Padilla (Twin Falls)  
Humberto Fuentes (Nampa)  
Rep. Donna Jones (Payette)

Lydia Guerra (Boise)  
Rep. Leanna Lasuen (Mountain Home)  
Sen. Cynthia Scanlin (Boise)  
Sen. J.L. "Jerry" Thorne (Nampa)

### **Idaho Humanities Council**

Mary Clearman Blew, Chair (Lewiston)  
Daryl Jones, Vice Chair (Boise)  
Jennifer Attebery (Pocatello)  
Robert Bennett (Coeur d'Alene)  
Moana Boyle (Rexburg)  
Hazel Cox (Pocatello)  
Ford Elsaesser (Sandpoint)  
Vincent Hannity (Boise)  
Dale Higer (Boise)  
Carla HighEagle (Lapwai)  
Victor (Butch) Hjelm (Pocatello)  
Judy Lussie (Idaho Falls)

Jody Mabe (Boise)  
Don Mackin (Moscow)  
Dean Mahoney (Lewiston)  
Joe Miller (Boise)  
Stephen Shaw (Meridian)  
Gary Williams (Moscow)

#### **IHC Staff**

Thomas McClanahan, Executive Director  
Rick Ardinger, Assistant Director  
Helen Ford, Grants and Administrative Officer  
Cindy Wang, Special Projects Coordinator

### **Idaho Centennial Commission Ethnic Heritage Committee**

Aldrich Bowler (Bliss)  
Idaho Purce (Pocatello)  
Les Purce (Pocatello)  
Hector deLeon (Caldwell)  
Davie Eiguren (Boise)  
Humberto Fuentes (Caldwell)  
Arthur Hart (Boise)  
Ida Hawkins (Coeur d'Alene)  
Alice Koskela (Pocatello)  
Mary Ann Kojis (Boise)  
Patsy Komoda (Idaho Falls)

Marjorie Lierman (Filer)  
Judy Lussie (Idaho Falls)  
Matilda Mahacek (Buhl)  
Leland Mercy (Boise)  
Joann Muneta (Moscow)  
Maria Salazar (Emmett)  
Adelia Garro Simplot (Boise)  
Anita Standal (Bliss)  
Marge Titus (Jerome)  
Lily Wai (Moscow)  
Aileen Weir (Twin Falls)



**Idaho Commission  
on  
Hispanic Affairs**

IDAHO  
*Humanities*  
COUNCIL