

**Maria Argueta  
Narrator**

**Abner Arauza  
Interviewer**

**February 23, 2013  
RBJ's Restaurant  
Crookston, Minnesota**

Maria Argueta        -**MA**  
Abner Arauza        -**AA**

**AA:** Okay, this is Abner Arauza interviewing Maria Argueta in Crookston, Minnesota. We are interviewing in the RBJ's Restaurant. And this is for the Minnesota Historical Society Oral History Project. It is February 23, 2013. Maria, for the record, let me have your name and your ethnicity?

**MA:** Okay. Maria Argueta. I am Salvadorian.

**AA:** Okay. And your parents' names?

**MA:** Well, my dad is Jose Argueta and my mom is also Maria Argueta.

**AA:** Oh, okay. And where were they born?

**MA:** They were born down in El Salvador down in Central America.

**AA:** What part of El Salvador?

**MA:** My mom is from Usulután, Usulután. And then my dad is from Cacaopera.

**AA:** Okay. You're going to have to spell those!

**MA:** [Laughs] I don't know if I can even!

**AA:** Okay. [Chuckles] That's fine. We'll find them.

**MA:** Well, Usulután is U-S-U-L-U-T-Á-N.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** Cacaopera, that one's harder. C-A-C-A-O-P-E-R-A, I believe.

**AA:** Okay. Yes. And it's one word?

**MA:** Yes.

**AA:** Do you know how your parents met?

**MA:** I do, actually. My mom left her house when she was sixteen. She went and worked with my dad's aunt at a store that she owned in Santa Tecla, which is near the capital of El Salvador, in San Salvador. And she worked there for a couple years. My dad had immigrated to the United States. Illegally he was here, but he would go back and forth.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** And then on one of his trips back to El Salvador, they met at my aunt's store.

**AA:** Oh.

**MA:** And so my aunt always thought that they would make a good couple, so she kind of introduced them.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** She played cupid for them, but, yes.

**AA:** Oh, okay. Well, that's interesting that the family, the aunt played a part in it.

**MA:** Yes. Yes.

**AA:** Okay. Do you have brothers and sisters?

**MA:** I do. I have one younger brother and one younger sister. We're all five years apart. I am the oldest.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** My sister, her name is Rosa Argueta. She is eighteen. She just turned eighteen in January.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** And my brother, his name is Luis Argueta, and he is a seventh grader.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** So he is the baby and the only boy of the family. [Chuckles]

**AA:** And what is your age and birth date?

**MA:** Mine? I was born May 8, 1989, so I'm twenty-three years old.

**AA:** Okay. Now where were you born?

**MA:** I was born in El Salvador, in Santa Tecla.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** So and then we moved to the US when I was five.

**AA:** So when your dad left, he returned to the hometown and stayed or what?

**MA:** When he left from the States or from El Salvador?

**AA:** From El Salvador. Because you said he came to the States.

**MA:** Right.

**AA:** Then he went and he married your wife, I mean, I'm sorry, your mom! [Chuckles]

**MA:** [Chuckles] Yes. Yes, and he would go back and stay with my grandparents, I guess.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** But it would be short trips, just to go and see how the family was doing.

**AA:** Okay. Okay.

**MA:** And he would come back and work and yes, he would go back and forth. When I was born he actually wasn't down there, so he was over here working.

**AA:** Oh, all right, so even after your mom and dad got married, he still kept coming back and forth?

**MA:** Yes. Yes.

**AA:** But she stayed in El Salvador?

**MA:** Yes. My mom stayed down there and we lived with my grandparents on my dad's side.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** While he was over here. And so I was born, and he went back a couple months after I was born. And then again he would leave and come back, until finally he decided that he wanted to bring us here, and to be with us.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** Obviously, there were better job opportunities for my mom as well. And I was growing up, I was five by then, and so he wanted a better education for myself.

**AA:** Of course.

**MA:** And my sister was on the way.

**AA:** Oh. [Chuckles]

**MA:** So, you know, he thought of us, and which, I mean for me, is a blessing. And by then he was already a, what is it? A resident alien?

**AA:** Resident alien.

**MA:** Yes. And so he applied for us to become resident aliens so we didn't travel. Thank god we didn't travel here illegally. And so it was a much easier transition.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** To come in like that.

**AA:** How did you travel into the US? Did you drive a car, bus, fly?

**MA:** We flew.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** We flew. I think that's when my travel bug sparked or I guess started.

**AA:** Oh! [Chuckles]

**MA:** I was just so excited to be on the airplane. And the whole, because we came on a night flight, it was night and I was supposed to be sleeping, but the whole time I was just this excited five-year-old, to be on an airplane for the first time.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** And we came and it was a weird flight because we came from El Salvador up to Houston, and then Houston to Chicago, and Chicago to LA, which is where we were going to be living! [Chuckles]

**AA:** Oh, wow! [Chuckles] Yes.

**MA:** So, you know, it was a long flight and different airplanes and stuff but, yes, we got there safely.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** Yes.

**AA:** Oh. What was your first reaction to LA?

**MA:** It's very [sighs] different and big. [Sighs] I don't even know. You know, I was five years old; it's hard to remember back then. But I remember it was just a lot brighter than I was used to. LA is a bigger city than where we lived, you know.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** I was *fascinated* by the big houses, and the tall trees, and big roads and streets. I just remember falling in love with this one house. I don't remember what it was, but I remember being in love with that house, because I think it was the first big house that we saw on our drive to my uncle's house, which was where we stayed when we first got there. [Sighs] And then I remember thinking, "How am I going to survive in this big place?" [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** You know, a five-year-old, everything was bigger than what it is, you know, to an adult. And all the cars, and just all the people around speaking English, a language that I had no idea even existed when I was five, you know, I had no idea what it sounded like. And it was scary! But I had my parents with and I had my dad, and I hadn't seen him in a long time. But that helped, you know.

**AA:** At five, that means that you were starting school, or would have started the following year.

**MA:** Well, I had been in a kindergarten when I was down in El Salvador.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** My aunts helped a lot with that. Well, and my dad, too. He sent money to my mom and took care of us. And so I went to a little private kindergarten. And it was just kindergarten. And then we had little uniforms and had my lunchbox and, you know, backpack that my dad had sent me from the US. So I was *proud* of this lunchbox and backpack!

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** So I had gone through kindergarten. And then when we arrived in the United States, since my English, obviously, was nonexistent, I had to repeat kindergarten and take English as a second language classes and get help from that. So I had to repeat kindergarten again, but it kind of put me behind a year, but you know, I still managed to learn quickly.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** And get ahead and, yes.

**AA:** Good. How did you end up in Crookston?

**MA:** [Sighs] Well, my grandparents had immigrated to Winnipeg [Canada]. They were political refugees. And they ended up in Winnipeg somehow, I'm not really sure. And so we wanted to be closer to them. They're my dad's parents, so we decided that we were going to move closer, spend some time up there with them. And we drove, I remember it was an old, brown, beat up Camaro that we drove in. [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** And my sister had been born and she was sick the whole way, driving from California to here. I'm not sure how, you know, my dad was the one that was good with the maps and knew where he was going. So we ended up crossing the border up near Grand Forks or I guess in that area. And we spent some time with my grandparents. My dad and mom came down to the US to look for a place to live and some jobs, and we ended up in Grand Forks, or East Grand Forks. And we moved down there. And we just wanted to be closer to our grandparents, my dad's parents.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** And then my dad got a job at Dee, Incorporated here in Crookston.

**AA:** Go on. What do they do there?

**MA:** They make different parts for, you know, cars, big ships.

**AA:** Oh, okay.

**MA:** Airplanes, things like that. And yes, he got a job there. And he didn't want to have to drive back and forth, so we looked for a place here. And we found a house, and we moved, and this is where we've been ever since.

**AA:** Wow. What year was that?

**MA:** That was late 1996, early 1997. We lived in Grand Forks for a couple of months; I want to say for six months before we ended up coming here.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** You know, back then, the town was growing, there were a lot of job opportunities. And my parents being low-skilled workers.

**AA:** Here or in East Grand Forks?

**MA:** Here in Crookston, yes.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** My parents being low skilled workers, they had to find jobs that, you know, they could do. And whatever they got was, you know, what they went after. And so Dee, Incorporated was one of them, and soon after, my mom got a job there. And so that's where she has been ever since.

**AA:** Wow. So now you said your dad didn't have skills, so he didn't need skills to work there?

**MA:** No, I mean, he had been here. I don't even know what year he came in, but his English was pretty well, all that he needed was, you know, the English skills.

**AA:** I see.

**MA:** Then he started off as a machine operator. And they showed him how to use the different machines and yes, you know, made the parts and that's the kind of job that he went after. He used to work as an apple picker in Washington State. So that's kind of the job that he had for a while. And then it was always just manual labor out in the fields. And then he moved here and started at a company.

**AA:** Now I may have missed it, but how did you actually hear, or your family, how did they actually hear of East Grand Forks and/or Crookston? You drove to Winnipeg?

**MA:** Yes.

**AA:** So you said because you were driving through? Or somebody told your family about?

**MA:** Again, that's a little hard to remember, I was six, you know.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** I think a lot of it had to do with just us driving through and then wanting to be closer to my grandparents.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** And that was the closest town, well, that my parents could find jobs in, and then find a place to live.

**AA:** Was there any kind of support network in place when you arrived? Like to find jobs, housing, medical services, education.

**MA:** [Sighs] No. I have to say no on that one.

**AA:** How did they manage?

**MA:** [Sighs] It was a struggle. My dad was the one that, you know, went out every day. Went to different places. He started out with farmers because it was in the summertime. So he started out by going to different farms and looking for field work if they had some.

Then he, you know, started going to the different companies. I think a friend that he met mentioned the job here at Dee, and so he went and applied. But as far as a support system, I don't remember having anything in place.

**AA:** I see.

**MA:** When we moved to Crookston, I remember that the Catholic Church reached out and kind of welcomed us. Then, you know, a couple other Hispanic families helped us. And then when we went to, well, when my parents went to register us to go to school, then they kind of helped us and gave us information on going, you know, to Social Services to get Medicare or help finding jobs and things like that, government programs like that.

**AA:** So when you first arrived, well, you had time to plan to move to Crookston. But when you first arrived in East Grand Forks, where did you actually stay? I mean, you didn't know anybody, right?

**MA:** Yes. No, and again, my parents left my sister and I up in Winnipeg with our grandparents.

**AA:** Oh, okay.

**MA:** And they came down, they made several trips back and forth to look for things. And we lived. [Sighs] I mean, you know the cheapest place that they could find was this basement of a house in East Grand Forks and it had one room. We were a family of four back then. But, again, it was, you know, something that needed to be done quickly, that that's the only place that they could find that they could afford.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** So we moved in there and we were there for a couple months and they looked into Crookston and moved out of there.

**AA:** Well, and that's why I was asking, because when you moved in, your parents didn't know anybody in East Grand Forks, right?

**MA:** Right.

**AA:** They just arrived.



**MA:** Yes, they just started looking on their own. You know. My dad with his little English and my mom was barely starting to even learn, you know, English words and so it was my dad who was the one that took point in that and took control over that and, you know, started looking as hard as he could and getting out there.

**AA:** Now you said that the Catholic Church reached out to you and a couple of families from the area. In what way, what kind of assistance did they offer?

**MA:** Well, the Catholic Church invited us to go to Mass on Sundays. They had a Spanish Mass, so they told us about that. The families, we found out that there was another family from El Salvador. And they just got to know us, you know.

**AA:** Go on.

**MA:** Invited us to their house for dinner sometime, showed my parents around, kind of told them where they could find, you know, different things. Hmmm, they helped us get to know the area. They helped us get registered for school, for my sister and I.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** Things like that.

**AA:** Okay. Okay. That family from El Salvador that you mentioned, are they the ones, the same family that has the grocery store?

**MA:** No, they are actually; they're an older couple that lives at Broadway apartments.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** And we've been friends with them for as long as I can remember. [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** Yes. But, you know they've always been there, and anything that they can do to help, they will. When my dad passed away in 2005, they were the first ones to be there for my mom and our family. And the husband, he's always asking whether we need to get our oil changed in our car.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** Or, you know, anything that goes wrong in our house, he always is willing to fix it for us. And just checks in on us every now and again and makes sure that we're doing fine.

**AA:** So what factors influenced your family's decision to stay and put down some roots here?

**MA:** We really liked the quietness of the town and of the area. You know, it's not a big city like LA was.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** We weren't very happy with all the crime and just the noise in LA.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** And when we got here, it was kind of like we could breathe. You know, it was open and safer. My parents liked the fact that it was a small school and a small town where they could raise us, you know, without the dangers of gangs or violence in the community. And a place where we had a nice house with a big yard where we could play and grow up and just be children.

**AA:** At your age when you came here, would you remember, were there any adjustments you had to make in the different lifestyles and pace of life, etcetera, etcetera, from where you came from and Crookston?

**MA:** Definitely. Well, down in El Salvador my mom was a housekeeper. [Sighs] Well, she was the housekeeper for my aunt, so we lived with family. And we had, you know, we lived in a nice place, a nice neighborhood. I went to a private kindergarten school. I would say we lived pretty well.

**AA:** Good.

**MA:** And then we came here, and I mean, our house is a two-bedroom house. We were a four family member, yes, and a four people family. You know, we weren't the richest of families, but that was all that we could afford. We went to public school here. A lot more kids. Ah, definitely had less money, we couldn't do, you know, we couldn't go out. Like we would always go to the beach on a weekend down in El Salvador.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** Just because it was cheap and the beach was right there. Now we couldn't. Weather-wise, you know, we had to buy jackets.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** I remember I had five pants on, and sweaters, hats, gloves, jackets.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** And I was still cold, just because it was a *shock* to be up here in the winter. And yes, you know adjustments like that, I would say. But within our family, we were still happy, you know. We made do with what we were given with our situation and we just kept on going.

**AA:** Do any experiences or memories stand out?

**MA:** Yes, a couple. One time well, we had been here for a couple years, but you know, we always kind of lived paycheck to paycheck. It was hard with, you know, sometimes only my dad worked, because my mom, her English wasn't developed yet. And so one time my dad was making coffee. And we always drink our coffee with milk. And we had just the tiniest bit of milk left in the carton. And he was going to pour it into the cup, but he didn't realize that the cup was upside down.

**AA:** Oh! [Chuckles]

**MA:** So he poured the milk that we had, and all of it was gone. We didn't have money to buy more milk or buy more food. And I mean, that's one instance that stands out. I don't remember what we did after that. But it's kind of funny looking back, you know, and seeing the things that we remember.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** And that's kind of always the one that sticks out the most, I guess it's just the funny. We laughed about it. What else could we do? You know.

**AA:** Sure. How about in school?

**MA:** [Sighs] I remember once I learned, once I learned English, and I understood what was going on, I hated being grouped in with the other Hispanic children and the ones learning English, because I wanted to excel, I wanted to *do*, I wanted to be American, that's what I wanted to do! So I would always get mad when I would have to go to the English as a Second Language room to get help.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** Or when they would pull me out of class to get help because then the other students would look at me weird, and I just did not like that. I remember when we had just moved into here, I had to *repeat* kindergarten for a third time, because in LA I was in kindergarten but I didn't finish it since we moved.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** And so I had to restart with kindergarten here. I remember struggling with drawing shapes. Hmmm, the teacher would tell me, you know, draw a triangle. And I didn't understand her! So I would get frustrated. I would draw whatever shape popped into my head.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** One time she asked me to draw a triangle and I drew a circle. And she would just get frustrated with me! And so that's the story that always sticks out. And I told my friend that story. And first time I ever talked about it with a friend [chuckles] and all she did was laugh. But now that's what she kind of teases me with, and now all I can do is just laugh about it, you know.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** I was . . .

**AA:** Now you said that you didn't understand. Was it a matter of language or a matter of just not understanding what she wanted?

**MA:** [Sighs] A little bit of both. My English wasn't the best, you know.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** Because in the school that I had been in LA, they spoke both Spanish and English. And a lot of the time they would speak Spanish with me, because my English wasn't there yet. And so when I moved here, none of the teachers spoke Spanish, they were all Caucasians. I didn't understand what she wanted first of all, and then there was the language issue, too. So it's definitely a little bit of both.

**AA:** Do you and your family—especially mom and dad—perceive Crookston as being your temporary home or your permanent home? More specifically, you know, many of us, if they asked us, "Where are you from?" My initial reaction is: Crystal City.

**MA:** Sure.

**AA:** You know. And that's, well, no, I haven't lived there for twenty-some years! [Chuckles] Moorhead is my home. So do they still dream of going back to LA, or to Winnipeg, or to El Salvador? Or is this basically what they see as: this is my life.

**MA:** For my parents, well, for my mom, this is definitely where, you know, she has her life. She used to talk about going back and living with grandparents when she retired.

**AA:** I see.

**MA:** But now [sighs] with all of the gang wars that are going down there it's dangerous. And she definitely does not want to put herself in that situation. So the thing that she always talks about is just getting a better house, you know, a house that she doesn't have to worry about fixing up [sighs] about it having problems. She's always wanted a house that has a room for each of us, you know, even if we don't sleep in the room and we all sleep together somewhere, but . . .

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** That's kind of [sighs] where she is at. For myself, I always struggle with that question as well, with, you know, when people ask me, "Where are you from?" [Sighs] It's hard to answer. I grew up here. I grew up in the States, you know. When I am traveling abroad, I definitely say I am American.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** Because I'm a representative of America, but I also add in, "But I'm also Salvadorian, I was born in El Salvador." I definitely don't want to stay in Crookston all my life. I want to get out there; I want to travel the world. Europe has kind of always been my dream of where I am going to live and have my career and my children. You know, I also see this as my home. This is where I grew up. I have become close with the community members, you know. They have accepted us as one of their own. I'm a Crookstonite, I am an American, I am Salvadorian, I am a citizen of the world! So it's hard to answer that question.

**AA:** Okay. Has your family maintained contact with your family, your other family, your grandparents in Winnipeg I don't know if they are still alive in Winnipeg, LA, El Salvador? Is there still contact?

**MA:** Oh yes, definitely.

**AA:** How?

**MA:** Well, we still have family up in Winnipeg. An aunt and uncle are up there. My grandparents are now down in El Salvador.

**AA:** Oh.

**MA:** They have their farm up in the mountains.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** And I don't think that they will ever leave. [Chuckles]

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** So communication has definitely gotten easier with all the technology that we have. My mom Skyped with her parents for the first time a couple of years ago, you know. We try to go back down there to see them in person. But it's hard with the price of airline tickets and just getting off of work. We usually just call down to El Salvador or to the family that we have in Los Angeles, and then we go up for holidays up to Winnipeg to visit the family that we have up there. But, you know, usually it's a phone call, or a Skype date, or things like that.

**AA:** It's amazing what technology will do.

**MA:** Oh, my goodness, yes.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** [Chuckles]

**AA:** Culturally, has your family maintained that connection with your homeland, El Salvador in this case? Or do you basically say, “Hey, that’s where I was born but I’m an American and this is what I am, now?”

**MA:** Again, this one’s kind of split. My mom, you know, still maintains that cultural identity. I tended to deny it when I was younger, when I was in high school. I really took that up again and took that into my full identity when I was in college, and when people were really interested in learning about this other culture that was part of me.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** I began to feel proud of that heritage and the legacy that my parents brought with. [Sighs] You know, I try to learn as much as possible from my mom. Making tortillas, for example, I still can’t make them correctly. [Chuckles] But I try!

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** Ah, my grandma always says, you know, “How are you going to find a man if you can’t make a tortilla?”

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** But, you know, and with my brother and sister, I see them, they’re more American than they are Salvadorian. And it’s hard to see, but again, you know, we can’t go back down there as much as we would like. And my mom is the only one that they can learn from with our different cultures and traditions. But they still know that they have come from there and that it’s a rich culture.

**AA:** Of course.

**MA:** And I try to help them learn as much as possible, and my mom teaches them things, you know. And we talk Spanish at home. We definitely don’t want them to not grow up learning Spanish, which is what we consider our mother tongue, our first language, even though they learned English and Spanish at the same time, you know.

**AA:** So you speak quite a bit of Spanish at home with the family. How about when you have guests?

**MA:** It depends on the guest! [Laughs] Usually yes, the people that come over to our house are Spanish-speaking, and they speak Spanish with us. We speak Spanish with my mom all the time. With my brothers and sisters, within us, we kind of speak Spanglish.

AA: [Chuckles]

MA: Oh, we usually speak Spanish when we get angry at each other! [Chuckles]

AA: [Chuckles]

MA: But when we like fight in front of our mom, we would switch to English so that she doesn't understand what's going on, you know, because we speak really fast.

AA: [Chuckles]

MA: And then she kind of gets lost or behind, but yes, usually it's just Spanish at home and then out in the community it's English.

AA: Okay. And that was going to be my next question. Yes. What? You know, we're talking about your cultural connections, and you have said that your family still embraces them, maintains the cultures of El Salvador.

MA: Yes.

AA: Can you give me some examples?

MA: Yes, well, the tortillas, again.

AA: Okay.

MA: We make a thicker tortilla out of cornmeal or *masa*.

AA: Sure.

MA: My mom makes those. I try. I really do try hard! [Chuckles] But we also have the national dish, which is a *pupusa*. And it's a tortilla with cheese and it's like some type of meat in there or beans. And it's stuffed in there, and we serve it with, what is the English word for *repollo*?

AA: Cabbage.

MA: Cabbage. Pickled cabbage, and then a tomato sauce. And so we eat that all the time, and when my mom makes them. And we don't use forks; we use hands, because that's what a real Salvadorian would do!

AA: [Chuckles]

MA: We make tripe soup, well, not every Sunday, but every once in a while on Sundays. That's the tradition.

**AA:** Are you talking about *menudo* or *pozole*? [*Menudo* is a soup made from beef tripe and hominy. It is garnished with lemon or lime juice, chopped onion, and chopped hot green peppers. *Pozole* is very similar but it is cooked with pork meat (usually not tripe). Some recipes use chicken, turkey or pork rinds.]

**MA:** [Sighs] It's kind of like that, it's a lot of vegetables, not just the tripe and then the . . .

**AA:** Hominy?

**MA:** Yes. Yes, hominy. But we put in, you know, corn, yucca, plantain, cabbage again, green beans, just all these vegetables in there.

**AA:** Sounds good!

**MA:** Yes!

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** But, you know, that's one of the traditions. On a Sunday, you would go into the market and you'd get a big bowl of tripe soup. So, yes.

**AA:** You know of course, as you probably know, living here among Mexicans, there's the Virgen de Guadalupe festivities in December. And, you know, so those kinds of holidays, do you bring any of those? Do you celebrate any of those?

**MA:** Christmas is very big in our house.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** You know, from the day after Thanksgiving we put up our Christmas tree. That's always been our tradition, is once we wake up the next day after that big turkey dinner, I mean that tradition we've adopted over the years. You know, it's not a Salvadorian tradition to have a turkey dinner on a holiday called Thanksgiving. But we do Christmas, we still open up presents on Christmas Eve at midnight. That's when we all get together and we always blast *merengue* (tropical music similar to *salsa*) music or Spanish Christmas music and just dance around. In the past, we would have relatives come up from Central America, but now not so much, now it's just our little family. Sometimes we go up to Winnipeg to celebrate with them. And again, they also still open presents at midnight on Christmas Eve.

**AA:** Hmmm.

**MA:** We used to be involved a lot with the Catholic Church and did the Dia de Guadalupe, you know, the festivities like that. But [sighs] I'm still searching for my faith, so I kind of stepped out from that and my mom switched churches also. And so we don't do those anymore, but we still you know, we still honor the Virgin Mary. [The Virgin of Guadalupe is considered the Patroness of Mexico and the Continental Americas. She is popularly invoked as *Patroness of the Unborn*.



On December 12, Mexicans and other Latinos observe La Virgen de Guadalupe, an advocate of the downtrodden.]

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** She's part of our culture, a part of our tradition. We celebrate Easter, things like that, you know.

**AA:** You said that your mom changed churches. Which church does she go to now?

**MA:** She goes to the Evangelica Apostolica. [Evangelical Apostolic church]

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** And that is a connection through the family, the other Salvadorian family that we know, that they have been our friends with. They were founding members of this church and it's grown over the years.

**AA:** I see.

**MA:** And so now she goes there.

**AA:** Very good. Now you've mentioned a couple of Salvadorian families. Are there quite a few of them here?

**MA:** There with us, I know that there are, for sure, three.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** At least three. The Hispanic population is more Mexican. We do have a couple of Cuban and Puerto Rican families. But it's Mexican, you know.

**AA:** Mexican from Mexico or Mexican-Americans from Texas, for example, or California?

**MA:** [Sighs] It's a mix. It's a mix.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** A lot of the Mexican-Americans are from Texas and, you know, they tend to come up during the summer and then go back during the winter.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** For the beet season and all of that harvest. We do have a lot of Mexican-American families from California or Florida that are here as well. But yes, there are even Mexican families that came from Mexico.

**AA:** If we can go back to the church thing. Was that more of a shift in faith, you know, a change in how she believes and embraces her faith? Or was it a relationship with the people that go to the other, her new church?

**MA:** A little bit of both. She grew up, [sighs] what is the English word for *apostolica*?

**AA:** Apostolic.

**MA:** Apostolic. Okay, she grew up apostolic, you know, the family, her family is Apostolic.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** And then she became Catholic when she married my dad.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** When they lived together. And when [sighs] he passed away, she kind of started, you know, going to this other church, because she had a better support system there with the families that she knew, and that's where she stayed. You know, she knew the traditions in that church. And so, you know, she went back to that.

**AA:** Okay. Are traditions changing in the community and in your family?

**MA:** I would say yes, definitely.

**AA:** How?

**MA:** [Sighs] In the community, I feel like a lot of the values that are, you know, family-oriented values are changing. A lot of the children are, you know, going away from their family. They might not want the traditional family structure that the Hispanic family, you know, puts into their children, or their values.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** We're also becoming more Americanized, I think. You know, we try to hold onto traditions but, as the generations go by, it's harder and harder, you know. Because our elders that we learn from, they might not have had time to teach us all the tradition, so and we tend to forget, and [sighs] it is hard to hang on to that knowledge with each passing generation. Within my family I would say, you know, the same thing. My brother and sister, and myself, you know, we're becoming more American.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** We tend to think more American than Salvadorian sometimes. With my mom she'll always be Salvadorian.

**AA:** [Chuckles]

**MA:** I mean, she's an American citizen, but she will always be Salvadorian. She will always think as a Salvadorian thinks. So it's changes like that. Changes in values that I see that are going on.

**AA:** Okay. Do you think it's intentional? Like, I want to be more American so I have to make this change, or is it just because there's not that influence of? If you're in the middle of El Salvador, you would have the influence of uncles and cousins to kind of nurture the Salvadorian culture.

**MA:** I say definitely the latter, yes, you know. I mean, Crookston is a predominantly Caucasian town. I mean, there's a growing Hispanic population, but again, they all come from different Hispanic cultures.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** [Sighs] Without being immersed in that culture, we forget it. You know, we grow up learning American things. We grow up learning about our culture through American eyes. You know, Mexican food, for example, it's become more Americanized.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** Well, when we don't have traditional Mexican ingredients that you would find in Mexico and, you know, things like that. And again, it goes back to each generation kind of separates a little bit more from the traditional cultural background.

**AA:** What type of relationship do you and your family have with others in the community, one as just an American who happens to live in Crookston, and from the other perspective, a Salvadoran family who lives in Crookston?

**MA:** [Pauses] I mean, we get along great with the community. But we've also been here for fifteen years now.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** Our neighbors, we don't have any problems with our neighbors. They're always friendly. We live in between apartment buildings and then another house, and the neighbor that lives in the house, he will always shovel our driveway in the winter, or when we go away for a while he'll always look out after the house. Within the community, I think that we are also very respected. Again, we've been here, we know people through, you know, the school.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** [Sighs] I mean, I don't want to toot my own horn, but we're a very respectable family. We you know, we try and do our best within the community. We don't cause trouble [sighs] I mean, with being a Salvadorian family in Crookston, [sighs] I feel like it's a little bit more difficult because we tend to be put into the Mexican culture and the Mexican community. [Sighs] You know, you can ask any Caucasian community member and they'll say that there's only a Mexican community. They don't see, you know, they don't see Salvadorian, they don't see Puerto Rican, they see Mexico and Mexican. So it's hard in the way that you want to tell people about your culture, but again, they only see Mexican, you know.

**AA:** So if they have known a Mexican family that celebrates the Mexican culture and the holidays and festivities and they've known them for many years, they then assume or they attribute that to you also?

**MA:** Yes. Yes. You know, until we tell them, "Oh, we're Salvadorian, that's not Mexican, that's not Mexico, that's a different country."

**AA:** I see.

**MA:** A whole, another, yes, there are similarities, but there's also different things that go along with that.

**AA:** Does that affect your relationship with other Latinos? Cubanos, Puerto Ricanos, Mexicanos, Tejanos?

**MA:** I would say yes, a little bit. I feel like there is a lot and I don't even know how to describe it. It's just since we have a bigger Mexican and Mexican-American population.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** Sometimes, we feel left out in a way. You know, because they all get together. And we might not always be invited to this get-together or we feel outsiders, basically. And within that community, within that part of the community.

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** And so [sighs] I always feel like it's a little bit harder to have a relationship, have a good relationship with other Mexican or Mexican-American families than it is with, you know, a Salvadorian family. Or, I mean, even with an American family or a Caucasian family. Sometimes I feel like it's easier to have relationships with them than it is with other Hispanic community members.

**AA:** What kind of work or jobs do Latinos do in this area? And is it changing from the time that you arrived? And I know that you were very young.

**MA:** Yes.

**AA:** But I'm sure that you had some observation. Ah, from the time that you arrived to now, do they seem to gravitate to certain types of work, or just all over?

**MA:** [Sighs] I feel like the work type that they gravitate to is farm work and field work, especially in the summer. For example, hoeing beets or beans, working out in the fields. Or when the harvest comes, they work at the "pilers." [During the sugar beet harvest season, beets are stored in giant piles until the factories are ready to process them. These are commonly known as pilers.]

**AA:** Okay.

**MA:** [Sighs] So that's kind of what attracts a lot of the Hispanic community members is, you know, that type of job. But I have also seen it grow and differ throughout the years. We have a lot more Hispanic members who are working; I mean, for example, Migrant Health, you know, there's a lot more Hispanic members there. Social Services, at the university, you know, there's several Hispanic workers or faculty members, staff members. And again, it's changing, because the different generations are going to school, they're being educated with these different skills, so it's not just manual labor anymore.

**AA:** Okay. Talk about the state, or talk about the condition of Latino education in this area, especially in relation to Latinos.

**MA:** [Pauses] I don't know where to start with that. I think that there are within the high school, I guess, is where I would have more knowledge of. [Sighs] Graduation levels are not the best for Hispanics. There seems to be a bigger dropout rate within the Hispanic population. [Sighs] But I mean it's gotten better, test scores within the Hispanic population have gone up.

**AA:** Yes.

**MA:** I think that there are definitely a lot more Hispanic children going into secondary education. You know, slowly, they're learning that education is one of the most important tools that you can have in your tool belt. [Sighs] Even within the educational system, they're realizing that Hispanic children learn might learn differently than American children. So they bring in, you know, people like me, for example, who work specifically with the minority population, the Hispanic population.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** To bring in different programs that will cater to their type of learning, cater to their culture, and get them excited to be at school, and get them to be comfortable with being a Hispanic in a prominently Caucasian community. You know, and so it's definitely changed. I think that we're making big progress in starting to cater more to the Hispanic population and the other minority population. It's not just white American students, you know, we're becoming a more diverse community. And so we're changing the way we view education and we tackle education in regards to these minority students.

**AA:** To what would you attribute the improvement or this academic success that you're seeing among Latinos?

**MA:** [Sighs] I would have to say, I mean, from my point of view, it goes back to the experiences that their parents have had. For example, in my situation, my parents came here, came to the United States as low-skilled workers.

**AA:** I see.

**MA:** And from day one they always told me that education was important and that they wanted a better life for myself and my siblings. And so I always put in one hundred twenty percent into learning and education so I could go back and help my parents in the future and help them get out of manual labor, low-skilled labor. I think that a lot of Hispanic children are seeing this and do want to get ahead and help their parents, help themselves, you know. And education is definitely the way to go.

**AA:** Can you describe the relationship of the Latino community in general to the majority community or Caucasian community in Crookston?

**MA:** It's definitely *changing* throughout the years. I think that there is more acceptances from the Caucasian community. I mean, for example, we have a Mexican restaurant. We have a Mexican store that is actually pretty popular for the white American community. You know, whites, Caucasians, they're fascinated with the food, the candy, the spices, the culture. And so [sighs] with time, they have become more accepting, they have become more curious. And that's kind of what grows the understanding and the friendships, you know, between the Hispanic community and the white community.

**AA:** I see.

**MA:** Well, here in Crookston. Yes, it's definitely becoming more of a friendship than it used to be. I feel like in the past it used to be more of a "them versus us" and we kind of tended to stay away from them and do our own thing. But now, you know, we have Hispanic parents being involved in the school, and different programs, and different community events, and things like that. And even the Caucasian population being involved in different Hispanic events as well. So we're kind of getting rid of that boundary that used to be there.

**AA:** Are there community organizations that involve Latinos or provide services for Latinos or Latino organizations in the community?

**MA:** Well, there is Migrant Health, you know. They help a lot of the migrant families that come up from the south during the summer. Social Services have various programs that help. Even within the school there's, you know, myself, the cultural liaison, the home-to-school liaison which provides communication with the different families. I help interpret for families that don't know English. I help them fill out forms. There is also Tri-Valley Opportunity Council that has a lot of great programs that help, you know, families in need, and they have both Spanish and English speaking workers there. And so there are definitely a lot of programs out there. I think

that what we lack is just advertising these programs, because a lot of the families might not know that they exist, you know, and so they don't seek them out actively.

**AA:** Are Latinos involved in political activity, whether they run for office or campaign for someone, or speak for or against political issues?

**MA:** [Sighs] No. I mean, from what I have seen and experienced, no. For example, this past election, we had Mark DeMers from East Grand Forks. He wanted to meet with the Hispanic community. And so he had an event at the library, but it was only myself, my sister and my mom, and another family that showed up. [Sighs] There has been, I think, *one* Hispanic person that has run for a position on the school board. And she lost; other than that, they're not very active politically. You know, political-wise. They kind of tend to keep towards themselves within that field.

**AA:** How are things between newly arrived individuals and those who have lived here for many years? Do you know?

**MA:** I mean, I can't speak for other families, but for my family and we try to welcome them with, you know, just inviting them to our house. Helping them get to know the area. Just being friendly, having just a friendly face welcome you to the community, you know. Because that's what other families did when we first got here, and it helped. It helped us become part of the community. I don't really know, you know, with other families, how that is.

**AA:** As an observer here in the community, would you say that the newly arrived ones are facing different issues than the issues your family faced when you arrived?

**MA:** I would say yes. I think one of them would be finding jobs, especially with the economy that we have right now. I mean, Crookston is growing, but at the same time it's getting harder and harder to find jobs. When we first came here, you know, there were a lot of job opportunities.

Housing is another one. Housing was *much* cheaper when we moved here, and that's gone up. [Sighs] You know, it's things like that, that have changed through time.

**AA:** If a friend of yours, let's say, from El Salvador or from California where you lived in LA, called and said that he or she was thinking of moving north or to Minnesota and asked specifically about Crookston, what is it like there, what would you tell them? About the people, about schools, about safety.

**MA:** The first thing I would say . . .

**AA:** The weather.

**MA:** [Laughs] Yes!

**AA:** [Laughs]

**MA:** The first thing I would say would be, “Are you crazy? Have you not looked at weather statistics for Minnesota?”

**AA:** [Laughs]

**MA:** [Chuckles] I would say, you know, it’s a peaceful community. It’s definitely become more welcoming and we have a growing Hispanic population. You know, job-wise, you can find jobs, but it might be a little difficult. It’s definitely a big adjustment if you’re coming from a warmer place. Our winters are *not* the friendliest of winters.

We have great schools. We have a peaceful community. We don’t have a lot of crime. I feel safe. Not locking my doors at night. You know, I leave my car on if I have to run into the store.

**AA:** I know you want to go into the Peace Corps. Let’s say you go to the Peace Corps, and you want to go to Europe, so you go to Europe. And then ten years from today you come back. What is Crookston like?

**MA:** I would like to see a more active Hispanic community, active in politics, for example, more active in education, in their children’s education. Just, well, getting their voice out there. I think that we lack that right now. I would also love to see a more united Hispanic community, not just, you know, the Mexican people being united and then the other families from other places not.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** But just everyone coming together and having their voices heard, running for office, you know, being active in like the way the school is run, changes like that. I would also like to see I guess more events within the community that highlight the different cultures that we have. And not just Hispanic culture, but I mean we also have Chinese families, we have African-American families, we have UMC [University of Minnesota, Crookston] where we have so many different international students. I would love to see a community that embraces this diversity and celebrates it.

**AA:** Okay. One final question. One more question. If the Crookston Chamber of Commerce was to say we’re going to put in a time capsule in a city park and it was your job to put into that time capsule something that when in ten, fifteen, fifty years from today, somebody would open it and would have an idea of what it was like to be Latino in Crookston.

**MA:** That’s a hard one.

**AA:** As a historical reference what would you put in there? What would you say?

**MA:** [Sighs] That’s a hard question. I think I would put in a recipe of some Hispanic food, most likely a recipe for *pupusas*. [Page 15]

**AA:** [Chuckles]



**MA:** [Laughs] Because not only is that my ultimate favorite dish but, I think that with, you know, we're the Salvadorian community, obviously, they're becoming more active, I would say. For example, the Mexican store that is here is owned by a Salvadorian. She's spreading that knowledge of the Salvadorian food. And it's not just Mexican things anymore. So I think that yes, that's what I would put in there.

**AA:** Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add to the interview?

**MA:** [Sighs] Well, we're a changing world. We're becoming more diverse. I think that we definitely as Latinos, as Hispanics, we need to embrace every aspect of our culture and of our heritage because in this diverse world, that's what makes us unique, you know.

**AA:** Sure.

**MA:** We can't forget where we come from because that's part of who we are, that's what makes us who we are. We need to be proud of that, we need to embrace it, and teach as many people as we can about it, because not only will that help us remember our traditions, but it will also further cross-cultural understanding.

**AA:** Good.

**MA:** And so just be proud of who you are, you know.

**AA:** Well, good. Well, Maria, thank you so much for the interview.

**MA:** Well, thank you.

**AA:** I appreciate it.