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Steve Parks  
Editor, *Reflections*

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## **Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows**

**Mark Lyons, Introduction to excerpts from *Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows***

t is time for Latino immigrants in the United States to take back their stories—stories that have been rewritten by people in a campaign to drive them out of the United States. The revised stories read in the press and heard on the streets, promulgated by mayors and legislators and citizens who have a vision of America the Way It Used to Be, go something like this: our towns are being taken over by brown-skinned immigrants who drive our crime rate up and overwhelm the criminal justice system; these immigrants drain our economy, sucking our resources for schools, healthcare and welfare programs; they take away jobs from Americans and drive our wages down; they don't really want to be American—they stick to themselves, won't learn English, and are only here to take advantage of our way of life while refusing to contribute to it; and now, post 9/11, they are a terrorist threat. Citizens, we are being invaded; take back your communities before it's too late.

One problem: the stories are not true. It would take many pages to refute these claims—and that's not the purpose of this article—but the claims are simply not true. In *Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows, Oral Histories of Mexican Farmworkers and Their Families*, immigrants have their chance to set the story straight. The truth is reflected more accurately in the story of Jesús Villicaña López, age 16, who picks mushrooms over 80 hours a week and lives in one room with eighteen other men to support his family back home. Or the story of Margarita Rojas, who worked three jobs to support her family and faces deportation in spite of being married to an American citizen. Or Salvador Garcia, who lived separated from his

family for over 20 years, makes no overtime even when working 70 hours a week, and had to sing La Bamba to the judge before she would give him his green card. Or Mayra Castillo Rangel, a recent college graduate who is living the dream that brought her parents here.

Here is a difficult question: What do Americans do about the fact that there are 11 million immigrants in the US who have no legal documents? A simple answer is to send them home—i.e., we should not reward people who entered the US illegally by allowing them to stay and work. If you break the law, you should be deported: a narrowly defined, legalistic definition of justice. I suggest we frame this discussion using a broader definition of justice that reflects our American values: Social Justice. When we talk of social justice, we not only ask if immigrants came with papers, we ask if their presence contributes to our society. Do they share our democratic values? Should people willing to work harder than imaginable and obey our laws be given the chance that our forefathers had? We talk about the paradox of the wealthiest country in the world bordering on one of the poorest regions in the world—so what about economic justice? What do we gain and lose by finding a way to share our wealth with our neighbors?

How we ultimately respond to the challenge of immigration will say much about who we are. Will “immigration reform” express our nativistic, basically racist, cultural isolationism? Or will reform reflect our generosity that welcomes diversity, that welcomes and rewards people who work hard and contribute to our society and have the same dream that we all share?

As our country makes this self-defining decision, it is crucial that immigrants have a true voice in the discussion, that we learn to listen. May Jesús, Margarita, Salvador, Mayra and the other narrators in *Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows* be heard.

Mark Lyons  
Editor, *Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows*

The following stories are excerpted from *Espejos y Ventanas / Mirrors and Windows, Oral Histories of Mexican Farmworkers and Their Families*, New City Community Press and Syracuse University Press, 2008. The book is in English and Spanish.

### Jesús Villicaña López



*Jesús Villicaña López is from La Ordeña, a village near Moroleón, in the state of Guanajuato. He was 16 years old when he did this interview, 6 months after coming to the United States.*

I made the decision [to come North] on my own because I wanted to find a new way of life or a future for myself. I wanted to be self-reliant and also to help my family—my mom and my brothers. I have four siblings, all younger than I: my sister is 8 years old and I have one brother who is 14 and another who is 12. Because I am the oldest, I have a great responsibility to be with them, to protect them and my mom. It's my duty to give them the best, to create opportunities for them so that they can get ahead. I am responsible for showing them how to live life.

In Mexico, I lived in a stone house patched with clay that had a dirt floor—it was tiny, with only one room for the entire family. We made our living growing corn and beans to eat—this is a staple food of the region.... My mother insisted that I go to school...I know that school is very useful, but I didn't have the resources to continue my studies and neither did my mom or my grandparents. So I decided to leave school and come up here. I believe that by doing this work here in the US, I can help my brothers and sister get ahead in life and provide them with a better education, a career, so that they won't have to make the same sacrifice that I made when I came here for them. I send my family four or five times as much as they used to earn each month. Every three or four weeks I send around \$1000 to Mexico.

I left Moroleón for the North at daybreak, with great sadness. I was with a group—my uncle and some friends of his, all older. I was the only young person in the group. The night before I left I tried and tried to get to sleep so that I could leave easily in the morning, but I couldn't sleep the whole night. I stayed up all night with my mom and then it was time for me to prepare to leave. My uncle came to the house and said that they had come for us. I left with my suitcase and then, with the blessing of my mother, I climbed into the car and we left. Crying, with great sadness, we left our families and the village where we lived behind. We left focused on our future, with the intention of finding a new way of life and confronting new problems. But, then, at the same time, it was a risky and very dangerous adventure.

I am one of the younger people in the camp. When I first came here the truth is that I felt an enormous fear inside of me, since I didn't know where I was and I knew no one except my uncle, who came with me. At night I felt this profound loneliness because I was in such a big place without knowing anybody.

Actually, I was very surprised at the conditions here in the camp. When I left Mexico, I thought that I was coming to a place where we were going to be, well, free, with a big living space. But when I got here, I realized that it wasn't that way—it was a small place where many of us were cramped together. At times we really have to make an effort to get along, since there are so many of us—we are 16 now, and in the summer there will be 20. The camp is one long room, an open dormitory, without separate bedrooms. Each of us has our own space where we sleep, but there is no real private space. We make sure to respect each other's things, though. With so many people living together, there are bound to be conflicts sometimes, but we know that we have to try to avoid them.

I get up faithfully at daybreak, at 2:00 in the morning. Before I leave for work I eat a little. If I want to, I can rest one or two days a week, but since I'm not that tired, I figure I should put more energy into work. So

I work seven days a week, 12 or 13 hours a day...It's piecework—they pay me by the box—so if I want to make more money, I have to force myself to try to harvest more mushrooms. They ask you to pick an average of six boxes an hour—they pay \$1.00 a box. Each box holds ten pounds of mushrooms. There are times when I fill eight or ten boxes an hour—so I pick 80 to 100 pounds of mushrooms each hour.

I would like to say something to all the people who might think that being here in the United States is easy. I want them to know it isn't that way because you don't necessarily know what you're up against. You think you will come here and find happiness, a new world full of marvels—but it isn't that way. You will face tremendous loneliness with a great many problems, large and small. And you have to be responsible for yourself instead of expecting to rely on others.

I would advise all who are thinking of coming here to think carefully about things. First, think about what you will do when you are here, who might accompany you on your trip, and if you are mentally and physically prepared, if you are strong enough to face your personal and social problems. Because if you are not prepared to face life, to face new challenges, it will weigh very heavily on you over time. Often it is misfortune that makes us unable to bear this burden and that gets us into trouble. And everything that you hoped for when you came here can turn out quite differently than you planned. You can succumb to temptation, like alcohol or drug addiction, and all the desires and dreams that you came here with can so quickly disappear into oblivion. If a person comes with desire, with interest, and if he knows why he's coming, what he's coming to and what he intends to accomplish here, then, yes—it's worth it.

*A few months after this interview, Jesús' father died. Jesús was not able to return to Mexico for his burial. In the Spring his mother, two brothers and sister moved into their new three-room house in La Ordeña—paid for with the \$10,000 that Jesús had sent home.*

## Margarita Rojas



*Margarita Rojas is 32 years old. She grew up in the town of Zacapu, Michoacán, and came to the United States when she was 18 years old. This interview was completed one week before her final deportation order was to go into effect.*

After I left high school, my dreams were always to be a kindergarten teacher, to have some money—which we didn't have at home.... But the economic situation didn't make my dreams possible and, afterwards, the man who came into my life—the father of my children—ended my plans. I discussed with him that I was going to continue studying, but tradition dictated otherwise. It was more like, "Women shouldn't study because eventually they get married and never practice their profession."

It was very difficult for me to bring myself here because I was leaving my heart there—my land, my family—but I knew that I had to struggle to make a better life. I thought that it was going to be better. For me, it was very difficult to change countries, to change customs, to change everything. I remember that when I went to say goodbye to my parents, my house was very sad—it seemed as if somebody had died, everyone was crying. I had to hug my parents and tell them that I was going. My parents cried, but they didn't stop me—they always believed that we should make our own lives. But, I tell you, I left half my heart there.

All those five years [here in the United States with my first husband] were full of abuse, violence, mistreatment and daily insults. And all this time [my daughter] Adriana saw how we were living—she was frightened and crying. She was six years old and was very traumatized. She didn't love him. She would tell me that when she would see her dad, her stomach would hurt—she was scared of him because he also beat her, he abused her. Then, I remember it well—it was December 30,

1994—he beat me over and over, viciously, without feeling, without reason. He just went crazy. I thought, "The moment will come when God will grant me a chance to leave because today I am leaving." Then, throughout the early dawn hours I stayed up to make sure that he would be sleeping. I kept my children all dressed up, including their jackets. When I heard that he was snoring—that was about 5:00 in the morning—I took my Richie in my arms and I woke up Adriana and I told her, "Big girl, let's get out of here." She was suddenly happy and my daughter left quickly, like a little kangaroo, without making noise. And we got out, thank God.

I dedicated myself to working hard to help my children get ahead so that they would be able to have nice clothes and good shoes, and I was succeeding. In the morning I cleaned houses 'til 12:00 or 1:00 pm. After cleaning houses, I took a bath and went out to do demonstrations, selling clothes, gold jewelry, beauty products and lingerie. I was the owner of three businesses; I had a chain, an enormous network, like you can't imagine, of people who depended on me—they were selling and they paid a percentage of the sales to me. I was popular. I was able to have an apartment for me and my children. It transformed me. My life changed after I started living alone and then I was happy. I wanted tranquility and peace. I wanted to help my children get ahead by myself, so that no one would tell me, "You and your children eat because of me" or "Because of me you all have a place to sleep and to live." That's why I had cried so much. I wanted to say "I can do it by myself, I don't need anybody." I stopped crying then.

Finally, I started a very beautiful relationship [with a man called Pablo, who is Mexican and an American citizen]...Pablo wasn't the typical *macho* that I had known. He gave me a lot of courage to be able to be free, to be able to make my own decisions, and he was never going to oppose them. In September 2000 we got married officially before the judge. I tell you, for me, all of this was very beautiful because now I felt protected, I felt loved, I felt very supported and respected. He

wanted a family and I gave that to him. I wanted happiness, attention and support and he gave all that to me.

[I applied for a work permit at INS, but] the only thing that they gave me was a deportation order.... I feel very bad, I feel like they have me tied up and I can't do anything—I feel like a criminal. I say it's unfair, after so much struggle, because I am married to an American citizen, with two children who are citizens and one who is a resident. I feel very frustrated because I think, "What will happen to my children, with their rights, the dreams that they have?" I feel worse for them, worse that they will lose everything that is their life here. Right now, I feel like they have me in a plastic bag and I can't breathe, like I am drowning. I wish they would let me breathe, let me be free.

My dreams are for my children to be able to go to college, to fulfill their lives as professionals, and not to have to depend on anyone the way their mother did. I wouldn't want them to have to do the kind of jobs that I did—I don't want my daughter cleaning houses or my son running all over the place looking for work. As I have said to Adriana, "I would be so happy to see you working, helping a lot of people, lending your hand to whomever needs it because you remember how we were in need and how we had many people who helped us."

I feel very bad because my husband and I finally found happiness and now a law is going to separate us. The only thing that I ask God is that when we go to Federal Court the judge turns out to be a just person. If I had the opportunity, I would tell the judge not to act as a judge, but rather as a normal human being with feelings. I would say to him, "I am not a criminal. I didn't murder anyone—why are you judging me this way? Think more about the welfare and rights of the children. Have compassion—we all have children. Don't pay so much attention to what I did by violating this law to re-enter the United States—millions and millions of people do it, almost every Mexican who is here has done it." I am a proud person and it's very hard for me to ask for

forgiveness—it's like I am stooping down and humiliating myself, but I will do it for my children. I would tell the judge, "Maybe I don't show it, but my heart is broken. Now, I no longer cry—for a very long time I did cry, but I don't want to cry anymore. The only thing I ask of you is that you do not destroy my family."

*Margarita Rojas decided to fly to Mexico with her children on January 25—the day before she was to appear before INS and face deportation. However, at the last minute she chose to stay in the United States and appeal her deportation order one last time so that her daughter, Adriana, could receive the medical treatment she needed. On January 26<sup>th</sup> she said good-bye to her children and appeared before the Immigration Service, prepared to face detention in jail pending an appeal of her deportation order. Her deportation was postponed and she was allowed to return home to care for her children. Her case is still in the courts.*

### Salvador García



Salvador Garcia Baeza is 54 years old and is from the town of Moroleón, Mexico. He came to work in the mushroom industry in Kennett Square in 1979 and got his permanent residency card in 1986. He brought his sons to Pennsylvania in 1996 and his wife and daughter in 2000.

I think that our family survived the separation because above all there was communication through letters, when they were little ten-year-olds, twelve-year-olds, fourteen-year-olds. There were individual letters for each one, giving them advice. I think my wife has maybe 300 letters—all those that I sent during those 22 years, she has them all. Each month I sent one letter. There was a lot of communication by telephone, asking about everyone, talking with

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them for 10 or 15 minutes. I gave them advice. I felt happy after talking with my wife, with the children. I felt renewed energy to begin work another day.

Of course, it was difficult being separated from my children. I didn't see them grow up. Now I know how they are doing because I see them. Well, I can say that I feel proud of how they've behaved and also I'm proud of my wife, that she knew how to take charge when I was in the United States. There are families that aren't like that.

[In my present job] they pay me \$7.20 an hour and I have worked there for eight years. Nowhere do they pay overtime. I've been working 13 hours a day for a month and a half—70 to 80 hours a week—and they still don't pay time-and-a-half. They say that they don't pay overtime because it's "agricultural work." I think that after 40 hours a week, you should be paid overtime, it doesn't matter what you call it—"agriculture"—or whatever kind of work. I think the important thing is that we do our jobs.

Where I am, it's not easy to complain and band together because people have a horrible fear—they're very scared to defend themselves. They fear that they would be told, "No more work for you because you're a troublemaker." I think they're afraid because most of them don't have papers—maybe 10% have papers. Of the 80 Mexican employees where I work, 15 have work permits and proper papers and I think that 65 are illegal.... But, also, it's true that undocumented Mexicans aren't very afraid of being deported. Let's say that one day INS comes in and rounds up the 65 illegals. Suddenly the factory is left without people. The 15 of us that are left will not do the work of the other 65, isn't that right? [Laughs].

Even though the bosses are very aware that it's against the law to hire illegals, they do it anyway—because they can pay them cheaper wages, right? It's a type of exploitation—they increase their profits by using

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illegal workers. The US government says that the illegal is a burden for the United States, but I don't think so. Because if the illegal makes \$300 dollars a week and they take out income tax, they take out Social Security and local taxes, state taxes, then how is the illegal a burden? If the government is thinking about kicking out those illegal people, sending them back to Mexico or El Salvador or Guatemala or to Argentina, wherever, tell me, who will do the work? Who? Americans will not work for \$6.50 an hour. The people who work in factory jobs or picking mushrooms or construction or who work in hotels or restaurants like McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's or Chi Chi's—most of them are Mexican. I think the US government should do what they did with me and all of the Mexicans in 1986—give us amnesty and residency.

I remember the day I got my green card, in '86. I went to an Immigration office in a town called Lima. They asked me questions—if INS had caught me, if I had problems with the police. I told them no. Then they asked me if I was a Mexican, and I said yes. They said, "If you are a Mexican, sing us the song 'La Bamba.' How does it go? If you sing it and we see that indeed you know it, then you are a Mexican. If not, you are lying to us." So they had me singing "La Bamba" and there I was, showing them that I was indeed a Mexican.

Para bailar la Bamba *To dance "La Bamba"*  
Para bailar la Bamba *To dance "La Bamba"*  
Se necesita una poca de gracia *You need a little bit of grace*  
Una poca de gracia para ti, para ti *A little bit of grace, for you, for you*  
Y arriba y arriba *And get up, come on*  
Yo no soy marinero *I am not a sailor*  
Por ti seré, por ti seré, por ti seré *For you I will be, for you I will be*  
Bamba, Bamba *Bamba, Bamba*  
Y para subir al cielo, se necesita *And to get to heaven, you need*  
Una poca de gracia... *A little bit of grace...*

I feel great pride for having gotten [my green card]. This green card represents years of sacrifice—not being with my family, living and working with men only, suffering. It's hard.

When I die, I would like to be remembered with affection. I want people to remember what I gave them in my life—the little things. What I am most proud of is the people that I know—friends and neighbors, in Mexico and here. And coworkers I have lived and worked with. I am proud to have fulfilled my obligations to my family, my children. I always took care of my family when they were in Mexico and sent them money so they would have enough to eat. Even though I would drink a few beers, it was never more than six or so. And I didn't spend all of the money that I earned on myself. I always thought of my wife, of the children. I wanted to make sure that they had a place to live, clothes to wear, food to eat, and an education. I tell my wife, I tell her, "You got lucky when you married me."

### **Mayra Castillo Rangel**



*Mayra Castillo Rangel is 22 years old and came to the United States when she was 12. She is a graduate of Chestnut Hill College, where she majored in French and Communications. She now works at Arcadia University in the offices of admissions and financial aid and is also the Minority Recruitment Coordinator. Mayra is the teacher of the dance group Danza Tenochtli, of La Misión Santa María de Dios, in Avondale, PA.*

We arrived here on July 14<sup>th</sup>, I think, during the summer of 1993 right after I graduated from 6<sup>th</sup> grade, primary school, there. When I entered school here I entered an all-English school, although I had some bilingual teachers and classes. Before I started I remember my dad

bought my brother and me a blackboard, chalk and an eraser and lent us his English books to start preparing for school. He said I had to learn all I could alone and at times he would help with what he knew, which I now realize wasn't a lot—but even though it was little, that and the encouragement all helped. He showed me the alphabet, the numbers and some basics. He also took us to a Puerto Rican friend of his at the mushroom plant where he worked so she could help us too. She read books for us and my first English book I read was by Dr. Seuss. I think it was something like *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*. I felt very proud because by the end I could read the whole book by myself, even if it was from memory. I could recognize some of the numbers and colors and other words and I could tell I had good pronunciation.

I think entering school was very difficult. I was very afraid...I had to present myself at the main office to get my schedule and be advised on how classes were going to work... I was so happy when I learned that [the principal], Mr. Carr, spoke some Spanish. That comforted me, but I still couldn't help but cry in front of him... I was very, very nervous and afraid and couldn't help it...[I felt] grief and shame and more fear and then I cried even more.

I think my family continues to be very ingrained in the Mexican traditions. I'm between the Mexican and so-called "American" traditions myself. I like that and work it to my advantage, to understand the two different worlds. Living in the US, I think I understand the culture and the language, but I try not to stray too far from my Mexican culture. I am still proud to say that I'm Mexican, but I'm happy to live in another country where I've had to adapt myself to the new culture. As a Mexican I love to dance the *cumbia*, a little *quebradita* and, of course, our folkloric traditional dances. I love the food and although I don't know how to cook the traditional dishes I still have my mom and I ask her from time to time to make me *un molito*, or *un pozolito* or maybe some *enchiladas* or even her own *gorditas*. Of course, I love my language, the Spanish that we speak at home. I forgot some things

from time to time since I don't speak it a lot. Since living in the US, I like the liberty, my freedom. I'm no longer a submissive Mexican woman, meant to be only a wife and a mother. That's what I've come to conclude about myself now that I live here.

I think that in part, my mom has been my role model, perhaps without wanting to be or without her realizing it. I have heard my mom talk and seen how hard she has worked all her life, sometimes at two or three jobs, plus she is also a mother and housewife, all at the same time. We Mexicans tend to believe or always say that the man is the head of the household, the one that contributes the money, the one that works more, yet my mom has shown me that I can go forward and I can do what I want because she has done it herself.

I just graduated [from Chestnut Hill College], where I studied French. That is what I chose as a career, although I haven't figured out what I'm going to do with it. People say I have a gift for languages, and maybe I do, but the toughest part is figuring out what to do with this gift. At times I have thought about being a school counselor because I had one in high school who really helped me when I was going through a tough time. I had two college professors who gave me a lot of support and believed I could do a lot with my life—they said I would go far in life. When they told me that, I believed it and little by little I got the courage to look for and ask for more in life. If anything, that is what I would like to do with the youth from our community and others—encourage them, make them see that we are in the land of opportunities and more possibilities than what our parents had in Mexico and that if they really want something, to go ahead and grab it. It is tough at times, but it can be done.

I wonder if my family has accomplished the American Dream—in part, yes, and in part, no. Our dream was to have a better life than we had in Mexico and we do have it, in a way. My parents have a home, a job, my dad has some benefits, we have food on our table and some

other amenities that have come along the way, like cars—not luxury cars or even new cars—but what we need for transportation and to feel accomplished in one way or another. I have an education that I know I would never have had in Mexico. I have traveled to many places around the world—something I don't think I would have done if I had stayed in Mexico. I actually think I would be married with children now; there's nothing wrong with that, but I'm just happier where I am now, single. Yes, materially we are better off, but we have all suffered a lot. We have lost the comfort of feeling at home when we go back to Mexico because we have become *Norteños* [Northerners] and have lost part of our Mexican identity while gaining a new one in the US. We have all suffered racial discrimination in one way or another and felt inferior at times and that was definitely not part of our dream.

### **Pasajes de *Espejos y Ventanas/ Mirrors and Windows*, en español Jesús Villicaña López**



*Jesús Villicaña López es de La Ordeña, un rancho cerca de Moroleón, en el estado de Guanajuato. Vino a Kennett Square cuando tenía 16 años-- 6 meses antes de hacer esta entrevista.*

Yo decidí venir [a el Norte] por mí mismo, por querer buscar una nueva forma de vida o un futuro para mí mismo. Por querer realizar mi vida dependiente de mí mismo y ayudar a mi familia--a mi mamá y a mis hermanos. Tengo cuatro hermanos, todos son menores que yo. Tengo una hermana que tiene ocho años y un hermano que sigue enseguida de mí de catorce años y el menor de doce años. Por ser el hijo mayor tengo la mayor responsabilidad de estar junto de ellos,

from time to time since I don't speak it a lot. Since living in the US, I like the liberty, my freedom. I'm no longer a submissive Mexican woman, meant to be only a wife and a mother. That's what I've come to conclude about myself now that I live here.

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de protegerlos a ellos y a mi mamá. Tengo la obligación de darles lo mejor, de tratar de abrirles más las posibilidades de que se superen, a vivir la vida.

En México, vivíamos en una casita de piedras pegadas con tierra y con un piso de tierra, con solo un cuarto para toda la familia. Nuestro sustento y alimentación era el cultivo de maíz y de frijol--el cual se alimentaban la mayoría de los habitantes de mi región. [Mi madre] insistía en que la escuela sería la forma para superarme... Yo sé que la escuela sí es de mucha utilidad, pero como yo no contaba con los suficientes recursos para seguir estudiando, ni mi madre ni mis abuelos. Pues, tuve que venirme para acá y decidí dejar la escuela. Yo en mis pensamientos creo que a través de mi trabajo que estoy realizando aquí en los Estados Unidos puedo sacar a mis hermanos adelante, brindándoles un mejor estudio, una carrera para que no tengan que hacer el mismo sacrificio que yo estoy haciendo aquí por ellos. Yo les mando a mi familia cuatro o cinco veces de lo que ganan en México al mes. Ya pasan tres o cuatro semanas ya junto mil dólares y los mando para México.

Salí de Moroleón a el Norte por la madrugada, muy triste. Estuve con un grupo--mi tío y alguno de sus amigos, todos mayores. La noche antes de salir yo traté y traté de dormir bien para en la mañana salir bien, pero no pude dormir toda la noche. La pasé en vela junto con mi mamá y entonces se llegó la hora en que yo tuve que prepararme para salir. Mi tío llegó a la casa y dijo que ya habían llegado por nosotros. Salí con mi maleta y, pues, con la bendición de mi madre, subí al carro y salimos. Todos tristes, llorando, dejamos las familias y nuestro rancho atrás. Ibamos mirando siempre hacia adelante con el fin de encontrar una nueva forma de vida y enfrentando distintos problemas. Pero, pues, a la vez, era una aventura riesgosa y muy peligrosa.

Yo soy uno de los jóvenes en el campamento. Cuando al principio venía aquí, pues la verdad es que yo me sentía con un miedo enorme dentro

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de mí, puesto que yo no sabía dónde estaba ni conocía a ninguna otra persona, sólo a mi tío que me estaba acompañando. De noche a mí se me hacía una profunda soledad de estar en un lugar tan grande y sin conocer a nadie.

Pues la verdad, yo me sorprendí mucho las condiciones dentro del campamento. Cuando salí desde México yo pensé que iba a llegar a un lugar donde íbamos a estar, pues, libres, con un espacio grande para vivir. Pero al llegar aquí me di cuenta de que no era así--era un lugar pequeño donde estábamos agrupados muchos. A veces cuesta trabajo entendernos unos a los otros, puesto que somos muchos--somos 16 personas hasta ahorita, pero en el verano serán 20. El campamento es un largo cuarto, un espacio abierto, sin dormitorios separados. Cada quien tiene su propio lugar en donde descansar, pero no hay ningún sitio privado. Pero todos los que están allí respetamos las cosas de los demás. Al estar viviendo muchas personas juntas, sí a veces se llega a haber muchos conflictos, pero nosotros sabemos que debemos de evitar éso Yo constantemente me levanto por la madrugada, a las dos de la mañana. Antes de ir al trabajo desayuno un poquito. Si yo quiero, puedo descansar un día o dos días a la semana, pero ahora que no estoy cansado, pues es cuando debo de echarle más ganas al trabajo. Así, trabajo siete días a la semana, algunos días trabajo 12 o 13 horas. Me pagan por caja, yo ando por contrato--si quiero obtener más dinero, yo tengo que esforzarme más por tratar de pizcar más hongo. Le piden a uno que pizque de promedio de seis cajas cada hora—le pagan \$1.00 por caja. Cada caja contiene diez libras de hongos. Hay veces que lleno ocho o diez cajas cada hora—o sea, pizco 80-100 libras de hongos cada hora.

Me gustaría decir algo a todas las personas que piensan que estar aquí en los Estados Unidos es algo fácil. Quiero que sepan que no es así porque uno no sabe a lo que se va a enfrentar. Piensa que va a venir aquí encontrando la felicidad, un mundo nuevo lleno de maravillas--pero no es así. Va a enfrentar una soledad tremenda, con una inmensidad de problemas grandes y chicos. Se tiene que hacer

responsable para sí mismo sin ayuda de los demás.

Yo le aconsejaría a quien piensa en venir acá que pensara bien en las cosas. Primero, se pusiera a pensar en qué va hacer al estar acá, con quién se va a venir en ese viaje, y si está preparado físicamente y mentalmente para enfrentarse a sus problemas personales y sociales. Porque al no estar preparado para enfrentarse a la vida, enfrentarse a nuevos retos, es algo que con el tiempo se le va a hacer a uno un peso enorme. Muchas veces puede ser por la desgracia que uno no puede llevar ese peso, y llega a andar en malos pasos. Y todo lo que esperaba de venir acá va a estar en otros pasos que no deseaba. Puede recaer en diversos vicios, en el alcohol o en la drogadicción, y las ganas que les traía acá, a trabajar y superarse, se van a quedar en el olvido. Pues, si la persona viene con ganas, con interés, y sabe por qué viene y a lo que viene, y qué es lo que va a realizar acá, pues sí--vale la pena.

*Unos pocos meses después de esta entrevista, el padre de Jesús falleció. Jesús no pudo regresar a México para asistir a su entierro. En la primavera del 2004 su madre, dos hermanos y hermana se mudaron a su nueva casa de tres cuartos en La Ordeña—pagada con los \$10,000 que Jesús les había enviado.*

### Margarita Rojas



*Margarita Rojas tiene 32 años. Creció en Zacapu, Michoacán, y vino a los Estados Unidos cuando tenía 18 años. Esta entrevista se completó una semana antes de que su orden final de deportación fuera puesta en efecto.*

Después de que yo salí de la secundaria mis sueños siempre eran ser maestra de *Kinder*, tener algún dinero--que no teníamos en la casa Pero lo económico no facilitó mis sueños y, después, el hombre que llegó a mi vida—el padre de mis hijos--me quitó la intención. Yo le platicaba

que yo iba a seguir estudiando--pero no se usaba mucho, en las tradiciones de ellos, que la mujer estudiara. Como que era más, “La mujer no debe de estudiar, ya al rato se casa y nunca va a ejercer la carrera.”

Era muy difícil venirme acá, porque dejaba mi corazón allá, mi tierra, mi familia, pero yo sabía que tenía que luchar por hacer una vida mejor. Pensé que iba a estar mejor. Para mí era bien difícil cambiar de país, cambiar de costumbres, cambiar de todo. Yo recuerdo que cuando yo me fui a despedir de mis padres mi casa estaba muy triste--parecía que alguien se había muerto, todos estaban llorando. Yo tuve que abrazar a mis padres y decirles que me venía. Mis padres lloraron, pero no me detuvieron ellos--ellos creían siempre que nosotros deberíamos de hacer nuestra propia vida. Pero le digo, dejé la mitad de mi corazón ahí.

Todos esos cinco años[aquí en los Estados Unidos con mi primer esposo] fueron de abuso, violencia, de maltrato, insultos diarios. Y todo este tiempo [mi hija] Adriana vió como vivíamos—ella se asustaba y ella lloraba. Ella tenía como seis años, y estaba muy traumada. Ella no lo quería. Ella me decía que cuando veía a su papá le dolía el estómago--le tenía miedo, porque también a ella la golpeaba, la maltrataba. Entonces, bien recuerdo--fue el 30 de diciembre del 1994 cuando él me golpeó mucho, muy feo, sin sentido, sin razón--él estaba loco. Yo pensé, “Va a llegar el momento que Dios me va a permitir salir, porque hoy me voy.” Entonces, en el transcurso de la madrugada, yo lo estuve velando que se durmiera. Dejé a mis hijos vestidos, inclusive con la chamarra. Cuando yo escuché que él estaba hasta roncando--eso fue como a las 5 de la mañana--yo tomé a mi Richie en brazos y desperté a Adriana y le dije, “Madrecita, vámonos de aquí.” Ella se puso feliz y, rápida, mi hija salió, como cangurito sin hacer ruido. Y salimos, gracias a Dios.

Me dediqué a trabajar fuertemente para sacar a mis hijos adelante y que ellos pudieran tener una buena ropa, un buen calzado. Y lo estaba logrando. En la mañana limpiaba casas, desde las 12 hasta la 1 de la tarde. Yo, después de limpiar casas, me bañaba y me salía a hacer

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demostraciones, a vender ropa, joyería de oro, productos de belleza y ropa interior de mujer. Yo era dueña de tres negocios; yo tuve una cadena, una red enorme, como no se imagina, de gente que dependía de mí--ellos vendían y a mí me pagaban un porcentaje por las ventas. Tuve popularidad. Pude tener un apartamento para mí y mis hijos. Me transformaba. Mi vida cambió después de que yo me fui a vivir sola--estaba entonces feliz. Yo quería tranquilidad, quería paz. Yo quería sacar a mis hijos adelante, yo sola, y que nadie me dijera, "Por mí comes tú y tus hijos," o "Por mí tienen donde dormir, donde vivir." Por esa razón yo había llorado mucho. Yo quería decir, "Yo puedo, yo sola, no necesito de nadie." Yo dejé de llorar entonces.

Por fin empepé una relación bien bonita [con un hombre que se llama Pablo, un mexicano y ciudadano americano]... Pablo no era el macho típico que yo había conocido. Él me estaba dando mucha confianza de poder ser libre, de poder tomar mis decisiones; y que él nunca se iba a oponer. En septiembre del 2000 nos casamos oficialmente ante el juez. Le digo, todo esto para mí era lindísimo, porque ya me sentía protegida, ya me sentía amada, me sentía muy respaldada y respetada. Él quería una familia y yo se la dí. Yo quería felicidad, atención, apoyo, y él me la dió.

[Yo apliqué por un permiso para trabajar de la Inmigración, pero] lo único que me estaban entregando era una orden de deportación... Yo me siento muy mal, me siento como si me tienen amarrada, que no puedo hacer nada, me siento como una criminal. Yo digo que es injusto después de tanta lucha, porque estoy casada con un ciudadano americano, con dos hijos ciudadanos y una residente. Me siento muy frustrada porque pienso, "¿Qué va a pasar con mis hijos, con los derechos de ellos, los sueños que tienen?" Me siento más mal por ellos, más mal que ellos van a perder todo lo que es su vida aquí. Ya me siento como que si me tuvieran en una bolsa de plástico, que no puedo respirar, me siento ahogándome. Quisiera que me dejaran respirar, me dejaran ser libre.

Mis sueños para mis hijos son que ellos puedan ir al colegio, que se

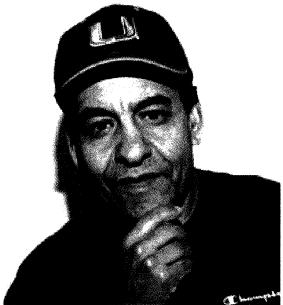
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puedan realizar como unos profesionales y que no tengan que estar dependiendo de nadie como lo hizo su madre. No me gustaría que ellos tuvieran que pasar los trabajos que yo pasé--no quiero que mi hija esté limpiando casas y ni que mi hijo esté buscando trabajos que lo corran de un lado, que lo corran de otro. Como yo le he dicho a Adriana, "Qué feliz fuera yo verte trabajando, ayudando a mucha gente, que extiendas tus manos al que lo necesita --porque recuerda cómo nosotros necesitamos y tuvimos mucha gente que nos ayudó."

Me siento muy mal porque al fin mi esposo y yo encontramos la felicidad, y una ley nos va a separar. Lo único que yo le pido a Dios es que cuando vamos a la Corte Federal, el juez sea una persona justa. Si yo tuviera la oportunidad, le diría al juez que no se pusiera como un juez, sino como un ser normal con sentimientos. Yo le diría, "Yo no soy una delincuente, yo no maté--¿por qué me estás juzgando así? Piensa más en el bienestar y derechos de los niños. Tenga compasión—todos tenemos hijos. No tome tanta atención en lo que yo hice, por haber violado esta ley y re-entrado--lo hacen millones y millones--casi cada mexicano que está aquí lo ha hecho." Yo soy orgullosa, y para mí es bien difícil el pedir perdón--es como estar doblegándome y humillándome; pero sí, por mis hijos, lo hago. Yo le diría al juez, "Yo quizás no lo demuestro, pero mi corazón está partido. Yo ya no lloro--por muchísimo tiempo lloré, y no quiero llorar más. Lo único que le pido es que no destruya mi familia."

*Margarita Rojas había decidido volar a México con sus hijos el 25 de enero—el día antes de su fecha de aparecer ante las autoridades de Inmigración, y enfrentar deportación. Pero, al último minuto, ella decidió quedarse en los Estados Unidos y apelar su orden de deportación una vez más, para que su hija, Adriana, pudiera recibir la atención médica que necesitaba. El 26 de enero ella les dijo adiós a sus hijos y apareció ante el Servicio de Inmigración, preparada para enfrentar detención en una cárcel, en espera de la apelación de su orden de deportación. Su deportación fue pospuesta, y a ella le dejaron regresar a casa para cuidar a sus hijos. Su caso todavía está en las cortes.*

## Salvador García



*Salvador García Baeza tiene 54 años de edad, y es del pueblo de Moroleón, México. Vino para trabajar en la industria de los hongos en Kennett Square en 1979, y obtuvo su residencia permanente en 1986. Trajo a sus hijos a Pensilvania en 1996, y su esposa e hija vinieron en 2000.*

Yo pienso que nuestra familia sobrevivió la separación porque sobre todo hubo comunicación por cartas, cuando eran pequeños de 10 años, de 12 años, de 14 años. Había cartas individuales, una para cada uno, dándole consejos. Creo que mi esposa tiene unas 300 a la mejor, tiene todas las que yo le mandé durante esos 21 o 22 años. Había una carta cada mes. Hubo mucha comunicación por teléfono, preguntaba por todos, platicaba con ellos 10 minutos, 15 minutos. Les daba consejos. Yo sentía una alegría después de hablar con la esposa, con los hijos. Me daba un ánimo muy grande para empezar a trabajar otro día.

Sí, como no, era duro por estar separado de mis hijos. No los vi crecer. Ahora sé cómo son porque los veo. Entonces digo para mí es un orgullo por el comportamiento que tienen y también un orgullo con la esposa, que los supo dirigir cuando yo estaba en los Estados Unidos. Hay familias que no son así.

[Ahora donde trabajo] me pagan \$7.20 cada hora, y he trabajado allá por ocho años. En ninguna parte se paga tiempo y medio. Ahora estoy yo trabajando un mes y medio trece horas diarias—70-80 horas semanales—y no pagan tiempo y medio. Ellos dicen que no se paga tiempo y medio porque es un trabajo que le nombran “agricultura”. Yo pienso que pasando de 40 horas la semana se debe pagar tiempo y medio, no importa cómo se llame—“agricultura”, o cualquier clase de trabajo. Lo importante que pienso yo es que uno trabaje.

Yo pienso que donde estoy, no es fácil de quejarse y formar un grupo porque allí le tienen un miedo horrible, espantoso a que uno vaya a defenderse. Porque tienen miedo que les digan no más trabajo para tí por andar quejando. Yo pienso que el miedo de ellos es que la mayoría no tienen papeles—10%, no más, tienen sus papeles. De esos 80 empleados mexicanos donde trabajo, quince tenemos permiso de trabajo y papeles buenos, y pienso que 65 son ilegales... Pero es la verdad también que los mexicanos sin documentos no tienen mucho miedo de ser deportados. Entonces, por decir, algún día la inmigración entra, y hay una redada de los 65 ilegales. Automáticamente la fábrica se queda sin gente. Entonces, los 15 que quedarán no vamos a hacer el trabajo de los otros 65, ¿verdad que no? [Se ríe]

Aunque los patrones saben bien que es ilegal agarrar ilegales, ellos lo hacen-- porque pagan más barato ¿Si? Es un tipo de explotación--las ganancias de ellos son muy buenas con el ilegal. El gobierno de los Estados Unidos dice que el ilegal es una carga para los Estados Unidos, pero yo pienso que no. Porque si el ilegal gana \$300 a la semana y a uno le rebajan *tax* sobre ingresos, a uno le rebajan Seguro Social, *taxes* locales, y *taxes* de estado, entonces ¿cómo es el ilegal una carga? Si el gobierno está pensando en echar esa gente ilegal para afuera, para México o para El Salvador, o para Guatemala, o Argentina donde sea, dime ¿quién va a trabajar? ¿Quién? Porque los americanos no van a trabajar por las \$6.50 a la hora. La gente que trabajan en las fábricas, las hongueras, la construcción, muchos hoteles, los restaurantes, ¿no? Como *MacDonald's*, o *Burger King*, o *Wendy's*—la mayoría son mexicanos. Yo pienso que el gobierno de los Estados Unidos debe hacer lo que hizo conmigo y con todos los mexicanos en 1986—darnos la amnistía y la residencia.

Yo me acuerdo el día que recibí mi *green card*, en el 86. Fui a una oficina de migración que había en el pueblito que se llama Lima. Me hicieron preguntas, que si migración me había agarrado alguna vez, que si tenía problemas con la policía. Les dije que no. Entonces

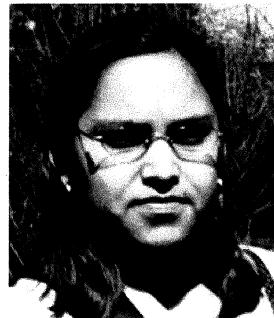
me dijeron que si era mexicano, les dije que sí. Me dijeron, "Si eres mexicano cántanos la canción de "La Bamba". ¿Cómo es que es? Si la cantas y vemos que sí tu la sabes, es que eres mexicano. Si no, es que nos está mintiendo." Ahí me tienen cantando "La Bamba", y yo allí demostrándoles que sí era mexicano, sí.

Para bailar la Bamba  
Para bailar la Bamba  
Se necesita una poca de gracia  
Una poca de gracia para ti, para ti  
Y arriba y arriba  
Yo no soy marinero  
Por ti seré, por ti seré, por ti seré  
Bamba, Bamba  
Y para subir al cielo, se necesita  
Una poca de gracia...

Bueno, para mí significa un gran orgullo por haber obtenido mi *green card*. Este *green card* representa años de sacrificio—de no estar con la familia, de vivir y trabajar con puros hombres, de sufrir. Es duro.

Pues cuando me muera, me gustaría que me recuerden con cariño, que me recuerden por lo que yo les di en mi vida—cositas. El orgullo más grande que tengo es sobre la gente que yo conozco, de amigos, de vecinos, en México y aquí. Y compañeros de trabajo, que he vivido con ellos y he trabajado con ellos. Tengo orgullo de estar cumpliendo con mi familia, con mis hijos. Siempre estuve pendiendo en ellos cuando estuvieron en México, de mandarles dinero, que no les faltara para comer. Aunque aquí luego me tomaba unas cervezas, nunca fue más de seis, o así. No gastaba todo el dinero que ganaba sólo en mí. Siempre pensaba en la esposa, en los hijos. Que no les faltara en dónde vivir, y qué vestir, y qué comer, y su educación. Yo te digo a la esposa mía, le digo, "Tú corriste con suerte conmigo, en tu matrimonio conmigo."

## Mayra Castillo Rangel



Mayra Castillo Rangel tiene 22 años de edad, y vino a los Estados Unidos cuando tenía 12 años. Ella es graduada de Chestnut Hill College, donde se especializó en el idioma francés y comunicaciones. Ahora ella trabaja en La Universidad de Arcadia, en las Oficinas de Ayuda Financiera y Admisiones; y también es la Coordinadora de Reclutamiento de Minorías. Mayra es la maestra del grupo de Danza Tenochtli de la Misión de Santa María Madre de Dios, en Avondale, PA.

Llegamos aquí el 14 de julio, durante el verano de 1993, justo después de graduarme del 6to. grado de primaria allá. Cuando entré a la escuela aquí, fui a una escuela donde enseñaban solamente en inglés, aunque había algunos maestros y clases bilingües. Antes de empezar la escuela, recuerdo que mi papá compró un pizarrón, gis y borrador para mi hermano y para mí. También nos prestó sus libros de inglés para empezar a prepararnos para la escuela. Dijo que yo tenía que aprender lo que pudiera sola y que en ocasiones él me ayudaría con lo que sabía—ahora me doy cuenta que no era mucho—pero aunque era poco, eso y el alentarnos era una ayuda. Me enseñó el alfabeto, los números y cosas básicas. También nos llevó con una amiga suya puertorriqueña en la planta de los hongos donde trabajaba para que ella nos ayudara también. Ella nos leía libros y el primer libro en inglés que leí fue escrito por el Dr. Seuss. Creo que era algo como "Un Pez, Dos Peces, Pez Azul, Pez Rojo". Al final de la lectura me sentí muy orgullosa porque pude leer todo el libro sola, aunque fuese de memoria. Podía reconocer algunos números y colores y otras palabras y podía darme cuenta de que tenía buena pronunciación.

Creo que entrar a la escuela fue muy difícil. Tenía mucho miedo... Me tenía que presentar yo sola en la oficina principal para obtener mi horario

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y para que me dijieran cómo funcionaban las clases. Estuve tan contenta cuando supe que el [principal], Sr. Carr hablaba algo de español. Eso me confortó, pero aún así no pude evitar llorar delante de él... Yo estaba muy, muy nerviosa y asustada y no podía evitarlo. Sentí tanta congoja y vergüenza y más miedo y entonces lloré aún más.

Creo que mi familia continúa muy apagada a las tradiciones mexicanas. Yo estoy entre las tradiciones mexicanas y las llamadas "americanas". Me gusta eso y creo que es ventajoso para mí entender dos mundos diferentes. Viviendo en los Estados Unidos, creo que entiendo la cultura y el idioma, pero trato de no apartarme mucho de mi cultura mexicana. Todavía me siento orgullosa de decir que soy mexicana, pero estoy contenta de vivir en otro país donde he tenido que adaptarme a una cultura nueva. Como mexicana me encanta la cumbia, un poco de quebradita y, claro, las danzas folklóricas tradicionales. Me encanta la comida y aunque no sé como cocinar los platillos tradicionales, de vez en cuando todavía le pido a mi mamá que me haga un molito, o un pozolito o quizás algunas enchiladas e incluso unas gorditas. Claro que me encanta mi idioma, el español que hablamos en casa. De vez en cuando se me olvidan algunas cosas ya que no hablo español todo el tiempo. Viviendo en los Estados Unidos, amo mi libertad. Ya no soy una abnegada mujer mexicana, destinada solamente a ser esposa y madre. Es a la conclusión que he llegado de mí misma ahora que vivo aquí.

Creo que en parte, mi mamá ha sido el ejemplo a seguir, quizás sin siquiera querer serlo o darse cuenta de ello. Yo he oído a mi mamá hablar y he visto cómo ha trabajado fuertemente toda su vida, algunas veces hasta con dos o tres trabajos, aparte de ser madre y ama de casa, todo al mismo tiempo. Los mexicanos tendemos a creer o siempre decir que el hombre es el jefe del hogar, el que contribuye con el dinero, el que más trabaja, sin embargo mi mamá me ha mostrado que yo puedo salir adelante y hacer lo que quiera, porque ella misma ha hecho lo mismo.

Me acabo de graduar de Chestnut Hill College, donde estudié francés. Eso

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es lo que escogí como carrera, aunque todavía no he planeado qué voy a hacer con esta carrera. La gente me dice que tengo el don de aprender idiomas, quizás sea así, pero la parte más difícil es descifrar qué hacer con ese don. A veces he pensado en ser consejera escolar porque tuve una en la escuela secundaria que realmente me ayudó cuando estaba pasando por una etapa difícil de mi vida. Tuve dos profesores universitarios que me apoyaron mucho y creyeron que podía hacer mucho con mi vida. Dijeron que lograría grandes cosas en la vida. Cuando me dijeron eso, les creí y poco a poco me hice valor para buscar y pedir más de la vida. Si hay algo que quisiera hacer para la juventud de mi comunidad y de otras, es alentarlos, hacerles ver que estamos en el país de las oportunidades y de más posibilidades que las que tuvieron nuestros padres en México y si quieren hacer realmente algo, sigan adelante y alcancen sus metas. Eso es difícil a veces, pero se puede lograr.

A veces me pregunto si mi familia ha logrado el "sueño americano", en parte sí y en parte no. Nuestro sueño era tener una mejor vida que en México y de alguna manera la tenemos. Mis padres tienen un hogar, un trabajo, mi papá tiene algunos beneficios, tenemos comida en la mesa y algunas otras diversiones que hemos logrado, un gran avance como son los carros-- no carros lujosos o incluso carros nuevos—pero lo que necesitamos para transporte, y sentimos que hemos logrado algo de una manera u otra. Tengo una educación superior que yo sé no hubiera tenido en México. He viajado a muchos lugares del mundo, algo que no creo que hubiera podido hacer si me hubiese quedado en México. En realidad pienso que estaría ya casada y con hijos ahora; nada malo en eso, pero simplemente estoy mucho más contenta como estoy ahora: soltera. Sí, en el aspecto material estamos mejor, pero todos hemos sufrido mucho. Hemos perdido el confort de sentirnos en casa cuando regresamos a México porque nos hemos convertido en "Norteños" y hemos perdido una gran parte de nuestra identidad mexicana mientras que hemos ganado una nueva en los Estados Unidos. Todos hemos sufrido discriminación racial de una manera u otra y nos hemos sentido inferiores en ocasiones y eso definitivamente no era parte de nuestro sueño.