

Topic: My grandfathers experience as a bracero

Abstract: My grandfather was the first of the family to leave Mexico in search for a better work opportunity. He headed north to the border of Mexico in search for work. He quickly finds work when a representative from a work agency offers him work. He then finds himself in hot weather state Arkansas and works the fields. He encounters discrimination something he never had to deal with and also grueling long working hours. When coming to the United States as bracero he opens up the doors for a better opportunity for the entire family

Keywords: Family and Heartaches, Opportunity in the North, The Bracero Program Working Conditions, No Dogs, Negros, Mexicans, and No regrets

My Grandfather the Bracero

My Grandfather was born and raised in Michoacán, Mexico in a small pueblo called El Cerrito Colorado. He married my grandma in 1941 and begun to start a family soon after the wedding. The honey moon lasted about fifteen years in which they had thirteen kids trough out those years. One had died at birth. They all lived in a two bedroom house that my grandfather had built before marrying my grandma. The living conditions where harsh. Neither the house nor the town had electricity or running water. Water would have to be brought from the rivers. The river was about 3 miles away. Each morning grandma would walk to the river and would walk back. Along with my grandma all four of my aunts would go to help bring water back. My grandfather was a farmer. He had cattle and grew his own crops to feed the family. He had all eight of my uncles working with him around the farm. As the family grew bigger it became very difficult for my grandfather to support them off just the cattle and crops. There were times were he would go without eating just so the rest of the family would have enough to survive off. My grandfather knew he couldn't live that way. He had to do something in order for the

family to survive. He tried looking for work in Mexico, but the pay wouldn't make ends meet. Tired of being hungry and running out patience he turned to his cousin for help. His cousin had heard of work in the United States. He had heard about the bracero program. He told grandpa he would join him if he decided to go north.

My grandpa knew in going to the United States meant he would have to leave the family behind. It was a very difficult decision he had to make. Not knowing exactly how conditions were going to be or if he would ever come back to see the family, he decided to take the risk and go north. He knew if he didn't go the family wouldn't survive. When the time came to say goodbye grandpa was filled with sadness in his heart. He recalls calling it the most painful memory he had ever had to encounter. Holding back on his tears he hugged grandma and gave each of his a kids a kiss goodbye. He walked away and didn't look back.

It was 1955 when my grandfather traveled to the border line of Mexico and the United States in desperate need of work. With the thoughts of the family in his mind and with a heart full of pain, he prayed to find work. When my grandfather reached the border he was approached by a man who asked him if he was looking for work. My grandpa in great shock quickly replied "si senior". My grandpa took that as a blessing. He didn't believe it was going to be that easy to get work. He thanked the man over and over. The man was a representative who worked for an agency who hired men to work in the United States. The man then took grandpa and his cousin to the agency where the paperwork was filled out and both received a temporary pass to be in the United States as workers. My grandfather and his cousin both happy to have found work and were eager to start encountered a small problem. They were giving a document that had the name of

the state were they would be working. At first my grandfather wonders if it was a mistake. He figured if both had filled paperwork at the same time both would end up working in the same place. That was not the case. The agency had split them up to work in different states. His cousin was getting dispatched to work in California, my grandfather was sent out to Arkansas. The agencies reason for splitting them up was they wouldn't allow for family to work together. They called it a conflict of family interest. This was just another heartache that my grandpa had to encounter. The only piece of family he had left was taken away from him. It was very hard from my grandpa to see him go.

Upon arrival to the United States, he was taken to the processing center where he was searched for vegetables, weapons, and marijuana. It seemed funny to him that he was being searched for vegetables. To this day he does not understand why. From there he was put in a bus a driven to his destination. He began his long journey as a bracero in the fields of Arkansas in that year of 1955. He recalls when he first arrived how scorching hot it was. He described how the hot wind was so unbearable that it would burn his eyes. He had never experience such heat like he did there. There he picked onions, strawberries and he also worked the cotton fields. He met other men that had similar stories like his. The majority of the men were experienced farm laborers. Who stopped working their land and growing food for their families with the illusion that they would be able to earn a vast amount of money on the other side of the border. He too had the same illusions. Sleeping in a housing home with about 200 hundred men was not easy. Showering was even worse. My grandpa had to endure not showering for weeks. It was not a pleasant time for him. The worst of all was when one bracero encountered the flu or an illness

most of the time everyone in the room would catch it as well. My grandpa didn't compliant he knew he had to be strong for the family back home. He recalls the time when "the Gabachos" used to spray a powder to disinfect him and to all the braceros. He couldn't recall the name of the powder, but he knew that it could cause cancer and other illness. He knew it caused cancer because his good friend at the time had died of lung cancer. He had told me that his good friend did not smoke and he blames the gabachos for his death.

During his time in Arkansas my grandpa remembers a hoe that gave him a backache. The short handle hoe was a tool widely used. My grandpa knew from his farming experience back home that regular long-handled hoe could have been used, but according to the gabachos it was considered harmful to the plants. The short handle hoe required to work in a bent over position and crawl along the dusty rows of plants for ten to twelve hours a day from sunrise to sunset. At the end of the shift, it was nearly impossible for my grandpa to stand up straight. The use of this tool is now illegal in most states, although you will still find farm workers using it especially in South Texas and in New Mexico. Once again my grandfather didn't complaint of the short hoe or of his backache. The thoughts of the family would get him by each and every long minute being bent over.

When my grandfather received his first paycheck he was speechless. His gross check was \$55.10 for about 60 hours of work in one week. My grandfather knew that he could definitely make a living out working in the fields. He was not one of those men who complaint about the pay, he was content with working and making money for the family back home. When receiving his check he put in the mail and sent back home to

my grandma along he sent a letter telling her how it was going for him and how he wished he was home with them. My grandpa would do this every time he would get paid he sent money along with a letter. Life was good for my grandpa. He didn't mind breaking his back if it meant survival for the family.

While his stay in the state of Arkansas my grandfather dealt with discrimination. He had never been discriminated and he didn't know what it was to be so. He came from a small town where everyone knew everyone and being respectful was a way of life. Even when he went to other pueblos he was respected and he respected others. It came to a shock when it had happen to him. He had never gone out to a sit in restaurant and wanted to experience what I was to dine in. He and his fallow friend walked into a restaurant. Not being aware of the sign that prohibited dogs, Negros, and Mexicans they walked in and sat down. My grandfather being hungry and happy to be in a restaurant patiently waited for someone to take his order. They waited for a long time. He noticed that he was getting dirty looks. Finally a white colored skin man approached them and in angry voice he cursed and shouted for them to leave the restaurant. He told them his kind is not welcomed. My grandfather was confused. The white man pointed to the sign hanging by the door. No dogs, Negros, Mexicans. My grandfather was outraged in anger. He didn't understand why the segregation over his skin color. What really got him angry was that Mexicans and Negros were included in the same sign as No dogs. He regrets ever walking in to that restaurant. Maybe that is why he has not dine-in at a restaurant.

Overall my grandfather does not regret the experience of coming to the United States. He went from not knowing what the future had for him and the family to being able to provide the needs and more for them. He worked like he had never done in his life

and it had its rewards. My aunts and uncles and my father were giving a better life. They had the opportunity to get some school done. They were also giving the opportunity to come to the United States. It was a lot easier for them to do so. The struggle and heartache and the hard work by grandfather opened up the doors for my father who has now giving me a chance for a better life.