

## Coming to the Plains

María Guadalupe García de Perales, Primary Interviewee  
Constancio Perales, Secondary Interviewee  
Cecilia Perales, Interviewer  
Videographer, Videographer

Guadalupe Victoria City, Durango, Mexico

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**CECILIA:** Okay, you can introduce yourself now.

[0:49]

**MARÍA:** Good afternoon, my name is María Guadalupe García de Perales. I am forty-nine years old, thirty years married with my husband. Here he is.

[1:44]

**CONSTANCIO:** Good afternoon, my name is Constancio Perales. I am married. I have four children, a boy and three girls.

**CECILIA:** Okay, well, so, let's... uh, my mom first and then you, okay?

**CONSTANCIO:** Oh, whatever you want. If you want, I can go outside.

**CONSTANCIO:** So, she... bye.

**CECILIA:** [laughs] Mom, this is like a conversation. I want you to be comfortable, okay? Okay. Okay. First question. Where are you from originally?

**MARÍA:** I am from Mexico, from Guadalupe Victoria City, Durango.

**CECILIA:** Could you tell me about your life there?

[2:42]

**MARÍA:** Yes, well, I lived my childhood in a very small town, but I lived very, very happily, very happily. We played outside when we were little. Then, at the age of nineteen, I got married and my husband came to the United States. And, I had three children there. The oldest is thirty years old. Then, the next one is twenty-four. Then, the next one is twenty-two years old. And, well, my husband went to Mexico back and forth, and we would wait for him there [in Mexico]. He sent me money, and we would support ourselves with that, until we managed to come here. I had a good life, I lived happily. My country, Mexico, is very pretty.

**CECILIA:** What were the conditions like when you left?

**MARÍA:** When I left México?

**CECILIA:** Yes.

**MARÍA:** Um...

**CECILIA:** Or why did you leave?

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[4:06]

**MARÍA:** At that time.... before he came to the United States, we lived well but a little poor. We didn't have enough food for our children. I was just thinking about how one day I didn't have food to feed my oldest kid [cries]. Later, my husband came and would send me money, and because of that I could buy food and we started to live better. Because he came here and sent me money, we would start living better. When he went there, he would stay for some months. We went to work the lands, we would pick beans, corn, and sometimes we begged - we didn't own the fields, and we were picking up leftovers, and we would support ourselves like that, we survived like that.

**CECILIA:** How did you prepare for your trip to the United States?

[5:38]

**MARÍA:** There were, there was a lot of preparation. I tried to come twice, and they caught us at this side. They sent me back. At the beginning, I didn't want to come. Even though I lived in those conditions, I really did not want to come because I didn't know this place and I was a bit scared, but my husband came, and the last time he went there, he said that he was tired of coming back and forth and losing his jobs here [in the United States] every time he left. That I had to leave with my children and that was when we decided to come here forever.

[6:24]

**CECILIA:** Who did you immigrate with and who did you leave behind? What else did you leave behind?

**MARÍA:** The third try, when we could cross, we got all the way to Nebraska. It was very hard because, even though we were poor, we left my house. I had everything that I needed, even though things were old: beds, a stove, I had everything. When we got here, we rented a bedroom in a house. I came with little kids, and the house where we rented the bedroom was nice. But I get there, and I had to have my kids in the bedroom because I didn't want them to go to the living room and break the woman's things, the owner of the house. And...

[7:33]

Yes, I felt sad when we got to a bedroom and I would see only the carpet. The bedroom didn't have anything. My husband bought a futon and some clothes. In the meantime, I was sad because I would live with everything that I left there. Even though things were old, the house, I would have everything. And I left my family. When I arrived here, to this town, Lexington [NE] I didn't have any relatives here. Just my husband. I left my parents, my siblings, I left everything. And in the moment, I felt sad.

[8:23]

**CECILIA:** Tell me how you got here. Like, about the way you arrived, mom. More details about how you arrived.

**MARÍA:** Well, there were many tries, there were many tries to get here. As I said before, some of them failed. In one of them when we failed, when they caught us, I remember my husband paid a man to help us cross through the border of Piedras Negras [Coahuila, Mexico]. In this side of the United States it's Eagle Pass [Texas] and that time I remember it was early in the morning.

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We got to the shore of the river and there were some guys who seemed to be gang members who would help us to cross. I had two kids. The oldest was eight and the girl was two, and so we crossed the river. They made me take off my clothes. I put them in a black plastic bag so they wouldn't get wet and when we came out of the river, we would put dry clothes on and would start running. We would get into the stores of Eagle Pass to not appear to be illegal. Then, the two men carried my kids on their shoulders, my eight-year boy, and my two-year girl.

[10:19]

That time they made me run a lot, a lot, a lot. They made us run a lot. That time we failed at this side. A little bit after Eagle Pass, they caught us, and they sent us back. But five months later, we tried to cross again. This time we did it through Ciudad Juárez [Chihuahua]. From this side it's El Paso, Texas. My oldest kid passed through the line. He was eight and he only said: American City, and he passed. Now I had one more girl besides the one of two years old, because when I tried to cross the last time, I was pregnant. So, I went back to Mexico and I gave birth to my girl. And this last time, I had another girl of five months old. And... well, a woman passed my daughters with two birth certificates of her daughters'.

[11:30]

I couldn't cross, they sent me back. I wanted to say American City, but they didn't believe me, they sent me back. It got late. The day was almost ending, and I was desperate because my kids were already on this side in El Paso, Texas. And I was still in the border of Ciudad Juárez, eh... We went to a pub. There, they had lots of IDs that they rented. They rented us one. The owner of the IDs found one with a picture of someone like me and told me: "You'll cross with this one." I tried it and I crossed. I crossed in that way. Later, my husband filed my documentation, and he became a citizen. And thank God, he fixed the documentation for us. And thank God, we are now citizens. But it was a little bit hard, a little bit sad.

[12:31]

**CECILIA:** What was your first impression of the United States? Was the reality what you expected?

**MARÍA:** The first thing I saw was El Paso, Texas. Everything seemed pretty to me. But I got here, to Nebraska, in November of 1996. I saw a lot of snow and I didn't like it much. I didn't like it, but I was with my husband and children, so I tried to keep looking forward. We had already a united family and I cared about that. That we were together. I didn't like it much when I got here. I said I would only be here a year. I didn't like the houses, I didn't like anything, but time passed, and I got used to it, and I like having my family together.

[13:39]

**CECILIA:** How did they treat you when you arrived in the United States? And now, is it the same or different?

**MARÍA:** Thank God, I was treated very well. Where we arrived, the woman was Indian, the man was Mexican. Both have died. His wife was Indian, and they treated me very well, me and my children. The woman went to the store, to Walmart. She bought clothes for my little girl, for the baby, a lot of diapers. I had a really nice welcome. I can't complain about it. Later, I started working and it would be different, because at work you spend time with more people, and well

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...you have to fight, you have to face obstacles at work but...It has been good. The United States has treated me well. We overcame struggles and thank God, now we have a house, and my children are going forward in their education and I am very happy.

[15:06]

**CECILIA:** Yes. Could you tell us about your working experience, here?

**MARÍA:** Yes, it was different. In Mexico, I was able to work at a store. I worked at a store, and here, I first started working at Tyson, with knives, which was very different for me. Very hard, it was very hard and I started working there. It was different from the way I worked in Mexico. After, I started working at Service Master, cleaning schools, here in Lexington, and then in the kitchen, and I am fine, but because of the lack of education and English, I haven't been able to get a better job.

[16:13]

**CECILIA:** If you were a man, would your experiences have been different? and how?

**MARIA:** I think so, because I have worked cleaning, I have worked in the kitchen and, I think my experiences would have been different, but, um... well, yes, definitely. Maybe I would be working at Tyson or working tough jobs, and I think it would have been different. We are always used to that. The ones who come from Mexico know that the responsibility to support the family is the man's, not the woman's. So, women are focused on family. Well, personally, I focus more on my family. I have always told my husband that I am working because I want to, not because it's my responsibility. Well, and I believe it would have been different. In Mexico it is normal that the responsibility to support the family is men's and women's focus is raising children.

**CECILIA:** What are some the differences, similarities that you have seen between cultures in here and from your country?

**MARIA:** Some differences... similarities...?

**CECILIA:** Or similarities that you have seen between cultures? Between cultures in here and from your country.

**MARIA:** Um...

**CECILIA:** Or for example, what are the lifestyles you changed when you got here?

[17:58]

**MARIA:** First, in the stores in Mexico, in markets where they sell meat, fruit, everything is outside. Here it is not. It is a single store where we go to grab everything. I think Americans don't focus much on family. Hispanics, we do focus more on family, on gathering family. I think that American are more distant, I don't know, that is one of the differences. Sometimes Americans attack Hispanics, though not always. There are good Americans. When I arrived, I met good-hearted Americans, but then, at work, I noticed that there is a bit of racism and they attack Hispanics. And that is the difference and the struggles that we have to overcome in this country. Sometimes we want to go back to our country. We feel we could live happier there, where people don't attack us much, but we have to keep going forward. We come to work, not to harm anyone, just to work and push our family forward.

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[19:56]

**CECILIA:** What were your experiences - for yourself and/or your family - when you got here? Have you realized those hopes or those expectations?

**MARIA:** Yes, I feel like they have come true. I feel that they have, thank God. With our jobs, my husband has been working at Tyson for more than twenty years, and I am working, as I said before. We have been able to help our children. From the oldest one who now is thirty years old, we have always tried to support them and help them get ahead. Now, thank God, my oldest daughter graduated from University of Kearney. And next May, God-willing, she is going to graduate as a teacher from University of Kearney too.

[21:04]

The other one is going to graduate from high school next year, here in Lexington. I think that we have been able to support our kids, focusing on their education, and making them good people, good citizens, here in the United States. I always tell my children: the education they receive is always worth it and it will be useful in any country. If they go back to Mexico, it will be useful there. If they go to a different country, education will be useful. And I always tell them not to be afraid, keep going forward, and that education is always, always useful. That is the best inheritance we can give our children.

[22:06]