

JENARO CASTAÑEDA'S STORY

My name is Jenaro Castañeda, [...] Jenaro Edmundo Castañeda. My middle name is Edmundo, and when I was growing up all of my family and friends removed the “Ed” from my middle name...so, my middle name is Mundo. I was born in a little town called Crystal City, in Texas, in the year of our Lord 1937. I lived in this little town in Crystal City, Texas until about 1942-3. [In that town], although we were all Spanish-speaking peoples, we were American Citizens. The entire business of living in Crystal City, Texas was conducted in Spanish because we all [had] Mexican [backgrounds]. The people who spoke English in the city were the city fathers and some Anglo people [who ran] the businesses of the city, but everything else was conducted in Spanish, and we didn't notice any difference or didn't [treat] anybody any different[ly].

It is interesting that my parents were born in Texas, my grandparents were born in Texas, and so [were] my great grandparents. It is also interesting to know that we never cross[ed] the border; the border crossed us. I will leave you to make your own conclusions. This narrative cannot bring to life the insults we experienced in every aspect of our lives while growing up as Mexican, in Texas and in Washington, in those days. This narrative cannot make you smell the filth and the other dirty smells we grew up with. This can not make you feel the low self-esteem many of us felt when we were called “dirty Mexicans” to our faces. In spite of these things, many of us were able to succeed and become what we are today because an education was made available to us, but there are [still] many challenges for the Latino community to overcome, [in order to] to achieve parity with [our] Anglo counterparts.

[When we lived in Texas], we were all poor; nobody had any money, and [most of us] worked in the agricultural industry. Crystal City happens to be the [agricultural] capital of the

nation. [This town has] a statue of Popeye, in the City Square, [because of the large Spinach harvest it produces]. [In Crystal City], because of the fertility of the area and [because] vegetables grow abundantly there, everybody worked in agriculture. [At the time when I lived there] everybody, everybody was [of] Mexican descent—Latino descent—yet we were all citizens of the United States.

My grandmother was the only midwife in Crystal City for over 20 years. She was the only person with any medical knowledge. She helped the people. [She helped] ladies to give birth to kids for 20 years. [She also] cured people as she could with herbs, spices, incantations, and witchcraft. We called her *La Bruja*--The Witch. [For her work], she was paid with chickens, fruits, vegetables, and [also with] promises because that was the way of life in those days.

My father did not work in the fields. My father worked in the ice plant. [He] made pretty good money, I guess. I guess, we did OK because, for many years, my father was the only one [within] the Mexican community who had a car in that little town. Eventually, [as] he was a carpenter by trade, and [he] had a pretty good job, we had a little ranch, a little farm with cows, chickens, and things like that. We had a comfortable life. [Later], my father got a job in a little town 20 miles down the road, called Eagle Pass. We wanted to move there, but we did not have enough money to pay [for] the [house's] down payment. [Suddenly], my father came home one day, and my mother [said,] "We are going to move to Eagle Pass, Texas. I found enough money to make a down payment."

My father said, "Where did you get the money?"

[Then] she said, "I didn't make the down payment in money; I traded our washing machine to *la Senora Cenaida* (Mrs. Cenaida)--the owner of the house--as a down payment."

[As a result], we moved to Eagle Pass, Texas, and my father worked as a lead carpenter in a new school called Stephen F. Austin High School for a number of years. [Later], he came to the State of Washington to work at the [Puget Sound Naval Shipyard,--the] Bremerton Shipyard, during the war. [One day], [my father] came back to Texas for a vacation. [Then, when he was at home], he received a telegram telling [him that] the war [was] over, and he didn't have a job anymore at the Bremerton's Shipyard. [Consequently, he was unemployed]. There was no work [in Washington State]; there was no work in Texas.

[This time], my mother said, "Why don't we go to Washington?"

And my father said, "No. We are staying in Texas."

In a Mexican family, a father rules. Before you know [it], we were [making] arrangements to move to the State of Washington.¹ That's the story that I call *El Viaje*--The Trip. Most people, [to make this type of trip] will get in a bus or [on] a plane and fly to the next destination. [Nonetheless], we got in the back of a 5-ton truck.

There were 25 people on the back of that truck [when] we move from Eagle Pass, Texas to the State of Washington...It was a State body truck covered with a tarp. [It] was [a] death[ly cold] winter. It was as cold as cold can be. We lay on mattresses in the back of the truck, and we covered ourselves. We just laid [down] on the floor of the truck, as the truck went mile after mile, after mile, after cold miles, heading for the State of Washington, [in the] hope [that here would] be an opportunity [for us]. [Suddenly], we [had to stop in] a town in Wyoming [because we] had a flat tire. [At the time, because of his work] in the Bremerton Shipyard, my father was

¹ The way he expressed this statements have a common Hispanic connotation. Hispanic males are characterized by their *Machismo*. Normally, they want to show their domination of women. However, when it is a woman who takes the decisions, they express the actions in an ironic-playful manner that highlights that although men want to show that they have the power, women frequently take actions and decision to solve family issues.

able to [speak] English. He took me by the hand, and we walked on the street to a restaurant. [He wanted] to arrange for our group to go there and have something to eat.

My father and I walked to the restaurant [while] the men were fixing the flat tire. [When] we got to the restaurant, the restaurant owner or manager wouldn't let us in.

[Immediately], my father said: "Why not? We have money; we can pay for our meals."

I remember the guy blocking the door [when he] said, "You are Mexicans! You cannot come in or have dinner here or eat inside of the restaurant, but if you want, you can go around back, and [I] will [make] some coffee and fill up your thermoses."

That's what we did. We went back to fill the thermoses with coffee, we paid, and we went back to the truck. The [rest of the men had] fixed the flat tire, and we continued our way to the State of Washington. We arrived in Washington in [a] town called Toppenish, about the end of March of 1946. We [ended up] in a labor camp. We started living there [that] March in 1946 and personally lived in that labor camp from 1946 to 1959.

The houses we lived in were not houses. They were huts, like military barracks. The unit was about a block long and [had] cracks in the walls and windows. There was no heat, no electricity, no light, no running water in these huts. When [we] had to go to the bathroom, [we] walked a block in one direction; when [we] wanted to get drinking water we had to walk to the end of the barracks to the outdoor faucets; and if [we wanted] take a shower, [we] had to go to the community shower. [Those showers] were down the road about a block [or] a block and a half. [People], after [going to] work everyday, had to stand in line [before getting a shower]. [In those camps,] there [we had very] little privacy. I was nine years old, when I saw my first man being killed, just ten to fifteen feet away from me. Unfortunately, in the ensuing years, I saw too many people getting killed, beat up; [I saw] child abuse, spous[al] abuses, alcohol and drug use,

family break ups, and more killings. [There were] a lot [of] abuses, but [it] didn't matter because the police never investigated [those abuses]. The philosophy [of the policemen] was: "Let them kill themselves, and let God to sort them out." That was part of my experience, but I chose not to focus on it. I chose not to focus on it, it was too negative and I could not handle it. So, I chose to focus on my goals, what I wanted to be, what I had to become [with the care of my parents].

[Our] cabin was nothing to speak of. You could see through the cracks and see the outside. [It] was deathly cold in the winter, and we all hung around the kitchen and [stayed] the closest [possible] to the dinner table because the wood stove was always burning and [there,] we had a little bit of hot water, a little bit of hot coffee, and a little bit of warmth. The only thing I can say of that environment is that we were too poor to do anything and too poor to go anywhere [else,] and [because of this,] we had to learn to grow up together as a family. [Growing up as a family is] one of the founding cultur[al values] of our Latino society.

My parents had no education; my mother and my father had sixth grade and third grade education [respectively]. But my father had an *oficio* (trade). He was a carpenter, his father was a carpenter, and his uncle was a carpenter. They taught him to be a carpenter. So, he may have [had] no [formal] education, but he had a trade, *un oficio*. He was able to take care of himself and his family. [My family was composed of] mom, dad, three boys, and three girls. My mother worked in the fields, and my father, who's nickname was "El Maestro (the master)," he was the carpenter for the entire camp, and all the children worked and [went] to school. My mother [also] counseled all the women, and my father counseled men. [I remember] women doing whatever she said; [her word] was gospel, [while men followed what] my father said. My [brothers and sisters] worked together in the fields. Oh my God; we worked together in the fields, and we fought together in the fields, and the little time we had [left, we] spent it as a family around the

dinner table. We got guidance and advice from our parents around the table. Just as my mother and father were the camp counselors, [later] we became the counselors for the kids we grew up with. When we didn't have an answer to whatever their question was, then we would go to mom and dad and they would help us. Our life was different because we had the respect of the [people in the] camp. People didn't pick fights with us, didn't abuse us. They never caused problems for us, like they caused problems for each other.

My mother liked to bake cookies and make popcorn bowls. I remember popcorn bowls while sitting at the table to put puzzles together, play cards, and Chinese checkers. [When it] was time to go to bed, she would tell stories. My mother never talked to us. She wouldn't talk to us. She wouldn't give us advice or tell us what to do, where to go or how to do [things] because she knew we wouldn't listen [to her]. Instead of doing that, when she wanted to share something with us or give us some advice, she would speak in parables. She would say, "*Ven aqui mijo, dejame decirte una historia,*" (come here son, let me tell you a story). My mother was a fantastic storyteller; on her knees, around the kitchen table, I learned many stories, many things, about how to direct my life, how to grow my life, how to be a decent person, how to be a passionate and compassionate person, how to be a caring person. I credit my mother and my parents for helping me to be the good person that I am now.

When the harvest season started, the government of many states would bring people from Mexico in trains to the different states to work in the crops. At the end of the harvest season, [many times] they would send them back to where they came from. [Some] of them [came] up here, not with the Bracero Program² but on their own. They would get jobs on individual farms or in individual industries and just started in here in [their] own. There was no [real] difference [between us and the Braceros], because all [the workers] lived at the farm labor camp and

² In 1942, the request for Mexican workers became policy under the name of "The Bracero Program."

interacted with each other. Whether you came in the Bracero program or on your own, documented or undocumented, the farmers had a steady inexpensive work force, who worked and worked and worked and worked and worked because there was not anything else to do.

The farmers liked us because we worked [hard]; that hasn't changed! Unfortunately, [farmworkers] still work hard, and they don't get pay that much.

During the summer, in the height of the agricultural season, in the State of Washington, there were about 500 men, women, and children living in close proximity to each other in that particular farm labor camp. [These workers] lived in the most primitive [way]; they worked very hard [in] cold and freezing [weather] conditions. When you are living in a farm labor camp like that in a close proximity, you can see [yourself growing] up so much faster than your contemporaries in the other communities. [This happens] because you are living as an adult, you are living with adults, and you see what adults do to each other and with each other. [There] you see the procreation that occurs between a man a woman. Nine months later, you have a new little baby brother or sister. I saw that happen from beginning to end because there was not privacy; entire families lived in one room as it is still happening today. When that happens, your childhood is lost.

My life in the fields started at very early age. [It] was tough because I started working in the fields when I was about 10 [years old]. We were not expected to work in the fields as kids; [instead,] we were expected to produce as adults. Even 10-year-old [children] were supposed to pick as much [crops] as an adult. [We] had to bring in as much money as an adult and compete with adults; work as hard as adults. In a typical day, in the life of a migrant kid of my age--at 9, 10, 12 years old-- we worked in the asparagus [fields] for example. We would get up at 2:30 in the morning to cut asparagus and yes, we were 9, 10, 12 years old. We went right along with our

parents and worked in the asparagus [fields] from 3:00 o'clock in the morning to 9:00 o'clock in the morning and continued to work until 10 or 12 [o'clock] at night. [Just] like an adult. We were not allowed to complain. [Besides], complaining didn't do any good. We still had to be out in the fields [to work] as adults. By the time other kids were getting out of bed to go to school, we had already put in hours of work in the mornings, and the same thing [happened] in the afternoons. Naturally, whatever [we earned for what] we picked went to help to increase the productivity of our parents. That [way,] they could make more money to take care of the family.

[Another] example [of the crops] we used to pick [was] potatoes. When you pick potatoes, you start picking potatoes at 3:00 o'clock in the morning and you have to fill a sack of potatoes [that] weight 100 pounds. You bended over it; you stood over it, filling your sack of potatoes, as soon as you get out and you get 100 pounds in your sack, you stood the sack in the middle of the road. Then [you] continued immediately to start filling another sack. We were paid at 7 cents a sack, 7 cents per sack per 100 pounds of potatoes. [When picking potatoes], about 9:30 to 10:00 o'clock [you had to stop because] the sun would damage [the] potatoes. We could not pick any more [potatoes in the morning after that time], then [the farm-owners] would hire us to load the truck up with the sacks that we had pick[ed] since 3 o'clock in the morning. [We had] to load those sacks up, take them to the warehouse, and unload them. That [work] took from about 10 o'clock on the morning to 3 o'clock in the afternoon, at which time, we started picking up potatoes again. We stopped picking [potatoes] between 6:30 and 7 o'clock. Then, [we had to] go back and pick up the sacks that we had [filled. Finally,] we would go home at 9 or 10 o'clock at night.

That was just, [one] of the crops we worked in. We [also] worked in the beats, pruning the beats, picking beats by hand in the cold, in October. We worked like that from harvest, to harvest, to harvest, [picking all sorts of fruits]--you name it and we did it. We picked apples, pears, peaches, and cherries, up and down the ladder and trees. We worked in the pea harvest forking pea vines into pea vines, 8 hours a day, with a pea fork. We [also] worked [together in] the hop harvest. It was back-breaking, back-killing work; it was 100 degrees outside, when we were harvesting the hops---hops grow in vines. We had to wear a hat and long sleeve shirt--with buttons at the wrist and buttons at the neck, because the vine is so coarse and its middle is stickers that rub against your skin and [scratch you]. Then, when you start sweating, the sweat gets in there; [it hurts] like [when someone pours] salt in a wound. But, you can't stop working because the harvest is going on. [In addition,] because we needed the money, my younger brother and [I] used to worked 8 hours in the pea binder and then work another 8 hours at a frozen food company. All the funding, all the money that we were making, we poured into one fund, because we had to make as much money as possible during the summer [to guarantee] that our family could financially survive [during] the winter when there were not jobs.

All my life, up to a certain point, everybody we associated with spoke Spanish. We were all poor; we were all in the same conditions. We didn't know [that] there was any difference between anybody. I wasn't [aware of differences] until we came to the state of Washington and lived in the farm labor camp. [I became aware that I was a Mexican when we had to] go to town [or when we had to] go to school, and we didn't have nice clothes [like] other kids had. [When] we started going to regular school--I think that [I] was in the 7th grade in Toppenish Junior High --[a] White kid in school told me that I was a Mexican. [He said] that I was a "dirty Mexican." I

remember who he was; [he] told me that I was a dirty Mexican and that I would never amount anything. [He also said] that I was poor. I did not know what in the heck he was talking about.

[Therefore,] I went home and asked my mother, “Am I a dirty Mexican?”

She said, “You are a Mexican. I don’t know about a dirty because you take baths pretty often. So, I don’t think you are a dirty Mexican, but you are Mexican.”

That [was] the only explanation that I ever really get. But, I started noticing that I was being let out of school functions kids didn’t want to play with me, and the teacher didn’t want to listen to me. [In fact, the] teachers didn’t answer my questions.

[Besides] working in the harvest, if you try to go to school, you fall behind. It was kind of difficult to work and go to school, and so we were left behind. Before you know it, you are too [old] to be in the class that you are in. You are too big to be in the 3rd or 4th grade. [It] is embarrassing to you and as soon as you can, you leave school. In doing so, you are leaving your opportunities for a better life behind in the classroom because you don’t know how to read English; you don’t know how to speak English, and you don’t know how to fend for yourself, in English, in the communities at large.

[When you are a child,] all you know to do is to take care of yourself, to take care of yourself out in the fields. [When you are a child, working on farms], you have a tendency to work in the fields and hide in the fields, when you are making some of the living. But, when you leave a farm labor camp, you are totally lost, afraid, and humiliated. Somehow, you know that you will never be able to come out of the fields to fit [in society]. You feel so useless and so worthless. Growing up in that environment, sometimes [we] were happy, but most of the time, we felt [very] humiliated [because in school, those other children] called us *cochinos* (pigs) or *el Mexicano sucio* (the dirty Mexican) o *El Mexicano cochino* (The Mexican pig). Those are not

very good words to describe a little kid. [When someone treats you like that] your self-esteem is in the toilet; [at that time, even] teachers treat[ed] you with disdain and put you in the back of the room.

After the hop harvest, [when] we started in school, we [already] were three or four weeks late, [causing us to be] behind the power curve. The teacher was very nice.³

She said to me, “Yes, come-in Mundo, come here and sit down with the rest of us. If you sit in the back of the room, I will get to you when I get a chance.”

The teacher was very busy; she had no chance to get back to me and the other Mexican kids. She never came [back], le[aving] us behind. [Although] she said, “I’ll get to you later.” somehow or other, later never came. The [teachers] never got back to us, and we didn’t learn the basics of math or history. [When] some of us made it to high school, they wouldn’t let us take the courses that would allow us to get into college. [For example], what are now computers [courses], then were typing [courses, and we were prevented from taking them].

My personal experience in the school system, in another sense, was ok because I was very athletic, and I played soccer and football, baseball, and basketball, when I had the chance. I didn’t always have a chance because [my brother and I] had to work before school, and we had to work after school. [Furthermore], we could [see] all these cute little White girls that we wanted to talk to and go out with and date, but they wouldn’t even sit next to us in class. That didn’t help our self-esteem [either; we wanted to feel liked, we wanted to feel good about ourselves but we were not because] every time somebody would address us as dirty Mexicans, as dirty this, and as dirty that....

[Later, I tried to get in[to] high school; when I tried to get into some courses that I felt would help me when I got out of high school, my high school counselor---I won’t mention his

³ Ironic expression

name, but I still remember him and what he looked like, I still remember his name---said: "Don't take those courses. You are a Mexican, don't forget [that] you are a Mexican; you will always be a Mexican and all you are ever going to be working out in the fields. Why you don't take some courses that may help you improve your skills, while you are working out in the fields?"

[Therefore,] the courses that we needed to better ourselves were not available to us because [the counselors and teachers] didn't allow us to take them. We were not allowed to take those advanced courses. We could take woodshop; we could take automechanics; but that, that was about it. Our counselors were geared to keeping us out [of the] classes that might have assisted us to seek a higher education or more formal education. They wanted us [to do what they wanted] and [what they] told to us [to do]. They made no bones about it.

[They said,] "You are a Mexican, and you are always going to be working in the fields. Why [do] you want to take this typing course that is not going to benefit you?"⁴
[At that time, I,] like all the other Mexican kids, suffer because [of the lack of education]. We were always so far behind on the education power curve.

At the age of sixteen, my father wanted to pull Mundo and his brother out of school, [for us to] help [to] pay for the family bills, [but] my mother would not allow it. [In addition to my mother's support], if I can give credit to somebody [else] for being who I am, I credit two gringos. One [of them] was the superintendent--the principal--of the junior high school. The other was the principal of the senior high school. Mr. Douglas Goheen and Mr. A. J. Strom came to my home in the farm labor camp. [They] begged to my father and my mother not to pull us out of school. [Then], they worked with us and found us a way to make up [for] our school work.

⁴ The lack of teacher's instruction and support to these Mexican children could be an example of a cause for the lower educational attainment that the Hispanic population, especially Mexican-Americans, is confronting at present. As we can observe in the narrative, the damage is not only at the educational level but at psychological level because a child who has lost his self-esteem can lose the direction of life.

[They] helped us to catch up with the rest of the kids. [They] didn't take me aside, and [they] did counsel me. [They] did help me; I have to say thank you to teachers [like them] because thanks to them, I am what I am now.

[With their help, our relationship with the Anglo children changed]. It didn't change for everybody. It changed for myself and my siblings. I believe it was because we learned how to speak [better] English [and because,] although we were set back in the school, we didn't drop out of school. We continued going to school, and we continued learning. We started excelling in sports, and my sisters excelled in academics. [After that], we [became] accepted in the Anglo community and [assimilated] into the Anglo culture. We had as many friends in the Anglo community as we had in the Latino community--the Mexican community. We were [also] able to transition back and forth with ease. [Later], we started seeing a better way of life, [a way of life very different to] that we had been used to in the farm labor camp.

After several years in the farm labor camp, my father was able to bring running water, and we got a shower. Nonetheless, it was still a farm labor camp. When we started associating with the Anglo community, even though we were working in the fields, [occasionally], we were invited to [our friends'] homes to meet their parents, to meet their families and to associate with them. [It was at that time, when] I looked around me and the only words that came to mind at that time were--wow, indoor toilets, indoor showers, electric stoves, comfortable chairs, separate dinning rooms, separate living rooms, and beautiful furniture. [After I saw the differences between our homes], I said to myself--this is what I want. I realized at about the age of 16 that there was a better way of life, and I wanted it [for me]. Soon after [that], we all started achieving that way of life.

I could see our lives getting better as the days went by. As the years went by, I looked around to other people at the farm labor camp, and I didn't understand why they [were not improving].

[In this respect], my mother used to say, "It is because you are going to school, you [are getting] an education, and you can speak English. [Now] you know how to take care of yourself, and they don't; [it is also because] you guys have ambition, and some of them do not. Some of these folks are just content to work and make enough money to eat, and go back to Texas and come back next year. You guys want more."

My mother and my father kept showing us [that] a better way of life than the farm labor camp was available to us. So, we tried to improve our lives [through] education. We stayed in school, and our parents pushed us. Maybe other people [in the camp] didn't have anybody to push them.

I could see that at a very young age, a lot of the Mexican kids were leaving the farm labor camp. Little boys and little girls ran away at the age of fifteen or sixteen; they just went to live in another farm labor camp, and by the age of twenty, these kids [already] had two or three kids. I saw that, and I did not want that for myself. I wanted to travel; I wanted to go to Seattle; I wanted to go overseas; I wanted to go to Europe, but that was almost an impossible dream for a kid in a farm labor camp. My friends used to tell me—who in the hell do you think you are that you want to go to Europe, you don't know how far is Europe? I wanted to go, I wanted to go, and I did not know how I was going to do it. But I wanted to go. I just aspired to something else, but my friends were also my teachers. They were living the kind of lives that I did not want to live. I did not want to get married. I did not want to have four and five children by the time I was 20. I really didn't know what that really meant, to have children by the time I was 20. I just didn't feel

that that was right for me. So, I set a goal for myself, and even made a bet with my brothers that I would not get married until at least I was 25, because we were still in school.

In 1957, thanks to God, [my mother], and a couple of gringos, I graduated from high school--the Toppenish High School. I wasn't the smartest kid in the world, but I had my high school diploma. I was 19 [years old], and I was the oldest kid of our class, but I was able to graduate. For me, I still remember walking down the aisle, getting my diploma, and having my picture taken with my parents. I remember that day, and to this day, it is one of the happiest days of my life. Because I knew, even at a younger age that I wanted to graduate from high school. I wanted to graduate from high school, and I did. [After I graduated from high school, I kept working]. [We] got a better house and left the farm labor camp. [Then], I [started working] milking cows; [I] milked 150 head of cows twice a day. I had to get up at 2:30 in the morning to be at work at 3:00 [o'clock], milk and feed the cattle, [and] go to stack hay. [Then, I took a] half-an-hour lunch [to] eat a couple of tortillas and *frijoles* (beans) and a cup of coffee or Kool-Aid. [After lunch, I had to] go back to the milking barn, [and I didn't] get off [from work] until 9:30 or 10 o'clock at night. The next morning, [I had to do it] again; it was brutally hard work, [but] that's what my life was.

I had no social life; I saw my girlfriend one or twice a month for a couple hours, maybe. One day, I was walking down the street when I walked by the military recruiting station. I went in, and the Air Force accepted me. Then, I went home and told Mom and Dad good-bye. In January 1959, I left the Yakima Valley and went out to see the world at the age of 21. The Air Force took these kids right out of the milking barn; two weeks later, I was in an electrical training school. I learned to be an alignment electrician. It was hard work, but I loved it; no one bugged me because I worked as hard in the Air Force as I did in the fields. It is interesting [that]

I went [back] to that electrical alignment school 10 years later. After being at that same school for 3 years, I became the director of the school where I went to [study].

In the military, I traveled all over the world. I was in Japan for 2 years, and I learned to speak Japanese; I was in Vietnam for 3 years and I learned to speak Vietnamese; I was in Spain for 5 years and I gained 10 pounds. [I] went to Europe for 5 years. [I] traveled all over Europe, Italy, France, Greece, England, Germany, Spain, Portugal, you name it, I was there. It was a totally, totally great, new, different, exciting, wonderful professional work for m, and because of the nature of my work, I was required to associate with the directors, managers, and the high-ranking officers of the military installations. That was a brand new life for me; I liked that way of life; I like their lifestyles, and I realized that they had those positions because they had college educations and I swore to myself that I was going to get a college education and be just like them because I liked their way of life, I liked the responsibilities, I liked how they dressed, I like the houses they lived in, and I liked the cars that they drove. I liked when they talked about traveling. I liked when they talked about going to Europe, visiting castles, eating in those fantastic restaurants, and staying in those beautiful hotels. It was just a fantastic way of life. I wanted to be part of that, but I realized that that would require having a college degree.

After 24 years in the military, I retired from the Air Force. I left the military so I could start another career. Then, while I was working [as High Voltage Electrician Purchase Agent at Fort Lewis], I started going to school, full time at night. In 1997, I received my Bachelor' Degree in Sociology at Saint Martins University. I was finally able to obtain my degree at the age of 50. [I obtained] all those things that I wanted when I associated with the military leaders--the European military leaders. [Now], I am a very wealthy man--no, not [with] money, but [with] knowledge, enjoyment, and personal [satisfaction]. Eventually, all [my family members became]

professionals. So, we all succeeded. [After I got my Bachelors Degree], I was immediately hired by the State of Washington as a Contract Compliance Officer. I have been working for the State of Washington from 1993 to the present in different positions. In 1993, I started as a Contractor Compliance Officer, [and] today, I am a Business Development Program Specialist.

[In my present job,] I travel all over the state, and I get to know places where there are a lot of Latinos--[migrant farmworkers, who are still in] the atrocious conditions [in which] the migrant workers [lived when I was growing up]. Children [are still] being abused, separated [from their families and school], denigrated, and [do not have equal] opportuniti[es] for education at school. This is a disgrace to our country; we haven't been able to devise a way to improve [the living conditions of] a lot of the people who harvest our vegetables and our food. [For this reason,]...when you sit down to your Thanksgiving dinner, [think about] the people who had harvested the chicken that you are eating; the people who had harvested those turkeys are the same migrant people with no education [who lives are struggles]. The people that are harvesting the fruit that you eat in your salad, the people that harvest [anything] that you eat are still migrant workers, and I lived that life.

People have to live in farm labor camps with the smell of defecation, urine, and filth [We should] not wonder [why] kids cannot get up on time to go to school. [It is] because they have to work before school and after school. It is no wonder they drop out; [it is] because they get too old to be in the 5th grade or the 6th grade, and it is embarrassing for them. But that is a situation that [needs] to be addressed. If we don't find the way to educate these children now, we are going to wind up to paying more for them [later].--when they go on public assistance during the winter or get into trouble with the law and [get] incarcerated. If we don't have the money to educate them now, [how much] are we going to [pay to] incarcerate them later? [At present,] 25

percent of the prison population in the State of Washington are Latinos, 30 percent over all are minorities. *Fijate* (look), they are not bad people; all they wanted was a chance to work. That's what [most of us] ever wanted; that was why we came to Washington from Texas; we came to Washington because there was no work in Texas.

[My life] has been a wonderful trip to me, personally, but it did not start out so wonderfully. It was a rough start, and I believe I learned from it, I grew from it.⁵ I have done everything I wanted to do. But what pisses me off, what makes me angry, and I am very angry about this, is that the situation that I grew up in, as nasty and as mean as I was in 1940s, is still happening today and should not be happening. It still happening today, people are still being treated like pigs, and they are not being paid for the work that they do. They are not being appreciated for the work that they do. [People] want to send them back to Mexico and Central America after they have given their lives providing services to the United States of America and to the States of Washington. Latinos, [with legal status] and without documentation, buy houses, buy cars, work, and pay taxes. They are productive members of the community. If you send them back right now, the state of Washington is going to suffer. There was an article in the newspaper from Yakima that said that these years they are going to lose 25 percent of the crops because there are not enough people—Latinos—to pick up their crops. So, you tell me, what do you want to do? Do you want to send these people back? [Do you want to] lose your crops or do you want to try to work with the communities to help these people become [more productive] citizens. [Some of them] are already citizens, by everything but name only.

Today, I am a citizen of the world. I am at ease at any environment, whether that is English or Spanish or Vietnamese, or Korean or Chinese or Italian. [Here] or in Europe, I am totally at ease---acceptable and accepting. I can make my way in the world. I don't consider

⁵ When talking about his memories, the nostalgic tone of Mr. Castañeda was remarkable.

myself, I don't limit myself to a quota, coded Mexican or Latino. I am a citizen of the world, and I speak three or four different languages. You can call me a Mexican if you want, and that's fine. You can call me a Black person if you want. I am totally comfortable with that. You can call me an Asian or European; call me what you want. I am totally comfortable. Within myself, I know where I am and what I can do. A label to me is irrelevant. If people need to label me to identify me, that is o.k. I will never deny that I am of Hispanic descent, that I am of Latino descent-- Mexican. But to myself, I am a citizen of the world [who has] a lot of resources available to me, and I want to create opportunity for people [who feel] that they don't have opportunities. I want to work in the minority communities. Specifically, I want to work in the military veteran's community. Because *pobrecitos* (poor), they don't know anything. They don't suspect anything, and since I am a veteran, I know how to access the services that they need to improve their lives. [Normally], when I am working in all minority communities, I am targeting the veterans from the Iraqi war. I have created an organization called VIEW, which means Veterans Integration and Employment Work Group [to help them].

[Today, for me I think that] it doesn't matter to be remembered. I am feeling that, right now, I am living a good life. I am paying my way in the world by helping people to help themselves, and if someone wants to remember me for that, it is o.k. I don't do things for other people [to remember me]. What makes me happy [is] helping people. That makes me happy. I have become used to working; [at present], you could say that I am a workaholic, and I don't mind that. I still a migrant worker, [and] I always will be a migrant worker. [However, at present], I work in different fields, and my harvest is not fruit and vegetables. My harvest is the improvement of the economy of the minority community of the State of Washington. We are all in this together; if we don't work together, we sink individually.