

Community Archives Center Tacoma Community House Oral History Interviews Transcript
Mary I. Vargas, Interview date: 5/11/2022

dindria: All right, here we go. We're gonna turn on the recorder. We're gonna start with the ones encircled. Okay. And I will prompt you. Okay. All right. We are ready to begin. Hello, what is your name? <laugh>.

Mary: My name is Mary Vargas.

dindria: And then will you please spell your name?

Mary: Yes. M a r y. See, I'm not...

dindria: You're doing fabulous. Keep going.

Mary: [00:00:30] M a r y.

dindria: All right. And then the day's date?

Mary: Today is May 11th, 2022.

dindria: And we are located in?

Mary: And we are located in Tacoma Community House.

dindria: All right. Where did you, where are you? I'm having trouble too, see? Where is your home country?

Mary: My home country is in Mexico.

dindria: All right. Tell us about Mexico.

Mary: Mexico. Oh my gosh. Mexico is the, um, best country, [00:01:00] I think, according to me. Yes, everybody, it's family. Everybody is happy. And um, you know, when you visit me, Mexico, it's like you are, I mean, they adapt you even though you don't know them. <laugh>, everybody gives you, um, part of their food. And um, you know, if they're having a party, you are more than welcome. And, uh, if you don't know how to do, um, [00:01:30] um, cooking or, uh, singing or whatever they're doing, they adopt you. They teach you and they make part of the family.

dindria: Beautiful. What part of Mexico are you from?

Mary: I am a more to the south of Mexico.

dindria: Okay. Who is your family? Describe them.

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- Mary: Who is my family? My family is the craziest <laugh>. But I love that <laugh>, we like to party a lot. We are laughing all the time. [00:02:00] We are talking all the time and we love to help everybody.
- dindria: Right on. Do you have family here and in Mexico?
- Mary: Yes. Uh, right now, at this point, all my family is here. Just my dad, who recently retired two years ago. So he's back and forth, back and forth. 'Cause he says United States is just for working people. <laugh> Not for not working people. So he gets bored and he goes back [00:02:30] to Mexico.
- dindria: Right on. He wants to do his retirement when he is in Mexico. And then he comes here to visit you. Right?
- Mary: Yes. <laugh>. Exactly.
- dindria: I love that. How did you get to Tacoma, Washington?
- Mary: How do I get to Tacoma, Washington? My gosh, that was back in 20,2000. 2000 actually. Okay. And then, uh, I didn't want to come to United States. Everybody was like, let's go to United States, let's go. No, I don't want it. I don't need it. I love Mexico. I'm very happy here and [00:03:00] I don't want it. My sister decided to come and visit, so she didn't want to come by herself. And she was like, somebody needs to go with me. And my mom was like, you are gonna be the one. She volunteered me. So we, um, decided to fly and then we arrived to San Jose, California. I remember about that day. And, um, I was like, this is United States, California. Eh, I don't think I like it. So we spend a month [00:03:30] over there. And then another relative invited us to Washington State. So we flew to Washington and uh, I arrived in one of those rainy, cold, foggy days. And, uh, um, of course I arrived to Seattle. Beautiful. Amazing, you know, metropolitan the city. But he lives in Roy on the forest.
- dindria: Oh.
- Mary: <laugh> in the middle of nowhere because back then it was barely any, any houses over [00:04:00] there. And then while I was, you know, my cousin was driving, I was like, oh my God. Okay. I was crying, crying, crying. I didn't like Washington at all. I wanted to go home. I need to go back. Well, been here ever since 20 plus years. And I love Washington. I don't see myself, nowhere else than Washington.
- dindria: <laugh>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So you grew to love us. Yes. Okay. All right. Well, I'm glad that was it the apples, was it the, [00:04:30] um, you know, trees, the mountains?
- Mary: He, it was more like the mountains because my dad has a huge farm in Mexico, so I grew up in a farm. I'm a farm person. Yes. So when I, you know, when I start just like going to

the mountains, the rivers, and uh, like enjoying all the greenish, I was like, this is, this is my place. This will be good.

dindria: Yes. <laugh>. Um, what did you think of the United States before you came?

Mary: Before I [00:05:00] came, I heard a lot of stories about United States, but nobody tells you the truth. <laugh>, Everybody shows you the best places, the nice pictures and all of that. And when I came, I told, I mean, United States is, you come to United States just to work, work, work, work and work. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, when you live in Mexico, you work, but you enjoy your life. You live your life. That's different, way different. Um, yeah. Right [00:05:30] now that I am settled in United States, yes, I agree. United States it's work, work and work.

dindria: <laugh>. That's really interesting. I love that you give us that perspective because I think sometimes we forget to live our life.

Mary: Yes, I agree. In United States, it's very popular, very common that you forget about the purpose, really. Oh. And when you live in Mexico, or I don't know how other countries are, but when you live in Mexico, I [00:06:00] mean people is not, it's not as stressed. They, they don't live as a stressful life as we do here. Okay. They don't, in Mexico, people is not like pursuing, you know, paycheck by paycheck to really, you know, and then, uh, they, they, they enjoy their life. They, they celebrate almost. And I, I always told my daughter, you need to go back to Mexico. 'Cause she, I have a nine year old daughter. And then she finally went last year and she's like, mom, can we move to Mexico please?

dindria: <laugh>, She's just like [00:06:30] her mom. <laugh>. Yeah. That means that you have to be making lots of trips, right? Yes. <laugh>. Um, what was your first American experience? And that might be in San Jose?

Mary: Oh my God. You know what? Yes. Well, not really, because in California almost everybody speaks Spanish.

dindria: Okay.

Mary: So it's not like, you know, being in United States without speaking English, it's very interesting. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So that was here in Washington. Um, my [00:07:00] first experience as was when we were into trying to order a burger, at Burger King. And we didn't know how to do it. <laugh>. That was the funniest experience that I always remind. I, I always remember with my, uh, youngest brother and I'm like, do you remember when we tried to order a Burger King meal? And we couldn't. He was like, don't even talk to me about this.

dindria: Oh, <laugh>, it's a bad memory.

- Mary: <laugh> I laugh a lot. He doesn't really like to remember that [00:07:30] I do because that makes me, um, appreciate and see where I am right now.
- dindria: Yes, yes. Exactly. Uhhuh, <affirmative> a big difference. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, okay, now we are going to have some fun questions. Woo-hoo. What food do you enjoy?
- Mary: Oh my gosh. You're gonna be like, what? Chinese.
- dindria: Okay. Exactly. I think that's where I need to go for lunch, Chinese.
- Mary: Yes. If I, and um, I have a lot of American people, [00:08:00] a lot of America neighbors, and they're like, if you're Mexican, why don't you go, when, when you go out, why don't you go to Mexican places? And I'm like, I'm cooking Mexican every single day in my house. Why should I go from Mexico place? I go for Chinese. Yes. Italian, other kind of foods. Yes. You know that I don't know how to cook.
- dindria: Exactly. Yes, exactly. My friend is Thai and we always try to go to Thai restaurants. He's like, no. Why are you doing that? <laugh>? Um, what is your [00:08:30] favorite music or favorite song?
- Mary: My favorite music I have to say is Country now that I understand English. Okay. Because before, I mean, you can listen whatever. And just because it read, you know the tone. Yes. But right now, um, you know, when you really understand what they're saying. I love country music because they tell stories.
- dindria: Oh, I was just gonna say that.
- Mary: They tell stories on their songs. They're not like crazy songs. Just because they tell stories. Yes.
- dindria: And they teach you lessons.
- Mary: Exactly. Right. [00:09:00] Exactly.
- dindria: Um, okay, now these last two questions maybe make you have to think a little more. Why do you want to tell your story today?
- Mary: Why do I want to? Okay. Because a lot of people don't believe that you can improve your life even though you, um, you don't speak English and you are not a, um, American born and raised. I came to United States when I was 20 without [00:09:30] speaking any English. My first place that I tried to learn English was Tacoma Community House back in 2001. And then I spent six months, but I got a job and then I was so tired to work eight hours and come to school. Yes. So I quit after six months. I quit, came back two years later 'cause I needed for my work. And I was like, I need to learn English, I need to learn

English. Came back for another three months and I quit. And [00:10:00] then I found other places near my house and I went over there. Back in 2019, um, I got a, uh, job related injury, which put me out of, you know, work.

Mary: And then I came back and I remember, I, that's when I met Catherine, uh, Kathleen, what are the best teachers here at Tacoma Community House. And then I spent nine months while I was like, trying to figure it out with Elle and I, what was my, um, the next thing, the next step. And, uh, [00:10:30] I remembered that the, the the day I was notified that I would be going for retraining at Pierce College. Um, I remember that I walk on the side on the, on the hallway and I told Charlene, I gonna come back with my degree and I gonna work with you at Tacoma Community House. <laugh>. She's like, she look, I remember she look at me like, okay, Mary, I'll see you there. Yes. So why do I wanted to share the story, to [00:11:00] motivate people, to motivate people, and to basically to prove that there is nothing in this life you cannot do without really wanting and pursuing. Yeah.

dindria: All right. I love that. Oh, that's excellent. I'm gonna use those quotes. That's fine. For a, um, a session that we're gonna have later. So I'm just gonna let you know, that was a good quote, <laugh>. Um, what do you hope for your future?

Mary: Why do I hope really that was my dream to be at Tacoma Community [00:11:30] House. I am, I am here already. Yes. So I am, like, I I, it's been a month almost and a half that I joined the Tacoma Community House. Really? And then I told Misha that, that she works in employment department. And I'm like, one day I gotta be working with you. Oh. Because my thing is to help people to, and then I love what employment people does. I really do that. And I really enjoy my front desk. Cause you know, I see a lot of stories and I see a lot of people and [00:12:00] then I see a lot of people like, I cannot say, I don't understand. Yes, you do. You sure do. You just need to calm down and repeat in your mind? Yes, I can. Yes I can and I will. And that's the reason why if you notice in my computer, I have notes. Yeah. And in the morning I put I need coffee. Once I get my coffee, I turn around and I put, it's gonna be a wonderful day in, in the neighborhood.

dindria: <laugh>. I love that you said in the neighborhood. Yeah, exactly.

Mary: And, also I, um, [00:12:30] I ask for permission and I upload my graduation photo on the Hub. And then I put a story for everybody to go to, uh, to Tacoma Community House and see that Yes, you can!

dindria: Because you are the example. Yes. All right. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, thank you so much. I appreciate your time. You're welcome. Thank you so much, Mary. All right, Mary!