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Garcia, Rafaelita Interview

Mary Cusick

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Stockton Immigrant Women Oral History Collection

by Sally Miller

GARCIA, Rafaelita (Spanish)

July 18, 1980

Interviewed by Mary Cusick

Transcribed by Robert Siess

**[Tape 1, Side A]
[Begin Tape.]**

MARY CUSICK: It seems like there's such a large group of Spanish people that immigrated to California that came from Hawaii. And you were one of these, because you were born in Hawaii and you came over to Fairfield when you were about four?

RAFAELITA GARCIA: Right.

CUSICK: Did you come with your whole family?

GARCIA: Yes. I was born in Hawaii and my folks had been in Hawaii for about seven years at the time.

CUSICK: Were they part of the Spreckles Sugar Company ship that came over?

GARCIA: Yes. Well, I don't know that they came on the Spreckles Sugar ship, but I think the purpose was to come and work in the sugar cane fields and to help them out.

CUSICK: So that's why they originally decided to leave Spain and go to Hawaii, because there was employment there.

GARCIA: Employment, right. Yeah. And possibly to benefit their life and the future and their children. This is what they were looking for, because life in Spain wasn't too, what should I say, affluent. So they had to just sort of look ahead, and my dad was one of those that really wanted to benefit his children a little bit, and he thought this would make a better home for his children.

CUSICK: Did he have any children at the time he left for Hawaii?

GARCIA: Yes. I have one brother, and at the time he's 72. And I had a sister that died on ship.

CUSICK: Was she a baby?

GARCIA: Yes. She was very young. I think my brother was five years old when they left Spain. And my sister was younger than that, so I really don't know. She was about three, I think. And she contracted measles, because I think all of them did. There was an epidemic. It was an epidemic on the ship, and there were so many people on those ships that they were just like ants. They were just thrown together, and they really didn't have any good, uh, separate rooms or anything.

CUSICK: Yeah. Apparently the passengers were really hard when they came over.

GARCIA: Well they were brought over just almost like sheep. A cattle ship was really what it was like.

CUSICK: Have you heard a lot of stories from you parents? Did they talk a lot about it?

GARCIA: Well, yes. My mother especially because she lost my daughter and because she was pregnant at the time.

CUSICK: Was she pregnant with you?

GARCIA: No, I have another brother that was born just outside of Hawaii. Right on the waters of Hawaii. So he was also in Hawaii. So she felt really bad that she thought they weren't really treated right. In the first place, I don't believe she wanted to come to this country. It was my father.

CUSICK: He was looking ahead for the family.

GARCIA: Right, he was looking ahead. But he was coming and she was alone, that is as far as family or anything. All her family was staying in Spain there. And of course my father's family,

well, all he had was a mother and a brother that I think had gone to Argentina. And maybe cousins and things. But he didn't really care so much about leaving then, you know. He was young and thought, I'll go and maybe make a sack full. I don't know. And maybe someday I can return. But it didn't work out that way. So my mother was never too happy about the whole idea, because she left her mother and her sisters and everybody. My mother was more sentimental. So she felt very bad about the whole situation?

CUSICK: Did she talk a lot about Spain to you and your brothers and sisters?

GARCIA: Well, she spoke about family life and things like that, yes. They had a happy life. Not an affluent life where they had everything they wanted, but happy as far as family is concerned. Very close knit. And they all worked very hard for a living, but...

CUSICK: That's where she had grown up.

GARCIA: Right. And she left her family and she didn't feel like she really wanted to leave them. She felt so alone. She had to make new friends, and the language was very difficult. In fact she never did learn. She understood maybe just a word here and there, but she never did really learn to speak the language. English. Other than Spanish, that's all she spoke.

CUSICK: Did your father speak English?

GARCIA: Oh, he spoke a little bit of broken English.

CUSICK: But for most purposes he was fine to speak Spanish.

GARCIA: Right.

CUSICK: Was that because he was working in the same place where a lot of other Spanish people were? That was in Hawaii.

GARCIA: Well, yes, I believe so. And I think also, in Hawaii, they spoke that Hawaiian dialect, and they learned that. They learned a lot and they could get along shopping and everything with that dialect. They learned a lot – well they were there seven years, you know. So they learned quite a bit of that. And then coming over to the United States, they first came over to Washington, the state of Washington. And they were there a year.

CUSICK: Why did they go to Washington?

GARCIA: Well, I think they were coming to California, but they came in through the port of Victoria I guess. So they decided, I think money was a little bit short, so they decided to stay there and maybe pick up a little bit on their money and earn a little bit. And also my father

thought maybe he'd try it and see if he liked it. He was trying to find a climate that was more like what he was used to in Spain as far as agriculture and...

CUSICK: So he was a farmer.

GARCIA: Yes, he was a worker, a farm hand. In Spain, he did work for a man, he was sort of like a boss. A foreman on the ranch and things like that. But coming here, he thought, well, if I can be around things that grow on the ground, on the land, I'll feel like myself. But he tried in Hawaii – I mean Seattle, he went to work for I believe Swift and Company, and he worked there a year in their slaughterhouse. But he didn't like that because there was a lot of snow and the weather was bad and he just didn't get used to it. They all got influenza, everybody. My brothers, my dad, everybody. And my brother was also pregnant at that move, and she lost the baby there, with the influenza and everything she lost it, stillborn. And so it was hardship and they felt like, my mother says, "Oh, I don't like this. There's snow all the time. So let's go on." And so then...

CUSICK: Had they []?

GARCIA: They had already heard from some friends here in California and they came.

CUSICK: Were these friends living in Fairfield?

GARCIA: No, they were living in San Francisco.

CUSICK: And what did they tell you about the area?

GARCIA: Well, they said there was a lot of factories and there was opportunities. If you happened to get a job it was fine. You could get in. My father went to San Francisco and he looked at [making?]. But no, he wanted to be out where there was open spaces and such as that. So he went to Fairfield, and it's like it is in Stockton. There's a lot of farming and growing and things like that, and he liked that.

CUSICK: How did he happen to settle in Fairfield? Did he know anybody over there?

GARCIA: I think he knew somebody that he had met in Seattle, and that is all.

CUSICK: So he came [] got a job?

GARCIA: Well, he worked. He found a job and he just went to work for somebody else, and he just worked. And he never did get any land or work any land for himself because he got sick and he had a heart problem. And he just couldn't do it.

CUSICK: So that [] was in Fairfield?

GARCIA: Well, I guess I was there until 1937 when I got married.

CUSICK: How old were you [moved there]?

GARCIA: I was 21.

CUSICK: So you're there from, well, let's see. You moved to Seattle, you moved to San Francisco for a little while...

GARCIA: Well, I was about... Well, no. We didn't live in San Francisco. My father had just gone there.

CUSICK: Oh, I see.

GARCIA: But I think I was about four years old when we finally came to California.

CUSICK: So you spent your growing up years in Fairfield.

GARCIA: All my school years through high school.

CUSICK: How many brothers and sisters came down with you when you finally moved to Fairfield?

GARCIA: When we finally moved to Fairfield, there was three of us. Two brothers and myself.

CUSICK: And your whole family came together. It was just your mother and father and your brother and you.

GARCIA: And myself. And my mother had another child in Fairfield. I've got three brothers.

CUSICK: And your parents settled down there. Was it as though they didn't know anybody there, they didn't have any relatives living there?

GARCIA: No, they didn't have any relatives. It was a new area. There weren't an awful lot of Spanish-speaking people there, but there were a few. And they were happier there because there were some Spanish.

CUSICK: Did they tend to associate...

GARCIA: Mostly with Spanish people, mmhmm.

CUSICK: []. I'd like to know what school was like. Did you start in first grade?

GARCIA: I started in first grade, and as far as I can remember, everything was fine. I didn't find any problems.

CUSICK: Were you and your classmates of the same ethnic background often?

GARCIA: Well, no. There was a few. I had one or two in my class throughout the years, but mostly were American-speaking and American children.

CUSICK: They'd been here for a long time and their families had been established and all that.

GARCIA: Yes.

CUSICK: Did you ever feel that you were different in any way...

GARCIA: No.

CUSICK: ...Either from a different part of the country or being of a different ethnic background?

GARCIA: I don't think so. I don't think that even the children then didn't, uh...

CUSICK: That they would made of it.

GARCIA: Made of it at all.

CUSICK: And your parents weren't speaking much English at the time, so did you learn English in school, or did you start speaking that beforehand?

GARCIA: Well, as I remember, I imagine I must have picked it up from my brothers at home, and also at school.

CUSICK: How did your brothers learn it?

GARCIA: Well...

CUSICK: They were a little older.

GARCIA: Yes. And my brother had already – my older brothers, they were two brothers, they were older than I was. So they both had already gone to school. So I imagine I picked it up from them.

CUSICK: How did your parents feel about it? The fact that their children were speaking two languages. Maybe Spanish more at home? Were you speaking Spanish at home and then English at school?

GARCIA: I think we did, I imagine in the beginning, when we were younger. But as we got older, we carried the English language into the home. And it was mostly amongst myself and my brothers we spoke English most of the time.

CUSICK: Except when you spoke to your parents.

GARCIA: Except when we spoke to them for a particular thing. And once in a while, we'd hear a few questions from my father. You know, he was very rigid first during that. We'd laugh about something, we'd all be talking, and pretty soon we'd all laugh, and he'd say, "Now what was so funny? Now tell us." And then maybe just blow off, and he'd say, "I don't want any language spoke in this house unless it is Spanish, so that your mother and I can understand." He says, "We don't understand it. You speak Spanish and we can understand and we can all laugh." He says, "We all make a good laugh," you know.

CUSICK: Was he saying this in a judging manner?

GARCIA: No, he was very serious! [laughing] And he'd say, "When you get out of this house, when you go out the door, then when you're speaking to other people, you speak what they have to speak, so they can understand you. But while you're under this roof and you're speaking here, speak so that we can all understand." And, oh, we'd say, "Okay, okay," you know. It was alright. And so we would be very quiet. And of course, if it happened we were eating at the table or something, everybody'd be very quiet because of his upset and stuff. And then out of the clear sky, maybe he'd start talking, and he'd throw in an American word, you know. And we'd start to laugh and we'd say, "Now who's speaking the language?" And then he'd laugh and then it would be all over. So then he never held us to any, you know, thing that we had to just speak Spanish. So we really never did just [] one language. We used them both.

CUSICK: Tell me more about school. Now, did the teachers seem to be able to handle the language differences? Because at least when you first went to school, you didn't know the entire English language at that time. You were still learning more. How did the teachers react to that?

GARCIA: Well, I really don't remember that we had any problem. I think that we just, being youngsters, you pick up everything. And I imagine we picked up everything, because I don't remember having any trouble at all.

CUSICK: They didn't have to make any special allowances.

GARCIA: No. No. No.

CUSICK: Do your family [] while you're at school?

GARCIA: No, that would [stand there?], no. I feel that, I know some places where there were more Spanish, like maybe where my husband was raised in Vacaville, there was a lot more of Spanish people. There were more like a big Spanish community. And there was an awful lot of

Spanish children. And they, I think, had more problems than we did. But really, it was just like a scattering throughout the city in Fairfield. It wasn't a very big city, but there weren't too many.

CUSICK: Did you tend to associate with people of your own ethnic background?

GARCIA: Not in school particularly, no.

CUSICK: You said there weren't many in the first place.

GARCIA: No, there weren't too many. And being maybe in a different class or something, it really never did bother me to have to mix with anybody.

CUSICK: You had friends with a lot of different groups.

GARCIA: Uh huh.

CUSICK: Did you often bring your friends home?

GARCIA: No. Not too many times. I don't know why. I guess maybe because of the language barrier probably.

CUSICK: How did you feel your parents would handle it if you had brought them home?

GARCIA: Well, I don't particularly think that they would like it too well. I think maybe that was my feeling at the time. That they felt, well, you're bringing strange people into our home. But I don't remember going to too many parties per se. I did go to several parties and was accepted. But my father wasn't one that let me go anywhere. He was a very stern man that he thought little girls weren't supposed to go anywhere. They were supposed to be home. You know, that real old-fashioned way of discipline, and especially for girls.

CUSICK: Did you find that you were spending more time at home than...

GARCIA: Oh yes. Definitely. More time home than anywhere.

CUSICK: Your father seems so [] when you say the old-fashioned, very traditional Spanish...

GARCIA: Very. Very Spanish. Traditional, right.

CUSICK: Was it just for the girls or your brothers too?

GARCIA: Well, he had the boys under his hand a little bit, yes. But as they grew older, they could go out. They could go, they could come any time they wanted. But I couldn't do that. I was a girl and I wasn't supposed to go out and do those things.

CUSICK: And you were living at home until you got married?

GARCIA: Oh yes. Yeah. I guess I wouldn't defy what he believed in. I just stood right there and...

CUSICK: What did your mother do about this? Was she standing beside him and agreeing, or did they both decide on this themselves?

GARCIA: I think mother was a little easier going as far as that is concerned. I think she would be more lenient and give in if I wanted to go somewhere, and she knew my dad wouldn't approve. She'd say, "You know your father doesn't want you to do that." I'd say, "Well he doesn't have to know." And she says, "Yes, and if he finds out then you know what happens." And maybe I'd beg and beg and sometimes she'd say, "Okay, but you better not say anything." So it would go on like that. And then too I remember I was just a teenager, I was about 13 or 14, and we went to work in the cannery.

CUSICK: So your father didn't mind you going to work?

GARCIA: No. No.

CUSICK: How did he feel? He thought children in general could work, or were you working more than your brothers, or your brothers more than you?

GARCIA: No. My oldest brother really took the bulk of everything, because my dad, when he first came here, he developed... First they thought it was just a stomach condition. A stomach trouble, ulcer or whatever. But it developed into a heart problem is what it was.

CUSICK: Was this when you were growing up?

GARCIA: And I was still young, yes. And so there was an awful lot of the times when he couldn't work. He had to be home. He was under doctor's care and he had to stay home.

CUSICK: You were aware of this.

GARCIA: Oh yes. We were all very aware of it. And so we all, whatever we worked, everybody worked, and whatever they made, everybody turned it in at home. I mean it was one pocket. One pocket to handle everything.

CUSICK: You were all contributing to the whole thing.

GARCIA: And then he managed the money. He saw to it that we had a roof over our head and that we had clothes, that we had food, that we had the things we needed to get along. But we didn't really have any luxuries. It wasn't that you could say, "Well, can I have a nickel or a dime to go down and just blow it on some ice cream?" or something. You couldn't do that. That was out. Only if he found, like maybe on a Sunday or something, that the weather was hot, and he'd say, "Okay, Nick or John or Rafaelita or whoever, go on down to the creamery and get us all an

ice cream cone.” And he’d give them money and we’d run down, it was maybe two or three blocks, and run down and get big ice cream cones. And we’d come home and sit there on the porch and eat it.

CUSICK: So he did spoil you guys once in a while.

GARCIA: Yeah. Oh yeah, he gave us a treat once in a while. As far as food, he was generous that way. We never wanted food. We always had enough. He’d always charge his groceries by the month, and he paid them by the month very prompt and on time. He never missed – he’d charge his groceries and at the end of the month, he’d say, “Figure it out how much we have. What we have, what we owe.” Get it all figured down. He’d go down and pay his bill, and then he’d always pick up goodies for us. Maybe a bag of candy or maybe he’d come home with a big thing of sweet rolls or something. He treated us to things, yeah. Oranges, bananas, anything that was a luxury as far as we were concerned, you know, because we didn’t have it every day. He brought us things like that. We always had plenty to eat as far as that and he always got to it. But he always said that if we didn’t all contribute to this pot and put it all together, we couldn’t do it. And we knew we couldn’t have, because with his sickness, it took a lot. The doctors took a lot. The medication took a lot. And the trips to the doctor, the gasoline and everything that later had to come in to this.

CUSICK: So he was making most of the financial decisions. Was your mother working at all?

GARCIA: She used to work, yeah. She worked at the cannery. Just a seasonal, mmhmm.

CUSICK: That’s right. There were a lot of canneries in that area.

GARCIA: That’s what people did.

CUSICK: A lot of kids worked there too, didn’t they?

GARCIA: Yes. Anybody that had children, and especially families that had a lot of girls, they especially would go to the canneries?

CUSICK: Why was that?

GARCIA: Because, if you had a lot of girls, you were very readily hired, because they needed women to work.

CUSICK: In the canneries?

GARCIA: In the canneries.

CUSICK: Why did they prefer women?

GARCIA: Well, because you needed women to can or sort the fruit or to do whatever.

CUSICK: And men didn't do that.

GARCIA: No. Men, maybe they unloaded the trucks and carried the fruit from the front end of the cannery to wherever it was going to be disposed of. Dumped over onto a conveyor belt. Or maybe when it was in cans, they used to work the machines. The canning machines. And the labeling machines. Anything else that was like that.

CUSICK: So any of the girls in the neighborhood, or that whole neighborhood.

GARCIA: Yeah.

CUSICK: Probably everybody in your little town. Well...

GARCIA: And they came from other towns too. From wherever, uh huh. And these people from San Francisco that we knew, they had three or four girls. And they used to travel to canneries like this wherever they could get in, and wherever they felt they could make the most money.

CUSICK: Did you like working?

GARCIA: Oh, I – making money. But of course I didn't get much of it. [laugh] Because like I say, I turned it all in. But it was interesting. I didn't mind really.

CUSICK: You didn't mind being under someone's supervision. Well, there were a lot of other children.

GARCIA: Yeah, a lot of young girls and everything always. So it wasn't bad.

CUSICK: And how did you feel when you knew that your money was going to your father?

GARCIA: Well, I used to get mad a lot of times and thing, well gee, you know. And especially if there was something that I felt I wanted. It might not have been an essential thing, but maybe something that I wanted. If I wanted, say – he was very against makeup as I was growing up. And say that I did want to buy some makeup or something. I'd have to let him know, and he wouldn't give me any money for that. And he had to know where everything was gonna go before he...

CUSICK: No way to try to sneak it!

GARCIA: [laughing] There's no way. So I think I objected to that a lot. But still, I knew that that was what I had to live by, and that was his way. And unless I just pulled away and went off, and a lot of times people would go away like this and the parents disown them. And you have that

feeling, well gee, I go away and maybe I'll never see my mother again! So I just didn't do it. I didn't think about it.

CUSICK: Let me ask you more about school. How'd you feel about going to school?

GARCIA: I liked it. I like school. I was very good in school as far as being a student.

CUSICK: You worked hard?

GARCIA: I worked hard, yeah. I was very good.

CUSICK: Did your brothers like going too?

GARCIA: Not my oldest brother. See, he came from Spain, he was five years old, and he was in Hawaii. And schools in Hawaii, I guess, were little different. Because like I say, they have that dialect, and they spoke that a lot. And he didn't like the idea of when he came here, then he was too big. And he was put in a class with younger children. And he felt like he was – I think he was 12, 13, 14, something like that. And he thought, gosh, I'm way up there, I'm a man. And here I am with these little babies. And he just would not go to school. He played hookie all the time. And my dad says, "You have to go to school. You have to learn."

CUSICK: Oh, your parents wanted you to go.

GARCIA: Oh yes. Mother wanted us to go to school, but my dad especially because they didn't read or write. They were illiterate as far as language writing and that. So my dad says, "You've got to go to school because you need that. Learning is everything." He felt his kids had to learn. It was very important that they learn.

CUSICK: He was still looking ahead. Were they thinking you'd need this education to get by when you were older and had your own children?

GARCIA: Well, he felt that if you could read and write, you could get ahead in life. That that was very important.

CUSICK: A feeling that he was held back because he didn't have an education?

GARCIA: Especially when he came to this country. Even in Spain he was held back because he didn't get schooling. There was no way that – he was maybe a ranch foreman, but that's not too much of a step up I don't think. I mean, you're out there working with the dirt all the time. Although I'm not knocking it because there's a lot of money in it too. But like nowadays, yes, the farmers, they're all educated. They go to work in a farm and they make money. They know how. But outside of that, I know my oldest brother didn't care about going to school, and like I say, the truant officer used to come after him. You know that!

CUSICK: Oh no! But the rest of you were really encouraged to go.

GARCIA: But he encouraged us to go.

CUSICK: But... Excuse me. It the same encouragement for both yourself and your brothers? Boys and girls should all go?

GARCIA: Well, he didn't have to encourage us because I wanted to go.

CUSICK: Did you graduate from high school?

GARCIA: Yeah, I graduated from [] High. But it ended there, because he wouldn't let me kind of go out and venture out into the world, and say, "Well, now you can go to college." There was no way...

CUSICK: You get the basic education and that's it.

GARCIA: That's it. He felt I knew how to read and write and that's it! [laughing]

CUSICK: Did he ever help you with any problems you had at school? Either with the people or school problems in general?

GARCIA: I didn't have any problems with anybody.

CUSICK: You did very well, as you said.

GARCIA: I was a good student. Teachers all liked me. They didn't pick on me or anything. I took Spanish in school to learn to read and write it a bit. I didn't follow it through too far, but so I'd have a little bit of basic knowledge of it. And I remember the Spanish teacher always when we'd bring home homework and write it, and of course I could read things and I would translate them, but I would do it the way I knew how, from speaking the language. And then we'd get in class and we'd be discussing this, and some of them would say things. And of course to me, they always said things backwards, you know.

CUSICK: What do you mean? When they were trying to learn?

GARCIA: They were trying to learn, and trying to translate, like you say the house is white, and in Spanish it's the white house, and so things like this. Or you'd conjugate a verb or however you'd use your verb. And I'd use it a certain way and she'd say, "Well, it can't be." And I'd argue with her.

CUSICK: What can you say? You've grown up with the language!

GARCIA: Now we use this at home all the time, and this is the way I've always known it. And she'd say, "Well, that's right. It is right." But she says, "You're the only one that can use it in the class because you're the only one that knows how to use it. And the others can't use it that way."

CUSICK: Oh, there's a colloquial difference. Yeah.

GARCIA: So she'd say – and if anybody copied off my paper, she knew, because she knew the way it was worded. And she'd say, "Now there's no one in this class that's supposed to use that except Rafaelita." So I used to get good grades always. So I really did alright as far as schooling. I didn't have any problems with anybody.

CUSICK: Did you have any special hopes or ambitions when you were in school? Especially as you got to high school?

GARCIA: Well, I used to kind of think, well, I'd like to do something, but I knew it was impossible with my dad, as far as...

CUSICK: Do you think that you wanted to go on with it or get a job?

GARCIA: I would've liked to have gone on. I used to think, "Oh, I'd like to be a nurse." I remember thinking to myself. But I also knew I couldn't do it, because there was no school there. Right in town. It was a small town. You'd have to go out of town. And there was just no way my dad would see something like that. So I never did pursue it.

CUSICK: It was kind of a dream that you had.

GARCIA: Yeah. And then after I got married, it was too late. I thought, well, there it is. You have children and you have to go to work, so you just get yourself a job and you just go to work and that's it.

CUSICK: Well what kind of hopes did your father have when you were going to school? He wanted you to learn to read and write....

GARCIA: Yes, but I guess to him, he never thought that his daughter was gonna go away to school. Well in the first place, we didn't have the money means. And there was no way I was gonna go away, leave home to go to work and go someplace else and get a job and go to work. Because he wouldn't allow that.

CUSICK: Yeah. He felt very strong about that too.

GARCIA: Oh yes, definitely. He was very, very strong.

CUSICK: Well did you get any kind of independence at all? Especially as you got to that point when you were a teenager.

GARCIA: No. You didn't get any independence.

CUSICK: Was this true for most of the girls your age?

GARCIA: No, there was a few that got a little more freedom because their parents, I guess their outlook on it changed more with the times. Now I think if I'd had older sisters instead of older brothers, it would've been different for me.

CUSICK: They'd have been used to it.

GARCIA: Yes. Because they would've fought ahead of me, before me. They would've been fighting him...

CUSICK: They would've paved the way.

GARCIA: ...And paved the way.

CUSICK: Yeah.

GARCIA: But as it was, I had brothers. So I was the only girl, and it was very hard for him to let go. There was no way that his little girl was gonna go out and get into this big world here where there's so many wolves out there. [laughs]

CUSICK: Well how did he feel when you finally did get married?

GARCIA: I don't think he gave in too easily! [laughing] He finally did say alright. But for a long time – there was no way. Girls were getting married young, and I had to wait until I was 21.

CUSICK: Did he think that was too young?

GARCIA: No. He didn't say that 21 was too young, but there was girls getting married at 17, 18, right out of high school and things at that time. And there's no way. Unh-uh.

CUSICK: Did he have any part in making the decision to get married? Did he influence your decision in any way?

GARCIA: The way he influenced my decision was that I wanted to get away from home! [laughs] I just felt like I was being suppressed all the time. You couldn't go out. You couldn't go to a movie. If you went anywhere, you had to have chaperones. And what kind of a life can you have that way? But I knew, too, that most Spanish girls had some restriction. But I knew that they weren't quite as strict as mine.

CUSICK: Oh. So first of all, you felt that Spanish girls had restrictions, and then you thought your father was probably one of the stricter Spanish men.

GARCIA: Yes. I knew he was!

CUSICK: Maybe the other American – well, as you say, the ones that weren't of a definite ethnic background, they didn't have so many restrictions? Were these the ones that were getting married younger?

GARCIA: Well, even the Spanish girls seemed to – I don't know what their reasons were. Well, there weren't too many Spanish girls going to school, going through high school. Even graduating there was not too many of them.

CUSICK: Just because there weren't too many Spanish girls period, or they didn't finish school?

GARCIA: Because I think a lot of them just didn't really care for school. A lot of them just didn't care.

CUSICK: So you think you were one of the few that did.

GARCIA: And in Fairfield, I think there was maybe a few more that graduated from high school than in Vacaville. In Vacaville, there was very few Spanish girls that ever graduated from high school.

CUSICK: What about Spanish men?

GARCIA: And the men either. Very few.

CUSICK: You think they were just going on to work?

GARCIA: Yes.

CUSICK: Did you work when you graduated from high school until you got married?

GARCIA: I worked only in the cannery or something like that.

CUSICK: Seasonal.

GARCIA: Seasonal work.

CUSICK: Well, again coming back to school, were you participating in a lot of activities or groups or clubs?

GARCIA: The only thing I participated – I liked sports. I used to like to play basketball or baseball or soccer or something. I used to do that in the little school teams. I remember in grammar school I used to just love to play. And then in high school I played some too. But that was all.

CUSICK: When you were about to graduate, what kind of hopes did you have then? You said you would've liked to go on.

GARCIA: I would've liked to have gone on, but I knew it was impossible, so I just thought, well, maybe if I'm lucky, I'll find a job and go to work. That was the only thing. But it was a small town and there was just nothing to be had. So I just didn't get any.

CUSICK: So then you were working seasonally for the canneries.

GARCIA: Mmhmm.

CUSICK: And how did you meet your husband? Or husband-to-be.

GARCIA: I met him at home. His brother and my brother used to chum around together. And they used to go to dances together and they were friends. And my brother used to go to the dances in Vacaville. They used to call it the Spanish Hall. They used to have a lot of dances on the weekends. Mostly it was a lot of Spanish.

CUSICK: So you said there was a big Spanish community in Vacaville. And a lot of them would associate just with their group that they knew.

GARCIA: Mostly.

CUSICK: And did a lot of people from Fairfield, or was your brother one of the few that went over there?

GARCIA: Well, there was two or three boys – my brother and several others that used to be together. They used to go up there and play.

CUSICK: Did they ever take you?

GARCIA: Not until after my brother was married, he didn't take me anywhere.

CUSICK: Yeah. So did he bring his friend down and that's why you're here? Or his brother?

GARCIA: My husband's brother used to come over to the house also. To be with my brother or to pick him up or to visit or something. And I guess he had seen me there at the house, and so one day he was going somewhere, and I think he had Frank with him, my husband, and he says, "I'm going to take you to see a young lady. I want you to meet a young lady. She's a nice young lady, you know." So he brought him over and here I was washing dishes. So that's how we met.

He introduced me and that was it. After that, he came to Fairfield a few times. He hitchhiked or...

CUSICK: Just to come visit you?

GARCIA: Yeah.

CUSICK: How far is it?

GARCIA: About nine miles. So he used to come by.

CUSICK: Oh, not too far. How'd you father feel?

GARCIA: He didn't meet this visitor. We used to meet on the sneak. After school or something.

CUSICK: Because he just didn't want to tell your father? He wouldn't have approved?

GARCIA: Oh no. I knew he wouldn't. I was too young.

CUSICK: How old were you at the time you met?

GARCIA: Oh, I imagine about 15.

CUSICK: Oh, so you reached the requirement[?].

GARCIA: Well we went together six years.

CUSICK: When did you father find out?

GARCIA: Oh, I guess after I graduated high school.

CUSICK: [laughs] Must have been a surprise.

GARCIA: And it was shortly after that we thought, well, maybe we'd get married and get away from this. And he spoke to my dad and my dad says, "No way. No way she's gonna get married. She's too young." So he said, "If you wanna visit and come and see her, okay. But she's not gonna get married. You have to wait until she's older."

CUSICK: Did he finally give his word? "Now she's ready?"

GARCIA: No. So we went together. He'd come over to the house. And like I say, there was a courtship that if we hadn't met out and gotten to know each other while we were away from home, or met away from home, we would never have known each other. Because it was just under supervision that you'd see him all the time.

CUSICK: Very formal.

GARCIA: Very. Oh, it used to be real, oh yeah.

CUSICK: He'd come in the sitting room and your mother or father would be there...

GARCIA: Right. Somebody would be sitting there with you while you visited and everything.

CUSICK: Sounds like that wasn't very relaxed.

GARCIA: It wasn't a very comfortable situation. [laughs] It was terrible. And I felt, just get married and get out and you'll be alright, you know. So finally after going together for a while, after I graduated, we decided we're gonna get married. So around the time I was 20 or so, he was, "I'm gonna tell your dad that we're going to get married." So he did talk to him. He met him out in the yard one day and talked to him.

CUSICK: What'd your dad say?

GARCIA: Well, see, I was pretty close to 21 at the time, so he didn't really say anything. He said it's alright. "Okay. If that's what you want." But he says, "You know that when you take her, you're gonna have to take good care of her." And then he gave him this little lecture and this little spiel...

CUSICK: Aww, yeah. Well, it was his only daughter.

GARCIA: So he says, "Oh, okay. I know. I'll take care of her. You won't have to worry about her." So anyway, we got married after I was 21.

CUSICK: You decided to wait until you graduated from high school. Was he going to high school at the time?

GARCIA: Frank? No. No, he didn't go to high school. He was one of those that dropped out, and he had to work also to help the family. They had a big family. There were seven children. And they all did more or less the same way. Now see, there was a difference. They worked and turned in money, but they used to get money to go out and buy things. I don't say there was a whole lot of money, because they used to have to take whatever they could afford. But then as they got older, I remember when we were going together, he used to come to Brentwood, he used to make boxes...

CUSICK: Oh yeah. He put them together.

GARCIA: Yeah. Nail them together. And he was what they called a nailer. And he used to do that. And he'd come up and he'd work, and he'd spend whatever he needed and everything. But then whatever was left, he always gave to his mother. And that way, why, they bought

clothes and they could do little things, you know, that maybe the rest of us couldn't do. Like I couldn't do, you know.

CUSICK: Maybe that's how he could afford to come down.

GARCIA: But then when we decided to get married, well that's when he started saving his own money for himself.

CUSICK: Oh. So it was fine by his family.

GARCIA: Yeah.

CUSICK: What did he do when you first got married?

GARCIA: That's what he was doing. And he still used to do that. It was sort of a seasonal thing, throughout the summer months. Well, into the fall, where they make melon boxes and everything.

CUSICK: So were there other jobs that he had during the other part of the season?

GARCIA: And then in the winter months, if there was any pruning or something to do out in the fields, he'd do something to go in.

CUSICK: Did he stay at that job for a long time after you were married?

GARCIA: No. No, in fact he gave it up very shortly. Because they brought in machinery to make these boxes, and that kind of put him out of a job. And he went to work at a sand mine in Brentwood. And he really didn't like it. It was heavy work, and he had a little problem. He had a nervous stomach. And work was heavy and they gave him different shifts. Eight-hour shifts. And they worked maybe one week 8-5 and the next week 5-12 or whatever. It was constantly changing. So he couldn't really get his sleep, and he really wasn't feeling too good.

CUSICK: How'd you feel about that?

GARCIA: I felt terrible. I thought, here's this man that's sick and hasn't told me about it. [laughs] But he said he really didn't always feel that way. It was when he was working, he was under tension you know. Which I guess is true. So we took him to the doctor and they took X-rays and different things and the doctor just couldn't find anything wrong with him. "It's just a nervous stomach, and he just has to learn to live with it." And eat very bland food and things like this. It's I guess almost like an ulcer, a stomach like that. So anyway, he did, but he came out of that okay. And I went to work in a grocery store then. And I started out working just part-time in the grocery store. A very small grocery store. And I worked there all summer, and I think by then he was still working...

[End of Tape]

[Tape 1, Side B]
[Begin Tape.]

RAFAELITA GARCIA [continued]: He said, when the season was over, he said to me, "Now, if I ask Mr. Dunnifer if it's okay," he says, "would you mind if I just took your job and you could stay home?"

MARY CUSICK: So he went to work at the grocery store?

GARCIA: I said, "Well, if you can talk him into it." He said, "Well, even if he doesn't give me a steady job, if it's just even part-time, it would be better than having me have to go out there in that orchard and pruning and working out where you only work a little bit, and you don't work every day anyway." He says, "You just work when the weather's good and only a few hours maybe." So I said, "Well, you can try." So he went and spoke to the man, and the man says that would be fine. But he says, "I want you to know it's not anything steady. I can't afford to pay you very much." And Frank says, "Well, I understand that. But maybe we'll see how it works, and if you can find it later that you can keep me, why..." So he did.

CUSICK: How did you feel about that?

GARCIA: Well, until we came to Stockton. In fact, he came here managing the store.

CUSICK: Oh. What year did you come to Stockton?

GARCIA: In '41.

CUSICK: And you got married...

GARCIA: In '37.

CUSICK: Oh. Okay.

GARCIA: So he worked for this man, and he took my place and replaced me there. And then I worked part-time whenever they needed me, and he worked full-time. And we moved to Stockton in '41, and he managed the store outside of town.

CUSICK: I'm gonna wanna get back later on to why you moved to Stockton, but for now, I'm wondering how was it for you deciding with different responsibilities. Did your husband decide that he would work and you would stay home for right now?

GARCIA: Yes.

CUSICK: Do you have children?

GARCIA: I have two.

CUSICK: I don't know how soon they came along, but...

GARCIA: Well, my daughter came along in 1940. And my son in '45.

CUSICK: So he was born in Stockton.

GARCIA: Yes. My son was. My daughter was born in Brentwood.

CUSICK: How did you make decisions about the children?

GARCIA: Well, I think we kind of divided responsibility as far as children. We had a different outlook about raising children than our parents, especially my parents and my father.

CUSICK: So you were very different from when you were growing up.

GARCIA: Oh yes. Yes.

CUSICK: Was it a conscious effort to change it?

GARCIA: No. I felt that they were individuals and that they needed to have a little freedom, and that they should be allowed to go out and, if they earned any money, it was alright for them, as long as they didn't squander it, it was okay for them to keep it. And I felt, they didn't ask to be brought into this world. That's the way I felt about it, you know. That I just had to give them the best I could.

CUSICK: Did you feel they were very demanding?

GARCIA: No. No. They were very good children. I never had any problems with them.

CUSICK: That's great. Did you sometimes help them with the problems they had growing up? At school?

GARCIA: They never really had any problems. My daughter was very introverted. She was very shy and wouldn't go out. And I used to try to push her and get her to go, and I'd say, "You have to get out there and mix!" "I don't want to!"

CUSICK: How old was she at that time?

GARCIA: Well, when she was in school, she never anything.

CUSICK: As a teenager?

GARCIA: Yeah, and even as a teenager, she wouldn't belong to clubs or anything. Like most girls want to belong to Raid Club and this club and that club. I finally got her one time to agree to belong to Raid Club, and I think she went to a meeting once and she quit. Just, "I don't like it mom. That's not for me."

CUSICK: What else could you do about it though? Did you really feel concerned about her?

GARCIA: Well, I thought she ought to get out there and mix. But I knew she wasn't having any problems socially, because she had friends. She had girlfriends. And she had boyfriends – lots of boyfriends! Lots of boys around all the time.

CUSICK: The whole time she was growing up?

GARCIA: Yes. So from the time she was going to school little, she had little boys that were always interested in her. So I knew she was going to be alright, but I just wanted her to be a little bit more outward. But she never was. And finally, after she got married, she came out of her shell a little bit, but she was always kind of introverted. Kind of stood back and watched everything. She knew what was going on, but she'd kind of hold back. She wouldn't push and say, "Well, this is the way it out to be."

CUSICK: Why did you feel you wanted to push her out and get her involved in these things?

GARCIA: Well, because I wanted her to get out and mix, and I wanted her to get out and amount to something. I wanted her to go on to school. She wasn't interested in school.

CUSICK: The whole time that she was growing up?

GARCIA: Well, she found school hard. She wasn't dumb, but she just needed somebody to give her attention and explain things to her. It took her a little more time. Slower to grasp. She wasn't retarded or anything, but she just had a hard time absorbing what she'd read even. She'd read it, but it would just take her a little more time to understand it and things. But when she started to grow up, and she was going to school, from the beginning, I'd take her to school and the teacher'd say, "Oh, she's doing fine. You don't have to worry. She's doing fine." Well, I found out that maybe she wasn't doing as fine as they told me.

CUSICK: Why'd they tell you that?

GARCIA: I think teachers always favored little children that were clean and neat and... Respectful. Courteous. And she was always those things, and that's the way she was. She wouldn't hurt anybody for anything. If anybody said "boo," she agreed. And everything was just right. And I kept her very clean, very neat, very immaculate, and she used to keep herself very clean. She wasn't a child that went out and got dirty. She didn't like that. And she used to always look like a little doll. And the teachers just loved her for her appearance.

CUSICK: But they didn't want to have it known that there might be any problems.

GARCIA: She did her work I guess, as far as getting by. I mean, she could do and get by. But I think if they had given her a little more special attention on certain things or helped her along... Because she wouldn't ask questions. If she didn't understand something, she wouldn't ask.

CUSICK: How did you help her?

GARCIA: Well, I used to just try to help her at home, and finally when I found out that she had to have help – that is, the teacher finally... They bused them I guess. She went to McKinley School outside of town. I don't know if you know where it is. Well then she was bused when she was in about the third grade I think, and she was bused to Lafayette School. And the teacher then wrote me a note and told me she wasn't quite up to standards. And I went over there and she told me, and I said, "That's not the reports I've got." And I showed her report cards and everything. And she says, "Somebody along the line didn't take the time." Because she learns if you can explain things to her and have her understand everything that's going on. So anyway, I helped her at home a lot. And she got by. She made it. I'd see to it that she got done, and we used to have a lot of little fights because I'd say, "Well, you've got to" and wouldn't let her go out and play until she got things done.

CUSICK: Does your husband feel the same way in helping her? Or making sure she got along?

GARCIA: He felt she should get along, but see, he's a slow learner, and I think she comes by it naturally, you know. And if it was schoolwork, he'd have a hard time. He can read the paper and tell you what it says, but he takes his time. He's very slow-reading and everything. And I think she gets a lot of that from him. Because he didn't have schooling either, you know, that much school. So he wanted her to have an education and he wanted her to go to school. And we gave them what we could. We didn't shower them with a lot of extra goodies, but what we thought they needed to get along with everybody and to fit in with their friends and everything. So they never gave us any problems.

CUSICK: Your son or your daughter.

GARCIA: Oh, neither one.

CUSICK: What was your greatest satisfaction as a mother?

GARCIA: Well, I think I have raised two wonderful children I'm very proud of. My son went to college. My daughter finally went to college. That is, she went to junior college. She went a little over a year to junior college.

CUSICK: At Delta?

GARCIA: At Delta. Well, it was San Joaquin College before... What'd they call it? Stockton College. Wasn't that that what they called it?

CUSICK: I'm not sure.

GARCIA: Gee, isn't that funny? I can't remember what they called it now. But anyway, before it was Delta. Whatever. And she went. And then she said, "Mom, I don't really want to go to college." She says, "I'm just taking up the teachers' time and spending the teachers' time and your money," and she says, "I really don't want to go. I'm not that interested." She says, "I know it's gonna be a disappointment to you." "Well," I says, "I'd like to see you go. That's what I wanted is for you to go to school and get your degree. I didn't expect that you should follow through with it, but I just wanted you to go to school and get a degree and then you'd always be prepared. Even if you get married and then someday you'd have something. If something happened to your husband or for some reason you had to go out and work, you'd have something to fall back on." She says, "Mom, I'll find something." Or maybe, she says, "Some day I may go back. But right at this point, I don't want to." I said, "Well suit yourself. It's okay, but you know now that you have to go out and find yourself a job. Because I'll feed you, and I'll keep you under my roof as long as you want to say, but I can't be doling out money for all, extras that you might have to have." There's just no way. I said, "If you're gonna be fooling around, doing nothing, forget it. I want you to go to school. Or else go out and find a job." And so she says, "Okay, I will." So she did. She went out and got a job. And she worked and she earned her own money for her own clothes, and that's all I expected. She stayed at home. She wasn't the type that wanted to leave home. Most girls were out getting apartments and moving out by themselves, and she really wasn't interested in going out and being by herself. She was just satisfied to be home and work, and that's what she did.

CUSICK: And what age did she finally get out?

GARCIA: When she got married.

CUSICK: That's when she became independent? How old was she?

GARCIA: She was 21.

CUSICK: Same age you were. Well, when they first got out on their own, and later your son moved out and got married, what were your concerns then?

GARCIA: Well, my concerns were that they could get along and that they could build a life for themselves, and hopefully someday have a little money so they wouldn't have to be worried and penny-pinching. Get a little ahead.

CUSICK: How do you think your family, when you were bringing up your children, compared with other Spanish families that you knew of in the Stockton area? First of all, can you go into a little bit, when you were growing up, did your parents have a lot of the old Spanish traditions and the customs and the holidays and the rituals and the special foods? And then did you bring those into your own household when you had children?

GARCIA: Well, when I was growing up, there was the Christmas hubbub. And it's like it is here in the United States, only they did have their own certain little things.

CUSICK: What did the Spanish people do that's different?

GARCIA: Their mode of celebrating, I would say. They used to get out and congregate in a home and they used to visit one another. They do this now, but mostly now it's cocktail parties before a holiday or something. But the holiday is more just for the family, isn't it? When we have Christmas or something, now it's mostly just your family that gets together.

CUSICK: Yeah. You've done that for the whole time that you've had your family?

GARCIA: Yeah. This is what it's been. It's more or less get together with your family and do this. Well, when we were home, it was a big thing. They used to get together and go from house to house and visit.

CUSICK: You did this when you were a little girl, growing up in Fairfield?

GARCIA: Mmhmm.

CUSICK: Like they'd go around in groups and sing?

GARCIA: And sing. Right. They used to go around and sing and make, they called it a sambomba. It was like a drum. Most of the time it was a big coffee can, if I remember correctly, like a three-pound coffee can. And then they would take the stomach of a pig, a hog, and the skin, and tighten it over this thing. Spread it out and let it dry. And in the middle would be a hole, and they would put in a stick. And they used to just work that, make a noise, and they called it a sambomba. It was something in the order of a drum. It used to make a noise. And they used to get a guitar. Somebody'd play the guitar and somebody'd have this sambomba thing, and they'd go out and play serenade. And they'd go to this one's house or the other. They'd send

me to all the Spanish people in town. They'd start one end, and they'd work around. Maybe it took them all night.

CUSICK: Was that just a special occasion then?

GARCIA: It was like on a Christmas holiday, uh huh. Like Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. It would be, maybe tonight they'd do it here and tomorrow night maybe they're at somebody else's house or something. But they'd go a couple hours here and a couple hours there. Wherever the morning would find a whole bunch of men and women, and they would fix what they called migas. I don't know if you've ever heard of that. Bread really is all it is. Some of them make it with flower and egg. And they make a dough out of it, and then they put it on the stove with olive oil and they just chop it up til it's real fine. And they eat it. It looks like meal. They'd have that with sausages, and they'd feed a whole big bunch of people breakfast. This was their breakfast. And that was their custom. It didn't make any difference. They'd say, "Oh, don't go home, don't go home. We'll fix some migas, and we'll all have migas for breakfast." So they'd fix this great big skillet of this stuff, and everybody would eat.

CUSICK: Did your mother cook a lot of special Spanish foods for you and your brothers?

GARCIA: Well, seasonings. She used the seasonings a lot because that was what she knew. She used to fix... The main Spanish dish is garbanzos. And puchero, yeah. That's the main thing. That was *the* dish. Uh huh. That was the dish, puchero. And then she used to fix beans, or what they used to call a desaldora[?], which is a stew with meat and potatoes and things like this. And she used to fix meatballs with potatoes and things. But with a Spanish seasoning and the saffron and stuff like this.

CUSICK: What other rituals did you have that you think were probably traditional for Spanish families?

GARCIA: Well...

CUSICK: What were the things you know your mother did at her home in Spain that she still did when you were growing up as children, that maybe you picked up from her?

GARCIA: Well, they made cookies for Christmas. It was always, oh gosh, hours on end – days on end – making different kinds of cookies. And she used to do that, and I'd do that once in a while. I don't do it as a habit, because we don't eat them anymore. Our society's gotten so that we're all watching our tummies. [laughs]

CUSICK: That's true.

GARCIA: We're all on diets, you know!

CUSICK: All of us. That's the American way!

GARCIA: Right. And so, if I make anything, I don't make a whole lot, and it doesn't take me that long. And we've probably learned to cut corners when we do things. But basically the same thing. I make some cookies that my mother used to make. And I do cook a puchero once in a while, once in a great while, because my husband likes it once in a while.

CUSICK: Do your children pick up the same kind of things that you carried through?

GARCIA: No. No. My daughter doesn't ever make puchero or anything. She might like it, but I don't know that her family would like it. Like her husband, he's Irish. And I don't think he'd like it. So she never cooks it. She just cooks American food. She'll make meatballs. I make meatballs once in a while, and she does that once in a while too. And he likes those. And she'll make a stew, but a stew is more or less the same in Spanish as it is in the American style. Only maybe we make it a little soupier than the American people make it. But outside of that, there isn't too much. And she doesn't make the cookies. They love them. They eat them. But she doesn't make them. There's too much work to them.

CUSICK: Was there any concern you and your husband had when your children got married? Like did you want them to marry Spanish people?

GARCIA: No.

CUSICK: Not necessarily?

GARCIA: No. I didn't care who they married, just so they married somebody they loved and they'd be happy about it. That's the way I felt about it.

CUSICK: And your husband felt the same way?

GARCIA: Yes. Definitely. In fact, my oldest brother married an Italian girl, and then the next brother, he married a Spanish girl. Of course my husband's Spanish. And my youngest brother married an American girl. So you see, we have everything in our family. My father wasn't so much that you had to marry a Spanish person. They he didn't really...

CUSICK: Set aside or anything.

GARCIA: No. He didn't say. But he did...

CUSICK: Did it please him, do you think?

GARCIA: Oh, I think yeah, it would please him if they were all Spanish. But he got along fine with my sister-in-law Sally. She was Italian. Oh, he got along fine with her! Of course, she learned the

Spanish. Being Italian, she spoke Italian, and she could also speak a few words of Spanish. She used to talk to him that way, and he got a kick out of her because she was very forward. And she would talk to him, but now Helen couldn't speak. She'd come over and she could just sit there like a bump on a log because she couldn't talk at all. She couldn't communicate with them at all. But outside of that, why, neither my husband nor I, nor my brothers, or none of us put any restrictions on who they should marry. They've all married into different nationalities and everything.

CUSICK: What was the nationality your son married?

GARCIA: She's basically American, but she's got a little bit of Italian, a little bit of German. She's just sort of a duke's mixture. She's a town girl. Bassinger. I don't know if you know them.

CUSICK: But by American... I mean, I know when you think of American, you think of these people who have been here for years and years. You mean like the old English stock?

GARCIA: Well, I mean that she doesn't have the Latin name. Her name, Bassinger, would be more like, what, German or whatever? But her mother was Italian and her grandfather was Italian on one side. I don't know what the others are. They're German and Irish and I don't know.

CUSICK: They've got a real mix in their family. Do you feel that your children hold their own ethnic background in as important a position as you? That they do it as something they want to maintain, or was that something that you brought them up with yourself?

GARCIA: As far as teaching them the language or anything like that, I didn't because I worked. I worked out all the time.

CUSICK: All the time they were growing up, you were working.

GARCIA: Mmhmm. And my mother came to live with me when my father passed away. And my father passed away in '46.

CUSICK: So your mother was living with you for quite a while.

GARCIA: My mother came to live with us when my son was only nine months old. So consequently, she stayed with me and watched the children for me. She was with them a lot. She used to speak Spanish to my kids all the time.

CUSICK: Did they pick it up?

GARCIA: My son did. He was little. He hadn't started to talk. You know, he was at the age where he might begin to say a word here or there. So she talked to him all the time, and he was with

her from the time he was little, so he had to talk to her. That's all he had to relate to, you know. So he used to talk to her. Now my daughter was already 4 ½ when he was born, so she had English already mastered. So it was very hard for her. She understood everything Grandma said to her, but she couldn't speak it. And she got to the point where she could talk to her a little bit, and tell her what she wanted. She could tell Grandma anything she wanted to tell her and make her understand, but not speak fluently.

CUSICK: Do you wish your children were able to speak it?

GARCIA: At the time, I didn't think about it, and I didn't really think it's that important. Because it wasn't used that much, the Spanish language, you know. You were just among Spanish people to use it, and there weren't that many. And I didn't know any Spanish people here in Stockton.

CUSICK: Oh, you didn't associate with a lot of Spanish people?

GARCIA: I didn't know anybody. I didn't know there was any Spanish people here.

CUSICK: Really?

GARCIA: I knew there were a lot of Mexicans.

CUSICK: Oh. But there were a lot of Spanish people too, weren't there?

GARCIA: I know. But I'm finding out now, now that I've retired from work, and at my age, I'm finding out that there's a lot of Spanish people here in Stockton that I didn't know.

CUSICK: Do you wish you had known at the time?

GARCIA: Well, I do. I really kind of wish that I had known, because I feel maybe if I had known, I might've taken my mother out to meet some of these people. And she could have visited. As it was, she was confined to just our home, and she only had us to talk to, and it made it kind of hard.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: Did you tell her how the old Spanish custom that when we were all growing up that the old Spanish custom was to marry into your own people and all?

GARCIA: [cross talk]: That's the way they were, but...

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: ...Because the women growing up understood better and they were given all much better. Man, you should see my sisters. They're crabby.

CUSICK: Because they didn't marry Spanish people?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: No, no, no. They're always crabby. [laughter]

GARCIA: So anyway, his sisters are... very particular, immaculate women. That's what it's getting at. So anyway, I didn't especially think it was all that important that they learned it because I didn't think they were gonna have to use it that much. I didn't realize that. But then in later years, as I see that it is – when my daughter started going to high school, I wanted her to take Spanish. I says, "It's time that you should learn."

CUSICK: Why did you feel she needed that?

GARCIA: Well, because I could see the change in the country. I could see...

CUSICK: That there might be more use for it?

GARCIA: More use. There's a lot more Mexican people. It was becoming a language that was getting more and more into it. Not necessarily having Spanish people around, but Mexican people, if you could speak Spanish, you could get a job anywhere.

CUSICK: That's what I'm doing.

GARCIA: This is the thing. So I told her, "You know, even if you don't go into it as a profession, learn enough that if you get a job that if somebody comes up that can't speak the English language, you maybe can help. You'd be surprised how much good it would do you." And she took a little bit of it, but she wasn't all that interested in it. Like I said, she wasn't interested in school. So she just barely got by with her grades. She made it through, but that was about it.

CUSICK: Their grandma, your mother, lived with you for a while?

GARCIA: She lived with me from the time my son was nine months old til he got married.

CUSICK: How old was he?

GARCIA: He was 21. He was in college and he got married. He had one more year to go.

CUSICK: He was just about done. I was wondering if you would prefer to live with your children at some point in time.

GARCIA: No. No. I hope not.

CUSICK: Why?

GARCIA: Well, I feel I'm independent. My mother wasn't independent. My dad was always the ruler of the roost, and everything he said went. She lived more or less like he wanted her to

live, you know. But he wanted her to live with me. He had told her that before he died. So she lived with me because that was his choice. But I don't think it was her choice.

CUSICK: She just did it because that's what was supposedly right?

GARCIA: Uh huh. What he thought. He felt that it was right for her to be with her daughter. And that's why she came to live with me.

CUSICK: How did you feel about that? You and your family.

GARCIA: I didn't mind. At the time, I really didn't mind. But I knew I could keep her and she would have a home and she wouldn't ever have to worry about cleaning anything, because Mom and Dad didn't really have anything when he passed away. They had a little home in the [mountains?]. But they just barely got by because he'd been sick all his life and everything, so when he passed away, she came to live with me, and I knew that if I took care of her, she wasn't ever gonna need anything. At times I felt it really wasn't fair to me and my family to have her all the time, as much as I loved her. I thought she should divide her time with the rest of the boys. But, being that my oldest brother's married to an Italian girl, there was a thing there. They lived out in the country, and living out in the country, why, maybe she wouldn't be able to get in. I thought, well, if she lived down there with them for a little while, they could take her to see her friends in Fairfield. Because he lived outside of Fairfield. But knowing that she lived out in the country, she didn't think that was gonna happen, because he was always too busy. And it would be stuck up there in the ranch all the time. Well, my youngest brother was married to the American girl, and there was no language communication there with her as far as... She could speak to my brother, but she couldn't speak to my sister-in-law. There was no getting together there.

CUSICK: This could be awkward.

GARCIA: So it would be very awkward. So once a year, whenever we took a vacation, I used to let her go to my middle brother's home. And she'd stay there for about a month. I'd say, "Just take Mom and keep her for a month. We're going on vacation." And so I would send her there and she would be there for about a month.

CUSICK: That's interesting that you really feel differently about that. Do your children have anybody else living with their family besides their spouse and their children?

GARCIA: No. But anyway, I feel that when you have somebody like that, I know sometimes my mother had said, "If I had it to do over again, I would've stayed in my home." Not because she felt deprived. But she thought she would've lived to stay with her friends. And we pulled her away from her friends. This is what we did. And I think it's wrong. We didn't stop to think where

she might be happier being among other people, and having us go in. But my oldest brother felt that she didn't speak the language and she shouldn't be alone in case she got sick or something. And we didn't foresee that maybe we could have hired somebody to stay with her. Give her company. A companion. Hired another Spanish woman or something to give her company. We didn't think of these things. But you think of it after it's too late.

CUSICK: That's often how it happens.

GARCIA: From what I have learned keeping my mother with me, I feel that if I can manage, there's no way I'll live with my kids. Unless I absolutely can't find anything else. But as long as I can be by myself, I'd prefer to be independent, yes.

CUSICK: Do you think your mother's attitude changed toward the Old Country as first she moved here? Your father too. Do you think their attitudes changed about Spain? Or did they stay the same? They didn't really talk about it quite a bit, you say? Not an awful lot?

GARCIA: Not a whole lot. They always felt that there was more opportunity in this country. That they had bettered their families by coming here.

CUSICK: So they did realize that, but what other feelings about Spain?

GARCIA: My mother always felt that she would have rather stayed there. Because her family was there.

CUSICK: Did she try to keep ahold of it any way she could, like keeping contact with relatives over there, or keeping the customs in the home?

GARCIA: Well, they used to keep contact by writing. I remember that for years they used to write back and forth.

CUSICK: Have you ever been to Spain?

GARCIA: No. No. But I intend to one day. I keep looking, yes.

CUSICK: Would you like to go back and see where your parents grew up?

GARCIA: Yes. And I wanna go back and possibly look up some relatives. I have a feeling that I have relatives living... Maybe not very close relatives anymore, but I've got to have some cousins there.

CUSICK: Oh yeah. Just imagine going back there and seeing all that history there.

GARCIA: Uh huh. I'd like to go back and do that. And possibly within the next year or so, I'll get to go. I don't know. We'd go now if we had another couple to go with us. We want to go with

somebody where we can be on our own. My husband's a bad traveler. [laughs] I don't know. He feels so secure in his home up here, and when he goes out, he just feels... You don't know what you're running into, you know. It's all different. And you go to a foreign country, and that country's nothing to us except we know our parents came from there and that's what we wanna go see. And we feel we wanna see it and we wanna go out and look for some relatives, but if we went with somebody else, we would have a lot more fun. So we are waiting for his brother-in-law and sister. He has a brother-in-law that probably will retire within another year or two and we'll see.

CUSICK: That'd be great. What about here in Stockton? Have you and your husband got involved in groups, organizations here? Especially ones that would include Spanish people.

GARCIA: Well just recently we belonged to the Spanish club. El Circulo Espanol, uh huh. We belong to that now.

CUSICK: Do you enjoy getting together with other Spanish people?

GARCIA: Yeah, we enjoy that. Now like I say, this is where I'm finding out that there's all these Spanish people that I didn't know. See, I worked all my life. I was a checker in a grocery store.

CUSICK: All the time your children were growing up, you were working? Even after they moved out, you were working?

GARCIA: Yes. I worked up until two, three years ago. It'll be three years in October. So I worked all my life.

CUSICK: Well, were you not as involved in other things outside your job?

GARCIA: I wasn't involved in anything. Nothing. Because I worked an eight-hour day, and for many, many years, I worked six days a week. And then I came home and my mother was with us, and she did a whole lot for me. I've got to be thankful to her. She was really good.

CUSICK: What about the children? Did they help you with responsibilities around the house?

GARCIA: Yes. As my daughter got older, I used to tell her, it's the weekend, and you can clean the house.

CUSICK: What about your son?

GARCIA: And my son, we used to tell him, "Well now, you've got to clean your room. That's your responsibility, and you have to do that. Or maybe you have to mow the lawn." And so he did that.

CUSICK: They had different chores that they had.

GARCIA: And they used to have to wash dishes and dry dishes until they'd get into hassles and Grandma'd end up doing dishes. She'd say, "Well it's your turn to wash!" And he'd say, "It is not! I washed last night!" And then Grandma'd say, "Get out of here. It's easier for me to do them than to fight with you." So she'd end up doing dishes. And she lived til she was 89, and she took care of herself every minute of the time. We didn't have to unless she was sick or got a cold or something. She got pneumonia a couple times. But outside that, she took care of herself up to the last minute. So we were very fortunate. And she used to cook for us. And she'd help a lot. I always did the washing, and she would do her own ironing. And she would do the boys' things. His clothes. Because they were smaller and she says, "We're not so particular with those." But I always did my daughter's things up until she got old enough to do her own ironing. I used to do that and do her ironing and my ironing and my husband's ironing. And Grandma'd take care of her own and the boy's.

CUSICK: She really helped a lot then.

GARCIA: Oh, she did.

CUSICK: That's great. Did you and your husband have to divide any of these kinds of tasks around the house or anything?

GARCIA: Well, the only thing we divided was on his day off, he did the yard work, and on my day off, which was for years and years only Sunday, I did the washing, and I did cooking for Sunday dinner, and if there was anything to back for the kids for school, I always took care of that. Or even when I came home at night, I used to do a lot of those things. So whenever I did big cleaning, we shared the work. My husband and I. He helped me a lot. Because even when we first moved in here, we didn't have rugs. We had just an area rug, and the rest of course were all hardwood floors. And they're beautiful, but we used to have to wax and polish, and that's a lot of hard work. And we did spring cleaning and fall cleaning. I took everything out of every room, one room at a time, and we used to clean out the whole house that way.

CUSICK: Did your children grow up in this house?

GARCIA: We moved in here in '52.

CUSICK: They were still around.

GARCIA: They were still in grammar school. My son was just going into second grade I believe. My daughter was in seventh. So they grew up here in this building.

CUSICK: So it's just been recently that you really came in contact with all the Spanish people.

GARCIA: That's right.

CUSICK: When you're talking to them, what kind of similarities do you find between the Spanish families, and how do you think life is for people of Spanish heritage?

GARCIA: I think as far as similarities, it seems like we all have basically the same backgrounds. Growing up, the way we grew up, the foods we've discussed, you know. They all seem to know all the same foods basically. And the same strictness at home. Maybe my father was more so the other way; he was very rigid. They probably weren't quite so, but it was basically in the same order. And I don't know. I think we have done fairly well. Coming here to Stockton, the opportunity was great.

CUSICK: Do you feel like most of the people in the Spanish group have had the same opportunities and would take advantage of them?

GARCIA: Oh, I think so. I think they were basically in the same category. From what I've seen in this Spanish group, some of them are farmers, some have been farmers, some are salespeople, some have been working with produce – some people I know that have sold produce to the stores where I have worked.

CUSICK: So have they been in a lot of different types of jobs, or do they generally stick to one line of work?

GARCIA: I think there are different types of work.

CUSICK: There are different opportunities.

GARCIA: I'm sure there has been. Like Dolores Jimenez. She was a beautician, a hairdresser. So she went into that, possibly because her husband had more money. I don't know when she got into it really. I never asked her.

CUSICK: That's right. I think she said she went back to school for that.

GARCIA: Yeah, that's what I say. Maybe her husband – he was a farmer, and I guess maybe they had a little bit more. I had to get out and work and supplement the income, but it's kind of hard. Then you can't go back. I have thought maybe at one time that maybe I would've gone back to school, but there was just no way I could do it. Going to work and keeping heads in the home and the family, and you're too busy. I had no time for anything.

CUSICK: Were there any kinds of events of real importance in Stockton that affected you and your family?

GARCIA: No. I...

[End of Tape]