

Interview with José Martínez

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Could I ask you to clap your hand one time in front of your face? Just go ahead and do that. Today is Thursday, July 31, 2008. My name is Mark DePue, and I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here today with José Martínez. Am I pronouncing that correctly?

Martínez: Yeah.

DePue: José is a worker here at the Eckert Farms, and we've been talking to the Eckerts—Chris Eckert, primarily—all day. José, when and where were you born? Your birthday?

Martínez: My birthday is 1963.

DePue: Okay. What day?

Martínez: June 20.

DePue: Okay. And where were you born?

Martínez: In Mexico.

DePue: Where in Mexico?

Martínez: In the Guanajuato State.

DePue: Okay. I'll have to figure out how to spell that later. Can you pronounce it again?

Martínez: Yeah, Guanajuato.

DePue: Guanajuato.

Martínez: Guanajuato.

DePue: Okay. Where is that?

Martínez: In the center of the country. I think I can show you on the map.

DePue: Okay.

Martínez: There, it's near to León.

DePue: León?

Martínez: Yeah, it's near to León on this.

DePue: Okay. So a little bit northeast of Guadalajara and Mexico City. What is the province that it's in then? Or is that the province?

Martínez: Well, the city?

DePue: Yeah.

Martínez: Yuriria.

DePue: Okay. Tell us a little bit about growing up there. What was it like to grow up there? What was your father doing for a living?

Martínez: (inaudible)

DePue: What your father did? Was he a farmer?

Martínez: He worked in the labor too, right there in Mexico. And his own land.

DePue: Okay. How much schooling did you get?

Martínez: Just the six years.

DePue: Okay. And when did you start coming to the United States?

Martínez: I remember the first time is 1986, '87. I do not remember exactly.

DePue: Okay. So you were about twenty-three, twenty-four at that time?

Martínez: I think.

DePue: Why did you come to the United States then?

Martínez: Oh, well, many reasons. I don't have work over there, and I like work over here.

- DePue: When you first came here, where did you go? Where in the United States did you go?
- Martínez: North Carolina.
- DePue: That's a long ways.
- Martínez: Yeah, I know.
- DePue: Why in North Carolina?
- Martínez: Well, the people who rent to me, right here, had a job over there to start working over there.
- DePue: So you knew somebody in North Carolina who was—?
- Martínez: No.
- DePue: Can I ask how you got to North Carolina originally?
- Martínez: Yeah.
- DePue: Were you able to drive there, or did somebody drive you, or—
- Martínez: No, somebody drive for me, taking me over there.
- DePue: What kind of work did you do there?
- Martínez: The first time, I think I'm picking tobacco and cucumbers. And in season, sweet potatoes.
- DePue: Okay. Was that just for a few months, and then you returned back to Mexico?
- Martínez: Yeah, for a few months, and returned to Mexico.
- DePue: Did you like that experience, the first time?
- Martínez: Well, yeah. Because I got some money to support my family.
- DePue: When you first came up, was it your intention to do this for many years in the future, or just one or two years to get some money? What were your thoughts?
- Martínez: Well, the truth, right here in this place, that's where I'd make some money. And in other places, another places, they work, yes, for few amounts, in the season. Right here, I can work around year. All January 1. But I was going back to Mexico to see my family, and come back again to work over here.
- DePue: So are you saying that the reason you like it here is you can stay here longer, for longer periods?

Martínez: Yeah, I like it over here. I think it's a pretty nice place to work.

DePue: Here being in Illinois, with the Eckerts.

Martínez: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. When did you start working here at the Eckerts?

Martínez: In the year 1994.

DePue: So you've been here for thirteen, fourteen years now?

Martínez: Around, I think.

DePue: How much of the year do you spend here, and how much do you spend in Mexico?

Martínez: I spend more time over here. Sometimes I spend eight months over here and four in Mexico with my family.

DePue: Most of your family is still back in Mexico then?

Martínez: Yeah, they are over there.

DePue: What months do you spend here, and what months do you spend in Mexico?

Martínez: Well, it depends what I need over here. I need to pay by bills, or—

DePue: So does it change from year to year when you're here and when you're not?

Martínez: I don't really understand what to say.

DePue: I'm wondering if you always are coming at the same time of the year.

Martínez: Yeah.

DePue: And when are you here? What months?

Martínez: Between March and April.

DePue: That's when you first arrive?

Martínez: Yeah.

DePue: And do you go back then about October, November?

Martínez: October, November, yeah.

DePue: Okay. So you get to spend Christmas time and the winter—

Martínez: Yeah, sometimes, in the (inaudible) season of the Christmas trees.

DePue: Okay. What do you like about working here?

Martínez: Well, many reasons to. For one, I can have habitation. And am able to go to work.

DePue: You think you make good money here?

Martínez: Yeah, because we don't pay rent, don't pay the right for the vehicles.

DePue: Okay. You have to pay for your own food, though?

Martínez: Yeah, I pay for my own food.

DePue: How about any health problems that you have?

Martínez: Problems?

DePue: What happens if you need to go to the doctor? Are you paying for that yourself?

Martínez: No, so far, no yet I need the medical. When I feel sick, I go back to Mexico and see the doctor over there.

DePue: Okay. So that hasn't been a problem here for you.

Martínez: Yeah, because sometimes the guy don't speaks good English, and I can't explain to the doctor what I feel, where I hurt.

DePue: Are you married?

Martínez: Yes, I do.

DePue: And where is your wife?

Martínez: My wife is right there in Mexico with my kids.

DePue: And how many children do you have?

Martínez: Well, right now, two. I have four total, but *dos* of them are married.

DePue: Okay. Do your children, the ones that are married, do they have employment? They have work in Mexico?

Martínez: Yeah, they are working in Mexico.

DePue: Okay. What would be your hope for your children then? Would you like to see them be successful in Mexico, or possibly come to the United States?

Martínez: Well, maybe in the future, I will bring my two little kids.

DePue: To bring them here, perhaps?

Martínez: I don't understand what you say.

DePue: Your two younger children, would you like to see them come here sometime?

Martínez: No, they are in the school over there.

DePue: Okay. So you see their future in Mexico.

Martínez: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. And do you see, as you get older, that's where you would retire as well?

Martínez: I think so.

DePue: Okay. What does your wife think about you living up here for so many months, and not seeing her all that often?

Martínez: Well, I don't have business over there, I work right here to support that. I work right here and send the money. I keep some for me.

DePue: There are no opportunities for you for work in Mexico then?

Martínez: Yes, there's work, but they pay very cheap. We're talking about like ten or eleven dollars a day.

DePue: Versus that much getting paid every hour, or more than that every hour here.

Martínez: Yeah. One day of work over there is eight hours, same thing here. But it's very cheap. It's very cheap.

DePue: Okay.

Martínez: That's why I work here.

DePue: What do you think about American immigration policy right now?

Martínez: I don't know. I have no idea.

DePue: You don't have any opinions about it, or—

Martínez: Independence?

DePue: What you think about arguments that Americans have now about immigrants?

Martínez: No, I don't know, because I don't see the news.

DePue: Okay. Anything else you'd like to tell us about then? Do you enjoy working at the Eckerts?

Martínez: Yeah.

DePue: What part about your experience as a migrant worker do you not like?

Martínez: Oh, well, when it's the bad weather, you no can work. Don't like that.

DePue: Don't like what?

Martínez: The bad weather. When it's raining too much, and no can work. All the jobs is fine. Everything else is fine. I like doing everything.

DePue: Okay. Any final words for us, for your children?

Martínez: No.

DePue: Thank you very much, José. It's been a pleasure to talk to you.

Martínez: Oh, you're welcome.

DePue: And this was an important interview; we're thrilled that we were able to do it with you. Thank you.

Martínez: Okay. You're welcome.

(end of interview)