

**TAKING A CHANCE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF MEXICAN ORIGIN
IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN THE AMERICAN MIDWEST**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to portray a complex picture of Mexican origin immigrants living in the United States. This study portrays their lives, their experiences, and their thought processes from the moment they made their life-changing decision to immigrate to the USA until their current realities of life in the American Midwest. The stories discussed and the interpretations made are the result of oral interviews with four families conducted in their native language of Spanish. The personal experiences of the seven participants are familiar to thousands of immigrants who arrive to the USA daily. Although these immigrants experience a great deal of hardship, they also develop a strong layer of resilience and solidarity with each other. The study also provides an in-depth analysis of key works of literature written by, and about, Mexican and Hispanic immigrants. These books are: *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools, An Ethnographic Portrait* (Valdés, 1996); *Of Borders and Dreams: A Mexican-American Experience of Urban Education* (Carger, 1996); *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* (Jiménez, 1997); *The Undocumented Americans* (Cornejo Villavicencio, 2020); and *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984). The experiences portrayed within these masterful works are then connected to those of the participants of this narrative inquiry. Additionally, connections are made by the researcher, a scholar of Mexican origin living in the American Midwest. This work illustrates why people choose to emigrate, their family and gender roles, their focus on educating the next generation, and their strong religious faith. It also depicts their challenges, fears, and resilience as they navigate living “between two worlds.”

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Every day in the United States thousands of immigrants arrive from around the world seeking better lives. They are often grouped together by mainstream US Americans as one entity, often with negative stereotypes. However, if one takes the time to know and understand people of diverse backgrounds, one will see clear differences between groups and some important similarities among them. The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to portray a complex picture of Mexican origin immigrants living in the USA.

This study focused on a group of families living in one community in the American Midwest. They are all of Mexican origin, living in the USA, and are linked by their church. Though it is a small group of participants, I delve deeply into their stories to provide a rich narrative of their lives. Through personal stories, the reader is able to learn about the different stages of this specific population from the moment these immigrants decide to make the geographical, emotional, and spiritual move that would change their lives forever, until their current reality and what their plans are for the future. In their interviews, these participants shared how the decision to immigrate has affected their lives on many levels, and how those decisions influenced them to become the people they are now.

Unlike a traditional literature review that uses extensive and broad research to support the study and findings, I focus again on depth. I selected key works of literature written by and about Mexican and Hispanic immigrants that delve into life experiences: Guadalupe Valdés' (1996) book *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools, An Ethnographic Portrait*, Chris Carger's (1996) book *Of Borders and Dreams: A Mexican-American Experience of Urban Education*, Franciso Jiménez' (1997) book, *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*; *The Undocumented Americans* by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio (2020); and

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (1984). The experiences portrayed within these masterful works are then connected to those of the participants. These connections illustrate why people choose to emigrate, their family and gender roles, their focus on educating the next generation, and their strong religious faith. They also depicts their challenges, fears, and incredible resilience as they navigate living “between two worlds.”

In many ways, this study is different from a traditional dissertation. It is not structured around a particular theory that I aim to contribute to through this research. Instead, it is a narrative inquiry, and the key importance of this work is bringing forward the participants’ voices, through their narratives, so readers can understand their experiences from their perspective. My goal is contributing to a greater understanding of immigrants’ lives. The problem is that in the United States, immigrants are misunderstood, especially those who are undocumented. Mainstream Americans stereotype them, and the media makes negative claims about immigrants as a single entity. By focusing on these life stories using descriptive detail, my aim is to shed light on the lack of understanding of immigrants in this country.

Wolcott (1994) argues that descriptive data should be treated as fact, with the assumption that “the data speak for themselves” (p. 10). Based on his approach, my goal is not to analyze the underlying meanings from my participants’ narratives, but to highlight the findings themselves. My analysis follows Wolcott’s (1994) advice to identify relationships and key factors among the data, which I do by connecting my participants’ stories with the works of literature. Wolcott (1994) argues that qualitative research should be connected to personal experience; my study supports this goal. Another aspect that makes this study unique is that I, the narrative inquirer, am also a member of the community that I am studying. I was born and raised in Mexico, and I made the

decision to emigrate to the USA where I have married, raised my own family, worked and supported my community, and advanced my own education.

In this chapter, I introduce the stages of my personal journey that have made me the person I am today. I begin with a brief autobiography that describes my work as an educator, researcher, and community activist. I conclude this chapter with an overview of my study.

1.1 My Story: Taking a Chance

In 2017, I ziplined in Costa Rica. I never would have imagined I would be participating in such extreme activities in different parts of the world, but I had the opportunity to be part of a student recruiting trip. This trip was a life-changing experience. Recruitment trips abroad often involve demanding 14- to 16-hour workdays, so we had the opportunity for some fun and relaxing activities as well, like the adrenaline-inducing experience of ziplining. After many pep talks from our coworkers and group leaders, I decided I would take advantage of this thrilling opportunity. After all, I have come to realize that life is all about taking chances. As I ziplined through the Costa Rican jungle, I realized how much have I grown since I first arrived in the United States 34 ago, and even compared to the person I was long before I moved to *The Land of the Free*.

This story begins in the summer of 1987 in Tilzapotla, Morelos, Mexico. My parents were retired educators who had worked with college students for decades. Mexican educators at all levels earn modest salaries so as a family, we were barely able to make it from paycheck to paycheck. I had just turned 18 then, and as the oldest child, it was my cultural obligation to help my parents and siblings with their needs, financial and otherwise.

Many relatives lived in the U.S. and visited us in Mexico. That summer in 1987, one of my aunts and her children visited from Chicago, which had a great impact on me. I had already finished my schooling as an Executive Secretary and Private Accountant, and I was searching for an

opportunity to grow professionally. I asked my aunt if I could move to Chicago and live with her, and to my surprise, she accepted immediately. I thought this would be my best opportunity to learn English and computer skills, which were highly regarded in my profession, so that I would be more marketable when I returned to Mexico. A number of my relatives had returned to Mexico after living in the U.S. for some time. They seemed financially successful enough to live well and travel, so I thought living in Chicago would enable me to help my family financially and help myself professionally. My parents allowed me to take this chance to improve myself, as I would also have the opportunity to help my parents and siblings to live better lives.

On July 18, 1987, I embarked on the trip that changed the course of my life. I traveled by plane and without my parents and siblings for the first time. I did not know where I was going, how long I would be there, or what I would do. I only had a few Mexican pesos with me, the equivalent of 20 U.S. dollars. The only thing I was certain of was that I wanted the best for my family, and they needed me. I knew that it was not going to be easy, but I was ready for the challenge. After a five-hour flight that felt much longer, I arrived in Chicago. Once I proceeded through immigration and customs, I reunited with my cousins, who took me to their home.

Everything was different from what I was used to back in Mexico. I was exhausted from the trip, emotionally and physically, yet the excitement of being in a new country made it difficult to sleep so far away from home and my family. When I woke the next morning, the first thing I did was look out the window toward the street. To my surprise, no one was walking around outside my aunt's home, despite the fact that her house was in the middle of a rather busy street. It was not like in Mexico, where each morning everyone sweeps the front of their home and what they consider to be "their" sidewalks. Mexicans take great pride in tending to their front stoops, and most ladies do so first thing in the morning. While everyone is working on making their homes

look clean and fresh, they greet their neighbors and passersby with “*buenos días!*” Children usually walk along the streets, rushing to get to school. The street scene I was accustomed to was lively and communal, but this was not the case on my first morning in the United States. The only thing I was able to see was an occasional car speeding down the street. From that morning on, I continued to compare the many cultural differences I experienced as if it was my homework. I tried to make some sense of my surroundings and what I was experiencing.

This practice continues to be part of my everyday life; I constantly compare and contrast the never-ending differences between the countries and their customs. One of the most important qualities of who I am is that I constantly find myself experiencing a life between two cultures. Sometimes this feeling can be utterly exhausting, and at other times it makes me feel capable and empowered.

When I work within the Hispanic community, I try with all my heart to fit in, culturally speaking, and be the person I am expected to be. I strive to be what is culturally accepted as a “good” wife, daughter, mom, grandmother, and various other roles. I constantly find myself explaining why I am a professional woman despite all of my other cultural “obligations.” Being a middle-aged, Hispanic, professional woman is not a role to have in my Hispanic community. Other women expect me to know how to make *tamales* and holiday meals traditionally prepared by women. I consider myself fortunate, however, because the Hispanic women around me are comfortable enough to tease me about my lack of knowledge on how to prepare the meals that they consider essential for a middle-aged Hispanic woman to be able to make.

The Hispanic women in the community where I live mostly accept me as their own. I get assigned to work in groups when they are preparing *tamales* for the biggest community feast: the annual celebration of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*. This celebration takes place December 12th, and the

meetings and preparations begin in February. Committees are formed and fundraisers are held, and sometimes community members donate raffle items. These committees are headed by the leaders of the community, and one of my roles is to identify capable leaders for the various committees. Whether in a leadership role or not, I am always included in these events.

My participation in the Hispanic community began in 2004 when a religious brother asked me to work with him to develop the Hispanic ministry of Rensselaer, Indiana. I took the chance. I did not completely know what it meant at the time, but I knew it would be a great opportunity to collaborate with the community. I have always identified as a spiritual person. I truly believe that God has provided everyone with certain gifts. He places you in life where you will be needed to put those gifts to use in productive, positive, and fruitful ways. I try to live this philosophy in my own life.

In 2004, I completed my first undergraduate degree in Business Administration at Saint Joseph's College, where I was required to take certain religious classes. During my final year, I took a class called Christian Humanism and also participated in a student retreat called Kairos. These two experiences helped me realize why God had placed me in this part of the world. I no longer aimed to be financially independent; instead, I realized that my life was meant to be of service and that I was to use my God given talents to serve others. Since then, my life took a meaningful turn; everything I do now is with the intent to serve or collaborate. When the religious brother asked me to help with the local Hispanic community, it was an easy decision for me. I decided to take a chance once again and collaborate as best as I knew how, because we are an underrepresented and underserved group of people.

In order to serve the community, I was to get to know the people and identify their needs. Over time, I connected with the community leaders. People in this area have been treated in ways

that humans should not be treated, often disrespected by their employers both verbally and financially. The Hispanics in the community are incredibly hardworking, often working 12-hour shifts. Most of the newly-arrived workers are not allowed to take breaks of any kind, having to eat while they work. Most Hispanic men in the community do shift work, while most of the women take care of their homes and raise their children.

When Hispanic people move to the U.S. from their countries of origin, they are often scared of the unknown, but they take this chance based on their current reality. Many Hispanic countries have the potential to be financially independent, but their corrupt governments and societies stand in the way. It is not uncommon for educated and qualified citizens to be unable to find a job that corresponds to their skills and knowledge; for example, an engineer who cannot make ends meet might also work as a taxi driver. In many Latin American countries, one can experience underemployment as a way for the community to survive and make ends meet. When parents have limited educational backgrounds, it is significantly more difficult to meet their family's basic financial obligations. When those parents find themselves unable to provide the basic needs of their families, they may decide to take a chance and move to the U.S. Their desperation drives this decision, and many die in the process. They are fully aware of the risks involved, and they still take the chance.

Our true leaders are those who move to the United States to find a better opportunity for their families. Fathers often take the first step to get to the Land of the Free. The families I have met during my collaboration with the Hispanic community where I live often share similar stories. Most of them migrated from Mexico, and most are undocumented immigrants. They took a chance in order to change their lives forever. They did not mean any harm; they just wanted to be able to

have an opportunity to work diligently, earn their wages, and provide for their families back home who patiently wait for their help.

These true leaders understand that they may lose their lives in the process. Many of them die on a daily basis while trying to cross the border. The journey is long, uncertain, and arduous. *Coyote* guides, who were paid a large amount of money to help them cross safely, rob many migrants during their journeys. Some *coyotes* abandon their groups in the middle of the desert if dangers or threats arise. This is why many die of thirst or hunger during their journey. When the lucky ones arrive safely to their destinations, they face additional challenges. They arrive hoping to find jobs as soon as possible in order to send funds to their families. Once the fathers are established and have paid their *coyote* debts, then they often take the chance to bring the rest of their undocumented families to the U.S. Stories like these begin every day in Mexico as well as throughout Central and South America.

Once I arrived in Chicago, I pursued many jobs. Most of them had almost nothing to do with my academic background. The first job I took was at a gelato factory. The owners were Italian, but most of their employees were from Mexico- coincidentally enough, from my dad's hometown of Tlaxapotala. My job was to pack small ice cream treats into a box of four. When the machine broke, I was assigned to clean the dirty, smelly bathrooms. I remember crying a lot during this task, and it was difficult to endure. This job was very different than the jobs I had in Mexico. I started working full-time at the age of 14, while I was still attending school. I worked at a luxury retail store. Eventually I became a manager and oversaw the minor accounting transactions. I had also worked as the administrative assistant to the executive director of production at a local factory. Despite the drastic differences in the positions and workdays, I never forgot my motivation to provide for my family back in Mexico. I knew I had to endure and should not complain. The gelato

factory job was arranged by my family in Chicago, who considered me lucky to have secured a job so soon after my arrival. I endured it until the factory closed because the company moved its operations elsewhere.

I was desperate to find my next job. Someone told me about an agency that hired people to clean homes. In Mexico, my parents had two cleaning ladies in our home: one who cooked and managed the kitchen, and the other cleaned the rest of the house and did laundry. An opportunity to have a job like this in the U.S. seemed adventurous, so again, I decided to take a chance. I stood in line every day to see if I was one of the lucky ones who was assigned to work as a cleaning lady. Working for this agency meant that I was lucky enough to have a ride to the house I was assigned to clean, and the agency gave me twenty dollars a day. I worked six to eight hours in a home, and I was alone most of the time. At first, I was assigned to work with someone else to learn how to use American cleaning supplies, but that meant I did not get paid until I learned how to clean properly. I learned quickly because I wanted to earn my own money. The job was tough and smelly. Women from different parts of the world rode in the agency van, and the ladies ate breakfast foods from their countries while we rode to work. Those smells were hard to bear, but the worst part came at the end of the workday. In addition to these food smells, the van smelled strongly of the hardworking women who sweated their hearts out daily. These overwhelming odors were my everyday reality.

I then found a steadier job at a flower factory, where we packed all sorts of flowers into shipping boxes. When the flowers were not in perfect, mint condition, we were to dispose of them in the garbage, which to me seemed like such a waste of something so beautiful. I got permission to take the discarded flowers home, and I would give them to my aunt. The flowers began to crowd her home, and I then had the “brilliant idea” to sell the flowers on the corner by my aunt’s home.

It seemed natural to me because there was a hospital nearby, but I sold the flowers until I found out that the hospital did not allow the patients to have real flowers in their rooms due to allergies. This flower factory job was seasonal and did not last long.

Later, I went to downtown Chicago to a small deli restaurant and met with the Korean owner, Mr. Lee, and asked for a job. When he asked me if I spoke English, I replied with my prepared answer, “Yes, I do!” Somehow he believed me, and he told me to return the next day. I took the menu from the restaurant and memorized it all in one night. I looked up the words I did not recognize. I learned more words and phrases as I interacted with the customers, and I also enrolled in English classes at the local City College of Chicago and finished my GED. Within four months I became the manager of the deli. I arrived at least an hour early to prepare for my shift. About one month later, I met the building engineer, a very handsome guy. A couple of years later I married him. That was 29 years ago.

He was a single father of three beautiful girls who were 2, 4, and 6 years old when we married, and we raised them together. When we could no longer afford a babysitter, I stayed at home for seven years and worked in their elementary school as a teacher’s aide. When the girls were in high school, I decided to return to my academic passions and attended the closest college. I started by taking one class at a time, which was all we could afford. As soon as I started school, I looked for a job at the college. My first job was to clean and dust the college bookstore, and then I became the administrative assistant to the Vice President. Little by little, my American academic background and experience in a college setting grew.

Four years later, I graduated in May, and that August I was asked to return as a faculty member. The college hired me to teach Spanish. After my second undergraduate degree, I completed my master’s degree in linguistics at Purdue University, and now this dissertation marks

the conclusion of my Ph.D. studies. After teaching for 12 years, my most recent job was the Director of International Student Services. This job allowed me to travel around the world and recruit students to attend our college in Indiana. Which is how I ended up ziplining in Costa Rica, yet another exhilarating “first” that invited me to reflect on all I have accomplished since I took the first chance and decided to move to the United States.

1.2 The Educator

If educators wish to continue growing, they must be like students and never stop learning. This is an ideal my parents have valued ever since I can remember. Both have been involved in academia their entire lives. My mother and father are now retired, but they were both college professors for the last few years of their careers. Needless to say, education has always been essential to my upbringing. As I conclude my doctoral studies in Linguistics, I am committed to honor my parents’ academic legacies. I also collaborate with my community based on my own life philosophy and journey as an educator.

I was born and raised in Mexico, where I attended kindergarten through my professional degree as an Executive Secretary and Private Accountant. I entered first grade when I was five years old (a year earlier than is typical) because my parents were teaching grade school at the time. They could not find anyone to take care of me at home, so they enrolled me in first grade to see if I could handle it. When I was young, my mother and father spent many hours after work teaching me whatever they could. Their games and songs were academically oriented. When I went to first grade, I was already able to read and write in Spanish, and I was more academically advanced than my peers. The school system allowed me to continue, and for the remainder of my school years I was the youngest student in my grade.

Before students are allowed to advance to secondary school in Mexico, they must take an aptitude exam. I passed the exam and entered secondary school when I was 11 years old. After three years of secondary school, I attended a three-year executive secretary and private accountant professional school program. I completed the program three months early because the teachers and principal thought I was ready for the working world, so I graduated from college with straight As when I was 18 years old. At the time I wanted to enroll in English courses and learn how to use computers, as I figured these skillsets would improve my success for the job market. My professional school secured a job for me at an industrial factory in Durango, Mexico, where I worked for six months, then I decided to move to the U.S. to study English and computers.

I arrived 34 years ago and attended Truman College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago, where I took English and computer classes. I learned that I could validate my previous studies by taking an exam that would reflect my knowledge, so I took the GED and passed. In the meantime, I met a person who changed my life forever. Twenty-nine years ago, my husband and I got married, and I became a stay-at-home mom for his three little girls. They are now my biggest motivation to complete my doctoral studies. I want to show them that you can achieve your dreams regardless of what life gives you.

After staying home for seven years, I enrolled at Saint Joseph's College and graduated four years later with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and a concentration in Marketing. In May 2004, I walked with my graduating class, and in August of the same year, I was asked by the Provost of the college to teach Spanish. I took the job without hesitation. After all, I felt confident due to my strict, academic upbringing. I taught at Saint Joseph's and continued taking classes there to further my education. I graduated in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in

Spanish. Soon thereafter, one of my professors took me under his wing and drove me to Purdue University to introduce me to one of his colleagues.

My mentor, Dr. Gámez, had faith in me and encouraged me to continue my studies. He said I still had more to do in the academic world, so I applied to Purdue University's Graduate School and was accepted into the Languages and Cultures Department. In 2011, I graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Spanish. When I defended my thesis, my advisers encouraged me to apply to the doctoral program. I was accepted, completed my coursework, and successfully defended my preliminary exams. At the time, my workload had increased tremendously at Saint Joseph's College. I was the Chair of the Languages Department and had various administrative duties in addition to teaching.

In July 2017, the President of the College offered me the opportunity to work as the Assistant Director of International Programs, and I graciously accepted. Six months later, the President offered me the position of Director of International Student Services, and I accepted. A year and a half later, the Board of Trustees suspended operations at Saint Joseph's. I was devastated to say the least. I decided to return to graduate school to complete my dissertation.

As a Spanish instructor, I teach the language itself (its grammar, syntax, and vocabulary) as well as the cultural context of the language. The focus of my research is related to identity, and I tend to emphasize the importance of getting to know the true nature of the people who live and breathe the target language as central to the linguistic experience. It is my intention that my dissertation develops an awareness of Hispanic culture in the United States.

1.3 The Researcher

My quantitative research in recent years has helped me realize that there is a world beyond this reality, a world where people's feelings and experiences are valued. My observations along

these lines began when I paid closer attention to the attitudes of the children I was working with and how their attitudes and language changed based on who was in the room or nearby. My quantitative research consisted of a pre- and post-test in an elementary after-school program with bilingual students who were encouraged to use Spanish.

The participants responded as expected; they consistently spoke Spanish, unless a monolingual English speaker entered the room. When this happened, the students switched to speaking English, regardless of whether the students interacted with the English speaker. For example, one day the students were working on their assignments, and a staff member brought snacks to the room. As soon as she arrived and set the tray on a table, the students automatically switched to English. They did not have any direct or personal interaction with her, but they were aware enough to switch languages. As soon as she left the classroom, the students switched back to speaking Spanish. This phenomenon occurred each time the snacks were delivered to the room. When it was time for the students to prepare and line up for the bus ride home, they spoke Spanish while they were inside the classroom. As soon as they walked through the door and into the school hallway, however, they switched to English instantaneously.

I also observed as the students' parents picked them up from school. These students often looked around to see who was watching them, then spoke in English for the most part, unless prompted by their parents to speak Spanish. Even then, some of the students replied to their monolingual Spanish-speaking parents in English.

The more I interacted with the students and their parents, the more evident it became that the students switched languages based on who was around them. I started to wonder: why did they do this, and did this behavior have anything to do with not feeling proud of their inherited culture? I believe that when bilingual children of monolingual parents understand the wealth and richness

of their inherited culture, this understanding is an invaluable asset, not only to themselves, their families, and their community, but also to the development of their own bilingual and bicultural identities.

Our world has become increasingly global in my lifetime. We are more aware of the rest of the world's places and cultures thanks to modern technology. Despite the current political climate and discourse, most people are aware that any given country is far more connected to the rest of the world in ways that most of us are not even aware of. We must educate ourselves about our surrounding neighbors as well as the rest of the world. We all benefit from this education. The more we interact with younger minds, the greater our responsibility to provide factual information about the world. We cannot allow ourselves to ignore global current events and their impacts on our countries and daily lives.

Hispanic immigrant families are people just like the other inhabitants of this beautiful country. These are hardworking parents who work inside and outside their homes, and their children participate in the Mexican culture their parents speak, live, and breathe every day. These parents have a goal in mind; they want their children to become people who improve themselves as individuals and succeed in American society. These children are born and raised in dual cultures. Their parents are proud of their Mexican culture and want their children to be part of it; at the same time, these families are trying to grasp their new American culture as well. These parents not only support the American culture their children live everyday outside their home, they also encourage their offspring to obey the rules and contribute to society.

These children face two daily realities. For the most part, one is their home culture and the other is found outside their homes. Perhaps these children's perceptions of the American media and other societal forces leads them to believe that being bilingual is neither valued nor prestigious.

As a researcher and instructor, I intend to communicate and prove that being bilingual and bicultural is beneficial to everyone.

Watching children of monolingual parents switch their languages because they wanted to be polite or were ashamed of their home culture has provided me with a sense of the complex linguistic landscapes navigated within these diverse communities. The more informed we are, the more empathetic we become. Our society truly needs empathy. More and more people are migrating to the U.S. for better lives than how they lived in their countries of origin. These immigrants are desperate to survive and provide better opportunities for their families.

1.4 The Community Activist

When I first arrived in Lake Village, Indiana (where I still call home), I realized that of its 800 inhabitants, only three of us were Hispanic and from Mexico. One had arrived at our small town twelve years before, and the other arrived in 1992, around the same time I did. I moved from Chicago, where I had lived for five years. When I first arrived, I could not find any people or products from Mexico or any other Spanish-speaking country. If I wanted to eat or cook any Mexican foods, I had to drive two hours to Chicago.

Little by little I became acquainted with the nearby communities, where there were also very few people from Spanish-speaking countries. Within about five years, I noticed that Hispanic people began to appear in the local stores, and I learned that many dairy farms were opening in the local area and had brought their Mexican workers from the southwestern U.S. They had decided to expand to the Midwest based on the success of these dairy farms in other states. They brought their veteran, trustworthy employees for the new business venture.

At the time, I was attending Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, and I volunteered often in the community. Saint Joseph's College was founded by a religious community called the

Precious Blood. Their identifying letters are C.PP.S., an abbreviation of the Latin name of the Congregation, *Congregatio Pretiosissimi Sanguinis*, Congregation of the Most Precious Blood.

The C.PP.S., like many other religious communities, have priests, nuns, and brothers among its members. One of the brothers was from Mexico and was working with the community in Rensselaer. When I found out that he lived at the college, so I contacted him, and he invited me to work with the Hispanic community of Rensselaer. I graciously accepted, entirely unaware of where this was all going to lead. I became involved with the community and provided information to the different ministries. As I became deeply involved in the C.PP.S. community, the Mexican brother was reassigned to another parish and moved elsewhere.

A religious sister, or nun, from Chile arrived to take care of the religious needs of the community. Sister R. and I worked together for many years, and she introduced me to the strict religious charisma of the *Verbum Dei* (Word of God). I learned that every religious community has its own culture or formation. Since 2004, I have been part of the *Verbum Dei* religious community. The local Hispanic community has been receiving *Verbum Dei* religious services since 2004, first in Rensselaer and later in the DeMotte Catholic Church.

Verbum Dei taught me that each of us must use our talents to support others who are much more vulnerable. Ever since, I have worked tirelessly. This has become my life philosophy and purpose. I have become very close to my community. If the community needs anything, they contact me and I try my best to direct them to available resources.

The dairy farms have increased their number of plants and employees, and our community has grown accordingly. More than 90% of these workers are from Hispanic countries. Most are from Mexico, but there is also an increasing number of workers arriving from El Salvador and other Central and South American countries.

I have become a source of religious formation and guidance for my community. About 20 other members have also taken formation and are now leaders within their own communities. We leaders take pride in guiding our friends and neighbors. We have been working together for about 17 years now, and the impact of our leadership continues to grow.

The Catholic diocese learned about my work in the Rensselaer and DeMotte communities, and they called to offer me a job. I basically continue to do the same work, but now I am compensated. I was volunteering for many years with one parish, and I now work with the diocese's 62 parishes, with the assigned title of Assistant Director of Family Life and Hispanic Ministry of the Diocese. This is a very long title, and its complexity is fitting for the broad scope of my work and responsibilities.

Most Hispanic parishioners in the diocese have about a sixth-grade education from Mexico. Only five of the 10,000 Hispanics in the diocese have finished college, and only two of us have graduate school experience; therefore, I have a great deal of responsibility. The more one is educated, the more one is able to serve his or her community. I continue to educate myself in order to better serve not only my own community, but also the farther reaches of the diocese. Moreover, I am humbly honored to be invited to speak around the country. I speak about how my own spiritual and academic journey motivates me to continue to serve, grow, and share my experiences. I must not give up, regardless of what life brings. I must continue to serve and collaborate with others as they prepare to be leaders in their own communities.

1.5 Dissertation Overview

I begin this dissertation with an introduction chapter, in which I set the stage for the study. This chapter describes the purpose and overall scope of the study, as well as my own autobiographical information as the researcher. Narrative inquiry is essentially stories lived and

told by the participant, generally with a beginning, middle, and end (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). As the researcher who is also a member of the community I studied, I framed this study by first sharing my own experience as a Mexican native who immigrated to the USA and began a new life here. I begin my story, “Taking a Chance,” in Mexico in 1987, when I moved to the United States. I describe adjusting to the new culture, finding jobs, getting married, and settling into a community. I then describe myself as “The Educator,” in which I share the details of my own education and my teaching background. As “The Researcher,” I describe my experiences studying native Spanish speakers through quantitative methods, and how this led to my desire to research immigrant families qualitatively to more deeply understand and share their stories. In “The Community Activist,” I describe my involvement with my local church and how that has enabled me to serve the Hispanic families in my community.

In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature. This includes a brief review of selected academic articles to provide information about the lives of immigrants living in the United States in order to establish the context for this research. I then move beyond academic journals to the five published books, providing in-depth analysis of those books, with some preliminary connections to my participants and myself.

Next, in Chapter 3, I provide details regarding the methodological framework for this study. I describe the seven participants and then detail the method of narrative inquiry. This includes descriptions of the method itself, establishing context, the research phenomenon, and the research questions. I also describe the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and provide details about data collection and analysis. Because this is a narrative inquiry study, I also spend time describing my own experience as the narrative inquirer.

Keeping with the philosophy behind narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I chose to provide a complete chapter for each set of participants, so their lived experiences are described in detail rather than summarized comprehensively. In each of four chapters, I provide detailed narratives based on each of the four interviews. Chapter 4 describes Guadalupe and Juan Pablo, Chapter 5 describes Estefany and David, Chapter 6 describes Maria and Chino, and Chapter 7 describes Isabel. The narrative in each chapter is structured based on the three research questions: General Demographic Information, Early Experiences in the USA, and Current Experiences and Future Plans. After the narrative, I include details from my Researcher Journal Notes to provide understanding of my own experience as the narrative inquirer engaging with these participants.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I provide a discussion of my findings in relation to the literature, implications for future study, implications for theory, implications for practice, and a conclusion for this study.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review is significantly different than the average dissertation. This chapter includes a brief review of selected academic articles as well as an in-depth discussion of books, academic and non-academic, that address the lives of Mexican immigrants in the USA. I found it necessary to include multiple types of sources in order to better represent the experiences of these immigrants beyond numerical data.

In this chapter, I begin with the importance of words to support the terms I use throughout my study. I next provide some descriptive statistics of Mexican immigrants in the USA in order to convey the importance of this research. I then share research to describe Mexican families, religion, language, and challenges they face. Moving beyond the academic articles, I then describe five books that provide in-depth, heartfelt accounts of real individuals living the experience of being Mexican immigrants in the United States. The differences between a more traditional literature review and the one you will read are significant: I more or less review the five books; in the reviews I link them to my own research and, importantly, to my own experiences. This process is an integral part of a narrative inquiry and demonstrates the sense of research going full circle, beginning with my experiences and connecting with them throughout the research journey.

2.1 The Importance of Words

The pan-ethnic terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are often used interchangeably and incorrectly in mainstream America. In their executive summary of the 2011 National Survey of Latinos (NSL), Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, and Velasco (2012) outline the fact that not all Spanish speakers identify themselves the same way. As far as the pan-ethnic terms “Hispanic” or “Latino,” most of them do not care to be called one way or the other, but to those who do, Hispanic is

preferred. Taylor et al. (2012) report that more than half preferred to have their identity described as someone from their place of origin. For example, someone who was born in Mexico prefers to be called Mexican instead of Hispanic, Latino, or Latinx. Only 21%, or one in five, describe their identity as “American.” Interestingly, only 29% of Hispanics in the USA see themselves as having a common culture among them. Every aspect of the data in this article resonates with the information shared by the participants in my research, who all identify themselves as Mexicans instead of Hispanics, Latinos, Latinx, or anything else. They are proud of their Mexican heritage and identity. In my study, I use the words Mexican or Mexican origin to describe my participants and the members of their community. I use the term “mainstream” to refer to citizens who are born and raised in the United States. This term refers to the majority group in the community who are predominantly White and non-Hispanic.

2.2 Mexican Immigrants in America

It is essential to understand the lives of Mexican origin families living in the United States, as they make up a significant portion of the population. The US Census Bureau published a report of population projections from 2020-2060 (Vespa, Medina, & Armstrong, 2020). As of 2020, 44 million people in the US are foreign born, making up about 14% of the US population. The report projects an increase of 46.4 million people from international migration. Of the 2020 population, about 18% of US residents are Hispanic. It is projected that by 2060, 27.5% of the entire US population will be Hispanic, including more than 1/3 of all US children (Vespa, Medina, & Armstrong, 2020). These numbers are likely higher, as this data only reflects people who identify as Hispanic, while many may identify as other or multiple races. The Pew Hispanic survey found that “most Hispanics don’t see themselves as fitting into the standard racial categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau” (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2012).

Of the foreign-born residents of the US, Mexicans account for about 24% of those, making up the largest group of immigrants (Israel & Batalova, 2020). In fact, of the Mexicans who choose to emigrate to other countries, 97% of them choose to come to the United States, yet in the US they are statistically more likely to live in poverty or have less health insurance than other immigrants.

In 2018, Mexicans made up about half of the unauthorized immigrants in the US, and they are less likely to become naturalized US Citizens than other immigrant groups (Israel & Batalova, 2020). Those who do become naturalized typically do so through family-sponsored channels. This is strongly reflected in my study, as most of my participants spoke about sending money, resources, and information back to family members in Mexico. They helped others emigrate, and they were helped by family members and friends who came before them.

2.3 Mexican Families

My research focuses specifically on Mexican families living in a small Midwest community. I interviewed four couples together and one widow. Van Hook and Glick (2020) spent ten years researching immigrant families in the US and found several patterns that unite them and relate to my own research. First, they classify the reason why people emigrate in three categories: those people who are taking a new job, those whose are joining their family members who already live in the USA, and those who emigrate because they are in danger in their countries of origin. These were common themes among the participants in my study as well. Additionally, immigrant families are known to send money they earn in the US back to relatives in their countries of origin (Van Hook & Glick, 2020). This trend appears in the books described next in this chapter, as well as in my research.

Other trends explored in the literature are gender roles within immigrant families. While it is often assumed that Mexican families make the decision to emigrate together, Nobles and McKelvey (2015) found that, in fact, such decisions are typically made by the male of the household. Unfortunately, women often are not part of the decision to emigrate. The women of the families stay back in their country of origin until their husband can afford to send for them and in many cases for their children as well. In addition, when the woman of the family handles the finances, most men do not need to emigrate (Nobles & McKelvey, 2015).

Van Hook and Glick (2020) also describe the traditional gender roles in immigrant families. Most men are breadwinners and most women, when possible, stay home to try their best to raise their children and to keep a clean home. However, many also work outside their home and when they get home, they also fulfill what they culturally understand to be their role as a woman in their family. In my research I found this to be true with my participants. Most men work at the local dairy farms and their wives are stay-at-home moms who take care of all household responsibilities.

2.4 Religion and Language

I conducted my narrative inquiry interviews in the Catholic church that my participants and I attend. Catholicism is the predominant religion among Mexicans. Interestingly, the Pew Research Center (Donoso, 2014) found that 81% of Mexican born immigrants identify as Catholic, while only 61% of Mexican Americans do. My study participants are all Mexicans who emigrated to the US, and their religion is a major aspect of their lives and their identities. Guglani (2016) conducted an ethnographic study of 48 participants in a Hispanic church in New York. Their church was an important part of their lives, and it was important for them to share their religion with their children.

In addition to religion, Guglani (2016) also analyzed the importance of the Spanish language for her participants. The older members of the group interviewed consider it an obligation to pass their mother language (Spanish) to their children. However, the participants who were born in the USA, as well as those participants who emigrated to the USA, prioritize culture over language. Guglani (2016) mentions that parents have a strong role in how the next generation uses the inherited language or in the language they use at home. The NSL found that “38% of all respondents are Spanish dominant, 38% are bilingual and 24% are English dominant. Among U.S.-born Hispanics, more than half (51%) are English dominant” (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2012).

In my study, my seven participants are first generation. They strongly emphasize the importance of their children knowing Spanish, but they let their children speak any language at home. Most of their children, who are second immigration generation or have been in the USA since they were very young, opt to speak English among their siblings. Guglani’s participants shared that they truly enjoy being part of their Hispanic church because their language and cultural identity are valued, and this was the same with my participants.

2.5 Challenges Faced by Mexican Immigrants in the US

Most Mexicans living in the US faced challenges during the process of immigration, as described in the following book reviews as well as the in-depth interviews with my participants. Even after many years in the US, however, many of these people still experience challenges in their daily lives. Hogge and Salvisberg (2014) conducted a study of 171 first generation Mexican adult immigrants. They explored the impact of American based acculturative stress (ABAS) the pressure that Mexican immigrants face from Anglo-Americans to adopt their language and culture, as well as Mexican based (MBAS), the pressure Mexicans feel to retain their native language and

culture. This study showed that ABAS and MBAS negatively affect self-esteem and psychological well-being.

Some of the stressors faced by the Mexican origin population are learning a new language, adapting to an unfamiliar culture, and balancing the American and Mexican cultures. They also find challenges in finding a place to live and finding a job to earn an income that will be suitable to live. Another challenge this population must endure is their immigration status, as they often experience discrimination by the mainstream society (Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012).

2.6 Book Reviews

While the research articles discussed above are helpful in understanding Mexican immigrants from a wide perspective, these traditional scholarly articles rely on facts and figures but do not fully convey who these people are. To delve more deeply into the lives and experiences of Mexican immigrants in the USA, I now move away from the traditional academic articles to review several pertinent books that consist of situations and life stories similar to those of my participants. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Given, 2008) emphasizes the value of using literature in qualitative research:

Literature is an art form that requires readers to attend to its details and imaginatively engage with characters and situations for emotional and intellectual impact. Unlike texts where individuals pay particular attention to information, literature invites readers into a literary space of human experience, which is of particular interest to qualitative researchers (p. 485)

The books I reviewed provide more detailed, personal, first-hand accounts of real lives. While there are many books published by and about Mexicans and other immigrants, I chose several that I believe relate most directly to the style of my research and the experiences of my participants.

For the review of each book, I follow the same structure: an introduction, themes that emerged, and a summary of my concluding thoughts for each book. It is my expectation that readers will find the books interesting and full of a wealth of content, with information on how each Hispanic has been living since they either emigrated or their parents emigrated when they were young. Also, each of the books expresses, in detail, challenges some immigrants have faced or continue to face on a daily basis. The reader will also see how they have succeeded and how they have overcome challenges through resilience, hard work, and the love and support of their families. While the articles provided mostly hard data, the books provide more of a portrait of who Mexicans in the USA really are. You will learn about their stories and more than likely, they will get to your heart.

2.6.1 Con Respeto

As I moved beyond academic articles regarding immigrants in the USA, I turned to a book by Guadalupe Valdés (1996) entitled *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools, An Ethnographic Portrait*. This book is a bridge between traditional academic work described above as it delves deeply into the experiences of the families to portray the lives of ten families in a border town between Mexico and the USA, as well as discussing her own experience as a researcher.

Valdés and her colleague, Barrera, conducted an “ethnographic longitudinal and descriptive study that was to follow 10 children in ten families (beginning at ages 4 and 5) over a 3-year period” (Valdés, 1996, p. xv). Participants included Mexican-origin parents who immigrated to the US and were raising their children in a border town she called Las Fuentes. The study originally focused on language acquisition in these children during their early schooling in the US, but Valdés grew concerned that the children’s school performance was influenced by their

teachers' negative perceptions about Mexican-origin families. Valdés wrote, "I found myself caring less about the study of language phenomena as such than about the ways in which Mexican-origin individuals used their two languages in order to survive" (p. 6). Her purpose in writing the book was to describe the lives of Mexican immigrants. It is intended for education policymakers and practitioners who make efforts to improve the academic success of Mexican-origin children. Valdés argues that although educators mean well, their effort to bring these children into the "mainstream" is actually hurting more than helping. She states, "in order to understand how school failure comes to be constructed in the United States for and by newly arrived groups, one must have an understanding of the worlds from which these individuals come" (p. 5). She therefore moves beyond education to describe the complex narratives of these ten families.

During my own linguistics research, (Cuza, Pérez-Tattam, Barajas, Miller, & Sadowski, 2013), my colleagues and I studied second generation children in an after-school program. I perceived that, in the presence of native English speakers, participants would shy away from their inherited culture or language. They felt a need to code switch, speaking English and adjusting their behavior around mainstream Americans.

2.6.2 Themes

In *Con Respeto*, Valdés describes the setting and context of her study, the ten families, their immigrations journeys, and many aspects of their daily lives. In this section, I describe five broad themes I found in the book that relate directly to my own research: researcher as insider, school performance and defining success, living in fear, living between two worlds, and strong women. I then summarize this section with observations and connections to my own life experiences as well as those of my participants.

Researcher as Insider

Immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, are often uncomfortable sharing their stories. Like Valdés, I feel humbled that my participants felt comfortable with me and trusted me enough to share their stories of crossing from Mexico and beginning a new life in the USA. Valdés was able to connect to her participants because of her experience as an insider who was also raised in Mexico.

Like the families I was studying, I had experienced sadness in leaving Mexico, in knowing that I would not go back. I had also raised children in this country. Like the mothers I was studying, I too had had questions and doubts about how strict to be and about how much of my own upbringing I could impose on my “American” children. Also like the mothers in the study, I had family in Mexico whom I visited often. (p. 11)

This is nearly identical to the connection I have with my participants and my own background experience. After 34 years in the USA, I still remember leaving Mexico, crying often and fearing that I was making the wrong decision. I missed my parents, siblings, lifelong friends, and neighbors. I missed working in an office and my comfortable middle-class way of living. I missed feeling safe in a place where the color of my skin or the language I spoke did not matter. Despite all this, the challenges of daily life and my sense of responsibility to my family pushed me to find a different life.

For Valdés, choosing her participants and gaining entry was not difficult; however, gaining trust and building rapport with the ten families took months or even years. Over time, trust was built, and they grew close:

I spent time in kitchens as the mothers cooked. I videotaped birthday parties, *Quinceañeras* (celebrations of girls’ fifteenth birthdays), and weddings. I accompanied mothers on errands, gave them rides to different places, and acted as their advocate in carrying out transactions. I could normally drop in unannounced and be greeted warmly by the children as well as the adult members of the family. (p. 10)

This mirrors my relationship with my participants; however, I worked with the Hispanic community in my area for 15 years prior to my research, so I did not have to spend time building rapport. My participants trusted me because I was born and raised in Mexico like them, and I had been in the USA long enough to navigate both cultures.

Valdés believed it was her duty as an ethnographer and writer to write her book *con respeto*, with respect:

The families and the children that I studied are, to me, not just examples of Mexican immigrants, but people whom I came to know and care for. I started out seeing them and relating to them as people who were part of my study, and somewhere along the three-year period of frequent contact, I stepped over the line, and they became part of an extended network of very special friends. (p. 13)

Likewise, as I write about my own study, it is my goal to present my participants accurately, authentically, and respectfully.

School Performance and Defining Success

Valdés addresses the challenges that children of Mexican-origin families face in US schools. She describes a boy named Saúl Soto, who despite performing well enough academically, was retained in first grade. Saúl's mother, Velma, was highly concerned and confused by this, so Valdés and her team met with the child's teacher. Mrs. Lockley believed Saúl was behind because his parents were not "involved" in his education. "She pointed to her lack of communication with Velma as evidence of both disinterest and lack of involvement. She had sent notes home with Saúl that were never responded to. Velma simply could not come to the school to talk to her" (p. 4). What Mrs. Lockley did not know, however, is that Velma's husband was out of work, she suffered from a work-related back injury, she had four school-aged children, she cared for her father-in-law at home, one of her children had frequent seizures, her stepson recently died of cancer, and the children had to miss three weeks of school while the entire family went to Mexico for her

father's funeral. Mrs. Lockley assumed the Soto family did not care about Saúl's academic performance, but the truth is they had many other issues to worry about.

Like Velma and her husband, most of Valdés' participants had little schooling in Mexico but wished for their children to have more education and opportunities in the USA. Valdés argues that the challenge, however, is that US schools prepare children for their futures based on the "American Dream," but this does not match the values and definitions of success for Mexican-origin families. Instead of prestige and impressive job titles, the dreams of Mexican parents involve "honest and hardworking sons, virtuous daughters, close families, and having *todo lo necesario* (the basic necessities of life)" (p. 8). These strong family values do not always translate to successful academic performance by US standards. Policymakers, educators, employers, doctors, and others in the USA need to remember that family is incredibly important for immigrant families.

Valdés' and my participants have strong family connections and see themselves not as individuals, but as a community. Valdés found that "Mothers and fathers and grandparents share modest personal goals and robust family goals" (Valdés, 1996, p. xii). My participants also related their success to providing a home for their children, living in a safe neighborhood, providing for their spouse, and caring for aging parents.

Living in Fear

In Valdés study, five of the ten families include a family member who was currently undocumented, which makes the entire family feel vulnerable.

For years at a time, they lived with the knowledge that at any moment they or members of their family, including their children, could be arrested by the border patrol and sent back to Mexico. The fact of being illegal made them easy targets for exploitation and for blackmail by angry neighbors and even resentful relatives. (p. 60)

With this fear of deportation, these families have to be prepared, so they usually have backup plans in place. These parents do not know if they will return home when they leave for work in the morning. Children know that if they come home to find their parents are not home, to put plan B in place, which could mean going to a trusted neighbor, or even move to plan C. However, once their paperwork is completed and they become residents or citizens, families can live more easily. Documentation becomes a source of pride, and they give advice to friends or relatives who are just starting the legalization process. I have seen this in the community where I conducted my research, as I am part of plan B or C for several families. My participant, Chino, shared that he does not trust his neighbors, worrying that someone will call the immigration office to report him. Like Valdés' participants, some of my participants live with constant anxiety about being caught.

Living Between Two Worlds

Valdés (1996) describes her participants as living “between two worlds” (p. 1), as their identities are shared between two cultures. My participants and I also live between two worlds. When I visit Mexico, my family and friends make fun of my “American accent.” They see me as an outsider, as I do not have enough knowledge of their daily lives. In the USA, people see that I am Hispanic based on my appearance and that I have a Hispanic accent in English. They use common phrases or movie quotes in everyday conversation, and I have no idea what they are talking about. I am not “American enough.” When I visit Mexico, people often ask me how I feel about going back “home,” and I do not know how to respond, as for the past 34 years, the USA has been “home” for me.

Mexican-origin parents are proud of where they come from. It is no surprise that this was the case for Valdés' participants as well as my own, who liked to compare and contrast their life now to the life they had in Mexico. In Mexico, things were usually much easier, slower, and more

family oriented, but they lacked in terms of their financial needs. In the USA, they found jobs that help provide for their families, but they sacrificed all the rest.

One of Valdés' participants said that although she had limited resources, she considered herself lucky because her family had everything they needed. In my own community, a woman invited me to her home, and I could not believe how humbly they lived. She proudly showed me the food in the refrigerator and jars of produce they grew over the summer, as well as all the "treasures" found at yard sales or free on street curbs. The woman tearfully confided that in Mexico, she lived in the streets, often sleeping in a cardboard box. Since she immigrated to the USA, she could not be happier. Like Valdés, my purpose in this study is to help illustrate the lives of these participants so that US-born citizens understand what Mexican-origin immigrants have been through.

Strong Women

While Valdés studied ten full families, she found that she learned most from the women, who shared intimate details about their lives. "It was they who, in the midst of making tamales or struggling to make sense of their children's experiences in this country, talked to me about their feelings their dreams, and their frustrations" (p. 72).

There were four women in my inquiry, and I learned a great deal from them as well.

My admiration and respect grew as the women spoke about the challenges they endured through their immigration journeys. They dealt with the separation of their parents, siblings, and everything that was comfortable and familiar to them. They embraced this change because they considered it important to live with their husbands, regardless of the living conditions. Some had to find jobs to help make ends meet. They had to be extremely organized and do their jobs as well as the household chores.

Valdés' female participants dealt with all of this as well as other challenges. For Saúl Soto's mother, Velma, daily life was hectic:

She carefully monitored the children's comings and goings and agonized when they were late from school. Some days she could barely walk because she was in great pain, but she kept going. She looked over her father-in-law, got the children ready for school, and frequently drove two hours to the Mexican border to buy cheaper flour, cornmeal, and beans. (p. 2)

Another woman, Isela, raised her family on less than \$600 per month, walked long distances to do basic tasks like grocery shopping, and navigated US life without speaking English. I cannot agree more with Valdés (1996) when she refers to the women in her book as "spirited, brave, optimistic, determined, loyal, and perseverant" (p. 93), as I also saw those qualities in the women in my study.

2.6.3 Summary of *Con Respeto*

As I read *Con Respeto*, I could identify similarities from my own upbringing to most of the people portrayed in these stories, and particularly to Valdés herself. We are both highly involved in our communities and care deeply beyond our research. We interviewed our participants in a professional manner, yet without even noticing it, we became part of their celebrations and daily lives.

2.7 Of Borders and Dreams

The next work I reviewed is Chris Carger's (1996) book *Of Borders and Dreams: A Mexican-American Experience of Urban Education*. This is a narrative inquiry portrayal of what many families go through when they emigrate from Mexico to the United States. I found this story well-written, as the late Chris Carger, a White American college professor, was able to put into words so many different aspects of Mexican culture that not many people are able to perceive unless they are born in that culture.

Carger worked as an ESL teacher and was responsible for the English as a second language class where Alejandro Juárez was assigned. Alejandro was a fifth grader and the oldest child of a Mexican immigrant family in Chicago. Carger was not only Alejandro's teacher, but she was able to see "the heart of the child" (Carger, 1996, p. ix). She became a mentor and advocate for Alejandro and his family to the point that they were asking her advice prior to making important decisions.

One of the many interesting aspects of this book is Carger's use of the word "borders," sometimes used figuratively and sometimes literally. Throughout the story, the reader recognizes the crossing of borders when families cross from Mexico into the USA through the Rio Grande. The story also portrays borders as the many challenging situations the Juárez family had to deal with as they went about their everyday lives. Likewise, the participants in my study faced different challenging situations that would be considered "borders," such as the fact that they are constantly concerned that they could potentially be sent back to Mexico by their neighbors or anyone who knows about their immigration status. Borders also include the fact that they did not know the language when they arrived, and some still do not know enough English to be able to resolve their most basic human needs. They face borders of not being able to call 911 if they have an emergency because they fear being sent back to Mexico. They face borders every day as they do such simple tasks as driving, their constant fear limiting them only to drive to work, the grocery store, and church.

2.7.1 Themes

There are two major themes from this book that connect to my research and the additional books in this review: the researcher's relationship to the participants, and the importance of education.

The Researcher's Relationship to the Participants

Valdés began as a researcher and then developed strong relationships with her participants, becoming like family. She gained entry into the lives of her participants because she was also born and raised in Mexico and now living in the USA. Carger, however, was not a researcher, nor was she of Mexican origin. Carger started as an ESL teacher, but she cared so much about her student Alejandro and his family that she became an important part of their lives. Carger was able to see the day-to-day activities of Alejandro's family, and she realized that any help she could provide them would make a world of difference. She was his *maestra* (teacher), then became his interpreter, and ended up being his family's advocate.

Carger experienced Alejandro's academic journey and all the "borders" he had to endure, including his own academic challenges as well as the academic system as a whole. But Alejandro, his advocate, and his family never gave up. They successfully surpassed all those challenges and were able to turn those "borders into dreams" that came true.

The Importance of Education

Like many other Mexican immigrant families in the US, the Juárez family has many dreams. One such dream was that they wanted to make sure their children received the best education they could have, a goal that was not always easy. Like the ten families in Valdés book, the Juárez family had to live "between two worlds." They dealt with the American culture outside their home, while at the same time continuing to emphasize their Mexican culture within their home.

Alejandro and his siblings were not allowed to play outside due to the dangers in their neighborhood. Carger encouraged Alejandro's mother, Alma, to move to a safer neighborhood. The new school was able to place Alejandro's siblings but did not have room for him, so he had

to go back to his former school. Alejandro's educators meant well, but they simply did not know how to serve him better and did not have time to get to know him individually or his family. They did not demonstrate any interest in providing a much-needed holistic approach for Alejandro's academic learning.

Carger met with different people in many situations while advocating in favor of Alejandro and his family, but often administrators did not budge. It seems that the Juárez family had even more borders to cross, but they never gave up on their dreams. Despite the fact that Alejandro's parents were not literate in English or Spanish, they were able to provide a strong family community at home. They were ready to provide anything they could to their children so they would be able to succeed academically. I also saw in my study participants that parents were dedicated to providing opportunities for their children so they could have better futures.

Summary of Of Borders and Dreams

When I read this story, I could not help comparing Carger's situation to mine. I find myself in a similar reality in the community where I serve. The vast majority of people in this community have limited academic backgrounds; few have finished grade school, let alone high school. Of the newcomers and first generation Mexican-Americans in my community, only a few have college degrees. I have no knowledge of anyone in graduate school besides me, so I feel a great sense of responsibility to find the resources I can provide to these parents who have limited access to higher education. They turn to me when their children are finishing high school and they have questions about college. Little by little, this new generation, some first-generation and some born in the USA, are pursuing a higher degree of education than did their parents.

I am involved with many Hispanic families through my work with the Catholic diocese. We are currently offering a course called Parent Leadership Formation. We train couples to serve

and help other couples by providing them the tools and the reassurance that they are not alone and that they have not lost their leadership as many seem to think. Many of these families share that because they do not know English, their children have to make decisions regarding academic situations. This is similar to Carger's story, in which Alejandro and his siblings were translating all correspondence for their parents. They did the best they could, but sometimes they did not have the knowledge to be able to do it.

When I read this narrative inquiry, I was able to empathize with Carger as she became an advocate for the vulnerable Juárez family and to the many "Alejandros" that will benefit from advocates like her. Like Valdés and myself, Carger found herself immersed in the daily life of the Juárez family. We all became more than researchers, we became close to the families, sharing in their challenges, hopes, and dreams.

2.8 The Circuit

The next work in this review is Francisco Jiménez' (1977) book, *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*. While Valdés' and Carger's texts are based on qualitative research, *The Circuit* is a collection of short stories for teen and young adult readers. It depicts the lives of migrant workers who move from place to place looking for farm work, following the seasonal crops, a lifestyle known as "The Circuit" (Day, 2006). Jiménez said, "I was not just writing my family's history, but I was writing the experiences of many people who went through the same adjustments" (Day, 2006, p. 4). Francisco's story is similar to those of thousands of children in immigrant families.

Jiménez narrates his life experiences as his childhood self, Francisco, one of eight children in a family that immigrated from Mexico to the USA when he was four years old (Santa Clara University, n.d). He begins by describing the challenges they endured while crossing the border

undocumented. Once they arrived in California, they were devastated to find that the labor would not begin for two weeks. Fortunately, a generous family provided them food and a tent to live in. Once the work began, the family worked long and strenuous hours daily, earning very little money.

In one story, Francisco became intrigued by a caterpillar kept in a jar in his first-grade classroom. He drew a picture of the butterfly life cycle and won a school contest, which helped him to finally befriend his classmates. In an interview (Cronacaman, 2008), Jiménez described his own life as like the caterpillar, as he overcame many obstacles and finally become a beautiful version of himself.

2.8.1 Themes

Four main themes emerged in this book: the strong love among the family, the importance of education, the family's resilience and perseverance, and their faith, particularly their devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. These are also themes that emerged in the interviews with my participants.

Family

The Jiménez family endured many sad and difficult times, but they loved one another strongly, prayed together, and never lost hope of having a better life. All the children helped with household chores in addition to picking crops. Even at a young age, Francisco wanted to help the family pick cotton, but instead, he was assigned the care of his younger brother Trampita while his parents and older brother Roberto worked all day. Francisco, Roberto, and their Papá searched the garbage dump for scraps they could use to improve their family home, whether it was a tent, a shed, or a garage. It was important for them to always make the best of their homes, even when they all slept on one mattress on the floor.

One day, the kitchen stove exploded, and the house burned down. Francisco was disheartened after losing his *librito*, the little notebook he wrote in daily. Mamá explained that not everything was lost because he remembered the information, but most importantly, they were safe and had each other. In all the times when they moved from one place to another or lost their possessions, the family always had each other as their most valuable resource.

The Importance of Education

When it came to education, the Jiménez children had to manage their schooling themselves. Francisco struggled to learn in English, because Spanish was spoken at home, but he enjoyed school and worked hard. He found a small notebook in the dump and he treasured it as his most important possession, his *librito*. He carried it everywhere he went, until that day when he could not rescue it from the house fire. A motivated learner, Francisco wrote English words as well as math, spelling, and grammar rules to memorize as he picked cotton.

Francisco and Roberto would start school every year around November, when the agricultural work ended. On the first day of school, Francisco went to the office and registered himself, since his parents had to work and they did not know enough English. This reflects Carger's and Valdés' books, in which teachers often assume that Mexican-origin parents are uninvolved in their children's education. Despite being able to support their children at school, *Mamá* and *Papá* always encouraged the boys to go to school and do their best, because they believed it would provide them opportunities for a better future.

Jiménez valued learning and saw his teachers as mentors. He explained in an interview, "In this very unstable life that we were living, the one thing that gave me a sense of stability was education. Whatever I learned on my own, and whatever I learned in school, that knowledge would go with me no matter how many times we moved" (Cronacaman, 2008). Education was the key to

Jiménez future. He completed all of his K-12 schooling and went on to earn a PhD and become a college professor.

The families in Carger's and Valdés' books worked hard to provide the best education they could for their children, because they knew that like it did for Jiménez, education could lead to a successful life. In all of these situations, the Mexican-origin parents made sure their children took education seriously, because they wanted them to have a better life than they were able to have. This is also true in my research. For example, Isabel shared that her children would not have had the same opportunities of education in Mexico. She also mentioned that her children were better fed at school than she could have had provided for them. Chino and Maria emphasized that they only want their children to truly love what they chose to study. Estefany and David provided opportunities for their children and encouraged them to study and work with "their brains instead of their hands." In my own case, both of my parents encouraged, supported, and expected me to continue with my education. Even now, they proudly tell everyone they know that their daughter is pursuing a doctoral degree.

Resilience and Perseverance

The Jiménez family was resilient to all challenges they endured, even when they suffered from hunger and lived in tents or run-down buildings. They worked long hours earning low pay and without health benefits. In one story, Francisco, his parents, and his brother Roberto worked all day to pick 600 pounds of cotton, only to receive \$18 for their work. The family did not go on vacation when others did, such as during Thanksgiving; instead, they took advantage of that time to work more. The children would receive only a small bag of candy for Christmas, but they never complained about not having enough.

After many years of struggling to learn English, Francisco and Roberto were finally able to speak and read in school. After constantly moving to different places looking for work, they were able to get steady jobs as janitors at their school and finally stay in one place. *Mamá* and *Papá* were pleased and proud, because they wanted a stable life and better jobs for their children.

At the end of the book, Francisco and Roberto are taken out of school by immigration officers. The other members of their family are deported back to Mexico. Determined to succeed, Francisco and Roberto live together, finish school, and find jobs to provide for themselves and their family. The rest of the family is able to return to the U.S., and they continue to push forward. When even their worst fears of deportation are realized, they still persevere.

Faith

Every time the Jiménez family faced a challenge in their lives, they prayed to God, *La Virgencita de Guadalupe*, and *El Santo Niño de Atocha*. When Francisco's baby brother *Torito* got sick, *Mamá* told the family that God would not let him die. She promised God that they would pray to *El Santo Niño de Atocha* (Holy Child Jesus, who takes care of the sick people, the poor, and children), every day for a whole year if *Torito* would heal, and they faithfully did so as a family. The Jiménez' devotion was present everywhere they went.

2.8.2 Summary of *The Circuit*

Jiménez' work in *The Circuit* is truly inspiring. Like Valdés and her participants, Jiménez experienced the common struggles and challenges immigrants face in the USA. Francisco was not fortunate like Alejandro to have an advocate like Carger to help him and his family, but the Jiménez family always had each other. Unfortunately, this is not the case for a great number of immigrant families because, due to the reality of many of them being undocumented, they find themselves

torn apart and have to leave their children behind in Mexico until they find themselves established enough to bring them along. For the participants in my study, I found this to be the most true with Isabel. She did not want to leave her two daughters behind. They traveled together with many challenges, but at the end they all ended up in the USA successfully pursuing their careers. Most of my participants struggled with leaving their parents and the rest of their immediate family. Some of them were not able to see their parents or siblings when they passed away, and they live in constant struggle.

2.9 The Undocumented Americans

Another book I reviewed is *The Undocumented Americans* by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio (2020), who was born in Ecuador and immigrated to New York at the age of five. Like Jiménez, Cornejo Villavicencio persevered to academic success. She was one of the first undocumented students to be accepted to and graduate from Harvard, and she is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at Yale. In this book she narrates the lives of undocumented individuals in the USA through a collection of short stories about their endurance, courage, contributions, sacrifices, and love.

Cornejo Villavicencio spent time in cities throughout the USA interviewing Hispanic people from various backgrounds (Meraji, 2020). She decided not to use a recording device so that her participants would not feel intimidated (Cornejo Villavicencio, 2020, p. xvi). In *The Circuit* and *The House on Mango Street* (which I describe next) the authors narrate their autobiographical stories through a main character. In contrast, Cornejo Villavicencio intertwines the stories of her participants with her own personal stories as an undocumented child of immigrants in the USA.

Cornejo Villavicencio is transparent about her mental health, emotional pain, and the challenges she and her family endured in their lives. She experiences survivor's guilt about stories like the one of Claudia Gómez González, a young lady who wanted to become a nurse but instead

was shot dead by border patrol, and for whom she dedicates this book. Cornejo Villavicencio struggles with “trauma from childhood and attachment issues,” a borderline personality disorder, and suicidal tendencies. She proudly shares that with the advance of this book, she was able to provide mental health help for her mother, father, and brother.

Cornejo Villavicencio has read many books about immigration but feels they do not reflect who her parents are. She says those books make it sound like “we [the immigrants] really like working hard for very little money and that is what we are built for and that we are really happy for any job we can have” (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2020). Cornejo Villavicencio wrote *The Undocumented Americans* shortly after Trump won the Presidential election in 2016, and she promised her participants that she would write in such a way that “white people would care” (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2020). She proudly shares in an interview that her writing is what got her “out of the ghetto” and poverty (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2020).

2.9.1 Themes

There are many interesting topics discussed in this book. The themes that most resonate with my own research and the other books I reviewed are the researcher’s relationship with her participants, family, faith and religion, and challenges and dreams.

The Researcher’s Relationship with her Participants

Cornejo Villavicencio interviewed many participants, such as undocumented day laborers in New York. She discovered that most laborers are lonely, as they do not have family members living with them, so she believes this is the reason they would talk with her after a long day at work. Although they were standoffish at first, the laborers opened up to her and shared stories

about their struggles in crossing the border, living in fear as undocumented immigrants, and being treated poorly by employers as they work hard to make ends meet.

The close relationship between Cornejo Villavicencio as researcher and her participants reminds me of my own research, as well as Valdés' and Carger's research experiences. We all began as researchers outside these families, and we found ourselves becoming their advocates, translators, academic supports, and trusted friends. These connections, as well as our own backgrounds, helped our participants feel comfortable confiding in us and sharing their vulnerabilities.

Family

As an adult, Cornejo Villavicencio is close to her family; however, when she was only 18 months old, they left her behind in Ecuador! Her father had been in a car accident, so they borrowed money from relatives. When they emigrated to the USA to work and pay their debt, the relatives kept the baby as collateral for the loan. This early experience is part of the deeply rooted anger and frustration that Cornejo Villavicencio carries with her.

Cornejo Villavicencio practically raised her brother because her parents worked (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2020). She took this responsibility seriously, to the point that she was disappointed when her brother did not want to attend college. This is a common experience for children of immigrants, just as in *The Circuit*, when Jiménez had to care for his younger siblings while his parents picked crops.

Cornejo Villavicencio is a first-generation “miracle” in her family who is earning a Ph.D. from Yale University. Her parents supported her dreams to write, even though they could not read a word of English. Cornejo Villavicencio said that her parents are the hardest working people she knows and that her parents, ancestors, and community work harder than the CEO of any given

company (First Generation Comets, 2020). She gives advice such as, “Be proud of where you come from” and “don’t change who you are.” She is clearly proud of who her parents are, and this pride extends to the millions of people with backgrounds like hers.

When I read Cornejo-Villavicencio’s work, I cannot help but think about what the children of my participants would say. I am certain that they are also proud of their parents and they appreciate who their parents are and what they have gone through in order for them to not have so many struggles. Each and every one of my participants is very proud of who they are and will never forget where they came from, just like Cornejo-Villavicencio and her participants.

Faith and Religion

Although it was a financial burden for them, Cornejo Villavicencio’s parents enrolled her in a Catholic school, because their faith was so important to them. She describes how her dad blesses her every time they say hello and goodbye. She refers to this as an Ecuadorian custom, and I have seen this with people from Colombia and Venezuela as well. Catholicism was an important part of her family’s life, until later when her parents became Jehovah’s Witnesses.

This book includes many examples of how strongly faith and religion are part of the lives of these undocumented Americans. In one story, Cornejo Villavicencio rode in a taxi to interview undocumented day laborers, and she prayed a Rosary for protection and that there would not be a raid on the warehouse. Many of the other participants practice their faith in a similar way. For example, a Mexican immigrant told her that after he nearly died from drinking alcohol, he swore to God that if he would recover, he would dedicate his life to making himself better. This is similar Jiménez’ story about his family praying to *El Santo Niño de Atocha* every day for a year so that his young brother would survive.

Though immigrants come from many countries, the shared faith in Catholicism runs deeply through the Hispanic and Latino communities. One can attest to this with my work. Every one of the seven participants shares without hesitation how important it is for them to be Catholic. This fact gives them an identity in the midst of the many other aspects of their lives where they do not have a sense of ownership or control of anything. Catholicism provides the identity piece that all human beings need.

Challenges and Dreams

As Cornejo Villavicencio interviewed undocumented Hispanic people, she learned about their dreams for the future as well as the challenges they faced. Some dreamed of raising children in the USA so they could have a better life than they had. Others spoke vividly about the experience of crossing the desert and fearing for their lives.

Cornejo Villavicencio interviewed several Hispanic people in Flint, Michigan at the time when the city was struggling with contaminated water. They were unable to read the news about the water, so they did not find out until days later when it made international news and was televised in Spanish. People had tried to tell them in person, but they were afraid to open the door because they are undocumented. Some people developed cancer and other illnesses, and many died, but they did not have a way to claim anything because most of them are undocumented.

Among these stories, Cornejo Villavicencio reflected about her own challenges:

As an undocumented person, I felt like a hologram. Nothing felt secure. I never felt safe. I didn't allow myself to feel joy because I was scared to attach myself to anything I'd have to let go of. Being deportable means, you have to be ready to go at any given moment, ready to go with nothing but the clothes on your body. I've learned to develop no relationship to anything, not to photos, not to people, not to jewelry or clothing or ticket stubs, or stuffed animals from childhood. (p. 60)

2.9.2 Summary of *The Undocumented Americans*

In contrast to the previous books that focus on Mexican immigrants, *The Undocumented Americans* includes participants from different parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. Like Carger advocated for Alejandro, Cornejo Villavicencio advocates for justice for *all* immigrants. She reminds me of César Chávez in the way she visited the laborers and advocated for justice. What these books have in common is the fact that the researcher became close to their participants to the point that they became like family. This was also true for me as the narrative inquirer among my participants, who shared the stories, faith, dreams, and challenges of this vulnerable population.

2.10 The House on Mango Street

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (1984) is comprised of short, fictionalized stories based on the author's life. The main character is a 12-year-old girl named Esperanza (which means Hope) who wishes to leave her Chicago neighborhood and have a home of her own and a place to belong (Sandra Cisneros, n.d.). Cisneros shared the importance of belonging in her life (PBS NewsHour, 2015), saying that immigrants in the USA are not always welcome, unless they are "the right kind of immigrant." She says if you have a Mexican accent, people ask things like "Why don't you go back to where you came from?" Though she was born in the USA, Cisneros never really felt at home in Chicago. She felt somewhat more at home when she moved to Texas and now in her current home of San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where people speak English and Spanish. Like Valdés, Jiménez, myself, and the participants in my narrative inquiry, Cisneros grew up living "between two worlds" and not feeling like truly part of either one.

Cisneros was born in Chicago in 1954 to a Mexican-born father and a Mexican-American mother. Her place as the only female child among six brothers in a large working-class Mexican family "sums up a prominent theme found in her fiction: women's marginalization in a culture that

places more value on men's accomplishments" (Herrera, 2006, p. 1). Esperanza experiences many challenges growing up. While young Francisco Jiménez worried about picking crops, supporting his family, and avoiding deportation, Esperanza deals with coming of age, thinking about boys, growing hips, fitting in at school, and about friendships with other girls in the neighborhood.

2.10.1 Themes

The works of Valdés, Carger, and Cornejo Villavicencio are the results of exhaustive research that portray the lives of Hispanic and Latino immigrants in the USA. Those nonfiction books, as well as the novel, *The Circuit*, specifically focus on immigration issues in the USA. In contrast, *The House on Mango Street* takes a different approach, as Cisneros paints a detailed picture of the daily life of a poor Mexican origin family. Her stories reflect many experiences common to Hispanic immigrants in the USA. I explore four main themes that relate to the other books in this study, as well as to the lives of my own participants: family, success and a better life, home, and faith.

Family

While her parents work, Esperanza is responsible for her younger sister Nenny. In *The Circuit*, Francisco's older brother was responsible for him, and then Francisco was responsible for his younger siblings while their parents worked. Francisco longed for his family to have a home in one place and not have to move constantly to follow the work. Esperanza, however, longs to get away and live on her own.

Cisneros describes her mother's life as frustrating and one she did not want for her daughter. This dynamic is portrayed through Esperanza and her mother. Esperanza's father is a hard-working man who "wakes up tired in the dark" (p. 57). In one story, Papa approaches

Esperanza to tell her that her *abuelito*, her grandfather, has died. She is shocked as her father “crumples like a coat and cries” (p. 56), and she contemplates what she would do if he were to die. Though their relationship is not evident throughout the rest of the book, this story shows the strong bond between Esperanza and her family.

In that story, Esperanza also thinks about how her whole family will have to travel to Mexico for the traditional funeral rituals, along with many other relatives. This is common practice among Mexican origin families. Although they live in the USA, they will make the trip back to their home country to honor the dead. My participant, Isabel, traveled home for her parents’ funerals. She ended up returning to the USA undocumented and full of sorrow, but still went back to Mexico to the funeral. Many do not make it on time or cannot make it due to their immigration status.

Success and a Better Life

Although Cisneros does not mention school as much as Jiménez does, both emphasize the importance of education as a means to a better life and success. Esperanza has a friend who wants to go to a university so that she does not have to work in a factory or stay home for the rest of her life. Esperanza’s mother tells her she used to be a “smart cookie” but then got married, had children, and lives a frustrated life because she could not live her dream of being an artist. She encourages Esperanza not to give up on her dreams.

In *Con Respeto*, the families encouraged their children to do well in school, but this is not a major sign of success for many of them. Similarly, in Esperanza’s community, school is not the only means for success. Many of the girls in Esperanza’s neighborhood see marriage as their ticket to a better life. Some of the girls from the community where I conducted my research look forward to marrying men who work on the dairy farms, seeing this as a means to success. Esperanza,

however, continues to write, seeking her own way to success. Like Jiménez and Cornejo Villavicencio, Cisneros found success through education. She earned a master's degree in fine arts, and has worked as a teacher, a high school counselor, and has worked at several universities.

Home

Esperanza dreams of having a home that would not have broken pipes and sit above a store, and the whole family would not have to sleep in the same room. She feels ashamed when her family looks at houses from the car windows, "I am tired of looking at what we can't have. When we win the lottery... Mama begins, and then I stop listening" (p. 86). Esperanza wants to become educated so she can have "not a flat, not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own" (Cisneros, 1991, p. 108).

Like the participants and authors of the other books in this study, Cisneros and her characters feel torn between two worlds. In one story, a man in the neighborhood brings home *Mamacita*, a relative from Mexico. She stays home with a baby while the man works, and she does not learn English. Esperanza hears *Mamacita* singing "homesick songs about her country" (p. 77), but the man yells, "¡Ay, caray! We *are* home. This is home...Speak English!" (p. 78). Later *Mamacita* hears the child sing a TV jingle, and she cries out, "No speak English!" (p. 78). This shows how many Mexican origin immigrants in the USA feel torn between two worlds, never really feeling at home.

In another story, a man named Geraldo was killed in a hit and run accident and died in the hospital alone. The police and doctors knew nothing but the man's first name. Esperanza reflected,

What does it matter?...They never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home... How could they? His name was Geraldo, and his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo - he went north... we never heard from him again. (p. 66)

Although Cisneros is not writing specifically about undocumented Americans like Cornejo Villavicencio does, she incorporates their challenges into this book through Esperanza's childhood memories.

Faith

As in the other books and with my own participants, the theme of the Catholic Church and faith was also present in *The House on Mango Street*. Esperanza describes celebrations she and her family attended in the basement of their church, just like how my participants celebrate their family events in the church hall. This is also the place where my research interviews took place. Esperanza mentions dancing, tamales, and the fact that children play and run all over the place. They feel like they belong there. They feel free and secure, just like the children of my participants.

2.10.2 Summary of *The House on Mango Street*

I relate to Cisneros' stories and her life, like the search for self-identity in a world where my Hispanic background is not valued, and my sense of home is in both countries at the same time. *No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá* (I am not from here, nor am I from over there). Additionally, I treasure both my Mexican family and my American family. My concept of a better life or success is to continue my education and use it to serve others so they may have a better life. Esperanza meets an old woman who tells her, "When you leave, you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand?...You will always be Mango Street. You can't forget who you are" (p. 105). This resonates with me, as I believe I must use my talents to help others. Cisneros created organizations to help underrepresented students pursue higher education and their dreams to be writers. Like Cisneros, I was a college recruiter, and I explained to parents around the world that

their children can and should pursue a college education. My dream is that I will continue to try my hardest to help the underrepresented students in my area.

2.11 Summary

These diverse books illustrate that one cannot group all Mexican immigrants into a single category. To begin, there are those who are first, second, or third generation. In addition, there are families in which one parent is Mexican and the other Mexican-American or another nationality. I myself was born and raised in Mexico and immigrated to the USA at the age of 18, and my husband is an American-born son of a second-generation Polish immigrant father and a second-generation French-Canadian mother.

Mexican immigrants have different academic backgrounds and work at different professional levels, from laborers to lawyers. Some immigrated on their own and sought work, and others were invited to work as professionals or laborers. There are differences among Mexican-origin immigrant children based on the order in which they were born, and there are differences among Mexican immigrants based on their socio-economic backgrounds as well. Valdés and I found many differences among our participants, but they all have in common the love for their families, their customs, their culture, their resourcefulness, and great resilience.

The more I learn about other people, I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of Mexican immigrants, and to help those who are interested in learning about both cultures. I understand why schools in the USA are not successful in reaching out to Mexican immigrant families, and I also understand why Mexican immigrant families are not proven successful in regard to communication between home and school. I humbly hope that my academic work can serve as a bridge to help these two sides be open to communicate with each other.

Even though the transition from living in Mexico to being an immigrant in the USA was incredibly difficult for me, it does not compare to the difficult challenges my participants endured. Some of them crossed the border illegally and undocumented. Some overstayed their welcome. Most of them are now US citizens, but the process from the moment they decided to step out of their comfort zone to today has a great deal of history that is described in detail in the following chapters. My most profound respect goes to all families that still endure this challenge on a daily basis.

This research is like a funnel. The quantitative data on Mexican immigrants gives a broad snapshot of where these people come from and where they live. The qualitative research articles zoom in more closely to the specific aspects of these immigrants' lives. Each of the books I explored narrows in to detailed accounts of the lives of specific groups or individuals who are living the immigrant experience in the USA. For this narrative inquiry, I further the understanding of the life experiences of Mexican immigrants living in one community in the Midwest region of the United States. By speaking directly and personally with seven individuals in their local church and in their native language, I am able to tell their stories of their decision to immigrate, the challenges they face, and their dreams for the future.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this narrative inquiry research study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is to capture the experiences of people who immigrate from Mexico to the USA. Through personal stories, the reader is able to learn about the different stages of this specific population from the moment these immigrants decide to make the geographical, emotional, and spiritual move that would change their lives forever, until their current reality and what their plans are for the future. In their interviews, these participants shared how the decision to immigrate has affected their lives on many levels, and how those decisions influenced them to become the people they are now.

Through the participants' detailed stories, readers are able to better understand the dual cultural reality these immigrants live on a daily basis. As of 2012, Latinos made up 17% of the US population, and they are the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the country (US Census, 2014). Discrimination is a natural part of life for Latinos in the United States (Almeida, Biello, Pedraza, Wintner, & Viruell-Fuentes, 2016). Almeida et al. analyzed data from the National Latino Health Care Survey, which asked participants how often they experienced discrimination of various types in their everyday lives. According to the study, Puerto Ricans reported significantly more discrimination (80.7%) relative to Cubans (45.8%), Mexicans (67.6%) and other Latinos (68.7%) ($p=0.01$) (Almeida et al., 2016).

In recent years, the media has predominantly portrayed only one aspect of the immigration story, painting these people in a negative light. In fact, the 2016 election included a great deal of anti-immigration rhetoric. In his campaign, Donald Trump declared publicly that immigrants from Mexico included the country's "worst elements," claiming they were rapists, drug-runners, and criminals (CBS News, 2015; Winders, 2016). He stated that "tremendous infectious disease" came

across the border, thus calling for a wall to be built on the U.S.-Mexico border to solve the “problem” of immigration (Campbell, 2015; Winders, 2016).

It is my hope, and the hope of my participants, that readers will be able to create an alternative view of these immigrants by reading their stories. All of the information provided by the participants was obtained through a series of individual interviews based on narrative inquiry that was focused and categorized mainly in three different parts, as described in the research questions.

3.1 Participants

The participants of my research are originally from Mexico, and they have children who were born and raised in the United States. For the purpose of this study, only the parents in these families were interviewed. Though many of the U.S. born children speak English fluently, most of the parents are predominantly monolingual in Spanish. Because their working English is limited, we conducted these interviews in Spanish.

Mexican origin immigrants in the US are incredibly diverse and have various socioeconomic status and experience different levels of privilege. For example, some are business owners and white collar professionals. In this study, all the participants live and work in a rural Midwestern town and are blue collar workers whose livelihoods rely on the local dairy farms.

The first couple I interviewed are Guadalupe and Juan Pablo, who are from the northern part of Mexico. Guadalupe is a stay-at-home mom and Juan Pablo is a mechanic. They have a son and two daughters who were born in the U.S. Their son recently married, one of their daughters was recently engaged, and their youngest daughter is currently attending high school.

The second couple I interviewed are Estefany and David, who are from central Mexico. They have four sons; two live in the U.S. and two live in Mexico. One of their sons lives with them

in this small Midwest city, and he attends college and works full time. Estefany takes care of an elderly woman, and David works on a dairy farm.

The third couple is Maria and Chino, who recently married. Maria has three daughters and a son from her previous marriage. Her former husband passed away a few years ago. Maria cleans offices and homes, and Chino works on a dairy farm.

The last participant is a widow named Isabel, who is retired. She worked most of her adult life as a farm worker in the fields of California. One interesting fact about Isabel is that she worked alongside the community activist César Chávez, and she has fascinating stories about the experience of working with such an inspirational man. She currently lives with one of her four daughters in the town where the interview took place. Her three other daughters and her son live in California.

All of the seven participants of this study have in common their dedication to serve others. Based on their interview answers, their compassion and love of serving others derives from the spiritual teaching they receive in their home parish. They all feel they have a mission in life to serve others with their God-given talents.

These participants are brave and resilient, based on their immigration stories. In addition to their kind, generous, polite demeanor, they also have strong family values. Despite their bicultural lives, they do not see this as an obstacle to being community leaders or being hospitable to anyone they encounter. However, they miss their families and places of origin. Every one of the participants interviewed for this project spoke about a sense of regret for not being present when their parents died or were ill. Also, as immigrants, their constant feeling of fear does not allow them to have complete and free lives.

3.2 Method: Narrative Inquiry

The phrase, “To do good research, one needs to be a good human being,” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17) provides me encouragement. Though the phrases “good research” and “good human” involve a great deal of responsibility, I strongly believe that I am able to take the responsibility to once again take the chance, as I did when I came to the USA, of this meaningful endeavor for my professional life.

I turned to qualitative research and particularly narrative inquiry because I wished to study people in their natural settings, through the use of interviews, conversations, and field notes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Rather than exclusively relying on numbers or manipulating behaviors and settings, qualitative research focuses on understanding and meaning based on observations and verbal narratives, coming directly from the perceptions of the participants (McMillan, 2008; Saldaña, 2011). Through Narrative inquiry, participants are able to make meaning from their lived experiences. It is a method widely used across disciplines due to the universality of people creating meaning through sharing their narratives (Phillion, Rahatzad & Dockrill, 2016). Across disciplines, narrative has been part of research from the beginning, as people have always made meaning from asking questions and sharing stories (Hendry, 2010).

This study is based on the idea that “life... is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). In order to develop an understanding of the lives of Mexican immigrants living in the American Midwest, I am applying narrative inquiry with a strong sense of multiculturalism. Phillion, Rahatzad, and Dockrill (2016) shared that narrative inquiry with a multicultural approach gives a voice to those individuals that otherwise would not be represented or are marginalized. Traditionally marginalized and oppressed peoples, such as immigrants, can be better understood and accommodated through the stories of their own lived experiences and considering these narratives through the lens of societal issues and

context (Phillion, Rahatzad, & Dockrill, 2016). The participants of this work and the community are meaningful to me due to the relationship we have formed over the years. Nothing would make me feel more humbled than to be able to serve as a channel for their voices to be heard and to expose the social injustices they have faced.

Further, He (2002) uses the term cross-cultural narrative inquiry to emphasize that in order to understand multicultural issues, it is essential to recognize the rich contexts of people's lives, particularly those who live and work within multiple cultures. I believe it is impossible to understand the lives of Mexican immigrants in America without recognizing that both of these cultures are part of their lives and shape who they are.

Developed primarily by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is a method in which the researcher collaborates directly with participants over an extended period of time in order to understand their experiences. This method is grounded in John Dewey's focus on experience, on both the personal and social levels, as the key to understanding people (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is essentially stories lived and told by the participant, generally with a beginning, middle, and end (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

As the researcher, I framed this study by first sharing my own experience as a Mexican native who immigrated to the USA and began a new life here. I then interviewed seven people who share this phenomenon, and I share their stories over four chapters.

3.2.1 Context

Geertz suggests that one cannot look at a single person or event without considering the "wholeness of his metaphorical parade," (as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 16). In this sense, the participants and I share the phenomenon of the immigrant experience in the USA, but we are also part of this 'parade' set within this particular time and social context. Clandinin and

Connelly (2000) purport that context is essential for understanding the experience of any individual, thus we must consider the time, space, and people related to the experience. In the case of this study, the participants share the context of living in the same town in the Midwest, and specifically attending the same church. Despite their unique situations, their particular stories share many similarities based on this shared context. We cannot say that the experiences of Mexican immigrants are all the same, because stories would be quite different if they were set in the context of a different part of the country, or in a different time such as 20 years ago or 10 years into the future. Today's current political climate impacts the experiences of these immigrants. For example, the study by Almeida, Biello, Pedraza, Wintner, and Viruell-Fuentes (2016) found specifically that “participants in states with more anti-immigrant policies were more likely to report discrimination relative to those living in states with less anti-immigrant policies” (p. 899).

3.2.2 Three-Dimensional Inquiry Space

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) created a term, the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Figure 1), based on personal and social interactions, the continuity of exploring past, present, and future, and the situation, or place where these interactions occur.

Interaction		Continuity			Situation/place
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions.	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people feelings, and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view.	Look backward to remember experiences and stories from earlier times.	Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event.	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines.	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view.

Figure 1 *The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure*

3.2.3 Place

The concept of place includes the physical setting where the narratives occur, which was particularly relevant in my study. The interviews took place in a small rural city in the Midwest. The community in that area is predominantly Caucasian and monolingual in English, and the original families from this geographical area have lived in this community for many generations. The site of this research is the local Catholic Church that my participants and I attend. Having the church as the interview site is significant and relevant for the participants of this study. This is the place where most immigrants of Hispanic descent in the area gather not only for spiritual nourishment with their weekly mass, but also for family social events. These Hispanic immigrants arrived from different places in Mexico with ancient traditions of gathering in squares where they conduct their daily lives. These people find any excuse to gather as families and close friends and neighbors that become like family. I conducted all interviews at this church, to honor the traditions of the participants and to give them a comfortable, familiar place where they could share their stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that the places in which participants live and work are part of their stories. Therefore, setting this study physically within the church that is so significant in their lives felt natural and fitting. This resonates with the narrative multiculturalism in that it is person-centered, experiential, reflective, and helps the reader understand the participants' daily life (Phillion, 2002; Phillion, Rahatzad, & Dockrill, 2016).

3.2.4 Research Phenomenon

Unlike research methods that pose a specific research question, create a hypothesis, and seek to find solutions, narrative inquiry focuses on exploring a phenomenon and responding to the question, "What is the experience of interest to you as the narrative inquirer?" (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000, p. 124). In this study, I set forth to understand the shared experience of immigrating undocumented from Mexico to the US and forming a life in the Midwest.

3.2.5 Research Questions

In addition to the dimensions of interaction, continuity, and situation, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe an inquiry through four directions: inward, outward, backward, and forward. “To experience an experience- that is, to do research into an experience – is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). The direction of looking inward refers to internal conditions, “such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Looking outward focuses on conditions within the environment, and looking backward and forward focuses on exploring the past, present, and future of the participants’ experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although I was gathering narratives from my participants, I conducted interviews and asked a series of questions to help obtain their stories in a chronological way. Clandinin (2013) describes narrative inquiry as “an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (p. 18). For this reason, my questions engaged participants in discussion of all of these dimensions.

My questions were designed to create an overall narrative of the participants’ origins in Mexico, their decisions to immigrate, the immigration journey, and their current life experiences in the U.S. A complete list of interview questions is included in Appendix A: Interview Questions for Participants. The main research questions are as follows:

1. What is the general demographic and background information for each participant? This includes topics such as:

- a. Description of their places of origin;
 - b. details about their family;
 - c. their thought processes behind what influenced their decision to immigrate; and
 - d. their hopes, dreams, and expectations for immigrating to the USA.
2. What were the participants' early experiences of arriving in the USA? This includes topics such as:
- a. The story of how they arrived to the USA, detailing the process of their journeys; and
 - b. how they live now, describing such details of their daily lives as how they get around, where they work, their language preference at home, and how often they visit their places of origin.
3. What are the participants' current and future plans now that they live in the USA? This includes topics such as:
- a. Their individual and family accomplishments since they arrived to the USA;
 - b. how they feel today compared to when they first immigrated;
 - c. their plans for the future; and
 - d. whether they have any regrets about their decision to immigrate.

3.2.6 Role of the Researcher

In narrative inquiry, the researcher is not an objective observer who stands outside the situation to watch and record the participants from afar. Instead, the researchers are “part of the landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 77). The narrative inquirer is in the field, sharing the experience with the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion, 2000). In my case, I am unique as a narrative inquirer because I am not an outside researcher who has been granted access

into the world of the participants. Instead, I have been working with this particular community for the past 17 years, and I am very much part of the community where I conducted this research.

Many Hispanic families have been arriving in the Midwest community where I live, spurred by the growth of dairy farms. Most of these immigrants are from Mexico, and they experience unique challenges. It is my hope that I may address some of those needs. My life philosophy is to be able to share whatever I have to offer with others. Through my academic training, I have acquired some tools that can be put to use in order to collaborate in addressing the challenges that this newly arrived community might face.

Most Hispanic women in this region come from rural Mexican areas and are culturally expected to do domestic tasks that have been passed down from generations before them. For example, most of these women cook, clean their homes, and focus on raising their children. I have witnessed how these women compete with each other as to who keeps the tidiest home or cooks the best meals. They take pride in preparing their meals from scratch. When they visit each other's homes, they are constantly comparing how they prepare certain dishes. For example, when someone does a poor job preparing tamales, this becomes of a sign of weakness among them.

Often, the community treats me differently. They see me as different from them in the sense that I work outside my home. I drive, while many other Hispanic women in the community do not drive. I am married to a non-Mexican, which is perceived as out of the ordinary. Additionally, I have accomplished a higher level of academic education than all the women in the community. Nevertheless, I am accepted in the community and have gained their trust, so I know they are comfortable being themselves while I conduct my research.

For the Hispanic community in the area, it is not surprising to see me performing research. With my Master's thesis (Sadowski, 2011), I was able to provide a program for Heritage Language

Learners that can be put to use in the high school and college academic systems in the area. The goal of my current doctoral research is to address other needs I have witnessed over the past few years. I trust that I can maintain my participants' integrity and adequately represent their lives and experiences. Based on past research in this community, I feel confident that my ethical behavior as a researcher has gained the community's trust.

Turner (2000) mentions debates regarding the view of the culture by anthropologists as insiders in the culture. He suggests that culture can be compared and analyzed based on how it was before the researcher was part of such culture. In my case, I am fortunate in that I was already in this community before the newly arrived Hispanic population moved into the area. As of today, I have lived in this community for 29 years, enough time to see major differences in the demographics within this area.

3.2.7 Autobiography

Narrative inquiry goes beyond being immersed in a population for the sake of gathering stories. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is autobiographical in that "our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121). They express that the inquirer must recognize his own interests and lived experiences in relation to the study. They refer to this as "composing narrative beginnings" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70), which helps the inquirer establish who they are and how their own experience relates to the experiences being studied. For this reason, I began this dissertation by writing about myself as the researcher in Chapter 1, to frame my own experience in relation to that of the participants. Phillion, Rahatzad, and Dockrill (2016) express that the inclusion of biographical parts of autobiographical work is welcomed by narrative multiculturalists. These

authors see multiculturalism inquiry as a necessity to be able to understand relationality in diverse social contexts.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

It is important to note that I have a close relationship with the majority of the members of this community due to the fact that I have worked with them for many years, from baptism of their children to religious formations and their sacraments. I have been invited to their homes to share meals or help with hardships like a death in the family. Also, every Saturday we have a mass in Spanish that has helped me spend time with the families at a personal level. These instances have led me to believe that these families do not consider me an outsider.

Based on my geographical location and the nature of my work, I am able to spend time with many people, especially Hispanics. Some of the members of the local community have been living here at least 15 years. We attend the same religious services and do mission work in more rural areas near our community. I feel close to many of them because we have lived, laughed, and cried in many circumstances of our lives. We have endured many experiences together, and I understand their anguish through the process of becoming documented citizens.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that narrative inquirers must “fall in love” with their participants, but also be able to step back and consider their situations from a distance. I am part of their story, but I also had to step back far enough to tell their narratives and maintain the role of researcher, which includes protecting the participants. In order to help keep the participants’ identities confidential, I used pseudonyms instead of their real names during the narrative of this study. Participants were so excited to be part of this study that they told me that they would not mind using their real names because they are proud of their journey and they want everyone to know their stories. However, I wanted to make sure to follow IRB guidelines and the best ethical

practices. I offer the idea if they would pick their own pseudonyms and they did. The participants chose their own pseudonyms, which helped them feel ownership in this study. They chose pseudonyms based on someone meaningful in their lives or based on their religious beliefs.

3.4 Data Collection

Based on IRB guidelines, I developed a recruitment flyer written in both English and Spanish to post in the church that these families attend. This flyer stated that I was searching for native Spanish speakers from Mexico, at least 18 years old, for a one-hour interview conducted in Spanish in the parish hall. I provided my email and telephone number, and all participants contacted me via telephone. I took the first seven, as this was the number I requested from the IRB. Because I wanted to share detailed stories of the Mexican immigrant families, I felt that the stories of seven people (in four families) would be appropriate. I also had to write a letter to the priest asking permission to conduct the interviews in the parish hall. Once it was approved, we set individual dates and times and conducted the interviews.

Because the subject matter of immigrating to another country is so personal, I believed it would be best to conduct all interviews in person. To keep the participants comfortable and have plenty of time to share their own journeys, I only interviewed one couple at a time. Interviews were conducted in Spanish so the participants could speak freely and comfortably. The interviews were audio recorded in order to be translated and analyzed later, and participants were aware of the recording device. After each interview, the recording was transcribed and translated into English. When we met, participants were given a consent form written in English and Spanish. The form explained that their information will be used for academic purposes only and not shared beyond the scope of this research. The participants felt free to speak knowing that their information would be kept confidential. Because the subject-matter of this study can be quite difficult for

people to discuss, the form also explained that they were able to stop at any time during the interview process if they felt uncomfortable for any reason.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher often uses “memory records” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 141), such as collecting data through interviews with participants in which they recollect their experiences. Narrative inquiry acknowledges that people make sense of information in narrative forms of cognition; we remember stories and best make sense of history when it is sequentially structured in storied form (Saldaña, 2011). An additional characteristic of narrative inquiry has to do with the chronological way participants tell their life stories, which often includes description of their past, present, and future (Creswell, 2013). Based on my guiding interview questions, the participants narrated their life stories in that order, starting with describing the family they grew up with, their depiction of their place of origin, how they thought about immigrating, and their first steps in the USA. They ended by describing where they are now, concluding their interview by providing what their plans are for the future.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once I collected data from the interviews, I translated and transcribed their answers, which was not an easy task. It was time consuming, but well worth it because I am able to understand even further the reality of this group of participants who are a reflection of the millions of immigrants in the USA. I wanted to make sure their voices are heard in the way they described their immigration journeys. I checked back with the participants to make sure the details were accurate. As I was translating and transcribing, I added to my researcher’s notes some themes I found in common among all participants. Among these life stories within this shared context, there emerged “places where actions and events occurred, story lines that interweave and interconnect” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). According to Reissman (2008), one of the main approaches

to analyzing narrative stories is through the researcher's identifications of themes in the stories. In my analysis, I describe three major themes I found in common among all the participants: family, church life, and resilience.

Family is the core of the life not only of all the participants of this study, but also of all Hispanic families. All of them spoke with a great deal of pride when they referred to any part of their answers that had to do with family. All of them were ready to talk in detail about those who they consider to be family, usually including neighbors, close friends, and even coworkers.

Another theme I found in common among all participants is church life. All of them attend Mass at least once a week, and they have their families' birthdays and special celebrations at the church hall. All of them have their children in religious education at their church, and after each service they gather for an extra hour to socialize with the rest of the faithful. One can say that church takes the emotional place of their town square where they come from where people gather to socialize and talk about their week. Church activities provide the sense of belonging to these participants. It is a place where they feel safe and they feel some sort of ownership. All of the participants do not see themselves surviving the emotional path without their connection to their church.

Another theme I found among all participants is resilience. As every participant was describing their immigration decision, path, and consequences they had to endure, it was palpable the amount of resilience they all endured. Resilience showed from the moment they decided to take a chance and try a different lifestyle because they were not able to cover their basic survival needs, to the description of their journey, knowing they could potentially die in the process, ending with their realities once they arrived to an unknown place, when they were full of fears and uncertainty based on their immigration status. All of those are only some of the examples of how

these participants live their daily lives. They have a Plan B and a Plan C with their families. Some of them go to work not knowing if they are returning home. Their children grew up knowing by heart their Plan B or C in case their parents are not back home after work or when the children are back from school. In addition to all of this, these participants had to endure many deaths of their families and they could not attend their funerals. Many of these participants have children who were discriminated against at school and they had to explain to their children that some people simply do not know how to deal with people different than themselves. Some of the participants shared that their fear extends to their neighbors. They do not know if their neighbors will give them up or report them to the immigration authorities. Also, the type of work these participants had to endure has not been the easiest part for them. The jobs are arduous and their work schedule consists of long journeys of 12 to 14 hours per day or more. However, they feel fortunate to have a job that allows them to provide for their families.

3.6 Limitations

The participants of this study are similar in the sense that all of them are first generation immigrants from Mexico. In the community where the study took place there is a new wave of immigrants in significant number arriving from Honduras and El Salvador. I wonder how the result of the interview would have varied should I have interviewed participants from those two countries in addition to the ones from Mexico. Based on the geographical location, immigrants from Honduras and El Salvador had to endure additional challenges that would be interesting to explore, compare, and contrast among them.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that all of my participants are active members of their local church. This is where I met them, and I know that they are all heavily involved in our congregation. Because this local community has so many Spanish-speaking people, the church has

a Mass conducted in Spanish. Not all Mexican immigrants are so connected to a home church like the participants in my study. Therefore, I wonder how the results of the interviews would vary should I have interviewed participants that do not attend religious services or have a church that is so inclusive. Even though most people arriving from Mexico are Catholic, not all of them are actively participating in their church activities or regularly attending their weekly Sunday service.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that the results of the interviews are based on the answers of the participants. Their stories are based on their own interpretation and what they wanted the interviewer and the readers to know. Based on casual conversation I have had with those participants over the years, I am sure the participants shared only part of their story. They potentially were embarrassed to share every detail, which I respect because it is their private life.

3.7 Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Narrative Inquiry

Beyond narrative inquiry, there has evolved a new work focused on multicultural and cross-cultural narrative inquiry, which focuses on the growing issue of multiculturalism in our global society (Phillion & He, 2008). This branch of research helps bring to light the stories of marginalized peoples and share the narratives of “diverse individuals and groups which are often either stereotyped, misrepresented, or dehumanized in the literature (Phillion & He, 2008, p. 5; Phillion & He, 2004). I wish to tell the stories of Mexican natives who immigrated to the U.S., like myself, to help educate Americans about a population they might only know through generalizations and negative stereotypes. Narrative inquiry is not focused on themes and categories, because we must see people not simply as members of a category, but as individuals with complex life stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each person in this study is not just an “exemplar of culture. It is the person, rather than the formal category, that is important” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 45). According to Phillion and He (2008), multicultural narrative inquiry

focuses on issues of “equity, equality, and social justice” (p. 2). By understanding the narratives of others, we gain the ability to empathize and feel more connected to other people (Phillion & He, 2008).

Based on my experience working alongside this group of immigrants for so many years, I consider of importance for the rest of the population to learn more about those who arrive into the USA and why they take the chance considering all odds. They need to have a voice with the rest of the world. Their stories need to be heard so everyone understands their journeys and their motives, or at the very least another side of their reality what would not generally be shared.

3.8 My Experience as the Narrative Inquirer

When I took courses on Qualitative Inquiry, I realized that I had a story to share with the world based on some of the stories I was reading. This was especially because I had many situations shared with the community where my participants live and work. Many people in the community shared their personal situations with me because I have worked with them through intimate details of their lives. For example, I helped them translate or interpret some of their doctor’s visits, read their personal mail for them, served as liaison between the church staff and the community since 2004, collaborating with them in every step of their application processes for their children’s religious education, and other situations that challenged them because they did not know how to read, write, or make a phone call in English.

When it was time to start recruiting for my dissertation, I developed a flyer in English and Spanish. I was sure that the church bulletin board was the best place to put it because every person coming into church would be able to read it. I was nervous because I knew the questions I had could be personal, plus the immigrating journey is not only difficult to endure but more difficult to share with others. I did not know who would volunteer to collaborate with the project. To my

surprise, it only took a couple of Saturday evenings; when people arrived to attend Mass, they saw the flyers and asked me about it because they know my name very well by now. I humbly realized that the participants trust me because we have worked together through so many projects. Most of them do not use email, so they contacted me via telephone.

There was an additional worry I had that most people with these demographics are not usually trusting when it comes to paperwork. I had all my paperwork in English and Spanish to make sure the participants understood that the information was going to be kept confidential at all times. Most people in this demographic are undocumented and when it comes to paperwork, they hesitate to provide their information. I am glad and thankful that they felt comfortable enough not only to share their information with me, but they went as far as to want their real names to appear. I, of course, followed IRB guidelines and never did. The participants felt comfortable choosing their own pseudonyms.

3.8.1 Participant Reactions

I strongly believe that when the participants saw my name signed in the documents, and based on the experiences they had with me, they felt safe that they were able to trust me. Even though at first I was not sure how their stories were going to unfold, I promised myself I would do everything in my power to respect and honor their stories and their trust.

The first couple I interviewed, Guadalupe and Juan Pablo were very formal; they addressed me with the pronoun “*usted*,” the formal word for “you” (as opposed to “*tú*,” which is used familiarly). I was used to this formality since they are from a rural north part of Mexico. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo seemed a bit nervous and were looking at each other and me for approval. I was taking notes and tried to have a comfortable yet professional approach. I did not want to influence their answers in any way. Interestingly enough, when I turned off the recording device they seemed

more relaxed and they cried about their regrets of being away from their parents when they passed away. As days passed by, Guadalupe and Juan Pablo assured me that they did not mind having their real names on the project, that they are very proud of who have they become. Of course I followed the IRB guidelines to keep confidentiality, but to give them ownership, every one of the seven participants chose their own pseudonyms.

Based on the first experience, I figured that having the recording device was intimidating to the participants at first, but they eventually got used to the idea and started to freely share their stories. The second couple, Estefany and David, were not paying attention so much to my recording device. David continuously looked at his wife Estefany for approval of his answers. David's background is much more rural based on his upbringing on a farm, Estefany's background is more urban. Even though her town is not a big city, in comparison to David's her town is significantly bigger. Those aspects are important to mention because the way they spoke was different. David spoke very casually, and his words reflected that he had been in school a lot less time than Estefany, who finished her technical degree. David's personality was much more relaxed and genuine, while Estefany spoke slowly and each word was carefully chosen.

The third couple I interviewed, Maria and Chino, had an interesting approach to the interview process. Maria participated first, and she did her best giving her answers. Then when it was Chino's turn, he was a bit formal at first, then he started to answer his questions as if he were being interviewed on television or the radio. He gave advice to the "audience" about who Mexicans in the USA really are. When the interview was over, Chino seemed excited to have been part of this project. He assured me that if I needed more answers or anything, just let him know, as he was able and willing to participate more if needed.

Every time I think of their interview, it brings a smile to my face. Maria was kind and humble, and she was generous with her answers. Chino at first seemed unsure about how things were going to unfold, and by the time the interview was almost 75% done, his body language was very comfortable and he sat as if he was being interviewed for a TV show. Maria and Chino are newly married, and they seemed very caring and loving to one another. It was an interview full of joy at first and at the end it was sad but hopeful for Chino because his paperwork to become legal will allow him to go and visit Mexico for the first time in many years. Maria seemed apologetic in that sense because she is able to travel to Mexico as often as she would like.

My last participant, Isabel, shared with me through her interview that she had never before sat and analyzed every step of her journey. She was emotional about it because her husband passed away and she felt that she had never thanked him enough for all he did for her and the whole family. Her story about working with Cesar Chavez was fascinating to me, since it was part of a major historical event.

3.8.2 Participants' Emotions during the Interviews

The participants had different reactions to the process of the interviews. Once they were involved with their stories, I noticed that they went through different stages; every interview was unique, but all had some similarities. For example, at first each interview started out feeling formal and business-like. As the questions were developing, the participants were thoughtful at first. I was able to tell that it was a memory they do not often recall due to going about their daily life tasks or because it is too emotional for them. As they continued to share their stories, the participants became more comfortable. At the end of each interview, it was easy for me to sense the participants' pride for what they have accomplished over the years, even though they have endured many emotional challenges, including missing their parents' illness and even funerals. It was so

emotional to them towards the end. At one point when I was interviewing Isabel, I asked her if she would prefer to stop the interview. Isabel said she just needed a moment, then chose to continue. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo got emotional after they made sure I had turned off the recording device and visibly put it away. All of the interviews ended with great big hugs.

3.8.3 My Reactions as the Narrative Inquirer

I felt privileged to learn about every participant's story. I now feel the responsibility to do the best I can to adequately portray all their stories to the best of my abilities. As I was going through the process of interviewing, I was a bit nervous. I wanted to make sure I did not make any technical mistakes and I wanted to make sure the participants felt comfortable and in a safe environment since their answers were so personal to them. As we were going through the process of the questions and answers, I wanted to make sure to take notes in addition to the recording because I did not want to miss any details. My greatest goal is that the participants feel accurately represented. They shared all their emotions and their personal lives with me, so I feel closer to them because of this. The fact that I recalled little details with accuracy, like the name of their hometowns, makes them understand that I was paying attention to their answers and that I highly value their responses.

The participants and I have the same background as far as the country of origin, but we live very different lives in the USA. I have learned so much from them. They have encouraged me to endure more, to be more resilient, and to value the fact that I can see both of my parents because they live in the USA and that I am able to travel to Mexico any time I need or want.

The ladies continue to give me "hard time" because I do not know how to cook the traditional Mexican meals, but they also offer me to learn from them. They are so generous with their time and with everything they can offer. They offer to cook large amounts of food for special

events or community events. I collaborate the best I can in the ways I am able to do it. Most of my collaboration is office related matters, but I think the community still appreciate and also value my collaboration.

As I reread every part of this work, I relive some of the parts of the participants' journeys. I vividly remember when we met for the interview, their uncertainty of the unknown yet their willingness to participate regardless. All that makes me feel humbled and with a great deal of responsibility. It is my hope that this work helps create some sort of awareness to those who do not know about these types of situations and some sense of empowerment to those who have lived similar situations.

3.9 Remaining Chapters

Clandinin (2013) states that "narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17). Keeping with this philosophy, I chose to provide a complete chapter for each set of participants, so their lived experiences are described in detail rather than summarized comprehensively. In the next four chapters, I provide detailed narratives based on each of the four interviews. Chapter 4 describes Guadalupe and Juan Pablo, Chapter 5 describes Estefany and David, Chapter 6 describes Maria and Chino, and Chapter 7 describes Isabel. The narrative in each chapter is structured based on the three research questions: General Demographic Information, Early Experiences in the USA, and Current Experiences and Future Plans. After the narrative, I include details from my Researcher Journal Notes to provide understanding of my own experience as the narrative inquirer engaging with these participants. After the four narrative chapters, I include Chapter 8: Discussion of Findings, Implications, and Conclusions.

CHAPTER 4. GUADALUPE AND JUAN PABLO

My original goal was to interview three complete families. Once I began to do the interviews, I realized that the parents and their children had different realities and background stories. It was then that I decided to interview only parents for the purposes of this study. Children are included if parents discussed them. I ended up with three couples in addition to a widow who was interested in participating in this project. All the participants in this study were born in Mexico and migrated to the USA. All names listed in this study are pseudonyms, and all the participants chose their own.

All the interviews took place in the parish hall of a church that all participants attend regularly. It is a Catholic church located in a rural town in the Midwest. The reason behind the decision to conduct the interviews in this building is because most Hispanics in the area use the parish hall for all of their social events. It is a place that feels safe to them and where they gather as a community to plan family and community celebrations.

This church is located in a small rural town in the Midwest, where there has been an increase of Hispanic families within the last fifteen years. This growth is because many dairy farms were built and opened operations in the area that mainly hire Hispanics laborers. Some of the dairy farms brought their star employees from New Mexico and from California when they first opened, and now many other Hispanics have joined these companies. Most Hispanic employees are originally from Mexico. Within the last five years, however, immigrants have arrived from different countries of Central and South America.

4.1 Guadalupe and Juan Pablo

The first family I interviewed includes a mother named Guadalupe and a father named Juan Pablo. Guadalupe is a stay-at-home mom, and Juan Pablo works in a shop. They have three children and live in a rural town in the Midwest.

The entire family is active in their parish activities. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo are leaders of many other families and facilitate faith-based classes in many other parishes within their diocese. All of their children are leaders of different volunteer ministries in accordance with their age within the church. Their son and his wife lead a youth group and ministry in their parish and are now starting to spread their talents throughout their diocese. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo say their youngest daughter was “born in the church,” as she has been involved there from birth. Even at her young age of 12, she leads a group of children to train as altar helpers and other ministries within the ritual of the weekly mass. Their church is a second home to them, as most of their activities take place there. When the family members are not at work or school, they are at church or doing ministry in other places, always involved and always serving others.

Guadalupe and Juan Pablo participated in this interview together, without their children. They usually do everything as a family, but before the interview, the two of them said they would prefer to be interviewed on their own so that they could talk freely about their whole story. As we went through the interview, Guadalupe answered questions first, and every once in a while, she would look at Juan Pablo for approval of her responses. They both took this interview seriously and expressed to me that they were honored to be part of this project.

4.2 Guadalupe

Guadalupe is originally from Santa Bárbara de Tutuaca, a small town of approximately 800 inhabitants located in a rural area of the state of Chihuahua in Mexico. The main sources of income

in Santa Bárbara de Tutuaca are agricultural work and related matters. Guadalupe comes from a large family consisting of her parents and eight children. She was the fifth born in her family.

When I asked Guadalupe about her memories of Santa Bárbara de Tutuaca, Chihuahua she shared, “*recuerdo mi niñez,*” (I remember my childhood), especially “*cuando estábamos en la escuela*” (When we were at school). She also recalled, “*Que íbamos a ayudarle a mi padre a cocechar la tierra*” (when we used to go to the farm to help my father to cultivate crops). Guadalupe helped her father plant and harvest vegetables, beans, and corn, which their family both ate and sold.

Guadalupe explained that her town had one elementary school with first through sixth grades and one high school with grades seven through nine. Guadalupe was only able to attend until sixth grade, but she did complete her elementary school. In rural areas in Mexico, it was and still is a customary goal for most children with parents in the agricultural industry to complete elementary school. For young women especially, expectations are centered on learning mainly home-related tasks, and this was the case for Guadalupe. In general, young women learn how to cook, how to manage the different aspects of keeping a home, and how to take care of younger siblings at an early age. Guadalupe and her other siblings were also involved in every aspect of helping their parents with the process of growing and harvesting crops and doing household chores according to the custom. Guadalupe recalled, “*En tiempos de siembra, a sembrar, ya después a levantar la cosecha*” (In times of sowing, we sowed; after, we harvested).

At the time of the interview, Guadalupe had not been to Mexico since she had arrived in the USA in 1995. Even though she has not been in Mexico for 23 years, she communicates with her family every week via telephone or text messages. When Guadalupe spoke about this, she had a hard time holding back her tears. She shared that what she misses the most is the freedom she

felt in her town, “*Lo que extraño pues es la libertad que teníamos ahí en mi pueblo,*” (What I miss the most was the freedom that we had in my town). For example, “*Cuando éramos niños y podíamos andar jugando fuera, que jugábamos hasta tarde*” (when we were children, we could play outside, we played until late). She also shared “*mis papás siempre estaban cuidándonos ahí*” (my parents were always looking after us there), and “*Siempre jugábamos sano*” (we played in a healthy environment). She further explained, “*No teníamos nada de tecnología, todo era jugar con la pelota, con los botes*” (we did not have any technology of any sort, all we had was a ball to play with, we played with cans). When some of the children did not have a ball to play with, they used crushed cans as soccer balls. Guadalupe, her siblings, and their neighbors also played “*a las escondidas*” (hide and seek) and many other traditional outdoor games passed down from their parents.

Guadalupe left her hometown March 16, 1995. “*Tengo 23 años que no regreso*” (It has been 23 years since I have been back), Guadalupe shared while holding back tears and with a cracked voice. She started her journey on the bus towards her first destination, the border city of Ciudad Juarez, located in Chihuahua, Mexico. Afterwards, she traveled to El Paso, Texas, and then took a plane to Dallas. When I asked Guadalupe what prompted her decision to immigrate to the USA, she shared, “*en el ‘94 yo vine de paseo a Dallas;*” she had traveled to Dallas in 1994 with a USA tourist visa. It was then when she met a guy, in her words, “*ahí conocí a un muchacho,*” and when she went back to Mexico, he visited her in Chihuahua. Both of them are from different states in Mexico, Juan Pablo coming from Monterrey and Guadalupe from Chihuahua. Guadalupe proudly concluded, “*los dos juntos nos venimos para acá*” (both of us decided to go back to the USA).

When I asked Guadalupe what she had known about life in the USA, she said, “*lo que me decían era que aquí podía trabajar*” (they used to tell me that I could work here). They also told her that there were more opportunities for her to help out her father (her mother had already passed away at that time).

Once Guadalupe and Juan Pablo were back in Dallas in 1995, “*fue cuando decidimos casarnos*” (it was then when we decided to get married). They started working and have since been able to financially help their parents who stayed in Mexico.

4.2.1 Early Experiences in the USA

Guadalupe arrived in Dallas on a plane from Mexico 23 and a half year ago at the time of the interview. She wanted to make sure to count the half-year, not just the 23 years: “*hasta ahorita 23 años y medio,*” she emphasized. When Guadalupe and Juan Pablo first arrived in Dallas, they lived with an aunt and cousins. They got married in Dallas and had two children there, then the four of them moved to the Midwest where they could try a new place, a new faith. Guadalupe reflected to her husband, “*nos venimos para ver qué suerte había para acá, ¿verdad?*” (we decided to leave in order to see what type of luck we were going to have here, right?).

I asked Guadalupe how her experience has been with regard to the hopes and dreams she brought with her when she first arrived in the USA, especially her goal of helping her family financially. Guadalupe shared that since they started working in the USA, she and her husband have been able to provide for their family in Mexico. Guadalupe is a homemaker and helps her husband by managing their finances the best she can. She cooks at home every day, and they usually spend their time at church, work, and home. They grow fruits and vegetables in the backyard to help minimize their expenses, and they have enough harvested food to keep them fed

for the majority of the year. It is a family custom to have everyone in their home help out in different ways throughout the entire process, from planting to harvesting their produce.

Guadalupe and Juan Pablo spoke about their three children. Their son is 22 and is currently working full-time as a mechanic in a nearby John Deere dealership. He is working on his college education and earned an associate's degree last year. He was the first member of their family to attend higher education, and they proudly attended the graduation ceremony as a family. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo are not sure why he has to continue going to school since he has already graduated once. I explained to them that he is pursuing another college degree. I see that they do not completely grasp the idea of multiple levels of college degrees because in Mexico the school system is very different than in the USA, but they trust that their son is making the right choices.

Their son got married less than a year ago, and they talk about the wedding as the event of the year for the whole community. Everyone they know was invited, and they also invited people they had just met. They had well over 800 people in attendance, making for a full and overflowing reception. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo feel comforted because their son and his wife purchased a home near theirs, and they all gather every other day to share a meal, and they attend Mass together. The son and his wife are actively involved in Hispanic ministry in their church. They also collaborate with the diocese by providing "formation", which is a spiritual training to others at their parishes. They also facilitate topics when the church offers retreats to the Hispanic community. They were recently recorded for a promotional video from their diocese sharing part of their story and encouraging viewers to donate to the diocese to help subsidize workshops for everyone.

Guadalupe and Juan Pablo also have two daughters. The youngest is 11 and is attending middle school, and the other is 19 and has finished high school. Although she is currently working

full time as a cashier, she wants to go to college. The family often has one of the grandparents staying at their home, as is customary for most Hispanic families. At the time of the interview, their paternal grandmother was visiting them from Mexico for a few weeks.

I can see the great amount of love within their family. Their church has also perceived this love, to the point that they asked them to be part of a documentary about Hispanic families within their diocese. The whole family took part in this opportunity, and they spoke about it with a great deal of pride and humbleness.

I asked Guadalupe about their family's language usage at home. She shared that she speaks to her son and daughters in Spanish, but the children feel more comfortable speaking in English. The children often speak English to her and she tells them she does not understand them, so they tell her she needs to learn English. Guadalupe explained that she did try to learn English formally through ESL classes offered by volunteer instructors at her church. Those programs ended due to the lack of attendance because the people in the community are too busy. Most women in the community are dedicated to taking care of their homes and their children, while the men are mostly working at the dairy farms in the area.

I asked if there was a rule at home about speaking either English or Spanish, and Guadalupe said there is no rule; everyone freely speaks any language they feel more comfortable speaking. She added: "*los niños y yo hablamos español*" (the kids and I speak Spanish), and "*ya entre los niños se hablan inglés*" (among the children, they speak English to each other). I asked Guadalupe how she deals with language usage when she participates in any activities outside their home. She said that when she has a doctor's appointment, "*mi esposo siempre me acompaña*" (my husband always goes with me), or one of her children go along to translate and interpret for her. She

concluded, *“Pero siempre voy acompañada de ellos”* (but I always go accompanied by one of them).

Guadalupe continues with her education via her home parish. The diocese offers Ecclesial Lay Ministry (ELM) classes, and the church is helping to offset the costs. The diocese provides scholarships for those interested in continuing their education. Guadalupe and her husband are taking advantage of these classes and they are halfway through the 4-5 year program.

4.2.2 Current Life and Future Plans

Guadalupe discussed some successful aspects of her life individually and as a family. She feels fortunate to be able to drive on her own and take her children to school and to their extracurricular activities. She feels fortunate that she and Juan Pablo have been able to attend their children’s parent-teacher conferences together. Guadalupe considers the most successful aspect of their family life to be that all of them are actively involved in their home parish, *“nos hemos acercado a las cosas de Dios,”* (we have become closer to God related matters). She explained proudly that every one of their children, as well as she and her husband, have specific ministries assigned *“gracias a Dios”* (thanks be to God). All of them sing in the choir, now including their new daughter-in-law; her two daughters are altar helpers, and her two older children are Eucharistic Ministers along with their parents. As a family and individually, they each feel those roles are their most important achievements. *“Para nosotros han sido unos logros muy grandes”* (for us, all these have been a very successful accomplishments), Guadalupe shared with great pride. Guadalupe shared that *“siempre nos ha gustado estar en las cosas de Dios”* (we have always truly enjoyed being involved in God related things). Guadalupe, Juan Pablo, and their family are full of joy because everyone is involved doing something together for the church in their community, *“estamos emocionados porque todos estamos”* (we are very excited because all of us are

involved). This fact is meaningful to them because they find a great sense of purpose by helping others.

Guadalupe specified that she and her husband are taking college-level theology classes through the ELM program. As a couple they also lead a program for families called “*La Formación de Padres al Liderazgo*” (Parent Leadership Formation), which aims to have couples guiding other couples on how to regain their leadership in their home. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo took a special training formation and are now facilitating this program throughout their diocese, guiding other couples to have better family relationships with their children and to regain leadership based on what the Bible says. Guadalupe shared, “*estamos muy orgullosos, porque se ha visto la emoción de las personas*” (we are very proud because one can see already the excitement of the people), and they are particularly proud to provide this formation because they have already seen positive results in some of the families they have been guiding.

Guadalupe reminisced that when she arrived in the USA, she felt badly because she was not able to communicate with mainstream society because she did not know any English. She stated, “*el temor mío era de que me fueran a preguntar algo*” (my fear was that someone would ask me something) and that she would not know what they had said. She did not want them to start a conversation with her because she did not know enough English to respond. She does not feel the same way now though. “*Ya me relaciono más con las personas*” (I am able to relate more with people now). Even though she does not feel confident with the language, she is more willing to have a conversation. Guadalupe shared that she and her family have never felt discriminated against. She feels that “*muchas veces nos discriminamos más entre los hispanos*” (many times we discriminate more among Hispanics).

I asked Guadalupe if she sees a difference in how Hispanics are treated by mainstream society today compared to when she first arrived. She said she had been concerned about immigration officers and being caught undocumented. However, today she feels much more comfortable about seeing an immigration officer because she has recently become a US resident. Things are not perfect for their family, but they are much more comfortable than when they first immigrated 23 years ago.

When I asked what her plans were for the future, Guadalupe quickly replied that she cannot wait for the day her husband is able to obtain his residency and regulate his migratory status to be able to stay more stable as a family. She said, *“para estar más tranquilos toda la familia, porque ahorita hay un temor”* (to be able to be more peaceful as a family, because there is a fear now). Guadalupe shared that right now her whole family constantly lives in fear that immigration officers may catch Juan Pablo. At this point in the interview, she had to stop for a few minutes because she started to shed tears and could not speak. This was a very emotional moment.

Guadalupe stated hopefully, *“Primeramente Dios que mi esposo pueda también pueda arreglar sus papeles”* (God willing, once my husband becomes documented), they still want to continue to live in the USA as a family and will not have the fears they have had for so many years. They would like to go back to Mexico to visit every once in a while, but they prefer to live in the USA. I asked if she knew anyone who returned to Mexico to live, and she said she knows some neighbors from her hometown. They lived in the USA for many years and one day they decided to go home. Guadalupe thinks that those neighbors made that decision *“por su avanzada edad”* (because they were older) and wanted to stay more relaxed after working for so many years in the USA. When I asked her if she has encouraged others to immigrate, she said that she has.

The last part of the interview turned out to be very emotional for Guadalupe. When I asked her if she regretted migrating to the USA, she said she has mixed feelings, “*gracias a Dios estoy casada y he sido muy feliz*” (thanks be to God that I am married and that I have been very happy). At the same time, she feels nostalgic about her hometown. However, even though she has been through a lot, she would do it over again—she would immigrate to the USA regardless.

4.3 Juan Pablo

Juan Pablo started our interview by thanking me for the opportunity to share his and his wives’ experiences as immigrants. He appeared to be proud and very polite as we began the interview, saying “*Antes que nada, buenas tardes*” (before anything, good afternoon). He continued, “*Muchas gracias a usted por darnos la oportunidad de compartir nuestras experiencias y nuestra vida de inmigrantes aquí en los Estados Unidos*” (Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to share our experiences and our lives as immigrants here in the USA).

Juan Pablo is originally from the state of Nuevo León, México. His town is called El Potrero, a place close to La Sierra towards the north side of Nuevo León, which he believed to have an approximate population of 800-1000 inhabitants when he lived there. He described this place as beautiful due to the fact that the town borders the mountains; “*es increíble, la mera verdad*” (It is unbelievable, true to be told). He stated proudly that in all the years he has lived in the USA, he has never seen a town as beautiful and unbelievable as El Potrero, “*será que es porque es donde yo nací,*” (Maybe I am saying this because it is the town where I was born).

Juan Pablo remembered that when his father was young, people dedicated themselves to cave mines until they could not obtain any more minerals from the mines, then they concentrated their efforts into agriculture as well as sheep and goat breeding. This was their main source of income.

Juan Pablo lived with his parents, and he was the youngest of seven siblings. El Potrero had a kindergarten and one elementary school. When someone decided to go to middle school or high school, they needed to go to *La Cabecera Municipal*, which is the equivalent to a City Hall, located about 15 kilometers away. Juan Pablo attended elementary school at El Potrero, then middle school and high school at *La Cabecera Municipal's* School. When he started to formally work, he studied two years of business administration, focusing on accounting, in the capital city of Monterrey.

When Juan Pablo talked about El Potrero, he expressed a great deal of nostalgia. When I asked him what he missed about his hometown, without hesitation he responded, “*Más que nada extraño la sencillez de las personas*” (mostly I miss how friendly people were there). He misses how the daily routine worked there. “*Extraño que al levantarme, podía ver a las personas que iban pasando en la calle camino a trabajar en el campo*” (I miss the fact that as soon as I got up in the morning I was able to see people passing by the streets on the way to work in the fields).

Juan Pablo misses how everyone greeted each other respectfully and how every weekend people gathered and spent time with each other. He says in El Potrero, people gathered at church every weekend, as well as at the square in the town, “*Algo que aquí no se mira, en verdad, no se mira tan seguido*” (Something you are not able to see here, you do not see it that often). Juan Pablo regularly contacts his family in Mexico. He misses his sister, brothers, sisters-in-law, and all of his nieces and nephews, so he communicates with them via telephone, texts, and WhatsApp. He calls his mother every day, and the rest of the family a couple of times a week.

I asked Juan Pablo what had prompted his decision to immigrate to the USA. He responded that the first time, on March 16, 1995, he wanted to immigrate to help provide a better way of living for his parents. After, he and his wife decided to immigrate to help both of their families.

He shared with me the strong sense of nostalgia and regret that ever since arriving, he has not been able to go back to Mexico. At the time of the interview, Juan Pablo had not been able to return to Mexico for the last 23 years.

Juan Pablo arrived in the USA in an irregular manner, without any documents. “*Me vine cruzándome y escondiéndome de la migración*” (I came by crossing the border running and hiding from immigration). He had known a lot of people who had done this. People who had been in the USA and gone back to El Potrero used to say that in the USA, immigrants were expected to work very hard, and that people would not go out to spend time with family or friends like in Mexico. Some people shared with Juan Pablo that the life of immigrants in the USA is mainly focused on working; however, he chose to migrate because he wanted to be more financially independent. “*Se me hizo bien para estar un poco mejor económicamente,*” (I thought this was a good thing to do in order to become better financially).

Juan Pablo planned to migrate to the USA, work, and save money to help his parents. He said the reality in El Potrero was such that working in agriculture was not enough to offset the cost of living. As far as he could tell, the economy was not doing that well in Mexico, “*La agricultura no deja tanto en nuestro país*” (agriculture is not a good source of income in our country). His intentions were to gather enough money to help his parents and to be well off financially, “*para tener un futuro mejor económicamente,*” (in order to have a better future financially).

4.3.1 Early Experiences in the USA

Juan Pablo arrived in the USA 23 and a half years ago, “*yo llegué con la ayuda de mis hermanos*” (I arrived with the help of my brothers). Once he had crossed the border, he and Guadalupe got on a plane. Juan Pablo’s brothers picked them up from the airport, and he was able to start working with them.

I asked Juan Pablo if he had experienced any differences between the ways Hispanics were treated by mainstream society when he first arrived compared to how they are treated today. I also asked how he sees his life now compared to the expectations, fears, and hopes he had when he first arrived. He shared that his fears have always existed and still are inside him now. *“Los temores en realidad yo pienso que siempre han existido dentro de mí, porque hasta el día de hoy sigo sin tener documentos”* (fear has in reality always existed in me, because up until now I continue to be without any documents). After all this time, he is still undocumented, so he is constantly concerned and watching out for ICE. Juan Pablo stated, *“estamos hora sí que cuidándonos de que la migración no nos vaya a agarrar”* (we are always looking out for each other so the immigration agents will not get a hold of us). He continues to hope that the immigration officers will not catch him and send him back. He assures that this is the reality for many *“hermanos inmigrantes”* (immigrant brothers). Despite all these facts, Juan Pablo’s hopes and dreams have produced positive results, because after all, he and his wife have been able to provide financially for their parents. Juan Pablo and Guadalupe have been able to build their own home in Mexico, and they also own a house in the USA. They have been able to have a better future as they dreamed it, and how their parents dreamed it in Mexico. They are hoping to go back to Mexico one day and be able to live in the house they have been working so diligently to build.

I asked Juan Pablo if he was currently working and if he would mind sharing where. He responded that he truly believes that his God had a surprise waiting for him in the USA, *“se me hace que es una sorpresa que tenía Dios preparada para mí desde mucho antes.”* He had always wanted to be a mechanic; however, he could not have done this in Mexico, as his parents could not afford to send him to study. He currently works in a shop, and although he is not a certified mechanic, he is respected in his work: *“me consideran mecánico y yo también me considero*

mecánico en ese lugar” (they consider me a mechanic, and I also consider myself a mechanic in that place). Juan Pablo feels that he understands about 35-40% of the English spoken around him. He speaks both languages, and said that in the shop they have two cultures, Hispanic and mainstream.

When I asked Juan Pablo how he manages to go to his doctor’s appointments, purchase food, or do any other daily tasks, he responded that he uses his own vehicle, *“arriesgándonos a que la policía nos detenga, pero siempre respetando las leyes”* (risking to be caught by the police, but always respecting the law). He is constantly concerned because he feels that he is risking being pulled over by police officers. Juan Pablo proudly emphasized that he and his family have always respected the traffic laws.

In regards to the language, when Juan Pablo and Guadalupe need to communicate about something serious, they look for someone who is able to translate for them, but if it is something basic, they use the little English they know. When they go to purchase their food, they drive their own vehicle and use the English they know when needed. Juan Pablo shared that in the food markets where they shop, most people are able to speak Spanish. Juan Pablo has always strongly encouraged his children to speak Spanish at home so they can learn to speak it better. There is no rule as far as using language; he and Guadalupe speak to their children in Spanish, and the children speak back to them in Spanish. There is a different reality when the children speak to each other, because they prefer to speak English among themselves.

Juan Pablo shared that he and his wife are a very happy couple with a very happy family, and the love for his family was evident. They do everything together, and they seem to be united at heart. Throughout the interview, he used significantly religious themes, thanking God for all they happily experience as a family. For example, he thanked God for everything they have and

when something positive happens to any member of the family, he states, “*para la gloria de Dios*” (to God be the glory).

Juan Pablo studied two years of accounting in Mexico, though he confessed that he never really liked it. He would have preferred to study topics related to agriculture or mechanics, but said, “*yo quería darles algo a mis padres de lo que se sintieran orgullosos de mí*” (I wanted to give something to my parents so that they would feel proud of me). Juan Pablo choked up a little while he said that. He and his wife are currently studying theology through a program facilitated by their diocese. He said those classes are at a college level, and he and his wife feel very proud to be able to have such a great opportunity to study.

4.3.2 Current Life and Future Plans

Juan Pablo talked about his individual and family achievements, starting with his personal experiences. He stated that he is better off financially, which was one of his fears when he arrived in the USA. He did not know if he would be able to provide for his family. He does not feel the same way now. He has a good job and has learned how to drive; “*yo no sabía en mi pueblo*” (I did not know how to in my town). He emphasized that one of his best achievements is that he has been able to provide for his parents and keep the promise he made before he left his hometown. Even though he is married and has children, he has never left his parents without his financial support. This was a promise he made, and he feels extremely proud that he has been able to keep it: “*Eso me llena mucho de orgullo*” (this fills me with joy).

As a family, Juan Pablo feels very fortunate and successful. He met his wife in the USA, and all his children were born here as well. It is a family success that they celebrate, to be able to live better compared to how they would have in Mexico. Juan Pablo said, “*me siento muy agradecido*” (I feel very grateful) to the USA because, even though he entered undocumented, the

USA has opened doors for him. He is sure that the government knows he is here, “*ellos saben que yo estoy aquí porque me han dado un número*” (they know that I am here because they have assigned me a personal identification number). It is not a social security number, but he can use that number to fill out his taxes. “*Me siento muy contento de estar en este país*” (I feel very happy to be in this country).

As for his future plans, Juan Pablo sees himself telling his grandchildren one day his own story and what he and their grandmother went through in order to live in the place where they are, and to remind them that they are also benefiting from his and Guadalupe’s decision to immigrate.

Juan Pablo shared that his hometown El Portrero and his country of origin are not comparable to anything else. He would be very proud to go back to his hometown, “*aunque ya sea yo un anciano*” (even when I am advanced in age). He has always dreamed of being able to go back. Juan Pablo wants to show his children the place where he was born and where they could have been born if they had not been born in the USA. Juan Pablo would like to show his kids “*que también ahí están sus raíces*” (that their roots are also there). He would love to walk back into his hometown holding his wife’s and his children’s hands.

When I asked him if he knew anyone who had lived in the USA and gone back to live in his hometown, Juan Pablo said he knew some people who stayed back there. Most of them stayed due to illness, and others have been killed there. Juan Pablo explained that lately his country of origin has become a violent place.

Juan Pablo’s future plan for himself and his family “*es seguir guiándolos en la fe en Dios*” (is to continue to guide them in the faith in God). He had feared that when he immigrated to the USA he would lose all of this, but the opposite is true. He is more involved and his faith in God is stronger now, and he described the many different ministries they are actively involved with in

their home parish. Juan Pablo attributes his and his family's achievements to the fact that his community has benefited from so many formations provided by what he calls "a gifted leader" who works closely and diligently with the community, "*Hemos sido guiados por una persona de mucha capacidad.*"

In the last part of the interview, I asked Juan Pablo if he feels any regret for immigrating to the USA. As it was for Guadalupe, this part was particularly emotional for Juan Pablo. He shared sadly, "*Tengo un remordimiento muy grande que es el de no poder ver a mis hermanos*" (I feel a huge regret because I have not been able to see or spend time with my siblings). When he immigrated, he left a sister and an older brother, who died last year. He feels deeply sad that he did not spend enough time with his brother; "*siento una gran pena por esto*" (I feel a great grief because of this).

When I asked if he would have immigrated to the US if he knew back then what he knows now, Juan Pablo took a deep breath and said, "*yo creo que no*" (I do not believe so). He believes that he and his family would have been happy in Mexico. But he assured me that he is not complaining about the USA, "*es una gran nación*" (it is a great nation). He shared that he and his family love the USA deeply from their hearts, however, "*no creo que lo volvería a hacer*" (I do not believe I would do it again). Juan Pablo does not recommend to anyone to immigrate to the USA because he feels that Mexico has what is needed to succeed. He blames the government of Mexico as one reason so many people immigrate to the USA. He explained that Mexico has a great deal of wealth and jobs for everyone, but that there are bad leaders in the government. He also believes that the fact that people immigrate to the USA helps the government continue to be corrupt.

4.4 Researcher Journal Notes

During this interview I took very few notes because I was able to tell that the couple was trying their very best to say “the right things.” I took many notes as soon as I got home that evening. During the interview, they continually looked at each other for approval. They also spoke to me as if they just met me, although in reality we have known each other for about 14 years. At times, they were looking at me as if they were looking for approval of their answers. I did not act differently than any other time we have talked. The fact that we had a recording device, that we were seated in the church hall, and that we were leaning against a table seemed too professional to them, especially after they signed consent forms for the interview. When we neared the end, both of them were emotional. When I turned off the recording device and made sure they saw it was shut off, they hugged me and said they have gone through so much and that they were sorry they were not with their families when relatives have passed away. It was something they live with every day, and they have a hard time forgiving themselves for this. They told me they were willing to do anything they could to help spread awareness that Hispanics in the US are in fact very different from how they are portrayed in current US political rhetoric.

Guadalupe and Juan Pablo chose their own pseudonyms, which were related to their religion and spiritual beliefs. I am sure the reader finds it evident that the beliefs and characteristics of the Catholic Church are strongly present in the participants’ answers. This family is deeply involved in serving others within their parish. I believe that the fact that I work for the diocese has something to do with it as well. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo’s lives are involved with the church, as they attend it five out of seven days some weeks. Juan Pablo is the choir director, a Lector, a Eucharistic Minister, and co-leader with his wife of the Parent Leadership Formation. Guadalupe is part of the Hispanic Women’s Group, belongs to the choir for the celebration of Mass in Spanish, is a Eucharistic Minister, and is a Lector. She is also responsible for organizing the yearly Posada,

a Christmas celebration in Mexico. It is a reenactment of Mary and Joseph looking for a place to stay when the Baby Jesus was born, a strong tradition in Mexico. They both are highly recognized and respected in their community, and they work diligently to keep their traditions alive for their children to learn and understand. For a family that constantly lives in fear that Juan Pablo could be deported, they do the best they can to live life to the fullest. They are a true inspiration.

Guadalupe, Juan Pablo, and their children are just one example of the millions of immigrants from Mexico and other countries who just want to better their lives. They do not mean any harm in any way. They are willing to take a chance to cross the border undocumented, knowing they could potentially lose their lives while doing so. How unfair to be wrongly judged by today's political rhetoric. These days in the USA, Hispanics are treated with more racism than any other race. Juan Pablo ran out of opportunities to find a job that would help provide the basic needs of his family. He left his family, customs, comfort, and freedom to move to a place where everything was uncertain, unknown, and discriminating. All he wants is to survive and to provide for his family. Juan Pablo, Guadalupe, and their children are an exemplary family that follows every law and norm of American society. Yes, there are many crimes in society; however, in all fairness, most of the people committing the crimes come from all different backgrounds. It is unfair to "brand" Hispanics as *the* bad example in society.

4.5 Summary

In reviewing the transcripts, I noticed three main themes from this interview: family, church life, and resilience. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo shared many of their experiences with each one of these themes.

First, I found the theme of family was mentioned the most. Guadalupe's motivation to immigrate was to be with her husband, Juan Pablo. Both of their motivation to immigrate to the

USA was to be able to provide financial support for their parents. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo started their new lives together as a couple, and they intentionally raised their family in the USA because they wanted their children to have better opportunities. Their daily lives include many family activities, like praying together before their dinner every evening. Everyone waits for Juan Pablo to get home from work so they can eat together. Any outdoor activities around their home involve the whole family, such as when they all help clean the yard. Also, during the planting and harvesting of their produce in their backyard garden, everyone in the family helps in some way. Beyond their home, they prove to be an exemplary family who is willing to support and help their community in many ways, such as visiting the elderly and sick friends or neighbors. When this family hears that someone needs a ride anywhere, they find a way to drive them where they need to go.

In addition to their strong family ties, church is another major theme. Church life for this family binds them spiritually and emotionally, and all the activities outside their home take place in their church. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo usually spend five out of seven days at their church. On Tuesdays they provide faith formation classes or take some sort of leadership training. Their son and his wife are youth leaders, so Guadalupe and Juan Pablo spend two Tuesdays a month supporting their efforts. Also once a month, Juan Pablo represents the Hispanic Community at the parish council. Every Thursday both have choir practice; he is the director of the choir and she is his assistant. On Saturdays they attend the Rosary prayers at 7PM and then prepare for the ritual of their mass at 7:30. Both Guadalupe and Juan Pablo have other leadership roles within the ritual of the Mass, such as being Lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, and greeters. Additionally, every other Sunday they facilitate a program called Parent Leadership Formation that aims to provide families with leadership skills and tools to lead their families. Every other Sunday they attend Bible Study,

which they sometimes facilitate. Sometimes Guadalupe and Juan Pablo travel to other parishes within their diocese to facilitate spiritual formations and to serve underrepresented Hispanic communities. Lastly, when anyone in their family has a birthday or any other celebration, they celebrate with their church family there in the church hall.

The third theme, resilience, comes to mind as soon as the story of Guadalupe and Juan Pablo unfolds. The fact that they endured hardship when they lived in Mexico and when they had to make the very difficult decision to immigrate into the USA demonstrates the resilience they both have. Based on conversations with friends that lived in the USA, Guadalupe and Juan Pablo knew that some hardship was to be endured; however, they never knew how difficult the choices they made would be. Through their narrative, I can see how strong, courageous, brave, resilient, and flexible they both are. While crossing the border undocumented, Juan Pablo developed anxiety and fears still exist now more than 23 years later. Despite this fear, he continues to work, worship, and try to live a “normal” life knowing that at any time immigration officers could send him back to Mexico. The whole family knows this and lives with that as part of their story, and they have a Plan B and a Plan C for the children’s welfare in case he gets deported. Every day counts. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo continue to be resilient on a daily basis as they hope and dream that one day all of them will have their paperwork regularized and will be able to live free from fear. They cannot wait to enjoy a day when they do not have to worry every minute of their day and night about being deported.

CHAPTER 5. ESTEFANY AND DAVID

The second family I interviewed is a middle-aged couple named Estefany and David, who are originally from Mexico. They have four sons: two live in Aguascalientes, Mexico, one lives in Mexico City, and the youngest lives with Estefany and David in the Midwest. This couple attends Mass together every weekend at the Catholic Church in their neighborhood. As many other members of the Hispanic community in the area, they see their church, in addition to being a place to worship, as a place where most of their social events take place. They actively dedicate their lives to serve others in and out of the church. Estefany and David were excited to be part of this project. I perceived that this couple could communicate with one another without having to say a word. They just looked at each other, and they knew what the answer was going to be to any question given to them.

5.1 Estefany

Estefany is from Aguascalientes, the capital city in the state of Aguascalientes, Mexico. She shared that her home “*es un lugar cálido y hermoso*,” (it is a warm and beautiful place). While the word *cálido* can describe a warm place based on weather, it can also mean warm in the sense of welcoming and hospitable. It was clear by her voice and smile that Estefany meant both meanings of *calido*. Estefany grew up with five sisters and three brothers. Both of her parents are deceased now. She recalls that their home was always lively and full of joy with her family of eleven.

According to Estefany, most people in Aguascalientes worked in the fields cultivating corn and beans. There are also some large factories, including the car manufacturer Nissan, which employs hundreds of people. Additionally, many women make and sell hand-knitted pieces to be

used as decoration or clothing. Those textiles are famous and are exported around the world, as they are distinctively from Aguascalientes. Some merchants travel to Aguascalientes to purchase the items in bulk and resell them in other states within Mexico.

Estefany's education includes prep school. In the education system in Mexico, prep school students attend three more school years after the three years of secondary school before entering the university. Students have to pass an admission exam before they attend any university-level academic institution.

Estefany shared that what she misses most about Aguascalientes are her family traditions. "*Extraña uno mucho a su familia*" (One misses family the most). Her family would get together for no specific reason, just to gather and spend time with each other.

One of the most important celebrations in Aguascalientes is *La Fiesta de San Marcos* (The Feast of Saint Mark), which Estefany and David spoke about with great pride and nostalgia. Estefany explained that this celebration is highly regarded nationally and internationally and even has a special song written about it. Although both Estefany and David are technically able to travel to Mexico at any time because they are documented, they have not been back to *La Fiesta de San Marcos* because of David's work. Also, they prefer to travel when they can actually spend more time with family and friends.

Estefany and David try to visit Mexico at least once a year to see their family and childhood friends. Estefany said, "*Me da mucho gusto cuando voy a visitar a mi familia*" (I feel so much joy when I go to visit my family). When she is home, she often calls her family and friends by telephone and by video call.

Many females of the Hispanic community in the USA have spent time living in Mexico and in the USA. This is also the case for Estefany, who lived in California for 10 years, then moved

back to Mexico for 10 years, and has now been living in the Midwest for nine years. It is not unusual for Mexican nuclear families be separated geographically, often because their income is not enough for every family member to live together in the USA. Other times, a family decides to build a home of their own in Mexico, and the wife stays in Mexico to supervise the construction. In general, children live with the mother, while the father stays in the USA. All of them are trying to save enough money to someday go back to Mexico and live there for good. Sometimes they may live with friends or family members while they live in the USA, sharing the housework and expenses. All of them send as much as they can to help financially support their families and to build their home in Mexico. The reality is that many never go back. Sadly, many men end up separated from their wives and eventually remarry in the USA. However, some do fulfill their dream to build a home, return to their places of origin, and perhaps open a business that will help them live well.

I was recently invited to facilitate a conference in Durango, Mexico. While I was there, I was invited to visit the government office that deals with social services, *Desarrollo Social y Humano Durango Capital* (Social and Human Development Durango Capital). There are many services in this department, including *Asistencia Social a las Familias de los Migrantes* (Social Assistance to the Family of Immigrants). I learned about a program that helps immigrants who have been deported from the USA back to Mexico to get started with a job based on the skills they learned while living and working in the USA. Many people apply for these opportunities, and some of them are accepted into this program. Given the current political reality in the USA, more and more people are getting deported back to Mexico and often must start from the bottom, even though many have learned to work and do different trades that are needed in their country of origin. Those individuals are benefited by these government programs.

Estefany never expected to immigrate. After she married David, he told her they were going to move to the USA. Estefany said this was a traumatic time for her. During this part of the interview, she had to take a few moments to recover emotionally. It was as though everything was happening all over again. Through tears she said, “*Para mí fue muy difícil dejar a mis padres. Fue demasiado difícil dejar todas mis costumbres, mis tradiciones, mi cultura, mi religión*” (It was very difficult for me to leave my parents behind. It was very difficult for me to leave everything behind, all my customs, my traditions, my culture, my religion).

When Estefany first arrived in the USA, it was hard for her to practice her faith. All the churches were far away and her husband worked all the time; his schedule would not allow her to continue to go to Mass. She suffered a great deal but said that “*bendito sea Dios*” (with God’s help), she was able to make it through. Little by little, they became better off financially, and they are now doing much better than ever.

I asked Estefany if she knew anybody in the USA before she immigrated. She shared that even though her family is from Aguascalientes, many of her relatives were born in the USA. She recalled that when the US relatives visited, they enjoyed having the whole family together. Estefany, her parents, and siblings, were great hosts in Mexico, and in return, the relatives invited Estefany and her family to visit them in the USA. It was then that Estefany obtained her tourist visa and visited her family members a few times in the USA.

Before Estefany visited the USA for the first time, her relatives told her that the USA is beautiful and that financially she could be very well off, shopping for better items any time she wanted to. The relatives also told her that people in the USA have more choices in food and can eat much better in comparison to Mexico. When Estefany arrived in the USA, she found that all the things her relatives had claimed were true. She emphasized the fact that as long as one works,

they can shop and eat whatever they want. When she immigrated, her plan was to take care of her family and her home. Once Estefany and David arrived in the USA, they had four children.

5.1.1 Early Experiences in the USA

Like her husband and many other immigrants, Estefany arrived with many hopes and fears. Learning the new language was one of her first concerns, because she had been monolingual in Spanish. She worried because she knew so little about the customs and culture she was experiencing for the first time. She was concerned that if something happened to her or her family, they might not know how to communicate with other people to ask for help.

Estefany remembered people in Mexico saying how one could earn good money in the USA a lot easier than in Mexico. However, she believes in her heart that “*como México no hay dos*” (there is no other place like Mexico). She likes the fact that she can purchase many items in the USA, but she is also sure this is not real life or the best way one can live. For her, family and God are the most important parts of her life.

Estefany arrived in Tulare, California about 35 years ago, and her life changed drastically. She left her parents and siblings in order to live with her husband. She does not regret that she immigrated, because she loves her husband, but she still misses Mexico and everything about it. She had a job and did not make enough money to live, but it was something. Estefany suffered deeply because she felt she had abandoned her elderly parents, and that she needed to be in Mexico to care for them. Still, she was able to visit her parents occasionally and help as she could.

In Mexico, elderly people are treated with respect in the family. Placing one's elderly parents in a nursing home is uncommon and looked down upon, so the elders often have their own bedroom in the family home, where they help support the family. Sometimes both parents work out of the house, and grandparents help take care of the household chores, cooking, and tending

the grandchildren. When the grandparents are much older, all their offspring take turns caring for them. This is why Estefany still has a sense of guilt about immigrating; she wishes she had been there more frequently when her parents were still alive.

It took a long time for Estefany to get accustomed to her new life in the USA. She loves her husband very much, which helped her endure her frustration of not being in Mexico when her parents needed help. She feels gratitude to the USA because, for the most part, people have been decent to her and her family, but she still misses the lifestyle in Mexico. Her life there was much more relaxed, and she had a sense of freedom that she has never felt again since she has been living in the USA. In her opinion, people in the USA seem to be sad all the time.

As stated, Estefany is a homemaker; she does not work professionally outside her home. She volunteers a great deal in her parish, but does not have a formal job. She drives to any place she needs to go, including to medical appointments, grocery stores, and any other place where she needs to go. Though she does not feel she knows enough English, she communicates everywhere she needs to. Sometimes when situations are more formal, she asks someone to help translate. Estefany and David's youngest son lives at home, and the other three live in Mexico. The youngest son goes to college and works. It is common in Mexican families to have offspring living with parents until marriage, and there is no social pressure to move out by a certain age. They stay at home to help their parents financially and with household responsibilities.

Estefany and David shared that at home, all three of them speak Spanish only. Their youngest son feels more comfortable speaking English with his friends and outside their home. There is no set rule about the language usage at home, it just naturally happens that the family members speak Spanish to each other.

5.1.2 Current Life and Future Plans

When I asked about some of the life experiences they consider to be successful since they immigrated into the USA, Estefany agreed with everything her husband shared, as far as having better everything. However, she also reminisced that when she immigrated to stay with her husband, he used to have a very old vehicle that was not reliable at all. She shared “*daba hasta vergüenza subirse en él*” (it was embarrassing to get in it). She jokingly added that it felt like they had to push the car in order for it to advance. However, “*con la ayuda de Dios y el trabajo de mi esposo*” (with the help of God and my husband’s work), they are financially better off now compared to where they had been. Not only do they have a much better vehicle now, but also each of them has their own. They have a home of their own that they are making payments on, and they live comfortably in the Midwest. They are close to reaching their goal of paying off their home.

When I asked how they feel now compared to when they first immigrated as far as the treatment from others around them, Estefany said that when they first arrived to the Midwest, they felt as if the majority of people were looking down on them because they are Hispanic and different from other people in that community. She thinks those people probably looked down on them because they spoke Spanish and knew very little English. Their community is predominantly middle class white Americans. The town where they live was originally founded by Dutch immigrants, and most of the people who live there today are of Dutch descent.

Estefany feels less discriminated against now because people are getting to know the newly immigrated Hispanics in their area. Nevertheless, she still thinks people are racist, but she and her family are not giving up on the idea that one day they will be fully accepted in the community. “*Tratamos de echarle ganas*” (We try not to give up), she concluded.

Both Estefany and David are fortunate that when mainstream people get to know them, they really like them and accept them. David already feels more appreciated by some people from

the community, including their neighbors who have gotten to know him and his family. David believes that because some Hispanics misbehave, mainstream people in their town assume everyone is the same. “*Muchas veces por unos pagamos otros*” (Many times we are to blame because of someone else’s misbehavior). He believes people in the USA are generally nice people and have good hearts.

When I asked about their future plans, Estefany said, “*si Dios nos da licencia*” (if God allows us to be able to do it), when her husband retires, they will go back to Aguascalientes, Mexico, and live there for the rest of their lives. She strongly asserted that they are not planning to stay in the USA. Many people they know who immigrated have gone back to Aguascalientes: “*Su añoranza es regresar a su país*” (those people’s strongest wish is to get back to their country). She believes everyone genuinely wishes to go back, including she and her husband. This is not because they are uncomfortable in the USA, “*aquí estamos muy agusto, gracias a Dios*” (we are very comfortable here, thanks be to God). These days, most people are nicer to them, her husband has a good job that allows them to eat well and dress well, but “*no hay nada más importante que la familia*” (there is nothing more important than family). As three of their sons and their families live in Aguascalientes, she and David want to go back and be part of their everyday lives and spend more time with their grandchildren.

Estefany shared that the one thing that has helped her endure her suffering has been her involvement in their church. When she first arrived to the Midwest, she told her husband she did not want to live the way they had in California, where they had not attended church or spiritual activities on a regular basis. Estefany remembers that in California she would not go out of her house at all. She could not attend mass unless her husband was off work, and this was upsetting to

her. However, now that they live in the Midwest she feels happy spiritually because her church is the main part of her life. *“Encontré una familia en Cristo”* (I have found a family in Christ).

Estefany and David are highly involved in their church. Estefany is the official instructor for Ministers of the Holy Eucharist in their church, and she also goes to other parishes within her diocese to provide this training. She also participates as one of the Lectors, which means she sometimes does the readings during the ritual of the Mass. One of the most important parts of Estefany's services to the church is to visit the elderly members of the congregation in their homes. She also provides communion to people who cannot make it to church. Estefany does not discriminate; she visits with both English- and Spanish-speaking parishioners. She also volunteers to provide formation to additional parishes within the same diocese, and sometimes she gets invited to provide formation to other dioceses.

Estefany also belongs to the Group of Hispanic Women, an active group within their church and community. The main goal of the Group of Hispanic Women is to serve people in need. They meet every Tuesday morning to help clean the church building, and they organize and plan the biggest event in their church, the annual celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12th. Estefany leads a team to decorate the church for the celebration. To all Mexicans, and for many other Hispanics, Our Lady of Guadalupe is a significant icon of their spiritual life, and hundreds of people gather to celebrate and give special devotion to this important figure. Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared on a mountain to one of the indigenous people of Mexico, so Estefany does her best to transform the church into that mountain. She shared that her decoration skills are highly regarded among the parishioners, as many of them take pictures of her work and purchase her decorative ornaments.

When I asked Estefany if she felt any remorse about her decision to immigrate into the USA, she responded with a specific memory. The last time she was getting ready to go back to the USA from Mexico, her dad told her sadly that he would miss her because Estefany was her parents' right hands. She did everything with and for her parents. She used to take them to their doctor's appointments and help them in the house, and this is why immigrating was so difficult. Within a year after she left that particular time, her dad had passed away. Estefany shared, choked up with tears: "*ya después regresé nada más a enterrar a mi padre*" (I just went back to bury my father).

It was evident that at this part of the interview, it was difficult for Estefany to share this sad part of her story. Her tears could not stop rolling down her face, and she seemed to be reliving that sad experience all over again. She thanks God for allowing her to see her dad still alive right before he passed. She also regrets not spending enough time with her mother: "*también lamento no haberla gozado un poco más*" (I also regret not to have enjoyed her a little bit more). It is difficult for her to think she could have been in Mexico all these years enjoying her parents more, but she shared that sadly she cannot do anything about it now because both of her parents are deceased.

Estefany would not have left Mexico and immigrated to the USA when she did if she knew then what she knows now: "*ya no volvería a suceder esto*" (this would never happen). Estefany has never encouraged others to immigrate because she knows how difficult it can be for people living far away from their elderly parents. If someone were to ask for money to immigrate, she says that she would not mind lending them money if they need it to pay someone to bring them, but she does not go out of her way to encourage anyone to immigrate. She thinks it should be up to the person who wishes to immigrate, and that maybe they need to experiment on their own.

When the interview with Estefany was nearly over, I asked both participants if they wanted to share anything else. David shared almost apologetically that he had made all these sacrifices in order to be able to offer his wife the best life he could possibly offer.

Estefany reminded David that the first time she arrived in the USA, she arrived with a tourist Visa. They both immigrated separately; she was in San Antonio with her family waiting for David to cross the border through California. This was when she felt the strongest sense of sadness about leaving Mexico: *“yo sentí que el mundo se me derrumbó cuando él me habló por teléfono y me dice que él sufrió mucho cuando iba a pasar por el cerro”* (I felt like the world fell over me when he called me on the phone and said he had suffered a lot while crossing over a mountain). David told her that he was about to give up crossing because he was suffering greatly and experiencing extreme challenges through his crossing journey. Estefany said she prayed to God and decided to leave this situation in God’s hands. She decided that if he was able to immigrate, it was meant to be; otherwise, they both were going to go back to Mexico, and she was prepared to pack her belongings. Later that day, she had a second call from David explaining that he had finally been able to make it through. Estefany then went to California to meet with David. From that moment on, they started their journey together in the USA.

5.2 David

Like Estefany, David is also from Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes, Mexico. David said that his place of origin is beautiful and very peaceful. He has a half-brother, three half-sisters, five brothers, and five sisters. I perceived that he was a bit timid talking about his family, perhaps because it is a non-traditional family. He appeared shy and refrained from saying anything else about his immediate family.

When I asked him about the main source of income for people in Aguascalientes, he agreed with what his wife had already shared and added, “*también hay mucha ganadería,*” (there is also a huge amount of commerce in selling and buying livestock). David also mentioned that for farmers in rural areas of Aguascalientes, “*Mucho cultivo de uva y mucho criadero de pollos*” (there is a vast harvest of grapes and people raise chickens for commerce purposes). He believes grapes grow well in that area due to the climate. People in some rural areas in Mexico still measure their wealth based on how many cattle or how much sown field they own. Farmers also sell other animals such as chickens, hens, roosters, chicks, sheep, and goats.

David attended elementary school. His parents made sure all their children attended and finished elementary school because the way they saw it, their children needed to know how to read, write, and do arithmetic to have a decent life. Parents in many rural areas in Mexico, especially very small towns, are mostly concerned with preparing their sons to understand agriculture and preparing their daughters for maintaining the household.

When asked how they felt about immigrating to the USA, both participants had deeply emotional reactions. In addition to missing family, they both shared memories of a huge celebration in the city of Aguascalientes, *Las Fiestas de Abril*, the Feast of April. This *Fiesta* is internationally regarded. Estefany explained some aspects of this feast, and David added many other aspects such as the fact that one can find a great number of vendors of many different types of merchandise, car expos, agricultural expos, cattle expos, rodeos, rooster shows, arts and crafts expos, both national and international celebrity appearances in many venues, a beauty pageant, parades, carnival games, never-ending food options, and a great number of special church celebrations. The Catholic Church predominates in that area and they are the hosts of different spiritual celebrations that are specific to the feast of the town. Family members often visit from

different parts of the world. It is a homecoming celebration for all the people who left Aguascalientes and come back to celebrate in their hometown.

Estefany and David keep in communication constantly with their family members via telephone or WhatsApp. This has become the most effective platform for immigrants to maintain communication with their family all over the world. David added that he communicates with his family more frequently than his wife does with hers.

David has been living in the USA for 35 years. When he first immigrated into the USA, he was able to do so with the help of a *coyote*, a person who charges a significant amount of money per person to help them cross into the USA. A *coyote's* fee varies depending on how the actual passing will take place and who is facilitating this journey. There are many *coyotes* operating all across the border between Mexico and the USA, and they offer different types of “services,” some of which are riskier than others. David used their services twice; both times were hard, but crossing the border for the second time was even more difficult and very dangerous. He ends this part of the interview by saying: “*Pero Dios quizo que estuviéramos aquí y aquí estamos*” (But God allowed us to be here, and here we are). He concluded: “*yo en realidad por buscar un futuro mejor tanto para mí, como para mi familia*” (I, in reality was looking for a better future for me and for my family).

When I asked David if he knew anybody in the USA before he decided to immigrate, he responded that his brothers had already been in the USA, in addition to other people from Aguascalientes. Immigrating was a concept he was already familiar with, since more and more people from his town were immigrating to the USA from Mexico at around the same time he did. He saw this as an opportunity for himself and his family to have a chance to have a better life. He

expressed his gratitude for the people who helped him and opened the doors of their homes to him when he first arrived in the USA.

He explained that it was very difficult for him to endure the first years. He remembers the time he was driving and crashed his car. He did not know what to do; “*me sentía desesperado,*” (I felt desperate), he said. He considered giving himself up to the authorities. He felt that God gave him the strength and patience to get through it.

He reminisced about when his siblings used to talk about the USA as a wonderful place. They always talked about all the marvelous things he could have if he were to immigrate to the USA. “*Le cuentan cosas bonitas a uno*” (people tell you beautiful things). When he first arrived and started experiencing the realities of life in the USA, most of those things were true, but some other truths had been left out. The fact that people had to work most of the time, the fact that people usually did not have time to be with family, and the fact that most of the time he would be too tired to do anything else other than work and go home – all those facts had been left out of his siblings’ stories, he remembers. His siblings told him that people could make so much money that it was almost as if you could sweep the money on the streets, there was so much. David says that it is true that one can have a lot of money, as long as one works terribly hard.

When I asked David what his initial plans had been as far as living in the USA, he responded that he wanted to work. He did not have any idea where he would work; he just knew he wanted to work hard. He was hoping that he could do something related to cattle because this is what he knew best. He grew up in the countryside of Mexico helping his father with their family’s cattle. He feels very fortunate that he found a job in the USA that allows him to be close to cattle. He shared that he loves to work with cows and other farm animals: “*me gustan mucho los animales*” (I love animals very much).

5.2.1 Early Experiences in the USA

When I asked Estefany and David how they arrived to the place where they are today, David said he went to the Midwest because someone invited him and that he is very happy where he is. Estefany encouraged him to be more explicit in his answer: *“dile cómo batallaste”* (tell her how difficult it was for you). She asked him to explain in detail how difficult was for him both times that he tried to cross the border between Mexico and the USA. I saw that this was a very difficult topic for him to discuss. The fact that his wife encouraged him to speak about it made him feel more comfortable. David started to narrate that not only was his crossing very difficult; the second time around was also very pricey. Nevertheless, he can attest that *“los sueños se cumplen”* (dreams do come true), based on his own experience. He said that in order for a dream to come true, one must be diligent in everything one does.

David continuously spoke about the positive aspects of making your dreams a reality. Also, he quickly ended his answers, as if he was trying to avoid sharing further details. Estefany was becoming a bit anxious because he would not provide any of the details that she hoped David would share. I considered the idea that he did not know or was not sure how many details she wanted him to share. I assured him that he did not have to share anything he did not want to, and that his answers were okay the way they were. After I said that, David did not hesitate to continue to speak. It was evident that he reacted to the encouragement of his wife.

The story began to flow easily for David at this time of the interview. He shared that the first time he left Mexico, he and two of his friends decided to make the trip with the hope that they were going to immigrate into the USA eventually. They arrived at an airport on the border of Mexico and contacted a *coyote*. It was a good experience because they only walked three hours and they were already at somebody's home, where they were taken care of nicely. The next day, they went to his brother's home in Los Angeles. From there, David and his friends were transported

to Tulare, California, where they would be able to get a job. This place seemed familiar to David, because some of his friends already had work there and had talked about this place in past conversations. In Tulare, he found a job, but soon the company ran out of work for him to do. He found a second job and the same thing happened. Jobs in Tulare are mainly related to agriculture, and sometimes work availability is based on the weather or the type of job the companies need to accomplish. David worked two of these jobs in a short period of time. He could not find a more stable job, and he ran out of money. His brother helped him financially until he was able to make ends meet. He was able to purchase a small car but, ironically, he could not drive it because he could not afford gas.

David did odd jobs here and there, and one time a farmer asked him to help find his cattle that had escaped. David was finally able to put gas in his car and he saw this as a great opportunity to make money by helping the farmer. However, when he was trying to help the farmer, David got into a car accident with his “new” car. He could not afford to repair it, so he lost the car and could not help the farmer. Again, he found himself with nothing at all and had to start, yet again, from the bottom. Some of the people who knew him in Tulare suggested he move to a different place where he could find better opportunities.

When David moved to Basilia, he found another job and was able to purchase another car. One day one of his friends from work borrowed his car and got into an accident, so unfortunately, David lost his car again. In addition to this, his job ended, and he found himself without any money again. All seemed to be against him. When he thought every hope was lost, his brother who lived in the Midwest at the time invited him to move there. David did not find work there, so he went to Michigan, where some guys “*me abrieron su corazón*” (they opened their hearts) and provided

him help. David worked for six months in Michigan, and he was able to save enough money to pay all his debt and go back to Mexico to see his family.

Chicago was the next place David traveled to once he returned from Mexico. He was working in the butcher section of a Mexican grocery store. He learned all about being a butcher, but it was a hard job and he did not make enough to take care of himself, let alone provide for his family back in Mexico. He tried to stay in Chicago, gain more experience, and eventually make more money, but he ended up just saving enough to go back to Mexico again to see his family.

After he got back for the second time, he started working with a company that rented tables and chairs for events such as weddings and *quinceañeras*. This job was very difficult and made him feel horrible. David sadly shared that his coworkers “*se burlaban de mí*” (they made fun of me), and he thinks it was because he did not have the necessary skills to be able to perform that job. Fortunately, his brother in the Midwest called and said there was a job for him there that was only for two months but had more to do with his expertise. Finally, David’s life improved because the two months of work actually turned out to last many years, and is his current job now. “*Bendito Dios aquí estoy todavía trabajando,*” (blessed be God I am still working here).

David reminisced about the times he crossed the border undocumented 35 years ago. The first time David crossed the USA Mexican border, the *coyote* charged him \$300, and the second time \$400. David shared that it seems like crossing the border undocumented was a whole lifetime ago. He made several comments about how God has helped him through all of his life journey.

Compared to when they first arrived, David and Estefany’s lives have changed tremendously, especially their spiritual life. They are both heavily involved in their home parish and attend Mass regularly. They constantly invite people to join the Catholic Church in their town and are involved in the different ministries serving Hispanics who live there and those who are

first arriving in the area. Both volunteer in their church; Estefany regularly visits the elderly at the local nursing home, and both David and Estefany take communion to people who are staying home due to illness or hardship. David heads the hospitality committee at the church and attends all events, diligently working to make sure everyone feels welcomed at all the events. There is something about David's personality that makes people feel comfortable. He welcomes everyone with a great big, genuine smile when they arrive at mass every Saturday evening. Even though his academic education is more limited than others, his genuine heart and generosity overwhelm and surround any space where he is. He is a true inspiration to many people, including to those who are not able to speak or understand Spanish. Everyone who knows him well likes David.

When David first arrived 35 years ago, he was full of hopes and fears like most immigrants. He feared more than anything the different customs and language in the USA. He said the best way he can describe it is that the USA is a very different world than Mexico. He remembers that in Mexico most people were very happy, content, and always celebrating and gathering as a family for no specific reason. David misses the sense of freedom he felt in Mexico. He adds that in Mexico people do not have to worry about being put into prison based on migratory status.

According to David, people in the USA do not have time to socialize. All is work and people are busy all the time. They meet for a specific reason or festivity and everything has a set schedule that people follow religiously. There is no room for flexibility; all is organized and set. He misses the opportunity to gather with family, friends, and neighbors just to spend time with each other, with no agenda.

Some of the most difficult moments for David stemmed from the fact that he did not know anybody when he first arrived to each new place in the USA. Most people were not as friendly as they are in his hometown in Mexico, where everyone speaks to and helps one another.

Nevertheless, David and his wife gradually got to know people and establish friendships, mostly from their church. They find a communal bond in their church and celebrate birthdays and other special occasions in the church hall. The church is a place where everyone feels safe, validated, and respected. They feel they belong there. The non-Hispanic people in the church have been welcoming to the newcomers in their church, including David and his wife.

As far as his work story, David has been employed in the same place for the last 16 years. He works at a dairy farm and speaks only Spanish with his coworkers, who are all of Hispanic origin, mostly from Mexico. In his day-to-day life, David and Estefany are able to drive pretty much everywhere they need to go, like for medical appointments, church meetings, and shopping. They try to make it on their own the best they can when it comes to language, but David does not know enough English to do most daily tasks. When the places they visit do not provide a translator for him, Estefany tries to help as much as possible.

5.2.2 Current Life and Future Plans

I asked David and Estefany to share what they consider to be success stories or proud events that have happened since they immigrated into the USA. David immediately replied *“bendito sea Dios, tener nuestra familia”* (Blessed be God to be able to have our family). At one point the whole family was living together in the USA, where their children were born. Three out of their four sons have already moved out of their home and some of them are married, and their youngest son is the only one left living at home.

Another successful event is that they were able to purchase their own home. They agreed that at some point they would have been able to buy a home in Mexico, but it would have been much more difficult to do. Additionally, David shared that little by little they have been getting better vehicles, especially compared to the ones they had in the beginning. Overall, he said they

have a better home, better life financially, and better everything! He shared this last part with tears in his eyes, as if he had never thought of this fact before.

When I asked David his future plans, he said he cannot wait to retire and go back to Mexico. He started talking about how beautiful their town is: *“si ustedes conocieran de dónde somos nosotros, somos muy alegres”* (if you only knew where we come from, we are very happy people), David proudly shared with a contagious smile on his face. He feels bad that he has to work and cannot yet go back for good to Aguascalientes. He shared that in the USA, people do not seem to go out much because they have to work and they are always stressed. He almost feels like people are imprisoned in their own homes and in their own lives: *“es como vivir en una jaula de oro”* (is like to live in a prison made out of gold). He says that people in the USA *“tenemos todo, pero no tenemos nada”* (we have everything, but we do not really have anything). He thinks this is because people are too busy working to enjoy what they have. David says that: *“allá un peso lo hace rendir; aquí te gastas el peso, pero triste”* - Over there a peso goes a long way; here, you have more money to spend but are sad because you cannot enjoy what you earn.

When asked if he felt any remorse about immigrating into the USA, David answered without hesitation that one of the strongest regrets they both have is the fact that they have not spent enough time with their parents. He recalls the year 1995 when one of his brothers got killed and his dad told him that David would then take his place in the family: *“M’ijo, se murió él, pero tú vas a quedar en lugar de él. Desafortunadamente pues yo le fallé a mi papá”* (“My son, he died but you are now going to take his place.” Unfortunately, I failed to fulfill this with my dad). David could not hold back his tears as he shared that he did not fulfill the role of helping his parents and being there for them. He feels that he did not do enough. Two of his half-brothers have also died, and he has not been there to support his parents. He feels especially sad that he did not have enough

time to spend with them. David said: *“es un remordimiento que traigo, un remordimiento de no haber estado con mi madre”* (I have a remorse, a remorse because I was not there for my mother). This moment was very difficult for him, and he had to take a break from the interview. At the time of the interview, his mother had passed away within only a few days, and he was not able to be there when it happened.

When I asked Estefany and David if they would have immigrated if they knew then what they know now, David responded that you never know - there have also been good times in the USA. *“Como México no hay dos”* (there is no place like Mexico), yet he thinks it is difficult to answer whether he would or would not immigrate, knowing what he knows now about their life history in the USA.

Estefany and David are able to see the great need some people in Aguascalientes have, so David has encouraged them to immigrate. In his words: *“los ve uno en la pobreza en que están”* (we see the level of poverty they live in). He says that he is just trying to help those people in extreme poverty. Because he has been able to work hard and succeed, he wishes for them to have the same chance at a better future for their families.

At the end of the interview, I asked David and Estefany if there was anything they would like to add, and David was glad I asked. He wanted to share more about his experience the first time he immigrated. David said, *“yo venía con una ilusión para hacer algo”* (I arrived with hopes to do something). He clarified that those high hopes were to be able to work enough that would allow him to help his family make ends meet, and he also wanted to be able to offer the best for his wife. At that time, they were dating, and he wanted to show her that he could make a living by working hard. He loved her then and loves her even more now, and he wishes he could offer her a castle. He sadly shared: *“no le di el castillo, pero le di mucho corazón”* (I did not give her a castle,

but I gave her much heart). They work diligently together in order to make the best life they can live together. Their relationship continues to get stronger over the years, and he hopes that one day his wife will feel like her home will feel like the beautiful castle he wanted for her.

Estefany concluded the interview by saying: *“hay que echarle ganas y ánimo, a seguir adelante”* (we must continue with eagerness in order to continue moving forward). David concluded: “¡Viva México!” (Long live Mexico!), and we all laughed together, feeling happy, sad, and nostalgic.

5.3 Researcher Journal Notes

Each interview of my research process adds more to my life than I could imagine. My hope is that my work can contribute to society. The more I work on qualitative research, the more I realize that both parties benefit from one another, the researcher and the participants. This couple has taught me so much about resilience and about loving one another.

It was evident at the beginning of the interview that both Estefany and David were a bit nervous. When then saw the recording device, paperwork, and notebook, I could tell they were uneasy to genuinely answer the questions. However, as time went by, they started to answer without thinking so much what the “right answer” should be. David looked at Estefany constantly for approval, especially at the beginning, but after a few questions, I was able to tell that he was more himself.

As the interview progressed, both Estefany and David became more emotional. I perceived that they had not reflected on their immigration journey. Estefany seemed both proud and unsatisfied about David’s narrative of his second time crossing the border. I could tell there was a story David was unwilling or unable to share. Off the record, Estefany shared with me that she comes from a well to do family in Aguascalientes and that David comes from a very humble

background. This was difficult for Estefany's parents when they first got married, but over time her parents grew to love David to the point that they considered him a son and not a son-in-law. David has a great big genuine smile that seems to be permanently marked on his face. He has a friendly and loving approach. I noticed that his register of language is at a total different level than Estefany, who has a richer academic background. David's register of language is one from a person with minimal academic background who lives in a very small town in a rural part of Mexico. Nevertheless, they seemed to get along well and to have become accustomed to one another. Estefany seemed more serious and short with her answers. Interestingly enough, not too soon after we started the interview as she was sharing her answers, she became emotional and had tears coming down her face, while at the same time, she eagerly opted to continue with the interview.

One interesting fact during the entire interview is the way they spoke with me. When we see started recording the interview, they automatically used formal speech with me, saying "*usted*" instead of the informal "*tú*." It is clear that they treated this interview professionally, as they were both dressed up for the interview in business suits.

This is another example of a family of immigrants who just want to do the right thing. They want to have a better life for their families, and they do not mean any harm. Their desperation of poverty is such that they are willing to risk their lives while crossing the border undocumented. It is a fact that they did not follow the right paths to cross documented. Given their former financial status while they lived in Mexico, they would not have been able to obtain a visitor's visa. To get a visitors' visa they must provide enough evidence that they are financially sound and will not stay living in the USA. Usually only affluent people like business owners are able to do it. Although immigrants love all the benefits that come along with living in the USA, they would rather stay back home with their families, the most important aspect of their lives.

Most undocumented immigrants have similar situations to Estefany and David. They are not able to provide financially for their families, not even the most basic needs. They are parents or relatives who are willing and eager to work hard even when they are not even sure what the job may be, how difficult it will be, or how much they will be paid. They are willing and eager to do this because anything is significantly better than what they would have back in Mexico. They are willing to risk their own lives in the journey of crossing in order to better their family's desperate situation. No human would go through such hardship willingly unless it is crucial for them.

This narrative from Estany and David, among the other participant narratives and the literary works, demonstrates that immigrants are not only willing to endure the difficulty of crossing undocumented, but they also endure other experiences once they are fortunate enough to reach the USA side. Immigrants often endure racism and work low paying difficult jobs, and their children endure racism and discrimination, even though many of them were born in the USA. Undocumented immigrants in the US, like any other humans globally, are willing to risk their own lives to survive and to provide for their loved ones. It is far from accurate to state that those immigrants are the worst Mexico sends, because they are hardworking parents. Not only are they helping the US economy grow, but they are also making the world a better place. I am not oblivious to the fact that there are some Hispanics who are not following the best practices or the rules of society, but I am certain that those of Hispanic origin are not the only ones causing distress to society.

5.4 Summary

In summary, there are three themes that seem to be the core of this interview with Estefany and David: Family, Church Life, and Resilience.

Family is and will continue to be the main focus for people of Hispanic origin, and this is true for Estefany and David. Estefany has gone through many emotions because she left her elderly parents, but she chose to leave because she believed it was her place to be living with her husband. Her life, like the life of many other immigrants, seems to be divided between two countries. Most of her children and grandchildren live in Mexico, while her husband works in the USA. Every day, David works earnestly to support his family. Their family is like many other families of immigrants; they deeply love one another despite the geographical distance between them.

For Estefany and David, the Church has become their way of life. When they are not at work or home, they are at their parish. This gives them the opportunity to belong somewhere, feel validated, and feel safe. Their church family fills a gap for the Mexican family they are missing. Neither of them can imagine their current lives without their involvement in their church, which motivates them to continue and gives them a sense of purpose.

Resilience is present throughout the entire interview with Estefany and David. How does one measure the amount of hardships immigrants go through? Impossible. Only they truly know what they have endured. For Estefany, the emotional side has been her greatest struggle. The endurance of leaving her elderly parents has been daunting, and she still cannot forgive herself for leaving them. However, she would not have done it any other way. She still believes that even though this was difficult, she made the “right” decision. Living so far away from most of her children and all of her grandchildren has also been very difficult for her. She regrets missing many important academic, social, and religious events in their lives. David on the other hand, has gone through so much from the moments when he was trying tirelessly to cross the border undocumented, to being ridiculed by heartless coworkers for his lack of skills in many jobs, and being looked down upon by neighbors that see him and his wife as different and lesser than them.

Nevertheless, these strong people continue to live with eagerness, in between two worlds and two cultures. They continue to do the best they can with the life they are given. All immigrants, especially those who allowed me the opportunity to interview them, have my utmost respect. I am forever grateful to be able to listen to their struggles and their successes, and for all the lessons they shared with me through their life stories. May the lessons from this work be sowed in fertile hearts.

CHAPTER 6. MARIA AND CHINO

The emotional story of Estefany and David and that of Guadalupe and Juan Pablo reflect the challenges and sacrifices that many immigrants experience. They share similar backgrounds, and their current lives share the themes of family, church, and resilience. These themes can also be found in the third interview with a couple named Maria and Chino.

Maria and Chino were engaged at the time of the interview and married soon after. Both participants are from the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, where they are from working families. They have recently become close to their church, participating in every church event related to the Hispanic community. Maria is currently the President of the Hispanic Group of Women, a member of the choir, and a minister of the Holy Eucharist. In her short time serving the church, people have noticed her strong leadership skills and her devotion to serving others. Maria emphasized her love and service to people in local nursing homes, where she is a regular visitor. She also visits people who are ill and homebound. She constantly organizes raffles to help the Hispanic community.

Chino, on the other hand, has just started to be acquainted with the church and its ways. He is a member of the choir, and he is picking up on Maria's example and tries to help as many people as he can. They live with two of Maria's children, a 15-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter. She also has two daughters who are married and out of the house. Chino tries to set a good example and helps raise the children the best he can. Their children are well regarded by the church community, and enjoy serving others.

6.1 Maria

Maria is from Uriangato, Guanajuato, which she described as "a very small town with a great deal of tradition". According to Maria, the source of income and labor for most families is

commerce, mostly related to textiles and other materials for clothing. When people arrive in the town, they can see small shops owned by local families. She also described the varieties of clothing her town has to offer “*desde que entra al pueblito y sale de él*” (from the moment you enter the little town until you leave there). From beginning to end, the town has shops of all sizes selling the locally made clothing. People from different parts of the country and from abroad go to Uriangato to purchase clothing.

People in Uriangato have the opportunity to attend school from kindergarten to preparatory school. Maria was able to attend elementary school until the fifth grade. She does not believe she has a “good head” for academic matters, and said that her parents tried to encourage her to finish elementary school, but she just could not do it.

During the interview, it was clear that Maria misses her hometown a great deal. Holding back tears, Maria said, “*lo extraño mucho*” (I miss it a lot). One thing she misses is the peaceful lifestyle she led in Uriangato, which she described as, “*lo tranquila que se va la vida, con mucha calma*” (the tranquil life there with a great deal of calmness). She emphasized that people in Uriangato do not seem to be in a hurry or stressed out. People take the time to greet and spend time with each other.

Maria greatly misses her family, which consisted of eight children and their parents. Her parents are no longer alive, but Maria strongly believes her parents are watching over her and her siblings; “*yo sé que desde el cielo ellos están con nosotros*” (I know that they are watching over us from above). Maria misses the times when she and her family would get together for no reason at all, just to be with one another. She remembers when all her siblings would bring their families to her parents’ home to celebrate birthdays and holidays, or simply to spend time with one another.

When Maria was a little girl, she and her siblings would play outside with the neighborhood children. She described the different games that were known by all the children and that everyone played until it got dark outside. Other things from home that Maria misses are “*las cajetas que venden ahí*” (caramel candies sold there), made by local people. She laughed as she spoke about a lollipop made of goat milk and caramel. During September in Uriangato, people make decorations in the streets. They look like welcome mats, but are made of flowers and other materials. This celebration honors the patron saint of the town, St. Michael the Archangel.

Another aspect Maria misses from Uriangato is the fact that most people walk from place to place. She used to walk to the market daily and to other stores. People do not necessarily have to leave their own neighborhoods, because they can purchase what they need locally “*siempre era andar caminando*” (we always walked everywhere). Maria said people there do not really need a vehicle except to travel far, and even then, they still have the opportunity to use affordable public transportation.

Maria shared that some of her most memorable childhood moments were when her grandmother used to call all the grandchildren to go to her home and pray the Rosary, giving them candy at the end; “*mi abuelita siempre nos ofrecía dulces*” (my grandma always offered us candy). They would often stay after they finished praying to hear their grandmother’s stories of her own childhood. “*Me gustaba mucho escuchar sus historias*” (I used to love to hear her stories). Maria and the rest of the grandchildren were delighted and did not want to leave their grandma’s home. Maria lived three houses down from her grandmother, so she could visit quite often.

Maria returns to Mexico at least once a year. Most recently, she said, “*fui por la pérdida de mis padres, que en paz descansen*” (I went due to the loss of my parents, may they rest in peace). Maria visits her siblings and their families when she goes back, “*cuando tengo la*

oportunidad, sí, sí voy para allá” (whenever I get the chance, yes, I do go over there). She tries to visit often, because her everyday life in the USA makes her miss her family. She loves to spend time with her sisters, nieces, and nephews in Mexico. Although her visits are short, she tries to make the best of the time she is given, *“para recordar los lindos momentos”* (to remember the beautiful moments). Between visits, Maria calls her family by telephone or WhatsApp, and they enjoy using video chats. *“Con eso de que ya hay mucha tecnología, gracias a Dios ya podemos comunicarnos de esas maneras con todos ellos”* (since there is much more technology, thank God we are now able to communicate in that way with all of them).

Maria came to the USA when she married her late husband. She shared that she migrated undocumented in 1991. At the time of the interview, Maria had been in the USA for 27 years. Her arrival was unforgettable for her, and she remembers it as a very sad part of her life, because she left her family behind. Maria’s new life in the USA was difficult at first, because she did not know what awaited her; *“una situación que nunca se me va a olvidar, a la vez fue algo muy difícil”* (a situation that I will never forget, at the same time, it was a very difficult one).

When Maria immigrated into the USA, she did not know where she was going or how her host family was going to treat her, *“no sabía cómo me iban a recibir”* (I did not know how they were going to welcome me). She decided to immigrate anyway because she and her husband were planning to start a new life together. Maria remembers sad moments while they were getting used to their new lives in the home of her husband’s relatives. They endured the situation until they were able to move out on their own.

Before Maria immigrated, her sister and her family lived in the USA. Her sister strongly advised her not to believe what most people said about life in the USA, like how people literally could sweep money off the streets. Her sister advised that it was not so easy, *“no es nada como lo*

dicen” (it is nothing like what people say it is). Maria heard all this advice from her sister, but she wanted to live with her husband. She had married and then stayed back in Mexico without her husband, which did not feel right, so she wanted to live with her husband in the USA. Maria’s husband also advised her about the difficulties of living in the USA, “*no va a ser para divertirse, va a ser para trabajar*” (it is not to have fun, it is to work). Nevertheless, Maria took a chance and decided to immigrate, and has worked hard ever since.

I asked Maria what her initial plans had been when she immigrated. In addition to wanting to live with her husband in the USA, she had always wanted to help out her family back in Mexico. She considers herself fortunate because in Mexico, she always had enough to eat, which was not the case for many people she knew. She felt bad seeing how hard her mom worked every day, “*yo veía cómo mi mamá trabajaba mucho*” (I saw how hard my mom worked). Her mom used to help deliver babies the old-fashioned way, in people’s homes. Maria also remembers how hard her dad worked in agriculture, “*toda su vida fue en el campo*” (his entire life was spent in the fields). He used to work “from sun to sun,” from early morning until nightfall. Maria noticed how difficult it was for her parents to provide financially for their family, so she wanted to help them. “*Yo tenía la ilusión de poder ayudarlos*” (I had always hoped to be able to help them).

6.1.1 Early Experiences in the USA

When Maria first immigrated to the USA, she traveled in a group of women and a *coyote* they had hired. The women had known many people who had hired this particular *coyote*, which gave them a sense of trust in the man. He explained that many *coyotes* abuse and mistreat women and that some women are sexually assaulted during their journey. Their *coyote* wanted them to be aware of their surroundings at all times, and if another *coyote* asked who they were, they were to respond that they were his nieces, “*es como si fuera una cadenita de coyotes*” (it is as if there were

a chain/link of *coyotes*). By insisting they act as his relatives, their *coyote* was trying to prevent any mistreatment of Maria and the other woman traveling together.

First, Maria and the other women left Uriangato and rode a bus for many hours, then stayed the night at a hotel in Tijuana, Mexico. They were instructed to be at the border between Tijuana and the USA at a specific time. Maria was shocked to find that many others were also waiting there, “*fue algo muy sorprendente para mí*” (it was something very surprising to me). Many of the women had also brought their children, including newborn babies. Maria was concerned for these mothers and for the other women who had to care for additional people. “*Yo decía, ¿cómo le vamos a hacer?*” (I asked, how are we going to do this?) She could not understand how all of them were going to cross, until she realized that many *coyotes* had been hired to help them cross the border.

Maria felt a little better when her *coyote* appeared and instructed them to stay put until he gave a certain signal. They waited together for many hours until they were given the signal. Maria and the other women walked for a long time until the *coyote* appeared and told them to get into a vehicle, which Maria found to be surprisingly small; “*ahí íbamos como sardinas, así fue como nos acomodaron*” (we were like sardines, the way they packed us in the car). She recalls that eight to ten women occupied every inch of that vehicle, including the trunk. Maria still does not understand how so many women were transported in that vehicle.

While they were in the small vehicle, their *coyote* told them that when they arrived at the next place, the women were to take off running as fast as they could. He said it would not be a long distance, but it needed to be the quickest run they have ever done, as their speed would determine whether they were going to get caught by immigration officers. The *coyote* informed the women that this part of the journey was the most dangerous and the most important; “*nos dijeron que esa era la parte más riesgosa*” (they told us that this was the most difficult part).

Maria had never seen streets so wide and large. She was afraid she might not be able to run fast enough, but two men were there to help them. The women were taken one at a time, holding hands with two total strangers, “*nos tomaron uno de cada lado*” (they took us one on each side). She ran as fast as she could with the men pulling her; “*nos dijeron que teníamos que correr sin parar*” (they told us that we must run without stopping). After the run, they were instructed to wait at a house for another vehicle. Maria recalled that the house was very small and they were all waiting in a tight space, but she and the other women did not have a choice; they had to wait until the *coyotes* instructed them about the next part of their journey.

While they waited, one of the *coyote*’s helpers told them the next step was to go to the airport and take planes to their individual destinations. They were warned that this step was dangerous because they were in California and the immigration officers were very attentive to any move made by undocumented immigrants. All the women were scared. They were told later that things were more dangerous at the closest airport than anticipated, so instead a vehicle would transport them to the airport in Las Vegas. Maria remembers being concerned because the vehicle was too small to transport that many people, but once again the *coyotes* filled every inch of the vehicle and sent them on their way.

Maria and the women traveled for what seemed to be many hours. When they finally arrived in Las Vegas, the women were left in a casino, where they waited with a great deal of fear and anxiety for many hours. Then the *coyotes* instructed them to fix themselves so they would not look like people who had just crossed the border, “*que no se nos notara que no éramos de acá*” (so that is not as evident that we were not from here). The women tried their best to “fix themselves” in the casino’s bathroom. They met their *coyote* at the agreed time, and they were transported to the airport in Las Vegas. Maria remembers that it was hard to say goodbye to her

new friends after they had been through so much together, but she was also ready to move on and get to the final destination of the journey. Maria was put on a plane to Chicago where she met with her husband, and she thought to herself that the \$3,500 she had paid the *coyotes* had been well worth it.

I asked Maria about her hopes and fears today compared to those she had when she first arrived in the USA. She said things are quite different from what she had heard about life in this country. Her husband had warned her that she would have to work hard, and she has always worked hard since she arrived. Early on, she would fill a shopping cart with fruits, vegetables, or other merchandise, and sell what she could up and down the streets. Maria worked seven days a week cleaning houses, offices, hospitals, jewelry stores, and restaurants. When she happened to have a Sunday off, she would go to rural areas and work on farms, picking fruits and vegetables. She worked so hard until she was able to save enough money for a down payment on a small house.

Maria never shied away from any job. “*Ora sí que trabajé de todo*” (I did work on anything), like cleaning in many places. She was afraid of not being able to go back to Mexico if her mom were to get ill. She felt horrible that she had to have her children babysat so she could work seven days a week, “*todo el tiempo daba a mis hijas a cuidar*” (the whole time I had somebody watching my daughters). Maria does not remember ever having a day when she could just enjoy the day and enjoy her children. There was no way she could give herself that luxury. She knew she had to work to provide for her family in the USA and the ones she left behind in Mexico, “*es una cosa que le apachurra a uno el corazón*” (it is a thing that crushes one’s heart).

6.1.2 Current Life and Future Plans

Today, Maria continues to work cleaning houses. At first she did not like this job, but she has grown to enjoy it. She likes that she has a flexible schedule so she is able to attend her

children's school programs, parent-teacher meetings, or doctor's appointments. She also likes being home to see her children off to school and when they return. Maria's job also gives her a chance to practice the English language skills she has acquired since she started to work for English speaking families. Maria knows her job is to clean and not to speak, but she likes to communicate with the clients to understand what they want done in their homes. She used to ask people to translate for her, but she now feels confident enough in her English skills to communicate on her own.

In her home, Maria encourages her children to speak Spanish, "*yo sí les digo que me hablen a mí en español*" (I do tell them that they must speak Spanish to me). She considers speaking Spanish important for her household, especially since she can tell that it is more and more difficult for her children to speak Spanish. She does not want them to forget their inherited language, "*yo con más razón insisto en que deben hablar español*" (it gives me a bigger reason to insist on having them speak Spanish).

When I asked Maria how she gets from place to place, she shared that at first she was able to take the bus because she lived in Chicago, and she could take public transportation everywhere. However, now that she lives in a rural part of the Midwest, she does not have the option to take public transportation because it is not available in that area at all. Maria now has her own vehicle and is able to drive anywhere she needs to go.

Maria considers herself successful in that she has four children and has been able to provide them with better opportunities than she ever had growing up, "*principalmente la bendición de tener a mis hijos*" (mainly the blessing to have my children). She asks her children how they are doing in school and tells them that one of her main goals is for them to be successful in anything they want to study or do. Maria considers it a success that she and her family are united. She

knows there is no perfect family and that she probably could have done better raising them, but she gives her all to keep her family united and help them be the best they can be given their circumstances, “*para que tengan una vida mejor a la que yo tuve*” (so they may be able to have a better life than the one I had). She enjoys learning from her children and hopes they learn and value their inherited culture.

Maria encourages her children to make better choices and to study and try to secure better jobs than those she has had. She clarified that she does not mind the job she does, because it has enabled her to provide for her children, but she wants her children to succeed in different ways. Maria’s mom used to say that for any plans they make, they should always say “*Primero Dios*,” which literally means “First God;” as long as God allows it, the plan will happen. Maria encourages her children to study anything they want, “*estudiar sobre todo*” (to study above all), whether they decide to be doctors, veterinarians, or any other profession. She is willing to support them with any decision they make as long as they do it with love and passion to serve others.

When I asked Maria how she feels today compared to when she first arrived in the USA, she said she feels so much better now. She still has to endure challenges, but they are nothing compared to the horrible experiences when she first arrived. She is grateful to God and to the USA because in her opinion, “*es un país de inmigrantes*” (this country is made out of immigrants) and all of them are trying to better themselves and their families. For better or worse, this country has hosted her and her family, “*este país nos recibió y aquí estamos*” (this country received us, and here we are).

One challenge Maria endured was the fear of getting caught by immigration officers, “*el temor de estar aquí sin documentos*” (the fear to be here without documents). She felt more fear at the beginning because she entered undocumented and did not have the proper documents to be

able to work. This is not the case now, but she used to live with constant fear that she could be deported. She never felt at peace, and she always had to be aware of her surroundings because she did not know what would happen. She felt like she could step into a trap at any time, *“de estarse cuidando de que lo vayan a agarrar a uno”* (to be watching for oneself that they may grab me). Maria now has proper paperwork to work in the USA, and she thanks this country for approving her residency and allowing her to feel free and not worry like she used to.

When I asked Maria about her future plans, she responded that at this time she has everything she could ever want. She has a job she enjoys and a roof over her head, and her children are doing the best they can with their lives. She feels very blessed, and she wants to continue to see her children being productive doing what they love, *“que ellos se realicen como personas”* (that they may become something of themselves as people). Maria would love to retire in her hometown in Mexico with her fiancé, Chino, and she feels good about her children making their own lives, *“los hijos crecen y hacen su propia vida”* (children grow and they make their own life). She wants to make sure Chino is able to get his paperwork so they can travel back and forth to Mexico. She realizes that her children would not want to live in Mexico, so she sees herself traveling to the USA to see her children and grandchildren *“no sería dejarlos del todo”* (I am not saying I will leave them at all).

Maria dedicates her life to service. She feels a moral obligation to share with everyone around her what she has been awarded. Because God has already given her many blessings, she wants to share them with everyone, *“al final, Dios me ha dado mucho”* (in the end, God has given me a lot). Maria remembers that in the past she used to be shy and quiet, *“yo era una persona apartada de la sociedad”* (I was a person apart from society). She did not do a lot other than work, go home, and attend her church. She did not have any friends. After losing her parents and her late

husband, she felt people were getting closer to her. In the church she attended, people approached her to help her as she was going through her losses. Maria felt God's presence through people from her church.

Through these losses Maria realized there is more to life and she was missing out. She realized she could help and serve others, and she has dedicated her life to service, "*como que sentí un llamado de Dios para servir a los demás*" (I felt as if I had a calling from God to serve others). Now, she reaches out to people in her church and asks if there is anything she can do for them, "*si mi Padre Santísimo me ha dado un don, quiero sacar ese don para servir a los demás en lo que yo pueda*" (If my most Holy Father has given me a gift, I want to use it to serve others in any way I can). She adds that there is a lot yet to do in life. Maria is sensitive and can see when people are in great need, and she goes above and beyond to help and serve. She shares her talents to serve others in anything she can, "*no nada más estamos aquí para nuestras propias familias*" (we are not here only for our own families).

Maria wants to continue to serve others and share her bad experiences with others in order to help them avoid suffering. She wants to always be a source of service, and she feels strongly about this life philosophy. Maria wishes, "*dar lo que yo más pueda de mí a este país que me ha dado*" (to give this country as much as it has given me), "*yo quiero regresar un poquito de que me ha dado a las personas que más lo necesiten*" (I want to give back what it has given me to those people who are in a greater need).

When I asked Maria if she knew anyone from her hometown that had lived in the USA and moved back to Mexico, she responded that many people in her town had done this. Those people stay in Mexico during the winter months and travel to the USA for the rest of the year. She thinks those people do not stay permanently in Mexico because they are not used to it anymore, "*sí se*

van, pero siempre vuelven” (they always go there, but they always return). Maria thinks they live part of the year in the USA because they are retired and probably are not able to work anymore. Perhaps they are tired or cannot be hired as easily anymore, or *“ya no tienen la misma fuerza para trabajar”* (they are not strong enough to continue working) such hard jobs.

When I asked Maria if she has any regrets about immigrating to the USA, she responded, *“en sí yo no siento ningún remordimiento”* (in reality I do not feel any remorse about anything). She shared that her parents gave their blessing and told her she could count on them if she needed anything, *“me dijeron, si es lo que tienes que hacer, adelante”* (they told me, “If this is what you must do, go ahead and do it”). As a matter of fact, she would immigrate again knowing what she knows now. She recognizes that *“he vivido experiencias muy duras, pero también he tenido muchas bendiciones”* (I have endured many very difficult experiences, but I have also had many blessings as well). She thanks God that she learned from both kinds of experiences, and she tries to focus on the good things and the learning experiences that she refers to as “blessings.” Maria appreciates those blessings through the love and generosity of other people towards her and her family. She attributes the fact that she is able to recognize and value the good things in her life to the many hard times she has gone through already. She feels at peace, with a happiness that she feels comes from God, *“nadie más me lo puede dar, solamente Él”* (nobody else could be able to provide this, only Him).

Maria does not encourage people to immigrate to the USA. She invites her sisters to visit and spend time with her and her family, but she does not encourage anyone to immigrate to the USA to live. Maria thanks God and the USA because one of her main goals was to have her own home and she has one now. She feels very fortunate to own a house.

6.2 Chino

Chino is from a town called Moroleón, Guanajuato, which he described as “*pequeño, pacífico, muy alegre*” (small, peaceful, and very happy). With a big smile and a sparkle in his eye, he shared that his little town is very beautiful, and that “*lo extraño*” (I miss it). I asked Chino what he misses about Moroleón, and he said, “*la familia, obviamente,*” (family, obviously). Chino grew up with his parents, two brothers, and a sister. He misses the family atmosphere all around, all the cultural aspects of his town, the festivals that the town celebrates, and his church. He misses how people relate to one another there and his town full of life where he always felt freedom and happiness. Chino remembers that when he was a child, he would go outside to play in the streets. He said when you would wake up in the morning and go outside your home, you would always see people talking in the streets “*ve uno gente platicando*” (one can see people talking to each other).

The main industry in Moroleón is textiles, which are regarded internationally. According to Chino, in Moroleón they have schools all the way from kindergarten to preparatory schools. Chino attended up to sixth grade, which is the highest grade you can attend for the elementary school system in Mexico. His parents could not afford to send him to a higher level of school, so Chino left the academic world to work so he could help his family, “*tuve que trabajar*” (I had to work).

Chino has not gone back to Mexico since he arrived in the USA back in 2001. At the time of this interview, it had been 17 years, “*no he regresado todavía*” (I have not been back yet). He entered the USA undocumented, and he hesitantly shared that, “*por situaciones migratorias no puedo ir*” (due to migratory status, I am not able to go back). He said, “*Estoy con la ilusión de volver algún día*” (I have hope to be back one day), as he misses his family. Although Chino has not been back to Mexico, he keeps in touch with his family, and he considers this to be crucial,

“es algo que no tengo que perder” (it is something that I must never forget). He does not want to lose any communication with them. He pointed out that if people migrate and do not continue to communicate with their family back at home, it is a very sad thing, *“vive aquí uno vacío”* (one lives here with an empty feeling). Chino and his family talk by telephone and sometimes video through Skype and Facebook Messenger, which help him feel close to his loved ones. He likes to communicate with his family as often as he can, *“aunque sea por la cámara pero los está uno mirando”* (even though it is through a camera, at least we get to see them).

Chino added that sometimes living in the USA feels like *“aquí está uno nada más encerrado”* (one lives here enclosed), almost with the feeling of being incarcerated in his own home. He does not feel the sense of freedom he felt back in Mexico. He attributes this feeling to the culture where he comes from, where people meet up and spend time with one another on a daily basis, even when people have to work. Chino remembers that when he was in Mexico, every day after work he would take a shower, then go out to the street to spend time with his friends, which is a common practice for the people of his town. He said some people go out to places to enjoy themselves, go to the movies, have coffee with friends, or go to each other’s homes to spend time together. In comparison, Chino shared, his life in the USA involves going to work and coming back home every day. *“Aquí a trabajar y a dormir, a trabajar y a dormir”* (here it is work and sleep, work and sleep). The routine and relative isolation are the same for everyone he knows in his new neighborhood.

Chino immigrated into the USA undocumented. He shared that he made the decision to immigrate because his economic situation was bad, *“allá trabaja uno mucho mucho y apenas saca para comer”* (over there one works very very hard, and we barely make enough money to eat). He

was not able to help provide enough money for his family to make ends meet. Chino and his family could barely spend money on anything else, not even clothes.

One of the biggest motivations Chino had when he decided to immigrate was the possibility of buying his mother a home of her own, *“mi mamá siempre la anhelaba”* (my mom had always wished she had one). He recalls his mother’s desire for a home, *“decía que aunque fuera de lámina, pero que fuera su casita”* (she used to say that she did not care if the house was made out of aluminum, as long as she could have one of her own). She often told her children how she wanted a home of her own, even if it was made out of scrap, as long as it was hers and no owner would ever take it away. Chino shared that when he was young, he always feared that one day the owner of the house he and his family were renting would appear and ask to have his house back. Chino could not imagine living in the streets. This was not a result of his imagination. He remembers that this happened a few times and his mother could barely deal with the situation. She found another home they could afford to rent, and the family helped pack and move to a new house.

Leaving the neighborhood was sad for the whole family because their neighbors had become like family. Chino did not want to see his mom to go through this again, and the only way he could think to help the family was to earn more money. It was evident that helping his mother was Chino’s greatest motivation, as he explained this about five different times and rephrased his goal in many ways during our interview. This is why he decided to take a chance and try to make her dream come true. He works hard every day toward making this happen still. *“Cumplí mi propósito de comprarle su casita a mi mamá”* (I fulfilled my purpose to purchase my mom a home).

Before he decided to immigrate, Chino had cousins living in the USA. One cousin advised Chino that life in the USA was not how many people in Mexico perceived it, *“la vida aquí no es*

fácil. No es como dicen otros” (life here is not easy. It is not how others say it is). His cousin told him that a lot of Mexican people who live in the USA and go back to their hometowns show off a lot of money, but most people in Mexico do not know all of what made that money possible. His cousin explained that in the USA, people make a lot of sacrifices in order to get money, and he reminded Chino of the value of US money when exchanged into Mexican Pesos. Chino also remembers that when some men who lived in the USA visited his hometown, they were very well dressed, purchased nice vehicles, and would show off to the local people about their great life in the USA. Chino once believed everything they said, but he now knows differently and realizes all the sacrifices behind those nice clothes and beautiful cars.

Chino’s current daily routine consists of waking up, going to work, coming home, eating, and going to bed. He follows this routine on six days out of seven, *“aquí se trata de trabajar”* (here is all about work). He knows the reason he immigrated was to work, so he does not complain about it, but he does not like having such little time to spend with family and friends. When I asked Chino what he initially planned to do when first arriving in the USA, he repeated *“como le digo, hacerle su casa a mi mamá”* (as I said, to make a house for my mom). In addition to this goal, he wanted to save money *“y poner un pequeño negocio”* (and to open up a small business). In case one day he returned to Mexico, he wanted to have his own business and not have to depend on anyone to help provide for his family.

6.2.1 Early Experiences in the USA

I asked Chino about his early experiences in the USA, starting with his immigration journey, he said, *“yo contraté un coyote”* (I had hired the services of a *coyote*), a person who makes a living passing people into the USA. *Coyotes* usually live in the border towns between

Mexico and the USA. Their fees are usually very high per person and they pass people every day, usually in groups. Most of them are males but some of them are females.

Chino paid \$2,500 US to the *coyote* who helped him cross the border. He said the crossing was very difficult for him, “*fue difícil atravesar todo ese proceso*” (it was difficult to go through all that process). In addition to constantly feeling scared and anxious, he and his group ran out of food and water, “*viene uno con el temor y se queda uno sin agua*” (one comes with fear, and we ran out of water). Chino described how scary the journey was and the need to constantly stay aware of his surroundings. They worried about being bitten by venomous wild animals throughout the desert, and being caught by immigration officers.

One reality for undocumented immigrants is that even after they survive the life-threatening journey, they never know if or when they might be caught and sent back to their place of origin, “*uno no sabe si va a llegar aquí*” (one does not know if they will arrive here). Chino described how many people became dehydrated during the journey or ran out of food, and how “*se pierden las vidas allá*” (lives are lost along the way).

Chino started his journey in Moreleón with a group of people traveling with the same purpose, who had also hired the same *coyote*. Once they crossed the border, another *coyote* was waiting for them and arranged to send the travelers to their individual final destinations in the USA. Chino’s group was instructed to walk for many hours, “*caminamos el desierto, luego llega uno a la casa de otro coyote*” (we walked through the desert and then arrived at another coyote’s home). When they were at the *coyote*’s home on the USA side, the *coyote* called their family members to inquire about the payment of his fees. Once he received the money, he then sent each immigrant to his or her destination in the USA.

First, *coyotes* put the person in a vehicle and then they find the best way to continue their journey. Chino talked about his continuing sense of fear and anxiety because at this point he had only just met the new *coyote* and he did not know the person driving the car. He also did not know anything about the city where they had arrived and he could not know whether the new *coyote* would actually send him to the right place. For Chino and the rest of the group, this was a frightening situation. All of them felt lucky enough because they were being told that they were in the USA, but at the same time, they did not know exactly what was going on. They just had to trust the new *coyote* and his helpers.

I asked Chino about his hopes and fears for his life today compared to when he first arrived. His greatest fear when he first arrived in the USA was that he would never again see his family back in Mexico. He saw how far it was, he remembered the days and days of walking, and he could not imagine how he would ever see his family again.

Since he has lived in the USA, Chino also fears driving, because he does not have the proper documentation to get a driver's license. He is worried about being stopped by the police, and "*temor que le vayan a llamar a migración*" (fear that someone could call immigration on him). Chino also shared that he does not know if he should trust his neighbors because he does not know if they will call immigration on him. Even though all his neighbors seem to be good people, he cannot fully trust them. He lives in constant fear and anxiety, "*son de los temores que tiene uno aquí cuando viene*" (those are the fears that one has once we arrive here). Chino's hope is to progress and have a better life and to become financially independent.

Although Chino fears driving, he still does it because he has to get to work, and he does not see any other way. Chino has asked favors from his friends with valid driver's licenses, but sometimes they do not want to provide rides or are not able to do so when he needs them. So he

takes the chance and drives himself, “*tengo que comer, tengo que trabajar, entonces tiene que aventar la moneda al aire*” (I have to eat, I have to work, therefore, I need to flip the coin in the air). Chino is also concerned about getting a flat tire, because he fears a police officer will stop. He is especially scared to be stopped now more than ever, given the current political state of the USA. He feels he would not get a break if he were stopped, and he does not think people would have mercy on him, “*en estos días ya no se sabe qué va a pasar*” (these days you never know what might happen).

Chino considers himself fortunate because he is able to communicate in English, “*no se me dificulta hablar con las personas*” (it is not difficult for me to speak with people). He lives with his fiancée Maria and her two children. At home, they speak Spanish mainly, but they often mix English and Spanish, which he calls “Spanglish.” Chino says that there is no specific rule in their family as far as what language to use at home. The children are free to express themselves “*en el idioma que ellos quieran*” (in the language they want to choose). Chino currently works in an agriculture related field, and everyone at work speaks mainly Spanish.

6.2.2 Current Life and Future Plans

Chino enjoyed answering questions about what he considers most successful, either individually or as a family, since he first arrived in the USA. He proudly responded that he has been able to build a house for his mom, “*porque esa fue una de mis metas*” (because that was one of my goals). He considers this to be his most successful accomplishment. He also considers himself fortunate because he has a decent work life, a roof over his head, and is financially stable. Another goal he had was, “*yo quería mucho hablar inglés*” (I wanted very much to be able to speak English). When he first arrived, he could only order food in restaurants by making silly gestures. He wanted to learn English so he could order his meal at restaurants where they only

speak English. Chino has met this goal and feels fortunate to speak two languages now. Chino also considers it fortunate his family is united, which he believes is one of the most successful traits a family can have. He likes that his fiancée's children feel free to communicate openly with him and with Maria, "*estar siempre unidos*" (to be always united).

Chino considers it a family success that the children have more opportunities in life than he and Maria ever had. His goal is "*poderlos guiar por el camino correcto*" (to be able to guide them correctly), and he wants them to continue their studies and do the best they can do for their lives. One of his main goals is to encourage the children to go to college and have a better life for themselves and for their future children, "*de mi parte yo digo que le echen ganas y que se vayan al colegio*" (from my part I say that they must have eagerness and that they go to college). He does not wish for them to go through what he and Maria went through. Because he could not go to school when he was young, he hopes the children will choose to do something productive with their lives.

When I asked Chino how he feels now compared to when he first arrived in the USA, he said that at first, "*se siente uno fuera de lugar*" (one feels out of place). He felt as if he did not belong in the USA, and he questioned himself about what he was doing here. He remembers feeling anxious and "*no puede uno dormir*" (was not able to sleep) at night, thinking often about how his family was doing back in Mexico, "*no sabía si iba a volver a verles*" (I did not know if I was going to be able to see them again). He greatly missed them, and said, "*son unas emociones encontradas muy fuertes*" (there are many strong mixed emotions). At this point in the interview, he became emotional and shared that many times at night he used to shed a tear or two. It took him a while, but he got used to the idea that he was already in a different country and had to work, "*ya*

con el tiempo se va uno acostumbrando” (over time one becomes accustomed to it). He did not want to give up on his goals.

Some of the most difficult moments for Chino were those when he realized he was alone. He did not have any communication with his family for a while, but now he feels better because he has the means to communicate with them any time. He still misses them, but he is comforted by the idea that he can see them on video calls and he feels them close to his heart, *“es como si los tuviera aquí conmigo”* (it is as if I had them close to me).

When I asked Chino about his future plans, he responded that first he would like to fix his migratory status so he can open his own business in order to have a better life. Chino would prefer to stay in the USA once he takes care of his migratory status, and has not thought about whether he would live back in Mexico again. He wants to take one step at a time, starting with the proper documentation so he can drive to and from work without having to worry about being deported. Another goal after that is to go to Mexico and visit the family he has not seen for 17 years, *“para poder estar yendo a visitar a mi familia allá”* (to be able to go and visit my family over there).

I asked Chino if he knows people who had lived in the USA and then moved back to his hometown. He does, and he thinks they have gone back because *“ya no quieren vivir con el temor”* (they do not want to live with fear anymore). Chino is scared every time he sees a police officer, thinking that because he looks Hispanic they will stop him to check his migratory status. Chino spoke about how common it is nowadays for people to get deported and have to leave their own children behind. He thinks some people go back to Mexico because that the current political situation in the USA is making it impossible for them to live. Parents are taking their children back to Mexico to avoid being deported and losing the opportunity to make sure their children are safe. Chino often hears people say, *“prefiero regresarme a mi pueblo”* (I prefer to go back to my

hometown). He believes it is better to be poor and without fear, saying, “*saben mejor los frijoles sin temor que con temor*” (beans taste a lot better without fear than with fear). In regards to immigration officers Chino says: “*pienso que les roban la tranquilidad*” (I believe they steal our tranquility).

When I asked Chino if he had any regrets about immigrating to the USA, he responded that one of his greatest regrets is leaving his family behind. It was very difficult to say goodbye to his family when he left, “*no es nada fácil*” (it is not easy at all). He still remembers his siblings and his mom crying when he left, and he carries that feeling constantly, “*es un resentimiento y un remordimiento que uno se trae*” (one brings along a great deal of resentment and regret). He wonders if he will ever see them again, and he thinks his mom and siblings feel the same way. When Chino talks to other immigrants, they also have this feeling of regret and sadness about leaving their loved ones behind. He said, “*yo pienso que la mayoría de nosotros venimos con ese remordimiento*” (I think that the majority of us come with that remorse).

Chino does not know whether he would immigrate again based on what he knows now, “*es una pregunta difícil*” (this is a very difficult question). He said, “*por lo que logré económicamente sí lo volvería a hacer*” (based on what I have accomplished economically, I would do it over again). However, when he remembers how difficult it was to leave his mother, “*por eso no lo haría*” (based on this, I would not do it again). He also added that life back in his hometown is much happier for people who live there, “*la vida es muy bonita allá*” (life is very beautiful there). For that reason, he does not think he would immigrate knowing what he knows now.

Chino has never encouraged anyone else to immigrate. He strongly believes that if you work diligently in Mexico, you can make it without having so much suffering in the process, “*yo*

digo que si le echa uno muchas ganas allá, sí se puede” (I say that if one eagerly works hard over there, one is able to make it). He believes life in Mexico is good, even if you are eating simple meals; *“yo pienso que ellos todavía tienen la fortuna de estar con la familia”* (I think that they are still very fortunate to be with their family). He strongly encourages people to stay surrounded by their loved ones and to stay in Mexico, because they have a better life there. He tells them that *“la vida no es como la pintan”* (life in the USA is not how some people describe it). This seems especially true to Chino lately, because immigrants are not being treated well, *“en estos días ya no se sabe qué pueda pasar”* (one does not know anymore these days what may happen).

Chino shared that his constant fear of living undocumented is so strong, and it is difficult to describe. He gave the example that, *“en este tiempo ya no puede uno llamar al 911 si uno tiene una emergencia”* (at this time one is not able to call 911 if one has an emergency) because he is too afraid that he will be taken away and deported. When he has an emergency, he tries to fix it himself and not take any chance. He lives in fear day and night, *“esa es una de las partes que a uno lo agobia”* (this is one of the parts that is aggravating for us).

Chino thanks God for everything he has and has been able to accomplish. He wants to send out a message to everyone that, *“no porque seamos ilegales es que todo lo que dicen de nosotros es cierto”* (because we are illegal does not mean that everything they say about us is true). He says undocumented immigrants from Mexico are not criminals and are not guilty of the horrible stereotypes Americans have about them. He assures everyone that most have only immigrated to work, to better themselves and their families, and to become something in life. He wants to share, *“tenemos metas también nosotros”* (we also have goals), and he asks that US citizens please not treat them as criminals. He emphasized that in life there are all sorts of people, and we should not judge someone based on their place of origin, *“eso no se vale”* (this is not right). He argued that

it is unfair to generalize and judge based on what other people do, “*no debemos pagar unos por otros*” (we must not pay for what others do). They do not want to live in fear, “*queremos vivir como los demás*” (we want to live just like anybody else). The fact that they do not have the proper documentation does not make them so different; “*queremos vivir en paz, queremos progresar*” (we want to live in peace and get better). Chino believes we are all human and children of God, and that “*tenemos derecho de llevar una vida decente y tranquila*” (we have the right to live a decent and tranquil life).

6.3 Researcher Journal Notes

When I first met with Maria and Chino, they both seemed nervous, but once we started, they seemed more comfortable with the interview. As we progressed, Chino sounded like this was an interview for the radio or television! Maria was open and willing to respond with a great deal of detail, and she shared her answers without hesitation. She constantly seemed apologetic for having a better life than Chino. Off the record, she shared that she had suffered a lot during her life, and she was emotional through most of the interview. It is evident that she dedicates her life to service, and Chino is now learning her ways of serving others. Based on his answers, I am confident that he finds enjoyment and pride in this new part of his life. He has mainly dedicated himself to work and to try to become a better version of himself. He taught himself how to speak English and is now learning how to write it.

When we started the interview, Chino chose to remain standing. As time went by, he sat and crossed his legs comfortably, as if he were on a television interview, and he seemed to be giving advice to an audience. Maria, on the other hand, sat for most of the interview at the edge of her chair and would not look up at me. I understand this, because culturally it is common for a person not to look directly into the other person’s eyes, especially when that person is of higher

standing than others in the room. They do this out of respect. I tried not to appear “better than” them, but the fact that I asked them to sign a document and had a recording device made them perceive me as superior. I found it interesting that when either of them answered a question; they would look directly at the other.

When Chino first spoke about the fact that undocumented immigrants are not criminals, he looked around as if to make sure nobody was in the room so he could express his feelings openly. As the interview went on, he seemed as if he was looking for a camera, and he spoke directly to the recording device to make sure people heard what he had to say about it. He was mainly concerned that people knew who undocumented immigrants really are.

I perceived that Chino is quite proud that he fulfilled his goal of providing a home for his mother. Based on his answers, I could tell he had not spoken about this before, as he seemed emotional and held back tears. I wondered why he held back his tears at some parts of the interview, and I thought perhaps it was based on a cultural assumption that men should not cry, especially in front of women.

Maria seemed apologetic many times, as if she felt bad that she has a better life than other people, especially her fiancée. She spoke softly, yet assured. She breathed more heavily when she spoke about helping and serving others, and off the record she shared that her two children at home resent her for being out of the house a lot more than before. Maria does not seem to want to change her new passion to serve, and she will not let her children think she does not care about them anymore. Her children go with her to visit the elderly at the nursing homes in the area. Maria does not know if they will also have the passion to serve others, but she sure hopes so.

At the time of the interview, Maria and Chino seemed very much in love, and they were preparing to marry in the Catholic Church. They spoke about this with great pride, especially

Maria. She shared that her friends from church are very happy for them. Maria and Chino are planning a huge wedding with at least 500 guests, which is common for traditional Mexican weddings.

When I asked the questions, the participants seemed to be respectful with each other. They each encouraged the other to reply to the questions first. Maria let Chino respond first for most of the questions. They truly seemed to work as a team. I noticed that both seemed to talk about crossing the border in great detail, and the memories and emotions of their crossing seemed to be still vivid in their minds and in their hearts.

6.4 Summary

Similar to the stories of Estefany and David as well as Guadalupe and Juan Pablo, the same three themes became evident in this interview with Maria and Chino: family, church life, and resilience.

As with the other couples, family is a major aspect for both Maria and Chino. Maria has been a dedicated mother and became widow just a few years ago. She has four children, two married and two still living with her, and she is the backbone of her family. Maria continues to work seven days a week to provide for her family. In addition to showing her children how to be responsible and work hard to obtain the necessities of life, she also provides a great example of how to use their talents to serve others. Her children know they can count on her for anything and that she will leave her work to be there if her children need her. She dedicates her life to her newly completed family. She married Chino, and both are trying their best to set an example for Maria's children. Chino's passion to provide for his mother was evident throughout the entire interview. He is proud of himself for fulfilling his mother's dream to have a home of her own, and he is now

thinking about opening a business where he and Maria can work together to provide for their family.

As with the other participants, church has played an important role in Maria and Chino's lives. Maria was suffering a great deal after the death of her first husband and her parents. She felt depressed and without hope. She became a regular at her church, and other ladies noticed that Maria was constantly crying before, during, and after church. They reached out to her and overwhelmingly gave her all their love, to the point that Maria promised herself that she would do the same for others. She has not stopped yet. For Chino, all this dedication to the church is new to him, but he seems to be gradually becoming more a part of it and the different activities Maria and the other leaders do.

Through their life story in the USA, Maria and Chino demonstrate their resilience in dealing with many challenging situations. Maria has performed many jobs within the last 25 years since she arrived in the USA, and she has worked seven days a week without complaining. To her, this is a way of life and a necessity for her family. Chino lives in constant fear of being deported. He wants peace and to be able to sleep at night knowing that he will not be deported at any moment. The part about not being able to call 911 in an emergency made me realize how difficult this might be not only for him, but for every one of the millions of undocumented immigrants who live in the same situation. I hope that by now, people realize that it is not easy being an undocumented immigrant in the USA. Also, I hope they see that those people do not immigrate undocumented just because they feel like it, but because their lives and the lives of their families truly depend on them. They cross the border with full knowledge that they may die in the journey. They are full of fear from the moment they decide to take the chance and immigrate, to the time they are crossing the border and suffering physically and emotionally, to the time that they live with fear every day

of their lives while they are undocumented. I am certain they would pay anything to be documented and free from harsh judgment.

CHAPTER 7. ISABEL

In the first three interviews, I met with couples to hear their stories of immigration from Mexico to the United States. This next participant, Isabel, is now a widow, but she and her husband, Juan, had a similar experience to the other couples. From undocumented journeys with *coyotes* to immigration fears, they have shared similar struggles. Isabel, like the others, shows a life of great resilience, dedication to family, and a strong connection to her church.

Isabel is a woman in her mid-seventies who is originally from the state of Jalisco, Mexico. She has been in the USA since 1973. She is a strong woman who has worked hard all her life. Isabel described her family as one from humble and poor origins in rural central Mexico. Through her interview, it is evident that life has not been easy for her or her family. When she married, she moved to the USA because she and her husband, Juan, decided it was the best option for them and for their two young daughters. When Juan died in 2005, Isabel could no longer live on her own, so she currently lives with her oldest daughter and her family in a rural town in the Midwest. She helps with the household chores because everyone else goes out to work, and she babysits her great-grandson.

In addition to helping in the home, Isabel is actively involved in her local Catholic church, where she has served as President and now Vice President of the group of women within the Hispanic ministry. She also serves as a Eucharistic Minister, a Lector, and a key member of the choir. Isabel sings the Psalm solo for the congregation every weekend's Mass, so I know personally that she has a beautiful voice. Isabel volunteers to help clean the church every Tuesday, and she visits the elderly at nursing homes. She has an enthusiastic personality and brings a happy attitude everywhere she goes. Her love to serve others is evident in her demeanor and also in the way she describes her relationship towards others. Isabel comes across as a sensitive, yet strong person due

to her life story and current situation. She exemplifies leadership with a great deal of love and positive attitude.

Isabel is originally from a small town called La Quemada, in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. The town has just over 1,000 inhabitants. This is a tranquil town that “*se caracterizó por gente amable, alegre y pues casi todos los que vivimos ahí somos familia*” (has been characterized as the town of gentle and happy people. Almost everyone there is related to each other). Most people who live in that town are either family or consider themselves family because they know each other very well. Isabel grew up with her mother, father, three sisters, and two brothers.

According to Isabel, most people in La Quemada make their living in agriculture, especially the men: “*los hombres se dedican al cultivo del maíz, el frijol, el cacahuate, pepino, rábanos y varias otras cosas*” (the men dedicate themselves to grow corn, beans, peanuts, cucumbers, radishes, zucchini, and many other kinds of produce). While the men work in the fields, “*las mujeres la mayoría, se dedican al hogar*” (the women, for the most part, are dedicated to the home).

The town of La Quemada had limited academic resources: “*solamente teníamos una escuela primaria*” (we only had an elementary school). Isabel was able to finish elementary school up to sixth grade. What she misses most about La Quemada is “*esa paz y esa tranquilidad, este, la alimentación tan sana, la gente tan sana.*” (the peace and tranquility, the healthy eating, the healthy people). Isabel not only misses the healthy lifestyle, she also misses how people in La Quemada are so genuine. “*Yo extraño mucho el convivir y compartir con toda mi familia*” (I miss very much spending time with my whole family). Isabel misses the way of living that was so different from life in the USA.

Isabel shared, *“hay muchas tradiciones en mi pueblo. Hay mucha tradición acerca de nuestra religión Católica y... por parte de nuestros antepasados”* (there are a great deal of traditions in my town. There is a lot of tradition about our Catholic religion and... from our ancestors). She said the Catholic traditions in her town have been passed down from previous generations and continue to take place throughout the town. In addition to religious celebrations, the people of La Quemada celebrate national and local holidays. Isabel emphasized one of the biggest celebrations in her town, when they celebrate their patron saint, Saint Anthony. She also misses traditions such as *Corpus Christi* Day, Mother’s Day, Christmas, and many other opportunities that unite families in celebration.

Isabel keeps in constant communication with her family, and is fortunate to be able to visit Mexico any time, *“yo siempre voy como cada dos o tres años a mi lugar de origen”* (I try to go back for a visit every two or three years to my place of origin). She visits long-time friends and *“trato de visitar la poca familia que queda”* (I try to see the few family members that are left). Isabel also makes an effort to spend time with people who had been friends with her parents.

When Isabel and her late husband, Juan, decided to immigrate to the USA in 1973, *“yo me vine casi recién casada”* (I came almost recently married). Their two daughters were six months old and a year and a half old. She immigrated undocumented into the USA. She and Juan hired a *coyote*, *“nos venimos pagándole a una persona para que nos pasara la frontera y pues fue muy difícil”* (we came paying a person to have him pass us through the border, and it was very difficult). She remembers how difficult it was because *“yo traía a mis niñas chiquitias, tuvieron que pasar por un lado”* (I brought my two very young daughters, and they passed through a different side). The *coyotes* passed her daughters through a different part of the border than Isabel and Juan. She remembers how scary it was to have to send their daughters separately, *“llenos de temores, de*

miedos, de que nos las fueran a robar o nos las fueras a hacer perdedizas o qué sé yo, tantas cosas que pasan en la frontera” (we were full of fear, that someone might steal them from us, misplace them, or what do I know, so many things happen at the border). Among many fears, Isabel and Juan worried that someone could take their daughters away from them, and she believes it was God who made it possible for them to immigrate and keep their daughters safe, “*con la ayuda de Dios, logramos pasar*” (with God’s help we were able to cross).

Prior to her own decision to immigrate, Isabel knew people who had immigrated to the USA, “*nos contaban muy bonito del sueño Americano*” (they told us about the beautiful American Dream). Those people told Isabel that in the USA there was so much money they could sweep it with a broom. She does not know if people were joking or were really saying that as long as people worked hard in the USA, they would have an opportunity to make money. Isabel and her husband decided to immigrate because he could not find a job in Mexico that would pay enough to make ends meet, “*mi esposo no encontraba trabajo allá, por eso decidimos venirnos*” (since my husband could not find a job there, that is why we decided to come here). They decided to take a chance.

According to Isabel, people who had lived in the USA used to tell her that the American Dream was, “*que aquí se trabajaba, pero que se ganaba mucho dinero y que era más fácil, pues, todo,*” (that here, if you work, you could earn a lot of money and that everything was easier). People assured Isabel and Juan that if a person worked hard, they would have enough money to make ends meet and also to be able to save some of it. These acquaintances said that in the USA there are better opportunities, “*para que los hijos estudiaran y que las ayudas que había aquí pues nada que ver con lo que hay en nuestro país*” (for the children to be able to study, and that the help and support there does not compare to the one of our country). The fact that their children

would have more opportunities to go to school and have a better way of living were enough for Isabel and her husband to leave their hometown and take the journey.

One of the things Isabel planned to do when she arrived into the USA was to be able to live with her husband. This is an important aspect of the Hispanic community, *“porque uno cuando se casa, según la cultura de nosotros, las enseñanzas que nos enseñaron nuestros padres es de que uno tiene que estar con su esposo y que uno lo tiene que seguir a donde él vaya”* (because when one gets married, according to our culture, the teachings from our parents is that one must be with her husband and follow him anywhere he goes). Isabel believed it was important to live as a family, so she followed Juan and they brought their two daughters with them. When they arrived in the USA, Isabel realized their children would have more opportunities to study and have a better life than if they had stayed in Mexico, *“en realidad esa es la razón por la cual yo me vine”* (in all reality, this is the reason why I came).

7.1 Early Experiences in the USA

Isabel shared that it was very difficult for her, Juan, and their two daughters when they crossed the border undocumented, *“bueno yo llegué con muchas dificultades porque tuvimos que pasar de indocumentados”* (well, I arrived with many difficulties because we had to cross undocumented). According to Isabel *“no se podía tener confianza de pasar libremente”* (one could not have trust to be able to cross freely), it was difficult to trust people in their journey as they were crossing. Juan had a tourist visa, but he decided to pay and cross with the *coyote* in order for Isabel and their daughters not to be on their own, *“así fue como llegamos aquí”* (that is how we ended up arriving here).

Isabel shared the details of how their journey unfolded once they decided to immigrate. The first step for them was to take a bus for over 40 hours from Guadalajara to Tijuana, *“fue muy*

difícil el trayecto desde Guadalajara hasta Tijuana pero gracias a Dios llegamos a Tijuana” (it was a very difficult journey all the way from Guadalajara to Tijuana, but thank God we arrived in Tijuana). Isabel and Juan each carried a daughter in their lap for the entire ride, “*mi esposo con una niña en sus piernas y yo con otra*” (my husband with one girl on his lap, and me with the other one). She remembers how hard, long, and extremely tiring the trip was, “*en aquellos tiempos no había tanta autopista*” (around those days, there were not many highways). They arrived in Tijuana with swollen legs and feet because they had been sitting for so long and bearing the weight of their daughters. At that time, they did not have disposable diapers, so their daughters wore diapers that Isabel had made out of cloth, “*yo tenía que venirlas cambiando de pañal*” (I had to continuously change their diapers). Every time the bus stopped and gave the passengers a five-minute break, Isabel ran to the bathroom and washed out cloth diapers so she could change her daughters. She could not buy a bite to eat, as she barely had enough time to wash the diapers and return to the bus.

When they arrived in Tijuana, the couple contacted Juan’s nephew. He made a living as a *coyote*, charging \$400 US to cross people from Mexico into the USA. Their nephew helped them hire a young couple to cross their daughters, and he helped Isabel and Juan cross the border. Isabel began to cry as she remembered, “*mi esposo iba encajuelado*” (my husband crossed inside the trunk of the car). I reminded her that she could opt out of telling any part of her story or take a break if she needed to, but she wanted to continue with the story. She shared how much her late husband loved her and wanted her to suffer the least during their journey, “*él para cuidarme, decidió cruzar así y yo iba enfrente con los demás*” (he, in order to take care of me, decided to cross like this and I traveled up front with the rest). Isabel recalled, “*era un carro muy grande*” (it was a very large car), and it contained about 15 people. The group crossed through bodies of water

and mountainous terrain, “*brincamos cercas y no recuerdo ya muy bien todo lo que caminamos*” (we jumped over fences and I do not remember very well all that we walked).

Once they crossed, “*nos escondieron en una choza como de zacate*” (they hid us inside a hut made of straw). The plan was that in this hut, they would eventually be reunited with their daughters. Isabel shared that “*a mis niñas las pasó una pareja por la línea*” (my little girls were crossed by a couple over the line), and the couple presented the daughters as their own. Isabel and Juan were in the hut, desperately waiting for their daughters, and Isabel still remembers hearing a person shout at the door, “*¡la mamá de las niñas por favor!*” (the mother of the two girls, please!). Isabel feared something had happened to the girls and “*¡ni un segundo, corrí!*” (not even a second, I ran!). The couple said they wanted to return the girls to their parents as soon as possible, because “*las niñas despertaron a llore y llore porque no vieron ni a su mamá ni a su papá*” (the girls woke up and they were crying because they could not see their mom or dad). Isabel was still having a hard time speaking in the interview. The way she narrated that part of the story with such detail was almost as if she were back in that moment.

Isabel recalled how she was finally reunited with her girls and they were all crying together, and she stayed with her girls for the rest of the journey. They crossed through St. Clemente, California, and then Juan and the rest of the group arrived. A *coyote* took them to Los Angeles, California. As a family, “*ahí estuvimos esperando hasta que llegó el sobrino de mi esposo por nosotros*” (we waited for my husband’s nephew who came to pick us up). The nephew let them borrow his house in Colinga, California, where they stayed for about two months until they were able to move into their own place. This is where their story in the USA began, 45 years ago. Once they settled, Isabel and Juan found work in agriculture. Isabel spent most of her career as a farm worker, picking strawberries and other produce.

When I asked Isabel what her hopes and dreams had been when she first arrived in the USA, she responded, “*yo no sé, quizás porque siempre he sido una persona de fe y he creído en Dios y en las bendiciones de mi madre, en toda la gente que pide por uno*” (I do not know, maybe because I consider myself a person of faith and I have believed in God and in all the blessings of my mother and all the people who pray for me). Isabel had believed in the presence of God throughout her life, and she had her mother’s blessings when she left Mexico, so “*siempre he tenido fe y esperanza de que todo va a estar bien*” (I have always had faith and hope that everything is going to be well). Isabel also shared that she and Juan had always worked hard to better themselves. She acknowledged that sometimes life brings difficult situations, but what has helped her is her spiritual beliefs and the fact that she and her family are united, “*hemos salido adelante, hemos sabido trabajar todos juntos*” (we have always moved forward, and we have known how to work all together).

Isabel always worked and dedicated herself to helping her family and others, “*mi único trabajo es servir, servir con mi familia y servir en mi iglesia*” (my only job is to serve, to serve my family and to serve in my church). She wants to dedicate whatever time she has left to helping and serving others, “*ya estoy grande y ya trabajé muchos años*” (I am older now and I have worked many years). She does not feel as strong as she once did, but she still volunteers to do the best she can with the energy she has left. She wishes she could still work but does not have the strength to do it.

When I asked Isabel what language she uses most at home and at her church where she volunteers, she replied, “*español, por supuesto*” (Spanish, of course). She knows enough English to go to doctor’s appointments and other places, she takes care of her own errands, and she drives anywhere she needs to go. When she thinks she may have trouble understanding more serious

matters, she tries to have someone else help her, “*para entender bien lo que me están diciendo*” (to better understand what people are telling me). Isabel currently lives in a house with one of her daughters, son-in-law, grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. The seven people in the household all speak English, but when they speak with Isabel, they speak Spanish. There is no set rule on what language they are to use in the household. Since completing elementary school back in Mexico, Isabel has never gone back to school.

7.2 Current Life and Future Plans

I asked Isabel what she considers to be a success in her life. She replied, “*mi primer logro es haber vencido tantos miedos que tenía yo de no poder salir de mi país*” (my first success is to have been able to overcome so many fears that I used to have to not be able to leave my country). She feared leaving Mexico due to the fact that she did not know the English language or culture, and she feared being confronted by immigration officers. She did not know what she was going to face in the USA, but she feels that she has overcome all those fears, “*pero el miedo lo vencí, ese fue mi primer logro*” (but I was able to conquer my fear, that was my first success).

Another success in Isabel’s life is the fact that now she can communicate in English. She also learned how to drive, obtained a driver’s license, and owns a vehicle. She has her paperwork in place for immigration status, and she proudly shares, “*hoy soy ciudadana americana orgullosamente*” (today, I am proudly an American citizen). She put all her energy into her work in order to make life better for her family, “*a futuro siempre vi que esto era lo mejor*” (looking towards the future, I always saw that this was the best thing).

Isabel added, “*trabajamos muy duro mi esposo y yo en el campo por más de 20 años*” (my husband and I had to work hard in agriculture for more than 20 years). She remembers that she worked on the farms in cold weather, heavy rain, and extreme heat. Isabel recalls that when the

company she worked for did not have enough employees, the employers would take advantage of the workers who actually showed up at work, *“los patrones, los contratistas abusaban mucho de uno”* (the bosses used to take great advantage of us). Isabel proudly shared, *“tuve la fortuna de conocer gracias a Dios en ese tiempo la unión de César Chávez”* (I had the fortune to know, thank God, at that time, the Union of César Chávez). Isabel was proud that she and her co-workers met and joined the activist César Chávez and his Union in California. The union could make sure the workers were treated fairly and with dignity. Isabel explained, *“se nos daba trabajo, nos cuidaban de los pesticidas, teníamos baños limpios, agua limpia, azadones largos”*: the union made sure the employers did not abuse the workers with careless pesticide mishandling, and they made sure that employees had clean bathrooms, clean drinking water, appropriate tools to work with, a fair salary, adequate health insurance, as well as access to good doctors for both the employees and their families.

Isabel believed César Chávez was a true hero to all the agricultural workers like herself in California. He also made sure the employees had unemployment compensation when they ran out of work. Before Chávez, this benefit was only available for city workers, but he made it possible also for agricultural workers, who worked harder and made less money. Isabel feels fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with César Chávez at the time when he was working diligently to obtain many benefits for the agricultural workers, *“César Chávez logró eso y muchas cosas para nosotros los campesinos”* (César Chávez was able to achieve all this, and many other things for us the farm workers).

When I asked Isabel how she feels now living in the USA compared to when she first arrived, she answered, *“yo me siento algo frustrada porque en aquellos tiempo todo era más fácil”* (I feel a bit of frustration because in that time, things were easier). She remembers arriving with

many fears, but she found amazing people who were ready to help her any time, *“me encontré a tanta gente con una disponibilidad de ayudarme, familia y no familia”* (I found myself surrounded by so many people with willingness to help me, family and not family). Help was always there from her husband’s family, as well as from many friends she made along the journey who became like family.

Isabel recalls that people used to tell her about experiencing some racism, but *“ahora es mucho más palpable todo esto”* (now the racism is felt much more deeply). Immigrants are more afraid and they do not know what to do. Isabel feels concern and empathy for them because they are her people, from Mexico, *“me preocupa porque es mi gente de mi país y de otros países que están sufriendo todas estas injusticias”* (I feel concerned because it is my people, from my country and from many other countries that are suffering all these injustices). Isabel feels things are worse now than when she first arrived as a result of the current political climate in this country.

Despite these political challenges, Isabel explained, *“yo vivo aquí en {state} por 7 ó 8 años vivo muy agusto, muy en paz, muy tranquila, me siento feliz, contenta por todos los logros que he tenido después de haberme venido para acá”* (I have been living in {this state} for the last 7 or 8 years comfortable, in peace, I live a tranquil life. I feel happy; content due to all the success I have had since I first arrived). Isabel feels fortunate to have overcome many obstacles throughout her life. She feels most proud of the fact that she and Juan provided their family the best life they could have. Isabel added that her husband became ill and she had to take care of him in addition to their children on her own, *“como mi esposo se enfermó muy pronto, yo tuve que luchar por todos ellos”* (since my husband got sick early on, I had to fight for all of them). She remembers that it was not easy for her, but when she looks back, she realizes how fortunate they all are for getting through

that part of their lives, “*saqué adelante a mi familia*” (I was able to make sure my family moved forward).

All of Isabel’s children have had far better academic opportunities than she had, and that is worth more to her than anything else in the world, “*todos viven bien, gracias a Dios*” (all of them live well, thank God). She feels like she has earned a trophy because all of her children, four daughters and one son, are doing well for themselves, “*gracias a Dios y gracias a este país*” (thanks to God, and thanks to this country).

When I asked Isabel about her future plans, she responded, “*yo quisiera regresarme a La Quemada, se me hace hermoso mi pueblo y mi gente*” (I would love to be back in La Quemada, my town and my people are beautiful). However, she does not know if she can really return, because it is difficult for her to live alone. Isabel indicated that she now wants to enjoy the life she has left with her children, siblings, relatives, and friends, “*mis planes es disfrutar lo que Dios me dejó vivir*” (my plan is to enjoy that which God gives me to live).

Isabel knows some people who have lived in the USA and tried to go back and live in La Quemada, but they all returned to the USA because things in Mexico are not the same anymore, “*han intentado quedarse, pero se han vuelto a regresar*” (they have tried to stay there, but they have returned here). Those people initially returned to La Quemada because they were tired of working for so many years, yet when they tried to continue life back in their hometown, it was not easy. They were not used to it anymore, and it was hard for them to adjust to living outside the USA.

According to Isabel, when people go back to their hometown in Mexico to retire, they find they also have problems there because there is unemployment and many people who work hard and do not get paid enough. These circumstances end up being discouraging for many, “*todo eso*

te hace decir, creo que estaba mejor en Estados Unidos” (all of that makes you say, I believe I was better off in the USA). Some of the additional discouraging things that people may experience in Mexico are violence, injustice, and many dangerous scenarios. These are other reasons why retirees so often end up going back to live in the USA. Some people who retire end up splitting their time between the USA and Mexico, living part of each year in each place.

I asked Isabel if she has any regrets about immigrating to the USA. She had to take a break, because this part became quite emotional for her. When she was finally able to speak, she shared that she had one great regret, the fact that she had lived a long time so far away from her parents, *“lo más difícil es estar tanto tiempo, tantos años lejos de tus padres”* (the most difficult part is to spend much time, many years far away from my parents). Isabel suffered a great deal not being able to be close to her parents, especially when they were ill. She felt guilty, *“sentía como que los había abandonado”* (I felt as if I had left them abandoned). She could not go back easily because her status was undocumented and she could not travel; however, sometimes she did anyway, not knowing if she would be able to return to the USA, *“muchas veces me arriesgué a ir a verlos”* (many times I had risked it to go and see them). Isabel could not stand the thought that her parents might pass away before could see them again, so she decided to risk her life and pay large amounts of money to go and see them a few times.

Through tears, Isabel shared that sometimes she *“no aguantaba las ganas, sentía que me volvía loca aquí”* (felt like I could not help it, like I was going to go crazy) because she could not see her parents and siblings for many years. During times when she was sick, had surgeries, and had children, she was not able to receive help from her parents or siblings because they all lived in Mexico. She felt *“tan mal y tan sola y luego pensaba cómo se sentirán ellos”* (so bad and so lonely, and later I thought about how they must have felt).

When I asked Isabel whether she would have immigrated if she knew in 1973 what she knows now, she said it was a difficult question to answer because she feels so many mixed emotions, *“es que es tanto sufrimiento y tanto dolor, pero también a la vez, la recompensa es grande”* (there is much suffering and much pain, but at the same time, the reward is great). She reflects that her children were able to attend better schools and receive breakfast and lunch at school for free. She is grateful that she is in the USA because when her husband had been ill after they arrived, the government helped them a great deal. She thinks that if this had happened in Mexico, her husband probably would have died because she would not have had enough money to afford his medication and treatments. They received help from the government for medical issues and nutrition. She believes if it had happened in Mexico, they could not have made it, *“si no hubiéramos estado en este país, no sé qué hubiera pasado”* (if we were not have been in this country, I do not know what would have happened).

Isabel explained that in Mexico when a mother has a baby in a public hospital, she has to provide diapers, medicine, and everything else for the baby. This is not what she experienced in a public hospital in the USA, so this is another reason why she feels fortunate to live in the USA instead of in México, *“no hay sufrimiento sin recompensa”* (there is no suffering without a compensation). She loves both countries, and she only blames the governments of both countries for having a problematic immigration situation.

When I asked Isabel if she has encouraged others to immigrate to the USA, she quickly replied that she has. It is easy for her to recommend that her relatives immigrate because *“mi familia es muy pobre”* (my family is very poor). Right now with the current political situation, however, she is not as eager to encourage her family to immigrate, but she wishes for a better life for everyone. According to Isabel, she knows people who are malnourished, unemployed, and even

abused, so she encouraged them to immigrate to the USA to get away from their unfortunate situations.

7.3 Researcher Journal Notes

As soon as Isabel entered the room where the interview took place, she displayed one of the biggest smiles I have seen in my life. Her positive attitude and happiness were contagious. I was taken by surprise because she brought food for us to share during the interview. She brought Mexican tamales and told me that she makes them by the dozen to help make ends meet at her home and also when she helped fundraise for her church. She shyly shared that her tamales are highly regarded and so she wanted to share them with me. I was delighted and humbled by her kindness because from my experience, Mexican women take great pride in their cooking. I know it is only food, but this gesture showed that Isabel was sharing a vulnerable side of herself with me during this interview.

Once we started the interview, Isabel was attentive and wanted to show the best version of herself. I noticed that she sometimes repeated the question, which gave her time to answer each questions in detail. Her eyes were expressive as if she did not want to miss any detail of the question. One quality I admired in Isabel is her wisdom. She does not have a strong academic background, but based on her answers I perceived that she has lived a fulfilled and well-rounded life. Her sensitivity to challenges around her are also evident, while at the same time, she seems to have a solution or at least a suggestion for each one of them.

Another trait Isabel had is her positive attitude towards most of the topics covered during her interview. She shed many tears when she described crossing the border undocumented and how brave her husband had been during their journey. I could tell it was particularly difficult for Isabel when she spoke about her two young daughters crossing the border. This part was by far the

most emotional for her, and I could tell that even after all these years, the memory is still painful. Also, when she shared that her husband became ill early on during their life in the USA, I could imagine how difficult it had been for her. In 2005, Juan died due to a heart condition, so she was left to take care of herself. Despite all of this, she seems to have a positive attitude towards the challenges in her life.

When Isabel became emotional at any times during the interview, my first reaction was to comfort her, and I reminded her that she did not have to continue if she did not want to. I also reminded her that she was free to opt out of any parts of the interview. However, she decided to continue every time. She said that she needed to share this with anyone who would read it because she hoped that her experience could benefit others. When Isabel spoke about any emotional parts of her life, she usually ended with something positive that came out of the experience. For most of the interview, she had a great big smile, even when tears were on her face.

At the end of the interview, Isabel could not say enough about how grateful she was for being able to participate on this project, *“yo nada más agradecer a la persona que está haciendo este trabajo”* (I would like to thank the person who is performing this work). She described it to me as feeling like she had won the lottery or an important role in a movie. She was grateful because many of the topics we covered were topics that she had not thought about since that part of her life happened long ago. She felt emotional in many parts because somehow she had hidden those moments in her heart, and she felt free to let them out during this interview. It helped her see the value of her life story even more:

“para mí es una satisfacción muy grande ser parte de este proyecto. De alguna forma regresas a tu vida. Sé que no es nada más la persona que está haciendo este proyecto, sino que la mano de Dios está ahí para que nos situemos en el lugar donde estamos y ver por todo lo que hemos pasado” (to me, it is a great satisfaction to be part of this project. Somehow one goes back in life. I know this is not only the hand of the person doing this project but it is also God’s hand that is there to

help us situate ourselves in the place where we are and to see everything that we have gone through).

As a researcher, I feel grateful to be able to meet people like Isabel, who despite her life challenges, is still full of love to share and advice to give.

7.4 Summary

As in the other interviews for this study, three main themes emerged from this interview with Isabel: resilience, family, and church life.

Isabel has been resilient throughout her life. She described how her family did not have enough to make ends meet. She has worked hard her whole life to help provide for her family, first for her parents and siblings, then for her husband and their children. Her situation has not been easy. It was a difficult decision to leave what was known to her and to leave her sickly parents behind to follow her husband to a country she did not know. It was not easy to adapt to a new culture or live with people who spoke a language different than the only one she had ever known. She had to not only cross the border undocumented, but to give up her two little daughters to people she did not know and trust that she was going to see them again. Isabel's resilience is evident not only from every step of her immigration journey but also throughout her life. The fact that she is currently still willing to babysit her great-grandson in addition to volunteering at her church is an example of something not many people do. Isabel has not given up in every aspect of her life. Isabel's resilience is a true inspiration to everyone who knows her, whether they know her life story or not, because her great big smile shines and warms the space where she is present.

As for her family life, Isabel has given herself up to take care of her siblings, her parents, her late husband, and to still today continue to help take care of her great-grandson. These are only a few of the many examples she provided during her interview. She also mentioned that the

deciding factor for her immigration to the USA was the fact that her parents told her she must follow her husband. She could have opted out of this, but she decided to follow her husband and to take their two daughters along because she wanted to make sure they would have better opportunities in life.

As far as church life is concerned, Isabel spends every minute she is able volunteer and serve others through her church. She shared that sometimes she spends five out of seven days in the church volunteering in different capacities. She lives just blocks away from her church, which allows her to be present for many activities. Isabel also shared that she was able to make it through all of her challenges in life because she considers herself a person of faith. She says that she puts everything in God's hands and this has helped her through her life.

After experiencing all of these interviews, my heart goes out to the many immigrants that decide to take a chance to better their lives even though they know they may lose their lives in their journey. How can anyone judge them without knowing their story? I wish more people would take the time and explore what some people have to go through in order to make ends meet. May we stop making judgments without knowing some people's realities. May we take the time to be kind to everyone we meet, even if those people are different from ourselves. May this work help in some capacity to create awareness about immigrants arriving in the USA.

CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In Chapter One, I describe my journey as an educator, as a researcher, and as a community activist working alongside the Mexican community in a Midwest town. I share my own experience as a Mexican woman who immigrated in 1987, “taking a chance” on a new life, and I describe my own experiences in a new culture, my first jobs, then getting married and settling into a rural community. Yet even with my own experiences as an immigrant, I was still incredibly touched by the lives of the seven participants in my study. It was my close contact with the Mexican community and their passion, resilience, dedication, and love for their family that inspired me to do this narrative inquiry research. I can now add one more role to my journey – the storyteller. I begin this final chapter by describing why narrative inquiry is the best methodology for this study, because of the power of storytelling.

In the literature review, I described several themes that were present in each of the five books. After analyzing my own data, I found that the experiences of my seven participants also connected strongly to those themes. In this chapter, I include a section about the connections between narratives, in which I describe these overarching themes. These connections between narratives serve to depict the experiences of Mexican origin immigrants in the USA.

These connections include the importance of words in reference to the Hispanic and Latino community, as well as the various reasons why people emigrate. Next, I discuss the role of researcher, as there was a significant connection between myself and the authors and researchers described in the literature review. Much like Valdés, (1996), Carger, (1996), Cornejo Villavicencio (2020), my life became intertwined with my participants as a result of this study. Other connections between narratives include family and gender roles, the importance of education, faith and religion,

and the shared feeling of living between two worlds. I then make connections regarding the challenges, fears, and resilience of everyone in this study.

After these connections, I present implications for research, such as a larger group of participants, exploration of Hispanic peoples from other countries of origin, and multigenerational research. In the implications for theory, I discuss my use of narrative inquiry as a member of the community that I researched. I then present implications for practice, including the encouragement for educators to incorporate first-person narratives in their teaching, and I conclude this study with my hopes for the future.

8.1 The Power of Narrative Inquiry

In Chapter Three, I described the methodological framework of the study. I shared in detail the research phenomenon, the questions, the context of the participants and the data collection details. I also described my role as the narrative inquirer. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed a method of narrative inquiry in which the researcher collaborates with his or her participants over a period of time. All this is done to be able to better understand the participants' experiences. For the scope of this research and to be able to draw a better picture of the lived experiences of Mexican-origin immigrants, narrative inquiry seemed to be the best fit. It is through the narratives of the participants that the reader can develop a better understanding of who these immigrants are, what they go through, struggles they encounter, and what they consider to be successes in their lives. In other words, it is my hope that readers can better perceive the identity of these individuals from their own perspectives, rather than the limited scope of academic articles or how the media wrongly portrays them (Campbell, 2015; Winders, 2016).

I found narrative inquiry to be the best approach for this research based on the detailed information the participants felt comfortable sharing with me (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000;

Riessman, 2008). Their comfort and familiarity allowed me to capture their journeys in their own words about the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of their immigration into the USA, as well as their current reality and what they are planning for their futures and the futures of their children. The interviews were conducted in Spanish to respect the participants' mother language and the fact that they are all mostly monolingual in Spanish. In this way, I could gather their most authentic and complete stories, in their own words, with the emotions they could only reveal in their native language. The interviews took place in the church that we all attend. This is their natural setting, as it is a place that has proven to be safe for them, their spiritual home away from home.

Through their narratives, the participants shared how difficult the immigration decision has been in their lives, which reflects a common experience of many immigrants in the USA (Carger, 1996; Cornejo Villavicencio, 2020; Jiménez, 1997; Valdés, 1996). Not only are they afraid to make this life-changing move, but they are also afraid of the unknown. They do not know if they are going to make it alive to the other side of the border. If they do make it to the USA, these immigrants do not know the new language or culture (Carger, 1996). They have a dire need to find a better way of life, and many of them die in the journey. Some of them die once they live in the USA without any family members nearby to claim their remains (Cornejo Villavicencio, 2020). Needless to say, this is not an easy journey or decision for them. They know they can lose their lives, but their needs are so great that they risk everything for this transition. It is my hope that this narrative inquiry reflects the heart of the people with this unique experience, and that it is valued and respected while at the same time helps to create awareness of the backgrounds of these immigrants in the USA.

8.2 Connections between Narratives

In Chapter Two, I describe a small sample of the extant academic literature that addresses demographic information and aspects of the identity of Mexican and other Hispanic immigrants in the USA. From this literature review, I realized that academic articles did not deeply portray the experiences of these first-generation immigrants from Mexico. This is why the reader can see that this dissertation is significantly different from a typical academic study. Rather than doing a more typical literature review, I moved beyond academic journals to review several books that depict in detail who Hispanic immigrants in the USA really are. This was done in order to answer my research questions: *What is the general demographic and background information for each participant?*, *What were the participants' early experiences of arriving in the USA?*, and *What are the participants' current and future plans now that they live in the USA?* The five books I thoroughly reviewed helped me understand immigrant experiences, their tireless work ethic, their empathy towards other people in need regardless of their place or origin, the importance of family in their lives, their humbleness, and their incredible resilience. This is what I want my readers to feel as they engage in the stories of my participants' lives. The themes found in each book, as discussed in the literature review, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Themes from the Five Books Discussed in the Literature Review*

Author	Book Title	Themes
Valdés (1996)	<i>Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools, An Ethnographic Portrait</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • researcher as insider • school performance and defining success • living in fear • living between two worlds • strong women
Carger (1996)	<i>Of Borders and Dreams: A Mexican-American Experience of Urban Education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the researcher's relationship to the participants • the importance of education
Jiménez (1997)	<i>The Circuit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family • the importance of education • resilience and perseverance • faith
Cornejo Villavicencio (2020)	<i>The Undocumented Americans</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the researcher's relationship with her participants • family • faith and religion • challenges and dreams
Cisneros (1984)	<i>The House on Mango Street</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family • success and a better life • home • faith

I dedicate Chapters Four through Seven to the participants by giving each family an entire chapter to share their narratives in detail. Those chapters are dedicated to Guadalupe and Juan Pablo, Estefany and David, Maria and Chino, and Isabel. Each one of those chapters includes their General Demographic Information, Early Experiences in the USA, Current Life and Future Plans, and at the end of each chapter I included my Researcher Journal Notes and a summary for each family.

In the following pages, I describe the connections between the academic literature, the themes in the books I reviewed that explored immigrant lives in depth, and the narratives I generated from the participant interviews. It is my hope that through the connections I made across these narratives, the reader may more deeply understand and appreciate the lives of Mexican immigrants in the USA. This is the core of my argument for the inclusion of narratives like this one in the research literature. This is my contribution to the effort that is needed to create a more hospitable environment for Mexican origin immigrants, and *all* immigrants, who come to the USA and wish to find a home and a place to belong.

8.2.1 The Importance of Words

Based on my review of academic articles, I recognize and emphasize the importance of words or terminology describing Spanish speaking individuals. According to the executive summary of the 2011 National Survey of Latinos (NSL) (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2012), not all of these individuals consider themselves “Hispanics” or “Latinos,” but of the two, they prefer Hispanics. Their true preference, however, is to be defined by their place of origin; for example, people from Mexico prefer to be called Mexicans instead of Hispanics or Latinos. These individuals are proud of their culture and heritage.

This linguistic preference was reflected in my study, as all the participants proudly consider themselves Mexican, not Hispanics, Latinos, or Latinx. All of them spoke about their love for their heritage, their culture, and even though they welcome their children’s new dual reality as Americans, they continue to teach and encourage their children to learn about their inherited Mexican culture. It is important for everyone to become better acquainted with this terminology, as the 2020 Census projects that by 2060, almost 30% of the entire US population will be Hispanic (Vespa, Medina, & Armstrong, 2020), most of whom will be of Mexican descent (Israel &

Batalova, 2020). As I discussed in the literature review, the media has portrayed these immigrants in derogatory ways. For example, in his presidential campaign, Donald Trump referred to Mexicans as the “worst elements” and as rapists, drug runners, and criminals, and he stated that they bring “tremendous infectious disease.” He repeatedly proclaimed that by building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, this “problem” could be solved (Campbell, 2015; CBS News, 2015; Winders, 2016). This rhetoric increased the negative opinions of people who feel that Mexican immigrants are inferior. This also led to greater discrimination and hostility toward the Hispanic/Latino population in the USA (Newman, Shah, & Collingwood, 2018), which was experienced by the authors of the literature and the participants in my study.

8.2.2 Why People Emigrate

The participants in my study reflect the findings of Van Hook and Glick (2020), whose ten years of research found that the reasons people emigrate to the USA are primarily for taking a new job, joining their families who already live in the USA, or because they find themselves in danger in their country of origin. We see this familiar pattern in *The Circuit*, Jiménez’ (1997) touching first-person narrative of his family’s persistent search for work and better lives. They were willing to risk their lives to move to the USA and take on migrant work, moving from one area to the next with the changing of the seasons and the crops.

For my participant Estefany, it was difficult for her to leave her elderly parents behind, but she emigrated to join her husband, David. For David, it was difficult as he had never left his small rural town in Mexico. Yet they were willing to make this major move in search of a better life. Maria emigrated to join her late husband because she knew how important it was for them to have more financial stability for themselves and their children to come. Even though it was difficult for

her to live with her husband's family, and she was not treated kindly, they survived and had a better financial life for their family in the USA.

Isabel and her two young daughters joined her husband who had emigrated to California the year before. They experienced many difficulties and hardships in their immigration journey because the two little girls had to cross the border with two strangers at a different time than Isabel and her husband. Their dire need of a better life was their motivation to continue with their decision to emigrate. Similarly, Guadalupe and Juan Pablo decided to emigrate together in search of a better life. Guadalupe emigrated as a tourist and overstayed her visa, and Juan Pablo crossed with great difficulties through the mountains.

Chino also moved to find a new job and was motivated to be able to offer his mother a home of her own, which he could never have done while living in Mexico. Once he started working in the USA and met Maria, who was widowed, they worked to offer the best life they are able to for Maria's children. All the participants in this study aimed for a better life for themselves, and to be able to offer better opportunities of education and economic success to their children, as well as to support their family members who stayed in Mexico.

8.2.3 The Researcher's Role

In my exploration of the literature, I found that not only were my participants similar to the authors, participants, characters in the books I reviewed, but my experience as researcher was also similar to the experiences of some of the authors, especially Carger (1996) and Valdés (1996). Carger's (1996) book *Of Borders and Dreams: A Mexican-American Experience of Urban Education*, describes her work with Alejandro Juárez, the child of a Mexican origin family living in Chicago. Carger began as Alejandro's ESL teacher, and as she became more aware of his situation, she became an advocate and mentor for the child and his family. Valdés' (1996) book,

Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools, An Ethnographic Portrait, follows ten Mexican origin families living in a border town in the US. Her Mexican heritage helped her to gain entry with her participants, who saw her as an insider.

Valdés, Carger, and I started as researchers and writers, but we became part of our participants' families, and they became part of ours. Valdés was born in Mexico like her participants, and this is also the case for myself and my participants, allowing us many commonalities. One commonality is the fact that as an immigrant, we never know if we are going back to Mexico. Also, we are raising families in a totally different context to that in which we were raised. This creates an emotional bond with others who have a similar experience, making us develop a close, family-like relationship. As researchers, we became part of our participants' lives, in many cases becoming a *Comadre* to the parents and a *Madrina*, or Godmother, to the children. Like myself, Valdés was very much part of the community where she conducted her research. Though Carger was not born in Mexico, her involvement with Alejandro and his family was enough for her to also become a *Madrina* to Alejandro as well as a trusted source his family would consult when they had important decisions to make.

This bond experienced with the members of Mexican communities in the USA cannot be explained in an academic article; instead, the lives of these people can best be expressed through their narratives. We do not often hear the voices of these underrepresented communities in academic writings, so it is unique to be in a position in which these participants feel comfortable enough to share their most vulnerable stories. Valdés, Carger, and I took years to establish rapport with our participants, which gives us as writers a sense of responsibility to portray our participants' stories adequately and respectfully.

8.2.4 Family and Gender Roles

Another major connection across the narratives in the books I reviewed and the narratives of my participants is the importance of family for Mexican origin immigrants living in the USA. This is particularly apparent in Jiménez' (1997) book, which beautifully depicts the lives of immigrant workers who follow what they call "the Circuit," meaning they move from place to place to find agricultural work. Jiménez truly speaks from his heart because he is describing his family's life in his collection of short stories aimed for teens and young readers, yet suitable for all readers who want to understand the experiences of immigrants. Jiménez' story is relevant because he represents the voice of millions of other children of immigrants. He describes in detail what he and his family went through as they crossed the border undocumented, and how they arrived to California with no place to live. Even though Jiménez and his family were from a humble background, they stressed the importance of a strong family bond. Reflecting the other themes of this study, Jiménez's parents encouraged their children to pursue their education, and they had a strong spiritual devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Just like in *The Circuit*, the works of Valdés (1996), Carger (1996), and my own research share the importance of family. Though many families are barely able to meet their basic needs, they make sure their children's special occasions do not go unnoticed, even if this means reaching out to members of the community to help with the expenses of Baptisms, First Communion, *Quinceañeras*, weddings, or graduations. It is common to designate *Madrinas* and *Padrinos* (sponsors) for these events, and those special people become *Compadres* and *Comadres* to the parents. It is both a privilege and an honor to be asked to be a *Madrina* or a *Padrino*, because one is trusted by the family to support their children if they ever need anything. I humbly share that my husband Jim and I have been asked to be a *Madrina* and a *Padrino* for many children in our community, which also means that Jim and I have many *Comadres* and *Compadres* in the

community. It is a special bond that makes us feel as if we are brothers and sisters to our *Comadres* and *Compadres*, making members of the community feel as if they are not alone, even if they do not have any blood family around.

In addition to strong family values, readers can observe the strength and value that women play in the lives of Mexican origin immigrants, as shown in *Con Respeto* (1996), *Of Borders and Dreams* (1996), *The Circuit* (1997), *The House on Mango Street* (1984), and my own research. The mothers in these stories are genuinely and intentionally involved, and they are the strongest support in the lives of their husbands and children. Mexican origin families have clear traditional gender roles. Among the participants of my study, most men provide financially for their homes. The women, even those like Maria who work outside the home, still tend to the household chores and take care of the children's needs before and after work.

My findings also show how these gender roles played in the decision to emigrate from Mexico to the USA. Nobles and McKelvey (2015) found that not only do men make the decision to emigrate, but women are generally not taken into consideration in making this decision. Nobles and McKelvey (2015) document that if it was up to the woman in the household, immigration to the USA would not happen; furthermore, if the woman of the household took the financial responsibility, they would not have to had to emigrate. Five out of my seven participants have similar characteristics. Isabel, with her two little girls in tow, followed her husband and father as they crossed undocumented with a great deal of difficulty. Estefany, though sad to leave her elderly parents in Mexico, followed David after his decision to emigrate. Maria followed her late husband and suffered hardships when she arrived in the USA and lived with her late husband's family. Though the men made the initial decisions to emigrate, the women play essential roles in their family homes.

8.2.5 Education

The next major connection among the literary works and the narratives of participants and myself is the importance of education. In her ethnographic work *Con Respeto*, Valdés (1996), found that the children of the Mexican immigrants were performing their academic work poorly because the teachers had negative perceptions about families who were originally from Mexico. According to Valdés (1996), these teachers mean well, but everyone would benefit from learning about the world of these immigrants instead of insisting on wanting to have these children of immigrants become more like the mainstream American children.

In my study, I learned that for every one of my participants, education is one of the most important aspects of their lives and the lives of their children. These participants prefer their children to be *bien portados* (well behaved), hard-working individuals, respectful, and to do well in school. They tell them that it is a lot easier to work with “your brains” instead of with “your hands.”

Guadalupe and Juan Pablo have different academic backgrounds. Guadalupe lived in a small rural town where they only had up to 12th grade of education, and she was able to complete 6th grade. Her main focus was to help her parents with the household chores and in their agricultural sowing and harvesting. Juan Pablo attended up to high school, even though he had to travel 15 kilometers away from his small rural town because they did not have any opportunities beyond elementary school. Though they did not have access to further their academic education, Guadalupe and Juan Pablo support and encourage their children to go as far as possible with their academic education.

Estefany and David also reflect this theme of the importance of education. Estefany completed prep school, which in USA terms is a technical school, but in Mexico students are able to conclude their academic education with a professional degree. She is now an Executive

Secretary. On the other hand, David's parents wanted to make sure he and his siblings completed their elementary education, and after that they dedicated their lives to sowing and harvesting. Estefany and David strongly encouraged their four sons to further their academic education as far as possible.

Maria was able to attend up to 5th grade, and her husband Chino was able to finish up to 6th grade. His parents could not afford to send him to the next highest school, so he had to leave school to work to be able to help his parents with the household expenses. Maria and Chino both want their children to do better than they did. Maria tells them that they can study anything they want, but she wants to make sure they further their education in whatever they have a passion to do.

Isabel is originally from a small rural town in Mexico with only an elementary school, so children needed to go far away to further their academic education. She was able to finish elementary school, which is up to 6th grade. Isabel and her husband made sure all their children completed the highest grades in school. Some of her children finished college and all of them are hard-working, responsible individuals.

My life has focused around academics since I was born, and it has not stopped. Both of my parents are retired college professors. My maternal grandmother and more than 90% of my aunts and uncles are involved in various aspects of the academic world. Both of my paternal grandparents had limited access to education as they grew up in the early 1900's, but nevertheless every one of my father's siblings are now teachers or professors. I am the oldest of three girls, and my parents put all their expertise and energy into teaching me. I started first grade at age five, already able to read and write, so the principal and teachers allowed me to move forward in my elementary school years. I was always the youngest in my class, and because my parents were teachers, they worked with me after school every day, so I was usually more academically advanced than my classmates.

I went to high school and then to a technical school to become an Executive Secretary and Private Accountant.

I arrived to the USA when I was 18 years old in 1987. As soon as I arrived, I attended English as a New Language class in addition to computer classes. I passed the GED then attended college in the Midwest where I obtained a BS in Business Administration and a BA in Spanish. After, I attended Purdue University where I pursued my MA in Hispanic Linguistics and where now I am now concluding my Ph.D. in Hispanic Linguistics. I realize that this is not the case for many Mexican origin immigrants in the USA. This is why I feel a sense of responsibility to humbly do my best on anything I do because indirectly I feel as if I am representing all those other immigrants who have amazing talents.

8.2.6 Faith and Religion

The next major connection between the narratives in the books I reviewed and my participants is that of faith and religion. When I was growing up in Mexico there were signs of religion everywhere, particularly Catholicism. I have had every Sacrament the Catholic faith calls for: Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Communion, Penance, Confirmation, Matrimony, and Anointing of the Sick whenever it is needed. While I was growing up, all of this was part of my everyday life. When Jim and I married, he was Catholic, and two of his three daughters were already baptized in the Catholic church. I had a sense of responsibility to make sure the youngest was also baptized. We as a family continue to practice Catholicism, to the point that I have become one of the Catechists, teaching the faith to young people in the local church. When I was approached to serve the Hispanic community in the area, I did not hesitate to do it, because I knew there was a greater need of Catechists who are able to speak Spanish and who know the Hispanic culture. A leader from the Diocese (a district under the pastoral care of a Bishop in the Catholic

church) asked me to work at the Diocesan level, and I have been working alongside the Hispanic community since 2004. This is how I had the blessing to meet hundreds of Catholics who, like me, were looking for a spiritual home, including the participants of this study. This is where I am able to see the daily reality of all those immigrants who find themselves in a common place. It is our spiritual home where all of us belong, where we feel safe, respected, and valued.

For Guadalupe and Juan Pablo, their connection to the church goes above and beyond. He is the Director of the choir, and they are both Ministers of the Holy Eucharist, meaning they are formed to share the bread (Body of Christ), and the wine (Blood of Christ). They are Lectors, meaning they read God's Word, and they facilitate a formation for adults. They are the "*Pareja Guía*" (guide couple) for a special program that helps parents regain their leadership at home based on Scripture. As a result of this formation, many adults are finding more meaning in attending Mass, and they have changed their lives for the better. This couple also visits the sick and couples in crisis. They pray with them and help them understand that they are loved and that people care for them. Guadalupe and Juan Pablo also attend theology classes to further their knowledge of the Catholic faith. They are also part of a Diocesan team and part of a missionary team that travels throughout the Diocese to serve the people who recently emigrated or in the area for 4-6 weeks at a time following the circuit of harvesting in different camps throughout the country. Overall, this is a couple with an entire family dedicated to serve God in every way they can.

For Estefany and David, their connection with the faith has an additional special meaning. They met while attending Mass in their hometown in Mexico, so Mass became part of their dating stage, and they have been going to Mass together ever since. David and Estefany shared that going to Mass and everything related to the faith has been an important part of their upbringing and that is also what they have done for their children. They are both heavily involved on serving their

home parish however needed, such as visiting the sick and elderly to help with household chores or delivering food to those in need. David sings in the choir and heads the hospitality team, greeting every person entering Mass with his large sincere smile. Estefany is a Lector, sings in the choir, and decorates the church for Mass and events. Estefany and David are both involved also in the mission team that visits temporary immigrants in the agricultural camps.

In many similar ways, Maria and Chino are also greatly involved in serving their church community. They also support diocesan efforts by doing mission work with the temporary immigrants in the agricultural camps, and Maria is chair of the group of Hispanic women of the parish. Maria and Chino encourage Maria's children and grandchildren to have all their Sacraments in order and they asked Jim and I to be *Madrina* and *Padrino* to one of their daughters. Maria and Chino are our *Compadres*.

Isabel is an icon in her church community, as she dedicates her life to serve the church. She serves in many of the same ways as the other participants, and she makes hundreds of tamales to help support opportunities to help the more vulnerable. She is also part of the missionary team to serve temporary immigrants. She strongly encourages her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren to have all their Sacraments.

Faith and religion are present in all of the texts I reviewed for this work. For example, in *The Circuit*, Jiménez (1997) promised to pray every day for a year until the child, *Trampita*, was healed from his illness. The family trusted in God and Blessed Mother, praying to the little picture of *La Virgencita* they carried everywhere they went. In *The Undocumented Americans*, Cornejo Villavicencio (2020) carries a Rosary with her and prays that God will protect her when she travels to any place where she does not feel safe. For Mexican origin immigrants in the USA, there is always evidence of their strong faith, such as the ever-present image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

8.2.7 Living Between Two Worlds

While reflecting upon my own life, the literary works I reviewed, and the narratives of my participants, I also feel that the concept of “living between two worlds” was a key connection to understanding the experiences of Mexican origin immigrants. In her introduction to *Con Respeto*, Valdés (1996) described her participants as living “between two worlds” (p. 1). I also described how this term resonates with me so strongly, as I often find myself caught between my two worlds of Mexico and the United States. This is also the case in *The House on Mango Street* by Cisneros (1984), who portrays the life of a 12-year-old daughter of immigrants living in Chicago. Cisneros describes the emotional struggles the family goes through because they are not “the right kind of immigrants” (PBS NewsHour, 2015). One part of her narrative that especially resonates with me is when she shares that because a person has an accent when they speak, sometimes they receive comments such as, “Why don’t you go back where you came from?” When my husband and I travel to Mexico for vacation, US friends say, “I bet you cannot wait to go back home!” I do not know how to react to this, because I have spent the majority of my lifetime in the USA. I do not consider going to Mexico as “going back home,” but I also do not feel fully “at home” when I am in the USA since I am proudly of Mexican origin. Along with the authors of the books I reviewed and the people they wrote about, we live in a continuous two-world reality. This dichotomy was also experienced by my seven participants.

The participants in these studies and literary characters feel proud of their place of origin, while at the same time are trying to make the best life with their current reality of living in a different country than the one they grew up in. These families intentionally embrace and treasure the opportunities that the USA has to offer to their families. They want their children to be the best they can be, finding success through education and promising careers. These families ensure that

Mexican traditions are followed to the best of their abilities in their homes and communities, while at the same time they encourage their children to be a responsible part of their American lives.

8.2.8 Challenges, Fears, and Resilience

Another major connection that emerged from the literature and my participants' narratives is the challenges they have faced and the fears they carry. Cornejo Villavicencio (2020), for example, shares her own struggle with mental health and highlights challenges with the mental wellbeing of the immigrants that most people would never read about. I found this part to be particularly interesting because even though my participants did not explicitly talk about mental illness, they all shared their ongoing fears. A major fear is that of getting caught and deported, just as Jiménez (1997) experienced in *The Circuit*. Undocumented immigrants live in constant anxiety as they try to cope with their new realities. On the positive side, when Cornejo Villavicencio (2020) writes about her parents, she does not hesitate to say how proud she is of who her parents are, and this is a sentiment shared by the millions of children of immigrant parents.

All the participants in my study shared their most vulnerable fears and challenges they face on daily basis. Chino expressed his constant worry that his neighbors could call the immigration office on him. Isabel detailed her and her husband's fear of losing their children when they crossed the border and once they started living in the USA. Not one of them knew if they were going to make it alive when they endured their immigration journey. David spoke about his fear and anxiety when he was assigned a new job at a butcher shop and his coworkers were constantly making fun of him. All the participants spoke about the guilt they felt when they left their parents behind, and in some cases, they even left their children. All of them spoke about their sadness to not have the same sense of security and freedom they felt when they lived in Mexico, and they miss their families terribly.

For Guadalupe and Juan Pablo, being part of their new reality has not been easy. Once they started having children, they realized that their children, though born and raised in the USA, had to face struggles of people who are not accepting of people who are different. Nevertheless, this has never stopped Guadalupe and Juan Pablo from helping and serving others in need. They have educated their children to respect everyone they come across them regardless of their origin or social economical background.

For Estefany and David it is no different. In his various jobs, David had to overcome the comments and treatments of others, yet his smile and warm personality has never left him. Estefany's heart has always been in two different places at the same time. She wanted to be with her husband and raising their children in the USA, while at the same time, it was difficult for her not being in Mexico for her parents when they needed someone to take care of them. Even though they have confronted difficult situations in many aspects, they are now a well-respected family in the community and very much liked by everyone who knows them.

Maria had a rough path. She took care of her late husband in the nursing home when the doctors could not do more for him, and she ran home to take care of her children and continued to work cleaning homes to be able to support the family, all while trying to learn English. After she met Chino, they dealt with people having an opinion on their relationship and the fact that she was married before. Chino lives constantly in fear of being deported and he does not easily trust people he meets, not even his neighbors. Even though he is no longer undocumented, the fears do not disappear. All of this does not stop Maria and Chino from helping others; their challenges allow them to understand that everyone goes through some kind of struggle, and they want to make sure others do not have to go through it if they can avoid this for them.

Isabel has had many challenges from the moment she crossed the border. She worked 12-14 hours shifts in the agricultural sector in all kinds of weather conditions, and she had to go home to cook, clean, and take care of her children and her dying husband. Even though Isabel faced many challenges and fears, her great big welcoming smile has never disappeared. She gives everyone a sense of belonging, and you can always see her smiling, singing, and dancing!

I have also experienced many of my own fears and challenges. At first it was the fact that I did not know the language or the culture. When I arrived at my aunt's home, I felt welcomed but also missed my own family terribly. I was in a totally new atmosphere and at a very vulnerable stage. I worked 12 hour shifts at any job I could find, and I attended English as a New Language classes and computer classes. When Jim and I got married, I was concerned about living in a new place where only two other people around us were not American born. I was concerned not to be liked or not to fit in this new community. I was concerned not to be able to raise Jim's daughters properly. All of this while I still missed Mexico and all the family and the comfortable life I left behind.

All of this has made the Mexican immigrants in our community feel like a family, thinking of each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are happy when things go well for each other and accompany each other when someone is facing a difficult situation such as the death of a family member. We try to be present for each other for all life throws at us. We are a close-knit community that wants to have the most meaningful lives we can, given the circumstances. We do not want to hurt or bother anyone. We just try our best for us and for everyone we encounter regardless of their place of origin.

8.2.9 Summary of Connections

The participants of my study, the participants and characters in the books, and the various authors and researchers share many characteristics in common. All of them consider family to be their top treasure and their resilience continues to be their strongest trait. These immigrants are hard-working and strong-willed. Even though they all go through so many hardships, they all seem to make it through the best way they can. Even those who are emotionally hurt or damaged find the best way they can to survive and try to make a better life for themselves and for everyone around them. These immigrants never lose hope; they are intentionally involved with their spiritual beliefs in order to make it through. They feel and believe that they are accompanied by God, so their struggles do not have to be dealt with alone. All my participants shared that the concept of “success” is to have well-behaved children who are responsible members of society, children that are hard-working and concerned about their parents’ and grandparents’ well-being. Many of these Mexican origin immigrants have limited financial resources and limited academic background, but they are nevertheless proud of who they are and what they have accomplished as a family.

8.3 Implications for Research

As I worked through the different stages of my dissertation, I saw how the demographics changed in my local area. A substantial number of new Hispanic-origin immigrants have arrived in the region where I live and work. The majority of them are arriving from Honduras and El Salvador, which is a new reality in the area. This change is significant because those immigrants arrive with a work permit status and start jobs upon their arrival. There is a great amount of animosity from the well-established Mexicans, some of whom have been in the area for almost 20 years, and they are still not allowed to have legal residency immigration status. Thus, local employers prefer to give any available jobs to the people from Honduras or El Salvador, which

causes a negative reaction from Mexicans who have been working diligently to keep their jobs. Some of the Mexican employees shared that they live “in the shadows” because due to their immigration status, they do not want to be identified. They resent the fact that the newly arrived employees from Honduras or El Salvador do not appreciate that they can work and have the freedom to be seen in society. The mainstream American-born society often lumps “Hispanics” into one group, but they do not care to understand that to Hispanics, we are all different, just as Cornejo Villavicencio helped illustrate. Hondurans, Salvadorians, and Mexicans have a similar language, but their traditions, cultures, and life experiences are very different. Future research could explore the stories of these new immigrants in the area, to help generate further understanding of the people who make up this community.

Additionally, future research could be multigenerational. The participants in my study all emigrated from Mexico to start new lives in the USA and create better futures for their children. I wonder what the stories of their children would be, those who were born and raised in the United States. How would the perspectives of those children living in this country compare to those of their parents and grandparents? A future narrative inquiry could explore the stories of second- and even third-generation Mexican Americans. Not only would this help generate a stronger cultural understanding from non-Mexican US citizens, but it would also help create more understanding within the Mexican-origin community from one generation to the next. A particular aspect that would make for informative research would be to focus on specifically on language and how it is used among family members of different generations.

The participants in my study are originally from Mexico, are first-generation immigrants, and have similar socioeconomic and academic backgrounds. All of them are Catholic and have children. I wonder what the narratives would be like with any variant to this group. The Catholic

faith and rich church community is a major part of the lives of these families. Future research could explore immigrants from other religions or who do not have a home church. Researchers could also study immigrants of different socio-economic backgrounds to see if there are still many shared experiences or significant differences in the lives of people who emigrated with stronger financial opportunities. Perhaps people who work in white collar jobs have a different experience from those who are farm workers in terms of how they are perceived and treated by mainstream Americans. This also suggests that research in different regions of the USA could yield insights as to how immigrant experiences differ.

A limitation of my study to address in future studies would be to include more participants. The number of participants was suitable for my narrative inquiry because I was able to spend significant time with each participant, hear their stories in their native language, translate the interviews to English, and analyze their stories deeply. The reality of my participants is similar to so many thousands of Mexican origin immigrants. More work needs to be done to properly represent the true reality of their identities. They are members of society who contribute significantly to the growth of the USA, and their presence and work should be well represented in the academic literature. The more we all can understand the stories of the people, not just the generalizations and stereotypes, the more we can appreciate them as humans, their needs, how to support them, how to work with them, and how to see them not as a burden but as a blessing to this country.

8.4 Implications for Theory

As Wolcott (1994) suggests, my purpose in this study is to “let the data speak for themselves” (p. 10). By highlighting my findings and making connections to the literature and my own experience, my goal is not to advance theory, but to shed light on a significant problem

through the use of descriptive data. I wish to bring forth these stories with the hope that mainstream Americans will recognize the importance of understanding Mexican origin immigrants as so much more than the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media. By identifying relationships and patterns among the participants' stories, the selected literature, and my own life experiences, I use the power of storytelling to motivate readers to continue to develop a better understanding of these unique people.

This research also contributes to narrative inquiry theory. I went in depth into the lives of my immigrant participants, a much neglected, marginalized population in the USA. Narrative inquiry is growing as a method for understanding marginalized populations, bringing the voices of these populations forward so we can better understand their experiences (Phillion, 2002). I was able to do this successfully because I already had an existing relationship with the participants, and the relationships were based on trust and reciprocity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I imagine this would not be the same result for another researcher, such as a white, American-born academic. The participants trusted me, and with this trust they were willing to confide in me and share the most vulnerable aspects of their immigration journey, their current lives, the dangers and challenges they face, and their resilience in overcoming obstacles. Trust had already been built over the years, and they could share all they wanted knowing that their information was going to be handled with the utmost respect and confidence.

Another reason this research was successful in the goals I wanted to achieve, is because I speak not only the same language as my participants, but the same variety of Spanish. It helped that all of us are from Mexico, and I can identify the different dialects of Mexican Spanish spoken throughout the country. This research would not be the same if someone from another language attempted to conduct it. In narrative inquiry, the researcher collaborates directly with participants

over an extended period of time in order to understand their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The relationships and connections I had with my participants as member of their group enabled me to establish a unique rapport with them. I was able to truly observe and interview these people in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and obtain verbal narratives directly from the perceptions of the participants (McMillan, 2008; Saldaña, 2011). With an outside researcher, these participants likely would not talk, would feel suspicious, and would not be able to fully convey their rich narratives if not speaking in their native language to a trusted, respected, member of their community.

8.5 Implications for Practice

The themes derived from my participants, the literature, and my own life represent the experiences of so many Mexican origin immigrants throughout the world. This work is a loving argument and a plea for mainstream Americans to move beyond negative stereotypes of immigrants to not only tolerate, but truly appreciate the contributions of these beautiful peoples. They are humans with complex lives, hopes and dreams, challenges, and fears. They work hard and contribute significantly to the US economy. According to the US Department of Labor (2021), the number of Hispanic workers in the labor force was 29 million in 2020 and is projected to reach 35.9 million in 2030. Furthermore, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2030, Hispanics will account for one out of every five workers in the labor force (US Department of Labor, 2021). Based on my experience working for more than 30 years alongside Mexican origin immigrants, I can say that these official numbers are not always accurate because many undocumented immigrants are not accounted for. Thus, the projected numbers for 2030 could easily be the actual number at this time. Because of their undocumented status, these immigrants are often viewed negatively, yet they *want* to become US citizens. If members of our society can better understand

the goals and experiences of these strong-willed, family-oriented, hardworking people, then efforts would be made to help them achieve their goal of citizenship.

This work is especially important for educators. I believe K-12 teachers and college professors should intentionally incorporate stories of immigrants from Mexico, as well as so many other parts of the world, into their classroom literature. Just as US students grow up reading Mark Twain, they should also read Sandra Cisneros. Just as they read stories of children growing up in the US like *Little Women* or *the Boxcar Children*, they should also read about Francisco Jiménez. The works chosen for this study are only a sample of the many incredible works of literature written by and about Mexican and Mexican American children, families, and communities. When teachers and school librarians explore the literature to choose books for their classrooms and schools, they should make a concerted effort to incorporate such works. If children are exposed to more diverse stories, they will develop a greater understanding of *all* the people who make up this country.

Teachers too should develop an understanding of the lives of these immigrants, as many of their students come from such backgrounds. In fact, required reading in pre-service teacher education programs should include Valdés (1996) book *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools, An Ethnographic Portrait*. When teachers better understand the everyday lives of their students and their families, the more effective their teaching will be. With greater understanding and support, children of Mexican-origin immigrants will be prepared to make meaning and beautiful contributions to American society.

As I have worked through this study, I have remained heavily involved with my local parish and the Catholic Diocese. Church leaders have been aware of my research, recognized the importance of it, and invited me to take on a new role as the Multicultural Competence Specialist

for the Diocese. In this role, I travel to different parishes throughout the area and speak with church leadership teams about the integration of different cultures, including the psychological, spiritual, and practical aspects of their integration. Once the church leaders understand these people, they can better support them and integrate them into the congregation, and the immigrants then have greater chances to contribute to the community. This study was essential to my work in this new role, and it can be used to inform practice for others carrying on similar types of work. Understanding newcomers' stories can help leaders create action steps for integrating them into their congregations, workplaces, schools, local government, and other organizations.

8.6 Conclusion

It is my hope that everyone feels safe and respected. Every person regardless of their demographic background and place of origin has what I call "a backpack" that he or she continuously carries. Those "backpacks" are full of fears, insecurities, bad experiences, abandonment, guilt, limitations, emotional scars, any many more challenges. Why as humans do we judge, minimize, disrespect, and emotionally hurt others? For much of the content inside those "backpacks" are more than likely not their fault and they are just trying to be the best they can be with what they have. What are we teaching the new generations? It is not in their best interest to still separate or look down upon those who are different than they are. Based on official demographic statistics, more and more people from other countries will continue to emigrate into the USA. All of them are leaving their countries of origin with so many emotional and financial struggles. Why not be the helping hand? Why not use everyone's gifts and talents to try to have a better society? This is everyone's responsibility, whether you see it or not. The new generations are learning what the adults in their lives teach them. If you are in a position of leadership, you

have an amazing opportunity to help the younger generations have a more peaceful, loving, caring society.

It is my hope that once the reader learns about these important differences, they understand that we are all human with dreams, hopes, struggles, happiness, and sadness. The world is becoming more and more global, and if we do not realize this, we are missing out on how to live life to the fullest. All of us have many gifts and talents we can share if we have an open mind, but most importantly, an open heart. Immigrants are more than numbers or statistics. They are souls full of dreams and resilience, and family is their pride and joy. They are humble, hardworking, and brave. The people featured in this dissertation opened their hearts and souls to share the most intimate parts of their journey. Even though they are immensely strong, they are also extremely fragile. Please handle with care.

APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: General demographic information

1. Please describe your home, your town where you originally come from.
2. How many were there in your family? Tell me about your family.
3. How did people make a living there?
4. Was there a school? Did you attend? What was your last grade attended there?
5. What do you miss about (name of town)?
6. Have you been back to (name of town)?
7. Do you stay in touch with your family? If so, how do you do it and how often?
8. When and how did you or (if you came as a child) the relatives you immigrated with decided to leave (name of town) for the United States?
9. Did you know any people who immigrated to the United States? If so, what did they tell you about life in the U. S.?
10. What were you looking forward to in the U. S.?

Research Question 2: Early experiences in the USA

1. How did you get to where you are now?
2. How long have you been in the USA?
3. Ever since you move to the USA, what has been your experience compared to the fears and hopes that you had prior to your arrival?
4. Are you working now? If so, where are you working now?
5. What language do you speak with those coworkers?

6. How do you get around to work or shop or visit a doctor's office or perform needed activities?
7. Who lives with you, and how are they related to you?
8. What is the main language you and your family speak at home?
9. What is your academic background now?
10. What is the rule at home as far as the language to be spoken at home?
11. How often do you visit your country of origin?

Research Question 3: Current experiences and future plans

1. What have been some of the accomplishments you have experienced individually and as a family since you arrived in this country?
2. How do you feel today in general about the USA compared to the time when you arrived?
3. What are your plans as far as where you see yourself living in the future?
4. What are your plans as far as going back to your country of origin staying in the USA?
5. Do you know any people who have decided to go back to their country of origin and intend to stay there? Why do you think they made that decision?
6. What are the future plans you have for yourself and for your family?
7. What regrets (if any) do you have about making the move?
8. Would you do it again knowing what you know now?
9. Have you encouraged others to make the move? If so, why? If not, why not?

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