Through The Eyes of A Bracero

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by

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Dicen por allí" or the word around town was that *"el Norte"* was in search of men to harvest the fertile lands of California. Jose Carmen Flores did not fully understand what it meant to travel to the United States as a contracted labor worker. The few things he did know was that *"prometieron un sueldo reasonable"* or a reasonable salary was promised and he would be away from home for no more than 3 to 4 months at a time. He registered as a bracero and quickly left behind his young wife and his not yet born first baby, Eufemio. He made the journey to *"el Norte"* in the company of other wishful men who believed that their prayers to *"la Virgen Maria"* were being answered. Finally reaching *"el Norte"* brought tears to his eyes, *"al fin llegue al pais de la esperanza,"* meaning he arrived to the hopeful country. After migrating for several years between *"el Norte"* and Mexico, Jose Carmen's hopes and dreams were shattered. *"El sueldo reasonable"* no longer held up to be true, and he was not paid for several of the jobs he conducted day in and day out.

Braceros were like-minded in that they brought with them a limited understanding as well as unreliable images of life in the United States.[1] Jose Carmen stated, *"fue difícil porque no tenia dinero para mandarle a Guadalupe,"* he did not have money to send back to Guadalupe, his wife. One may ask the question, who is Jose Carmen Flores? Why is he important? Not only is Jose Carmen Flores my grandfather, but what makes his experiences important is that they do and do not reflect those of other braceros.

[1] Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 94.

The Second World War mobilized the citizens of "*el Norte"* to win the war. With strength in numbers, millions of men from different social and economic backgrounds enlisted into the armed forces leaving behind jobs. Besides the soldiers who left to join the fight overseas, agricultural workers in "el Norte" left as well in search of better paying jobs. For example, "increasingly agricultural workers were lured away by the higher wages of rapidly expanding defense industries, especially in west coast cities."[2] To alleviate the labor shortage, on August 4, 1942, the governments of Mexico and the United States concluded an agreement, the first of several in the period of 1942-1958, under which braceros, contract laborers from Mexico, were to be imported to work on American farms.[3] After the first initial agreement between "el Norte" and Mexico, the Bracero Program was reinstated on two separate occasions. By the time the program was terminated in the mid 1960's, millions of Mexicans had participated.

Some historians have argued over the years that the Bracero Program has been hidden among the history of the Second World War. The Bracero Program helped *"el Norte"* win the Second World War. Erasmo Gamboa argues, "More than any other event, World War Two prompted an unprecedented effort to mobilize human resources toward the common goal of victory."[4] Besides being a help to winning the war, the Bracero Program initiated a wave of immigration of Mexicans to *"el Norte,"* ultimately changing the face of the country and California. Braceros and immigrants who lived in *"el Norte"* have drawn insufficient attention to their experiences in history books. Historian Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez has done extensive research on Mexicans during the Second World War in which she argues, "… there was a

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[2] Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Ribera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 173.
[3] Otey M. Scruggs, "Evolution of the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement of 1942," *Agricultural History* 34 (1960): 140.
[4] Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), xvii.

bittersweet reminder that these stories have too been omitted from other general historical treatments of World War II."[5]

My grandfather claims braceros were only good for their [farmers] own benefit. The braceros that came to "el Norte" faced the harsh reality of tough and dangerous working conditions, but for the most part it was a beneficial experience for farm owners. Historian Otey M. Scruggs states, "The workers came principally because American farm wages, low as they were, were two and three times higher than wages in underdeveloped Mexico."[6] Even though the farm wages were considerably higher, my grandfather does not share this fact because there were several times when he never received a paycheck. From extensive research, just about every single bracero was compensated for their efforts on the fields. The lack of recognition on behalf of historians, my goal is to raise awareness of my grandfather Jose Carmen Flores' experience. My argument will prove the lack of recognition, because my grandfather's journey to *"el Norte"* has never been heard of. I will demonstrate that my grandfather's experience is at times is typical and most importantly atypical of other braceros because he was a victim of unpaid labor and he wished to return to Mexico when so many braceros desired to stay.

II. FROM MEXICANO TO BRACERO

My grandfather was born and raised in a small farming community known as San Jose de Ornelas, Jalisco and at a young age he knew what it took to harvest the land. In order to become as a bracero my grandfather needed to register in the nearby town of Poncitlan, Jalisco. According to my grandfather Poncitlan was the nearest place for registration. Within a few of weeks of registering my grandfather and fellow braceros were called to service.

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[5] Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, *Mexican Americans and World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), x.
[6] Otey M. Scruggs, "The United States, Mexico, and the Wetbacks, 1942-1947," *The Pacific Historical Review* 30 (1961): 149.

My grandfather was under the impression that coming to *"el Norte iba a barrer dinero"* or in other words once arriving to "el Norte" he would sweep up money.[7] He quickly learned that his preconceived ideas were not what he expected. My grandfather first visited *"el Norte"* as a contracted laborer in 1957 during the wave of the second installment of the Bracero Program. After interviewing him I was able to gain a grasp about what it meant and was like to make the decision of working in *"el Norte."* The demands of farmers and supervisors were through the roof. During my interview with my grandfather he said that many of the farm supervisors who were of Mexican decent made strict demands. If they were picking oranges the supervisor wanted only oranges from the bottom of the tree and not from the top. What infuriated my grandfather was the fact that a *"Mexicano quien nacio en el Norte se portara racista con su misma gente."*[8] My grandfather did not know anyone in *"el Norte"* and he assumed that all *"Mexicanos"* would be in it together.

As a bracero, my grandfather never stayed on a single farm during his stay in *"el Norte,"* the longest he ever stayed on a farm was for four months. When he came to a new farm the braceros were escorted to their living quarters followed by a short orientation by a supervisor who explained how the farm owner wanted the job done. According to my grandfather, approximately 300 to 400 braceros worked and lived on the farm. The men were thrown into a large living space and each bracero has a small bed to sleep on. Historian Erasmo Gamboa states that, "overall, the braceros' quarters provided little more than a rudimentary place to sleep."[9] Even though the living quarters was dirty, smelly, and cold it was one less worry for braceros because they did not have to pay to live there. Unlike the free living quarters, my grandfather

[7] Jose Carmen Flores, interviewed by Karina Flores, March 15, 2010.
[8] Jose Carmen Flores, interviewed by Karina Flores, March 15, 2010.
[9] Erasmo Gamboa, Mexican Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 92.

remembers paying for the food they ate. They were fed three times a day and it was simply subtracted from their paycheck every two weeks. When I asked my grandfather what the food was like he laughed and said *"estaba buena, a mi me gustaba"* in other words he said it was good and he liked it. The braceros were fed food that they knew very well such as meat, beans, and tortillas. For the three meals that they were fed it cost the braceros $2.50 per day.[10] Other braceros were not fortunate enough to have food prepared for them. According to bracero Delfino Alfredo Munoz Pacheco, *"Teniamos que preparer nuestra propia comida."*[11] This bracero claims that some of the farms they landed on required that you prepare your own food. Most of the braceros did not know how to cook, but if they wanted to eat they had to defend for themselves.

When my grandfather worked on a tomato farm in Sacramento, California he was paid 20 cents per box that he filled. He was only paid the 20 cents if and only the box met the requirements imposed by the farm supervisor. The farm supervisor was looking for a certain amount of tomatoes in the boxes and he also wanted the ripe tomatoes picked first and placed in the boxes. Even though the pay sounds relatively low for today's standards during this time for braceros it was more than they made back in Mexico. My grandfather had worked on farms in Mexico before he became a contracted laborer, but he said *"nunca pense que el trabajo que nos dieron seria tan estricto"* or I never imagined the job we had would be so strict.[12] The demands of farm supervisors and or farm owners are nothing of a surprise because the farm industry was not only crumbling due to the Second World War, but they could pay Mexican laborers what they wanted because they believed that they did not know any better. According to Marjorie S

[10] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 15, 2010.
[11] Delifino Alfredo Munoz Pacheco, interviewed by Mirella Losa, July 3, 2008.
[12] Jose Carmen Flores, interviewed by Karina Flores, March 15, 2010.

Zatz, "The Bracero Program satisfied demands for a cheap labor force."[13] Strong job performance was expected and received from braceros. Braceros were determined to perform to the best of their abilities even though at times the job demands led to work related injuries. When they [braceros] arrived, the men received little or no training or caution about the hazards of powerful moving equipment.[14] My grandfather recalls that some orientation of what was expected occurred, but mostly they were just thrown in the fields. The farmers' lack of attention to the safety of the braceros in the work place resulted in senseless disabling and sometimes fatal accidents.[15] Work related injuries came about from braceros that had little or no experience with the types of agriculture machinery.

Braceros typically worked 10 hours during the day leaving them with little time for themselves. Besides working all day, my grandfather and other braceros would go to the nearest bar and have a drink or two. When my grandfather went to the local bars for a drink his way of communicating with the bartenders was by pointing. My grandfather said that by pointing most people understood what you wanted. My grandfather never learned to speak English when he was in *"el Norte"* he claims it was not necessary because all of the farm supervisors and the cooks that worked on the farms were *"Mexicanos."*[16] Knowing that those closest around him spoke Spanish was a security net not only for my grandfather, but for the other braceros. The braceros were part of a close nit community were everyone looked out for each other. A lot of the men would sit in the barracks and tell stories about what life was like back in Mexico. Former bracero, Eligio Solorio Joaquin, explained in his interview that braceros killed time by

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[13] Marjorie S. Zatz, "Using and Abusing Mexican Farm Workers: The Bracero Program and the INS," *Law & Society Review,* 27 (1993): 859.
[14] Erasmo Gamboa, Mexican *Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest*, *1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 70.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.

playing cards and going into the nearby town to flirt with the local girls.[17] Being a bracero was hard for my grandfather, he traveled between Mexico and *"el Norte"* for over 10 years. Each time that he came back to *"el Norte"* it was harder to leave because he already had several children. His only motivation to be a bracero was to provide a good life for his children.

Towards the end of my grandfather's journey as a bracero, he was faced with a moment in his life that he vowed to never forget. During his stay in Stockton, California he worked on a peach farm for three months. During his stay my grandfather claims that the farm owner made sure that each bracero knew that each bin in which the peaches needed to be placed in only had a certain number. If one of the bins was not properly filled, the farm supervisor would stop the assembly line to inform the braceros that certain bins did not fulfill the demand.[18] The braceros at this farm were divided into groups and each was assigned to a certain location on the farm. Since there was no way of identifying who filled what peach bin, if a bin or several bins were not filled correctly the braceros in that location were responsible for staying longer to make up for the bins that were incorrectly filled.[19] My grandfather would become upset when this happened in his location of service.

During my interview my grandfather said that this peach farm left him with *"memorias muy oscuras"* or dark memories he would never forget. Towards the end of his stay in Stockton he looked forward to go back home with my grandmother Guadalupe and the kids, but when Friday came of that particular week he discovered that he would not be receiving a paycheck. The braceros were told that the farm was facing some difficult times and that their check would soon come, it would be just a matter of time. My grandfather said, *"Nunca pensamos que nos dirian que no habria un cheque, tenia much coraje pero nos aseguraron en un par de semanas*

[17] Eligio Solorio Joaquin, interview by Mirella Losa, June 26, 2008.
[18] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.
[19] Ibid.

tendriamos nuestro cheque." [20]My grandfather never imagined that this could happen to him, at that moment all he could feel is anger, but he believed them when the braceros were told that they would get there paycheck within a few weeks. According to my grandfather, weeks passed and they were never fully compensated for their hard work. The farm owner and supervisor told the braceros to return during their next return to *"el Norte,"* but all of them knew that their sweat and tears would go unpaid for. My grandfather never did anything about it because other braceros made complaints to the Mexican Consul, but nothing was ever done about it. Still hoping that he would be paid for his job he never left the peach farm until his contract was expired. He left Stockton with what he called *"una nube negra"* (with a dark cloud over his head). After doing extensive research, this particular experience was not heard of amongst braceros. Of course the other braceros on the farm unfortunately experienced this as well, but it seems that their experience is distinctive and inconvenient.

III. FROM BRACERO TO *"UN AMERICANO"*

The Bracero Program ended on December 31, 1964 with the help of President John F. Kennedy. John F. Kennedy, announced in 1963 that the program would soon end, said that braceros were "adversely affecting the wages, working conditions, and employment opportunities of our own agricultural workers."[21] Before the conclusion of the Bracero Program, my grandfather returned to Mexico. While in Mexico he came across a lawyer in Guadalajara, Jalisco who was known for helping braceros obtain their visas. With all the correct paperwork filled out my grandfather left Mexico with his visa. Before he returned to *"el Norte"* he already had been contracted to work on a farm. With a visa in his walled my grandfather managed to travel to *"el Norte"* without question. His years of being a bracero were long gone, but his

[20] Ibid.
[21] Philip L. Martin et al., *Managing Labor Migration in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 2006), 95.

motivation remained the same. As the family grew so did his pursuit to find the perfect job. He returned from Mexico in the spring of 1964 arriving in Delano, California as a grape picker where he was paid $1.35 per hour.[22] When my grandfather arrived he informed the farm owner and the farm supervisor that he was no longer a bracero, but that he had his visa. As my grandfather was telling me this story he said that many braceros had their visas already, at least the one he met as a grape picker.

The farm supervisor informed all employees that they must work 10 hours or more.[23] My grandfather was no stranger to the exploitation that occurred with all braceros, but it came to a point where he stood up for himself and others. The farm supervisor was born in Texas, came from Mexican parents, and even spoke Spanish. Besides demanding long hours, the farm supervisor demanded *"que todos los trabajadores teniamos que trabajar por un año allí."*[24] Even though the supervisor required employees to work there for a year, he went as far as to confirm that if employees did not work for the required year they would not be receiving their visas. Many of the employees did not quite understand why they needed to stay for a year, but my grandfather decided that he needed to do something about it.

My grandfather and the other employees arrived at the nearby immigration office where they told the immigration worker about the farm supervisor who was withholding their visas until they completed their first year on the job. The immigration worker informed my grandfather and the other men that they had no right to keep their visas away from them.[25] Feeling empowered by the information he gathered at the immigration office, my grandfather returned to the farm and demanded that his visa and the visas of the others be returned. I am not

[22] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.
[23] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

quite sure what the farm supervisor thought about the demand of my grandfather and others. During that conversation with my grandfather I was able to understand that my grandfather and the others walked away with their visas in their wallets and with their heads held up high.

After leaving Delano, California my grandfather traveled south to the Central Coast. He heard about jobs in where they were in search of workers. When my grandfather came to "el Norte" he did not know anyone, the only thing he attached to were his memories of "el campo" or the lands back home in Mexico. He made his way to Lompoc, California and took a job at a local nursery where he picked flowers. The job was reminiscent of him working in the fields where he picked tomatoes, oranges, peaches, or grapes. At this point in time, my grandfather was no longer a bracero, *"yo ya era un Americano y no necesito este trabajo."*[26] My grandfather was born and raised in Mexico and he never forgot where he came from, but he had a visa and he saw himself as an American and he believed that he did not need jobs like this. According to former bracero Vicente Campos Cruz, *"Aveces el trabajo era dificil y no nos gustaba, entonces ibamos en busca de otro trabajo."*[27] Bracero Vicente Campos Cruz like my grandfather made similar decisions because when the work became unbearable he and other braceros would gather their belongings and left to find a different job. He made his decision to leave the nursery in Lompoc and he even left without a paycheck. My grandfather had experienced what it was like to not receive a paycheck. When this happened to him as a bracero it enraged him, but he did not quit. His family was at the center of his fight.

After leaving the nursery in Lompoc, my grandfather made his way to Buellton, California and applied to work at the world famous Anderson's Pea Soup. He was hired to work in the kitchen where he was required to wash and clean pots and pans. My grandfather stayed at

[26] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.
[27] Vicente Campos Cruz, interview by Mirella Losa, 26 June 2008, Bracero History Archive.

the restaurant for several weeks. Every time he went to work he said, *"Me miraban con ojos de odio y teniamos que entrar por la puerta de atras."*[28] The people who entered the restaurant would look at him with hate in their eyes and those who worked in the kitchen were required to enter through the back door.

IV. *"SI SE PUEDE"* (YES WE CAN)

Known best for co-founding the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 1962, Cesar Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona on March 31, 1927. He was born to Librado Chavez and Juana Chavez of which who were of Mexican decent and migrant workers. As the Depression intensified and years of drought forced thousands off the land, the Chavez family lost both their farm and store in 1937.[29] At the age of 10, Chavez and his entire family traveled west to California settling in Delano, California. At the age of 17, Chavez entered in the U.S. Navy during the Second World War. After returning from the war, Chavez married Helen Fabela who he meet while he worked on a vineyard. Chavez and his wife moved to San Jose were they started their family. "He was just a farm worker, one of thousands, easily lost in a crowd, small of stature, quiet, self-effacing, soft-spoken, poorly educated." [30] Once in San Jose, "Cesar's life as a community organizer began in 1952 when he joined the Community Service Organization (CSO), a prominent Latino Civil Rights group.[31] As a prominent member of the Community Service Organization, Chavez urged farm workers to have their voices heard by registering to vote and he also spoke against the racial and economical discrimination that existed. His goal was to unionize farm workers by attacking aggressively using nonviolent tactics. During the mid-

[28] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.
[29] Rick Tejada-Flores, "Cesar Chavez," PBS, http://www.pbs.org/itvs/fightfields/cesarchavez.html (accessed May 2, 2010).
[30] Jacques E. Levy and Fred Ross, Jr., *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1.
[31] "American Hero," Cesar E. Chavez Foundation, http://chavezfoundation.org/_page.php?code=001001000000000 &page_ttl=American+Hero&kind=1 (accessed May 2, 2010).

1960s and early 1970s his union organized boycotts of California table grapes ad nonunion lettuce.[32] As Cesar Chavez traveled from city to city he spread his message to farm workers to unite and stand up. The farm worker supporters carried banners with the black eagle with HUELGA (strike) and VIVA LA CAUSA (Long live our cause).[33] The marchers wanted the state government to pass laws which would permit farm workers to organize into a union and allow collective bargaining agreements.

In May 1972, Chavez received devastating news in which he discovered that the Arizona State Legislature pushed through a bill that "denied farm workers the right to strike and boycott during harvest seasons, and effectively making it impossible for them to organize."[34]The news of the bill made the United Farm Workers upset and called to meet with the then Republican Governor Jack Williams to appeal for him to veto the new legislation. Governor Jack Williams denied them a meeting with him and quickly demanded that the bill be placed on his desk so he could sign it. Chavez who was dedicated to his fight went on a 25-day water-only fast, but it quickly took a toll on himself. With the news of the passing of the bill and Chavez's poor health, he was quickly approached by Latino labor and political leaders who encouraged him to stop what he was doing because the government could not be easily overridden. The Latino labor and political leaders told Chavez, "No, no se puede!" (No, no it can't be done"), they kept repeating in Spanish.[35] There were always setbacks that challenged the faith of labor right leaders, but Chavez never let any setback discourage him or the United Farmers, he announced to those closest to him that, *"Si se puede"* or Yes we can. For more than three decades Cesar led the first

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[32] Cesar Chavez, "The Organizer's Tale," *Ramparts*, July 1966, 43.
[33] United Farm Workers, "The Story of Cesar Chavez," http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/07.html (accessed May 1, 2010).
[34] United Farm Workers, "History of ¡Si Se Puede!," http://www.ufw.org/_board.php?mode=view&b_code=cc_his_research&b_no=5970&page=1&field=&key=&n=30 (accessed May 1, 2010).
[35]Ibid.

successful farm workers union in American history, achieving dignity, respect, fair wages, medical coverage, pension benefits, and humane living conditions, as well as countless other rights and protections for hundreds of thousands of farm workers.[36]

When my grandfather worked on a vineyard in Delano, California during the spring of 1964he was no longer a bracero because for the first time in his life he crossed the border with a visa in his wallet. Now that he was a legal citizen of *"el Norte"* my grandfather would have never imagined that the vineyard supervisor would demand the workers to work for one year. The vineyard supervisor also informed the workers if they did not stay for the required year he would not return their visas. The strict demands of the vineyard supervisor did not sit well with my grandfather that he did what he could to make sure he received his visa back and that he would not work for the required year. My grandfather was a bracero from 1957 until 1964 and during that time he endured several setbacks, but he never stood up for what he believed was right or wrong. He took what was given to him and accepted it. Historian Marjorie S. Zatz, argues that the Bracero Program "…was a system of contract labor whereby farmers could hire young Mexican men, pay them low wages, and send them back to Mexico when they were not needed." [37] The Bracero Program took advantage of innocent young Mexican men who endured serious hardships. If the Bracero Program took advantage of the Mexican farm laborers, why did they not do anything about it?

During the interview with my grandfather I asked him that same question and for a second he was not sure what to answer. He looked down towards the ground and I was not sure if I had asked the wrong question. I gave him a moment to gather his thoughts and he responded,

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[36] "American Hero," Cesar E. Chavez Foundation, http://chavezfoundation.org/_page.php?code=001001000000000 &page_ttl=American+Hero&kind=1 (accessed May 2, 2010).
[37] Marjorie S. Zatz, "Using and Abusing Mexican Farm Workers: The Bracero Program and the INS," *Law & Society Review,* 27 (1993): 851.

"Tenia mucho miedo de que me corrieran si decia de las ingusticias."[38] In other words my grandfather said he was terrified of being fired if he complained about the inequality he experienced. J. Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow have argued that for braceros "…a major portion of the year's income comes during the brief harvest period, workers are reluctant to risk their livelihood on a strike at that time."[39] The primary reason my grandfather became a bracero like others were because they believed that they would make a lot of money and with that money they could send it back to their families in Mexico. Jenkins and Perrow also argue that, "A majority of workers are interested primarily in the quick money."[40] When I asked my grandfather why he stood up for himself he told me that he did for only one reason and that was because *"ya no era un bracero, yo ya era un Americano y tengo mi visa."*[41] In other words, my grandfather claims he was no longer a bracero, he was an American, and he had a visa. My grandfather is a man struggled during my interview, talking about the bracero years was difficult for him. I do know for a fact that when my grandfather obtained his visa he believed that he could find a better paying job. I was able to conclude that the visa for my grandfather was a free ticket to the American dream.

The Farm Worker Movement fundamentally changed the Arizona and California agricultural industry with the dedication of Cesar Chavez and his followers. Chavez's successor, UFW President Arturo Rodriguez, thanked the president on behalf of the United Farm Workers and said, "Every day in California and in other states where farm workers are organizing, Cesar Chavez lives in their hearts. Cesar lives wherever Americans' he inspired work nonviolently for

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[38] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.
[39] J. Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow, "Insurgency of The Powerless: Farm Worker Movements (1946-1972)," *American Sociological Review* 42 (1977): 252.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.

social change." My grandfather was a bracero unitl 1964, but continued to stay in *"el Norte"* until 1970. During the interview with my grandfather he mentioned to me that he heard of a man by the name of Cesar Chavez. My grandfather said, *"Cesar andaba en pueblo en pueblo hablando de los derechos de los campesinos."*[42] My grandfather heard about Cesar Chavez from other braceros and migrant workers who told him that Chavez traveled from city to city raising awareness about farm worker rights. He also went on to say, *"La causa de Chavez si ayudo un poco, nos subieron el sueldo un poco."*[43] My grandfather claims that a Chavez's movement did help a little and his wages were increased. Unfortunately, my grandfather never came across Chavez, an encounter with Chavez' could have motivated my grandfather to do more about the exploitation he endured. At the same time, Cesar Chavez did not become well-known until the late 1960s and 1970s. My grandfather left *"el Norte"* in the spring of 1970 and his eyes never got to see the remarkable changes the fight of Chavez embarked.

V. THROUGH THE EYES OF ANOTHER BRACERO

Even though my grandfather never joined Cesar Chavez in his fight for higher wages, better working conditions, and farm worker equality; a close family member promised to continue the fight. Paulino Pacheco or also known as Pauline by family and friends ran the Santa Maria, California United Farm Workers office. Paulino Pacheco and my grandfather Jose Carmen Flores were cousins. My great-uncle Paulino first visited *"el Norte"* as a bracero in 1957. His first stop as a bracero was in Texas where he worked picking cotton.[44] My great-uncle made his way out of Texas and spent most of his time working in Chicago as a bracero. He eventually traveled west where he settled in California. Like my grandfather, my great-uncle

[42] Ibid.
[43] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.
[44] Victoria Pacheco, interview by Karina Flores, May 5, 2010.

received his visa in the same fashion. Once he was a legal citizen he returned to Mexico to gather his belongings and bring his wife Victoria with him. My great-uncle became a migrant worker like my grandfather, but once he brought along his wife he dedicated to staying in one place for the sake of his growing family. My great-uncle is no longer alive, he passed away last summer due to a brain hemorrhage after battling diabetes for over 15 years. The fact that he is no longer alive makes it difficult to understand his motivations that led him to fight alongside Cesar Chavez. My great-uncle's wife is still alive and I was able to learn a few things about my great-uncle. The home they shared is still filled with pictures, letters, and United Farm Worker flags. I interviewed my great-aunt Victoria and she could only tell me a few things that she remembered. She apologized to me for not being able to give me more information, but I assured her that whatever she told me would help me understand my great-uncle and the Farm Worker Movement.

Not having enough information on my great-uncle I decided to Google his name and I received many hits. As I scrolled down the page I noticed that there was a transcript of my great-uncle and my great-aunt's name on it. I started to read it and realized that indeed that was my great-uncle. I never imagined that after so many years that I could find something valuable to me and the rest of my family. My great-uncle first met Cesar Chavez during the first 25 days that he was starting the union in 1968.[45] After meeting Chavez for the first time, my great-uncle devoted his time to organizing the local union office in Santa Maria, California. My great-uncle kept constant communication with Chavez because the membership in the Santa Maria office was rather low. As time went by Chavez worked closely with my great-uncle and they were able to start the "Toilet Revolution." During this interview my great-uncle recalls when, "He [Chavez]

[45] "Paulino and Victoria Pacheco," California Department of Education, http://chavez.cde.ca.gov/researchCenter/default.aspx (accessed May 6, 2010).

told us he wanted us to put toilets in the fields and have fresh water available, so the workers could rest and take a break."[46] Following Chavez' nonviolence tactics, the "Toilet Revolution" turned into a successful push towards improving working conditions.

Besides being active in the community my great-uncle also made sure that what was taking place in Santa Maria others would find out about it. The United Farm Workers published a newspaper by the title of "El Malcriado" meaning the rascal in English. The name "El Malcriado" was "reportedly taken from a radical newspaper produced in Mexico in the Revolutionary Period (c. 1910?) (or possibly, a Southern California publication of the 1920's-1930's?). The implication is a rowdy youth, 'badly raised,' who does not give due respect to his 'betters,' who does not remain silent and docile, who challenges authority (an example in today's pop culture might be Bard Simpson)."[47] In just about every "El Malcriado" my great-uncle Paulino kept readers informed about recent activities in Santa Maria. For example, in the August 18, 1972 newspaper issue it states, "Paulino Pacheco spoke to us about Solidarity, the power of Non -violent action, and the battles we must fight on the road to liberation."[48] In another article, my great-uncle Paulino informed readers, "A car caravan of 32 cars with more than 80 farm workers and supporters went through Santa Maria, Arroyo Grande and Guadalupe to announce and publicize the California Supreme Court decision returning to us our right to continue organizing in the fields."[49] His dedication to "La Causa" never went unheard of, because he used whatever means he could to encourage fellow farm workers.

VI. CONCLUSION

[46] Ibid.
[47] Doug Adair and Bill Esher Rampujan, "Origins of El Malcriado," Farmworker Movement Project, http://www.farmworkermovement.org/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/billEsher.pdf
[48] "Feast of Solidarity Renews Spirit of Struggle," *El Malcriado,* August 18, 1972.
[49] "Santa Maria," El Malcriado, January 12, 1973.

Jose Carmen Flores came as a bracer in search of the American Dream just like the millions of braceros who registered. In other words, "Impelling the braceros toward the border was the dream of quick money."[50] Leaving in the spring of 1970, he never looked back on what he had lived. So many braceros were looking for the opportunity to become an American and he was given that opportunity. With the visa in his wallet he embarked on a journey to finding a job that would fulfill his expectations, but he quickly discovered that being of Mexican decent did not allow him to reach the status he once wished. Jose Carmen believed that returning home was where he belonged and *"el Norte"* would only be a distant memory. He was courageous because he lasted as a bracero over seven years without giving up and his sole motivation was his wife and children. According to historian Katharine M. Donato, "Former braceros who obtained legal papers sponsored their relatives for entry."[51] In the case of Jose Carmen Flores, he did not want his wife or children to suffer what he went through. Not bringing his family to "el Norte" was a way of protecting what he had left, because his hopes and dreams were taken away. After being disappointed time after time, Jose Carmen Flores decided to stay in Mexico. With the money that he was able to earn as a bracero he purchased land and decided to be the farm owner and supervisor with his own demand, but demands on himself.

Jose Carmen Flores was not like all the other braceros that resided in *"el Norte"* they shared many similarities, but his experiences determined the kind of person who turned out to be. Since his departure from *"el Norte"* he does not visit because he left feeling distraught. The only thing he could think about was *"el pais de la esperanza me hizo como quizo."* He claims they did what they wanted to do with me and I will not be returning to a place where I was never

[50] "Bulge of Braceros at the Border," *Life,* February 15, 1954, 28.
[51] Katharine M. Donato, "U.S. Policy and Mexican Migration to the United States, 1942-1992," *Social Science Quartely 3* (1998): 705.

welcomed or never will be welcomed.[52] As he is now in his early seventies, Jose Carmen Flores continues to own land and has helped other relatives that still reside in Mexico providing them with a stable job. He may never return to "el Norte," but I hope that one day he will understand that what he did for this country will be recognized whether if it is today or 20 years from now. He should never hold his head down because being his granddaughter makes me proud and I will tell others of his trials and tribulations which makes him a respected *"Americano."*

[52] Jose Carmen Flores, interview by Karina Flores, March 16, 2010.