

Washington County Museum  
Oral History Interview with Vangie Sanchez  
August 2, 2013

Informant: Vangie Sanchez (VS)

Interviewer: Luke Sprunger (LS)  
Transcriber: Pat Yama

Luke Sprunger (LS): It is August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013. I am Luke Sprunger for the Washington County Museum. I'm also a graduate student at Portland State University and today I'm interviewing Vangie Sanchez in Hillsboro.

So Vangie, to start out the questions I'd like to talk about your background and early life. So maybe we could just start with where you were born?

Vangie Sanchez (VS): I was born in Needville, Texas. I was actually born in a house. My mom delivered me in an old cabin that they used to live in.

LS: And what part of Texas is that in?

VS: It's pretty close to the Houston area, Houston, Texas area.

LS: And how many years or how much time did you spend in Texas in your childhood?

VS: Nineteen years.

LS: And where were your parents from originally?

VS: My mother originally from Zacatecas, Mexico, which is pretty close to the Texas border, and my dad from Guadalajara, Jalisco which is pretty far away from the Texas border.

LS: And what did each of them do for a living?

VS: My mom was a housewife and my dad used to work for the railroad.

LS: Do you remember what sort of work he did when he was in Mexico?

VS: No. I don't think I've ever asked, but usually it's fieldwork you know, trying to survive. He lived like in the mountains up in Guadalajara so I suppose that he worked with the family.

LS: So I think when we talked before you mentioned that before you ended up in Oregon permanently you were migrating, going different places for seasonal work. Could you talk about how long that went on for and some of the places that you went to?

VS: My goodness. I think we started off in Oregon working at the

strawberries, picking strawberries, and when the strawberries and the black-caps and the raspberries and the green beans and everything-- when the seasons were over, we went on to California. We were told that there was fieldwork in California.

And before this my step-dad had a history of migrating when he first married my mom so it was in his blood in other words to migrate. So he knew a lot of places but mostly in the Detroit area, back over there, in those states. And so we went off to California. Somebody said, "Follow us," a family we'd met. And we went to California, to Pasco, California and we lived there at one of the migrant camps. [We] picked everything you can think of--pepper, tomato, almonds--what else did we do?

I eventually actually worked at a rose packing plant. They would pack the roses that they cut and tie them with strings and everything and label them and I worked there for a while too. But mostly I was working the fields. I also worked at a shoe factory. It was one of the boots, kind of hiking boots--the light brown ones. I don't remember what their company name was but I worked there, too.

And then once we started migrating—it got into his blood again because I was living with my mom and my step-dad with my two kids. We started moving again back to Oregon. We even worked in Colorado for a few years and moved back and forth. It was interesting but it was like roaming around looking for work wherever there was work. And when there wasn't work many times it was like he would work or we would look for part-time work in order to survive, wherever we could find it.

LS: So you said your step-dad worked or lived over by Detroit for a while. So you didn't go with him at all?

VS: No. When he first married my mom, that I remember he had already started migrating. There was a certain area in Texas, McAllen where there were families that migrated every year to work and so they went sort of towards Detroit, Indiana I think they did a lot of field work. And so he had done that for many years and then he settled. And then when they started wanting to do it again, it took on full force. They had a lot of kids so they had to try and survive as best as they could. And back then there weren't that many laws about kids not working in the fields so they worked the kids, too, to make money.

LS: Just any age of kids?

VS: Oh yeah. You could see the kids were always in the fields. Even my kids learned how to do migrant work when they were young.

LS: So I think before you mentioned getting involved with some of the labor activism in California connected with the César Chávez. How did that come about?

VS: When we first went to California we wanted to work. And we were at the camp and we didn't have any work so we weren't aware of some of the migrant workers striking to get better wages. So we went to a field. And we were told, "Yeah you know we need you guys" and so we started working. And unbeknownst to us we were called scabs which is you know you come in and the others are fighting for more money and everything, they want everybody to stay away-- the other migrant workers. And we didn't know that so we just went in and started working so we were not on the very good side of the migrant workers. We were like sort of working with the Teamsters and we weren't aware of that.

And when we were picking grapes--I remember this so clearly--the migrant workers, they were always in jeopardy of getting really beat up or killed by the Teamsters. They came in and they would sneak in and tell us—they would act like workers and they would sneak in and tell us about why they didn't want us to work. And it was such a desperation because you wanted to support the migrant workers but at the same time you needed to survive because there really was no money coming in.

And eventually we joined them and my parents would go and meet with all the migrant workers with César Chávez. It was a very hard time because we had to depend on what they called 'commodities'—food, the cheese and the beans and everything that the government gives you because you're trying to prove a point. You need more wages, the farm workers. And working conditions were not that great either.

LS: And can you describe the conditions?

VS: Yes, there were cabins that were maybe 18' by 18' and part of it was the kitchen and another big room was where everybody slept like on bunk beds made out of just plain boards and mattresses. And who knows how many people slept on those mattresses before. It was just a little stove on top of the table and a refrigerator. And bathrooms, you had to walk maybe about half a block to get to them. I think it was an old army barracks that we lived in.

LS: And is this California or here?

VS: In California. Here it was even worse in Oregon.

LS: Really.

VS: Yeah. In Oregon, the propaganda when the farmers go to Texas is you've got washing machines, you've got toilets, you've got beautiful cabins, the scenery and everything. And we got here and it was one room. One room and it has to be about the size of this kitchen. And I don't know what the size is but you have a stove in the corner and you have two bunk beds over on the other corner and you have toilets also that you have to go out and walk. And the washing machines were of course the ringer washers. And it was hard. It was really hard because there wasn't much that was provided to us—that was promised and not provided to us.

LS: And that was a whole family in the cabin of that size.

VS: Yes. We had two cabins and all of us—12 of us squeezed into those two cabins.

LS: And if I had to guess on this room I'd say maybe it's 12 feet by 20 or so for the sake of this recording.

VS: Yeah. So it was really hard. And if you asked for more room then of course then they wanted to charge you for that extra room because only one family qualified per cabin which is lucky because I could qualify for a cabin with my two kids we could stuff some of the siblings in there. And you know my mom and step-dad kept the other kids. And it was very cold. There was no heat in there. The only heat you have is from the stove, the two burners that you're provided with.

LS: So that was recruiters coming to Texas that told you and your family these things about it.

VS: Beautiful propaganda yeah. And at first, I think I mentioned before it was mostly families from Texas and then maybe in '70 the single Mexican peoples, guys started to come in and migrate into this area. So they kind of took over. And now there are Mexican families from Mexico living there. I can't tell you what their status is or whatever but when I go up there I donate clothing and everything because I know how hard it is. And so I take a whole bunch of stuff and I notice that there're families and their cabins would now be considered luxurious because they have bathrooms in there and everything and kitchens. But not before, it was just one room.

LS: Do you remember when you were living in the cabins at first, were there any organizations or individuals providing any sort of assistance?

VS: There was the Valley Migrant League, which I eventually worked for. I taught ESL [English as a Second Language]. And there was another program called VIVA [Volunteers in Vanguard Action] that would go and also Legal Aid would go into the camps. There was a lot of roughness there. The camp owners would get really upset when they tried to open people's eyes to other possibilities or other opportunities instead of working in the fields.

LS: So those organizations, they were present even from the time you arrived?

VS: Yeah. Well they had barely started and I think a lot of it has come from Washington community action programs maybe or the cultural center. But actually, Luke, I think they started when we kind of started and when other families started coming in because I know it was '71

when I was working for Valley Migrant League. So it was just getting all the families together and starting them.

LS: So what influenced you and your family to stay permanently in Oregon rather than move for work?

VS: The kids and their education basically, because my oldest Rob had to repeat first grade because we moved around so much one year and I just said, "No, this is not the kind of life." And by law and I'm glad, kids have to get an education. And so that really is what stabilized us—and the fact that we didn't make enough money to go anywhere that year. Asking for a lot of help to try and stabilize our lives here in Oregon.

LS: And do you remember about how long you lived at some of the camps? I don't know if you were at just that one or several.

VS: It was seasonal because work is seasonal so we would live at each of the camps maybe about three months. And then that season ended and you move on to another place. And we lived in Bakersfield and Pasco, California trying to stay closer to the fields that you work in and if you could find housing too. Or travel—if you live in one camp you had to travel very far to get to work sometimes. But if you need it, you go.

LS: Did your family then have to share a car?

VS: Yeah we had a pickup so we all crammed into the pickup. It was an old, old pickup, which is what we migrated in.

LS: Then eventually you transitioned into some different work



opportunities. What did you start doing after you left field work?

VS: I started working for Migrant Education [Migrant Education Program]. I was a home school counselor. I had a high school diploma so that allowed me to get my foot in the door and I worked with Jose Garcia who would be another good person to interview. He ran the whole program and I interviewed and I got the job as a home school counselor. And I was going to the homes to meet the migrant families and take down all the information and if the kids needed help with anything—like IEP [Individual Education Plans] programs or whatever, we would register them for that. But basically it's a program that tracks every migrant child to make sure that they're getting health care, education, and if they drop off what is the drop off age. So it's a good tracking system. It's quite a bit of work but to me it was great. If there's a health history especially that's really helpful because these kids move around quite a bit.

LS: And do you remember what year that was in?

VS: That was in probably '73 that I started working. I actually worked for the Cornelius Grade School right after I finished the ESL class, teaching ESL to the Mexican kids that were there that had just come from Mexico—so a lot of teaching experience. I loved it though. I learned a lot.

LS: I think you mentioned before that you also worked for Valley Migrant League, Virginia Garcia Clinic, Legal Aid.

VS: Yes, yes I did. And then I started taking night—I also went to beautician school, beauty school and started in '68 but Valley Migrant

League that had funded my scholarship ran out of money, so I didn't have money to pay for babysitting so that was—I went about six months and I was in a nine month course so I couldn't finish. So I had to go on public assistance for a while.

LS: Was that difficult for you?

VS: Oh very, very much so. That's one of the reasons that as my kids were growing up I told them about getting an education. And I said, “I refuse for any of you to ever have to be on public assistance” because the questions they ask are very dehumanizing. They're very invasive.

LS: Can you describe the Mexican American community when you first arrived, or even if it felt like a community to you?

VS: You know at first it didn't because we were just a few of us and I think the only place we got together was if we had dances or community events, which weren't too frequent. But it was mostly the kids would hang around with mostly non-Hispanic kids and a few families here and there, and you know the Telaveras and the Vidales I think were some of the families here, maybe the Hernandez. And these families would kind of stay in touch with each other. The kids went to school so we sort of knew each other. But it had—it was a very isolating feeling at first and then more families started to settle in and the crowd got bigger. And Centro Cultural kept us together. When all the other agencies kind of dissolved, the cultural center has always been there.

LS: Do you remember how many families there were at the beginning?

VS: Gosh, that we knew of at first it was maybe, after we settled in and

the kids started going to school, I would say maybe about ten families that we kind of kept in touch with.

LS: And I think you mentioned sometimes just sort of meeting people that were new—how did that come about—meeting and finding out about new arrivals?

VS: Sometimes the church, when you go to church. Most of us are Catholics so we'd meet at church and try and communicate with each other. And school functions because there was so little of us that we really did try and stay with each other in order to have that cultural base that you long for.

LS: So obviously since then when you arrived in, was it '64?

VS: '67.

LS: '67, so the community has grown quite a bit. Could you describe maybe how you feel it's changed in other ways than just the size or if it even feels like the community the way it was?

VS: Yeah. You know before then it was like everybody knew everybody else. You always had that control over your kids--“You'd better behave because you know I know so and so and they're going to tell me how you behave.” Now I feel like there's not that sense of community anymore. It almost feels like everybody has their own group because so many other communities from Mexico have come here from Oaxaca, from Guadalajara, Costa Rica and it seems like everybody has their own community. And I think it's a little bit more separated than from when we were Tejanos, all of us Tejanos here and we'd go out sometimes

maybe we could get together, have dinner. It used to be Little Black Sambos. I don't know if you remember those. Probably way beyond your time--a breakfast place or an eating place and after dances and everything. It just seems more isolating now than it was then.

Because there does exist, Luke, and I'll be real honest, some discrimination between the people from Mexico and the people from the United States. It's always the feeling that many of the people from Mexico think we're privileged because we were born here and we have all the rights of the United States and they don't. So there's some tension that exists because of that. There have been some casualties because of that here in this community.

LS: Do you think maybe some of the organizations here that have offered social services, have there been ways through those channels or other ways may be those two groups have found ways to interact more positively together?

VS: I think so. And it's like my brother said—he owned a band and he used to make dances and he would say, “I used to play just Texan music” which is Tex-Mex, some English mixed in and stuff like that. “And pretty soon I noticed that people weren't coming to the dances. And I knew that I had to change my music in order to accommodate the whole community.” So I think for all of us that are here now that the Texans that are outnumbered, we've learned to adapt and embrace the community. I think so much more so than sometimes they embrace us because—I don't know if I should call animosity. I don't know what it would be because they are angry because we do have privileges.

And when I was visiting Mexico I was at the airport and I was teaching this lady how to speak a few words in English to survive and she says,

“You're so nice.” And I said, “Well, why wouldn't I help you?” She says, “You know we have this myth about people from the U.S. that are Mexican, that they're not very friendly and so I'm just surprised that you're so nice.” And it was like—there you go again. You know that same dynamic that exists.

LS: So about the time that you arrived here, I mean obviously these organizations are getting established and there's the Chicano/Chicana movement on a national but [also] a local level. Did you recognize it as such—was it something that you—?

VS: I've always considered myself a Chicana, I do. I always say I am a Chicana. I don't say I'm Hispanic. I don't say I'm Latina because we tend to be kind of lobbed together, all the cultures. And all of us are very different. People from Puerto Rico, Mexico, you name it. It had started because of the migrant workers—the Chicanismo. And I attended many rallies. Actually I have one of the original flags from *El Grito*, which is the red flag with the black eagle on it. All of that stuff, I've always—I've got pictures of Chávez's brother when he came to Oregon and everything. It had come into this area because people were not getting paid hardly anything at all.

LS: Did that change the way you viewed yourself, your own identity or was that—I don't know if that's something you already had established?

VS: I think it helped. I do. I was interviewed by a bunch of kids the other day and they told me how they liked the way I spoke. And I said, “You know what? You have to have a sense of self.” And I think that's when I found it because I realized how people that do this all their lives

suffer so much and I just said, “You have to be proud of who you are, number one.” And so I think I started being proud of what we could do as a culture, you know for the migrant workers, for everybody else. And it just gives you a good sense of worth to help somebody else once you've gotten up a little bit higher to go back and lend a hand. I think it helped me a lot.

LS: Do you think locally, did the movement really reach out to those migrant workers from Mexico or was it more Mexican American?

VS: No, I think it reached out to everyone because the desperation of the work and the pay, it's great and it still exists. It still exists. It's very unfair what people get paid and the living conditions.

LS: Do you think the movement, did that influence maybe some of your goals in terms of your own career, goals for your children? Did that have an impact on how you saw your own future?

VS: Oh, definitely. I knew I didn't want to be working in those fields forever or lead that kind of lifestyle after just after—well four or five years, that was enough and seeing my kids working beside me. I said, “Okay I have a high school education. What can I do with this?” And had been very assertive so I started looking for work and was given the opportunity by Jose Garcia to take night classes and I started taking them. [It] took me years to get my BA [Bachelor of Arts] but I finally got it and that's been a lifesaver and trying to be a good role model to my children.

LS: And then you ended up graduating from Colegio César Chávez is that correct? And what year was that in?

VS: 1978.

LS: And could you talk about your experience there and the education you received from that organization?

VS: I worked during the day and I would go to classes on Friday. Jose Garcia gave us the time to go and report to the college. And it was a beautiful experience. Unfortunately the college no longer exists. They've had a lot of struggles and there's a book about that. But it was just nice to see a college full of Chicanos that were trying to get ahead. And all of us were older. We were not younger. It was like the best opportunity for us to feel like we belong somewhere because we're always looking for that, where if you go into a room you look for the first brown face you can see and connect [*laughs*] with that person. And when you go to most colleges there's already preconceived ideas about who you are and they're usually not very positive about the Mexican people. And so it was just good to see that and it was like, *Wow, I'm so impressed that there are so many people here that want to get an education.* It was a good feeling because you could get to talk the language and you get to be with instructors that were Hispanic too. So there's a connection and that connection is so important.

LS: So it sounds like a very positive environment. There's a real sense of community there.

VS: Yes and there's still some of us around. Some of us have gone but they had good directors there. They were fighters for their college and so it would come and go and come and go. It's like, *Okay am I going to be accredited? Are they going to be accredited by the time I graduate?* And

it was, but there were a lot of struggle to keep it accredited.

LS: And you said you were working--so you were living here in Hillsboro while you were attending school. So you'd drive down for classes...and that was when you were working at Valley?

VS: No, I was working with Migrant Education.

LS: Migrant Education. And then once you—what did you receive your degree in?

VS: Liberal Arts but I majored in Psychology.

LS: And did that immediately open up any additional opportunities for you, work-related or—?

VS: I went and worked for the clinic.

LS: The Virginia Garcia.

VS: The Virginia Garcia clinic. And first I started as reception and then I was with the parenting project. And I liked that because you get to train parents in parenting and stuff like that; doing social work—visiting with the families. Also working with pregnant moms and giving them advice and teaching them a lot of stuff about having a baby. [And] working with the men, which was a challenge because they don't understand post partum and stuff like that. So, working with the men too.



And then I just decided you know I want to do more social work than that. And so in 1990 I applied for a job with the State of Oregon as a social service specialist and I got it. It was interesting because I was sitting at the office waiting for my interview and this Hispanic family comes in—I was in McMinnville—applying at McMinnville and nobody could help them so I'm sitting there and they said, “Oh my God what are we going to do?” And I said, “I can help you.” I think that helped me get hired right on the spot.

LS: Yeah, absolutely.

VS: “Oh my God you were so good with people. You made them feel so comfortable.” I said, “I know what it's like so.”

LS: Could you describe a little bit more of your job title, the work that you did there?

VS: I started out as an investigator, a Child Protective Service investigator. And at first I was so angry because I said, “I have no idea what I'm getting into.” It was a very hard job and I would go and investigate abuse. And then I said, “You know, I don't like this.” It was actually very threatening because some of the families come and just come at you a hundred miles an hour angry because you have their kids. We got threatened by their dads that were accused of abusing their kids. And so I just said, “I don't like it. I want to do more.”

So another friend and I put together a proposal for the state to be parenting project coordinators and we would teach the Hispanic families. What was happening then we would remove kids and then we couldn't return them home until the parents got the training they needed--how not

to mistreat their kids. And there wasn't any in Spanish so those kids were not going home. Even though some of the cases might not have been so severe, the kids were not going home because there weren't any services. So we said, "Let's do that. Let's provide those services."

And when we did that my other friend went and did parenting and they trained me to be a family sex abuse treatment person, a counselor. And I went to eastern Oregon to train. And so I then fell into the family sex abuse treatment part of it. And after that program went to private sectors I was working with some of the parents and they said, "Well we need to train the Hispanics—recruit and train Hispanic foster parents because there's a lot of Hispanic kids coming into care." And so I said, "Well you know I can do that." I developed that program, too. I developed actually the family sex abuse treatment program and the foster parent training. And so I stayed there forever and did until I retired from the state.

LS: And that was basically only working with the Hispanic families because there was that need that was so great.

VS: Yes. The need was so great. And it was a challenge sometimes because some of the families that were in the community were families that I knew--you know that had kind of settled at the same time and yet they were coming into the system. And I'd say, "Okay, how's this going to work? They might hate that I'm here. We know each other." But it actually worked to my benefit because they really respected and really worked hard after I told them, "You know this is for real. If you do not comply you're not going to get your kids back." So it was good. But it was my fear because we knew each other.

LS: Right. Well it certainly puts the relationship in jeopardy.

VS: Yes. And I had to do a lot of soul searching about that when I decided to take that on but nobody else could do it. You see, what the problem was that the family spoke English but there's just something about doing it in Spanish and reaching the people in your own language that really works. And that's what I did.

LS: Right. I think people, they can understand another language but sometimes it's difficult for it to carry the same connotation.

VS: Yeah, if you don't understand the culture and how to really work with the people you're not going to get anywhere.

LS: So I was going to ask if you a few questions that go chronologically back quite a bit further and those are about instances of discrimination that you felt in your life. Do you remember anything from Texas, what that was like, if you felt discriminated against there when you were a student, a young adult?

VS: Oh my God, Texas is *[laughs]*—the KKK [Ku, Klux, Klan] is alive and well in Texas. Yeah, I didn't really see it with me I think because I always was so assertive and friendly and everything. My nickname used to be 'Smiley'. But I did see it with some of the students. I mean you could feel it. You understand what I mean? You could feel the discrimination because you would not be invited to a lot of things. But I saw it with the Hispanic guys when they would do something in school, they had to run through a belt line. I don't know if you know what a belt line is. They would line up all the football players with belts and they had to run through the belt line. And of course they were trying to hit the poor guy. And it just used to break my heart to see that happen.

LS: That was a school punishment?

VS: In high school, yes. Back then teachers would wear big rings and hit the kids and a lot of our guys were hit on the head. I'm sure some of them got concussions. But yeah, discrimination was the kind that they let you know that you don't belong there. Even though you might go because it's a school function or whatever, you know you don't belong there. They don't make you feel like you belong there.

LS: So, were some of the school activities closed to Hispanic students?

VS: No, they were open to everybody but mostly we had our own thing. Yeah, we had our own way of—dances and everything. It was not something that many of us would go to.

LS: And you felt that the teachers sometimes reserved a different type of punishment for Tejano students.

VS: Oh yeah, for sure. I saw it with my own brothers.

LS: How about instances of discrimination here in Oregon, or if not outright just maybe feeling that you weren't being incorporated [on a community level].

VS: Oh you know some of the people were very outright about not wanting you in their stores or anything. They'd follow you. They'd make remarks that just were totally inappropriate.<sup>1</sup> One of the things that I remember the most—and I don't remember if I told you—it was when my son went to pick berries in the field. He went to pay for what he was

buying and—it still kind of bothers me—and when he went to pay the lady she took his money but she told him to put it on the counter. And then she told him, “You get away from here you dirty Mexican.” And he says, “Mom I couldn't wash my hands. There was no place to wash my hands.” He was so heartbroken that she had called him that.

My son will never go to the grocery store. And I asked him one day why and he says, “I will never forget the way that lady made me feel when I tried to pay her for my candy.” Because we used to give money to buy candy after we got out of the field. And we were dirty. Our hands were dirty. Our clothes were dirty. And he says, “I just can't force myself.”

LS: So it's just that grocery store or—?

VS: Yeah it's the one in North Plains. It's still there. I'm sure they've gotten used to the Mexican people by now because that's all there is in North Plains and Hillsboro and everywhere. There're reasons why they call Cornelius, 'Little Mexico' and Hillsboro, 'Hills Burrito'. *[laughs]*

LS: I don't think I've heard that one before.

VS: Oh yeah. Hillsboro is called Hills Burrito because of all the Mexican people there now.

LS: Do you think that discrimination is still a major problem here?

VS: Yes. If you want me to be honest, yes I think it still is. You know my kids and I assimilated pretty well because of the success we've had in everything but we've noticed it with other people. And at first we did.

We went through a lot of discrimination. Even my daughter in high school was harassed because she was on dance line, she was one of the candidates for the homecoming queen and everything. She got herself in there and besides being very beautiful she had a beautiful personality. And so she was out there. And she experienced quite a bit of discrimination.

My other kids—you know it was like—“Okay so you make fun of me. Okay, that's okay. I'll still be your friend.” But the youngest was more high profile I think. So the oldest and the youngest I think have kind of been more high profile and so they just get in there, where the other ones are just like—they don't bother them because they will come back at them for anything. So they were more passive with whatever they did to them. In order to succeed they knew they had to.

LS: Right.

VS: Yeah they had to put up with the nicknames or whatever that they called them. Sandy and Gerry would not—they would kind of fight it a little bit. Yeah, they did. They got called a lot of names but it's amazing now as I see my son turn 50. His friends who showed up for his party, one of them was Hispanic. None of the others were Hispanic. That's the kind of people he grew up with because we were one of the first families here.

LS: And those were his—for all your children their friends even that were giving them a hard time.

VS: At first, but I think once they met the whole family and the dynamics of how much love and everything was there, it was really

beautiful because a lot of kids have told us—“Our family has never hugged saying goodbye. Okay, I'll see you later, ma,” or whatever. And they say, “When we met you and your family we started to really learn the value of family, of that hug. You know you would always say 'Dios te bendiga'—God Bless You today. And I wanted my mom to say that to me.” And some of the kids still visit, they say, “When I leave please say 'Dios te bendiga'?” And I say, “Yes I will.” And I'll always make the sign of the cross too. But to me it was beautiful that they picked that up from our family.

LS: So they did see something to appreciate.

VS: Yeah. And they would hang around with us. In fact Steve says, “I can still remember when you used to take us to the beach. My brother and I were the only white kids there with you. And people would stare and look at you because you had two blue-eyed kids with you. And we used to get the biggest kick out of it when you'd tell them, 'Oh they're from the milkman' just so they would quit staring. *[both laugh]* You were always so funny.”

LS: So other than discrimination, what do you think are some of the problems here in the Mexican-ancestry community?

VS: One of them that really touches is me is the fact that—the gangs. And I think that started when they eliminated sports from schools because before then even my kids wouldn't have been able to play if I had to pay what these families have to pay now for being in sports. I think that it was like a process of elimination almost of the poor whether it be Hispanic, Asian, white even because these families can't afford sports. And which are the kids that are getting into trouble? The kids that are big families and they don't belong to any kind of sports because the

families can't afford them. Yeah, I think to me that's really what bothers me the most—having seen that happen immediately.

LS: And those programs were cut for financial reasons?

VS: Yes. It's really nice to belong to something and be proud of it and these kids don't have anything to belong to with that gone. I see the kids playing soccer here in front of my house and I'm amazed at their soccer skills. And they're playing there because they don't have the money to join the school. They had weekend soccer teams that their parents put them in but they don't belong to the schools or anything. It's like the Hispanic community has come together so that they can put their kids in those soccer teams and start their own little leagues and play against each other, but not from the schools. I think if that hadn't been taken away

[long pause for coughing]

I think the kids wouldn't be out on the streets they way they are now.

LS: Do you think when you were raising your own kids with the community being more tight knit at that time, do you think that was an important resource—having other families look out for your kids?

VS: Oh yeah because they took care of each other. All those kids kind of took care of each other. Yeah I think so. I think it helped keep them on track.

LS: Do you think the parents of the other families—did they try and look out for the kids as well or was it more just the kids themselves?

VS: I think all of us were working so when we could we would attend



the kids' games or whatever. And that was also a place where we kind of kept in touch with each other.

LS: So you've mentioned some individuals and organizations that have helped create opportunities for the community here. But just for the purposes of this interview would you maybe like to mention some more people or organizations, or just elaborate on what we've talked about in terms of who has done some good work here and for what causes?

VS: I think Jose Jaime has. He was a priest. He's an ex-priest and I think he was really good at getting the kids together and forming a youth club and influencing them in a very positive way. It would provide like classes and maybe even field trips and stuff like that. I think he was one of the first persons to do that.

LS: And that was a club—.

VS: The Catholic Youth Club.

LS: So organized through the church, then.

VS: And through the cultural center. Also Sonny Montes helped organize, I think, the Valley Migrant League. The Arandas as I mentioned, they've been here a long time too.

I think one of the reasons that I don't get so recognized is because I've been a single woman, you know fighting the battle. But I also fought the schools when I found out that some of the teachers were beating up on my brothers and that they were being very hard on Hispanic students and

I took it to the state superintendent and I brought it to his attention what was happening and of course were very...and so all Hispanic parents got together and we got organized and we filed a complaint with the state.

LS: Did you say those were your brothers in school? So your younger siblings?

VS: Yes my younger siblings. Yeah, how mean the teachers were with them and were beating on them.

LS: And that's another question there. Is that how you felt discriminated against inside the Mexican community but also outside it, just being a woman but also being a single mother.

VS: I think I have done a very good job of having everyone respect me because they've seen me be a very hard worker. They've seen me succeed and they've seen my kids be very successful in their lives. And I was always very focused on my kids, always involved with them as much as I could.

I think there's still institutional racism within the state system where I had many job positions with one pay where other people wouldn't have, they wouldn't have allowed it from other people because I was bilingual. Advances too are not that great. So there are some people who have advanced but—it's starting to slowly but it's taken awhile to see that advancement in the Hispanic community within the state. You have people that are white but have Hispanic surnames and maybe those are the ones that are getting the positions but not *Hispanic Hispanic* people sometimes you know, getting those positions. So some of us like we believe we're kind of like token. [*chuckles*]

LS: Right.

VS: Yeah. If you were assertive enough to really try and make it up there, there were times when we did.

LS: So do you think in terms of employment opportunities it was more difficult because of your ethnicity or because of your gender do you think? It's really hard to tell but—.

VS: Yeah. I think sometimes it's just the fact that people have such a negative impression of the Mexican people. I do sometimes, people don't get hired, that they were lazy or this or that. And it's so untrue because I think of anybody the Hispanic, the Mexican family are so into education, are so into work ethics and everything. Yeah I've just seen that and I so admire. When I've seen them going to weekend things and parties at Centro or something, right away the parents are saying, "Well we have to go early because we have to be at work early and get you dressed." They start their morning at four o'clock in the morning where nobody else would do that—you know in order to keep their job. I think there're a lot of misconceptions about the Mexican people, which is really sad but they are, they do exist.

LS: Have you ever felt pressure in the work place to downplay your identity or not speak Spanish and things like that?

VS: Oh they would remind us—the co-workers that they were very uncomfortable if two of us were speaking English and Spanish. And it's funny because I think you know this Luke—you're bilingual—you don't even feel it sometimes if you're talking to another Hispanic. You just

carry on the conversation back and forth, back and forth, back and forth and that used to bother a lot of people. They'd make rude remarks. I mean I was called a 'Spic' and an 'old Mexican' and stuff like that and it's like, that's okay.

LS: And these were from people that you worked with?

VS: Yeah. In fact one of them was sitting with me one day, one of my co-workers and she was one of the most racist people in the work place and everybody knew it. So I was sitting there and she had kind of started to like me a little bit. And she was talking to me and she says, "Vangie, what are you?" And I said, "What do you mean?" And she says, "Are you really Mexican? And I said, "Yes. I do have Spanish blood. You know there was French in our family and I grew up with bread and sauerkraut and all that kind of stuff. And my grandma used to make some and she probably had some German ancestry in her too; had green eyes and the whole works; blonde hair." And she said, "That's it. I knew you were not completely Mexican."

So it was like, *Wow, is that why you are accepting me now because you know that I'm not completely Mexican?* And I told her that. "No, no, no but I just knew it. I just knew it." It was like, wow. To me it was very sad that I had to be something else or maybe she might not have accepted me as a friend.

LS: Well, just that lack of understanding about what Mexican really is, as a nationality.

VS: And I think many times it's a threat that people feel, because one of the students in school said—we went to a class to talk about our

Hispanic, Mexican ancestry and how a lot of the land in the U.S. used to belong to the Mexicanos. And one of the girls was crying and so the professor asked her, "Why are you crying?" And she says, "You know, you guys presented such a great amount of information, so positive. Look at you. You're successful. I just feel really sad because what I'm hearing from my father and why I don't talk to another Hispanic Mexican kid is because my father says that this land used to belong to you, one of these days you're going to come back and take it away from us and then be taking all our ranches or farms or whatever we have here." I said, "Really is that what your father is telling you?" She says, "Yeah, that's what he's always told us. To not hang around with the Mexican kids because pretty soon you know they're going to be so many of you'll want your land back." I said, "That is really interesting" for lack of a better word. [laughs]

But it's an awful thing. Racism is an awful thing, because sometimes you don't—people don't tell you things. They look at you and you know that they look at you kind of disgusting, like you don't belong here. And it's real funny because all my kids are married to non-Hispanics. My granddaughter is married to a young man in the Spokane area and those people are as red-necked as they come. And you go in there and you say, "Okay, I'm going to enjoy this party" and we've managed to break that.

And I think one of the biggest things that happened this last time was that the great grandmother was there. And she's a very beautiful lady. And as she was walking out the door I said, "I am so pleased to meet you. You're a beautiful person," because we had been kind of talking a little bit. And it was like as if all the family was watching us. Do you understand what I mean? Just to see how we were going to get along. And at the end she bent down and she kissed my cheek and she said, "You know what? You're a very beautiful lady too." And so we hugged each other and I think that in itself kind of made everybody say, "Okay we are all family now—Mexican and white. We have this great couple

and this grandson—my great grandson and we need to work together for the sake of the kids.”

LS: Wow.

VS: It was a beautiful moment. I told my son it was so touching for her to do that because we had been told, “You got to be careful you know because they're really red-neck, mom. They're really racist and this and that.” But I think because we were the oldest there and we managed to do that the kids will say, “We need to follow this example.” And they have been a lot nicer.

LS: Wow. That's a great story.

VS: Yeah, they have been a lot nicer. But you see we had to be the ones to show them that we can get along. Instead of telling them, “No, you can't get along” and make the kids feel threatened by it. And a lot of it is not knowing the people, not knowing the culture.

LS: Right. And it sounds like you feel—with the story you share—a lot of the times when there's discrimination or people treat you differently it's because of that fear because they don't know you, they don't know your family or your culture and their mind just starts going.

VS: We sit around and we talk about it. We were a migrant family that had nothing. We were homeless and everything. Yet we've been able to go to Whistler twice. We've been just doing so many things. And we even get teary-eyed and say, “Who'd have thought that this poor little migrant family would have had all these beautiful experiences.” Brings tears to my eyes because we were very poor at the very beginning.

*[chokes up]* Sorry.

LS: Oh no, that's okay. I think you certainly have a lot to be proud of with your family and the way you've raised your children.

VS: Yeah, I do too. *[still emotional]* And I wish that nobody would grow up knowing discrimination, but it does exist. It does. It's very painful. Sorry.

LS: Oh no. It's fine. No problem. Obviously when you were raising your kids you were very focused on them. Can you maybe just elaborate on the types of opportunities that you hoped to create for them as you were raising them?

VS: Yeah. Number one, I wanted them to be proud of who they were so I was always taking them to whatever Hispanic, Mexican thing that was happening. That to me like I said is the most important thing—having a sense of yourself. I would take them to sports. I would always encourage them. I would always tell them, “The world is yours. Really, you saw me graduate from college, as old as I am, what's to stop you when you don't have any worries and I have four of you to worry about.” So I think that helped them.

You know it was really interesting, the other day we were playing this game about families and one of the questions that they asked my son was—we were sitting around with a group of people—“Who is your role model?” And what he said is, “My mom. I saw where we lived. I saw what we went through and to know that one woman can be so strong to get us out of there, out of what we were in. I will never have a better role model than that.” I said, “Thank you.” I thought that was beautiful.

LS: That's probably one of the best gifts you can get as a parent.

VS: Oh my God, yes definitely. "You are my role model." He's always told me that. "I know how you struggled to go to college at night and have friends take care of us while you studied and everything." And I had good friends that had already graduated from college and would help me with my papers and everything so it was kind of nice.

I hope I didn't mess up your thing by crying.

LS: Oh no, not at all. Honesty is always the best thing. That was very honest. So raising your children you said was—maintaining that sense of cultural identity with them was very important to you.

VS: Very important. Very important. Because some of our friends would say, "Well we're Indian" or "We're something else". "They're not Indian, they're Mexican. Why are they saying that?"

LS: Like Native American Indian.

VS: Yeah, Native American. And it's like why are they saying that? And I told my kids, "Don't you ever do that." Because to me if you are a Mexican person—and you have my son who owns his own coffee business; I have a daughter who is a supervisor in the State of Washington for investigations; another one that owns part of an engineering company and another one that's a butcher—you're so proud of them. And you say, "You have got to say, 'I am a successful Mexican.' Don't ever say anything else." Because that is what is going to



create the positive thinking about the Mexican people when you can share who you really are and your success, not something else. And we've even been mistaken for Jewish, Egyptian, Samoan, every other culture you can think of. It's like, "No, I'm a Mexican." And we're very proud of that.

LS: And you raised them all bilingual. Is that correct?

VS: Yes.

LS: Do they still speak Spanish with you?

VS: Oh yeah. In fact my son just told me the other day, he said, "You know what I noticed about you, mom? That when you want to give us advice and you really want it to hit our hearts you say it in Spanish. You don't say it in English. I notice that you speak to us in Spanish when you're really feeling something from your heart, you say it in Spanish." I said, "I just feel like it has a different meaning whenever I tell you that in Spanish." Because I raised them talking English and Spanish.

LS: So how important is the Spanish language to you, to your sense of identity and expressing yourself?

VS: Very much so because that's why I went back to teaching at Portland State, with teaching the foster parents because I just worked with Hispanic families and I feel like they have so much to learn and I feel sad that English is such a hard language for them to learn because really it is. I feel like I have to go back and help train these people in Spanish because they're so great. The foster parents are so great. And they're like sponges. They want to learn and so I feel like I've got so

much more to give that I can't stop now until the good Lord decides I can't. *[laughs]*

LS: So do you think that's something that—I don't know, working with those families that you're able to use Spanish. Is that something that you enjoy, connecting with them on that level?

VS: Oh yeah. And I think one of the most pleasant things is that I don't only have people from Mexico now—which is again bringing all of us together—I have people from Cuba, Puerto Rico, from Costa Rica, from Venezuela, from Guatemala, you name it. They are all in that class together and so they all get along just beautifully. And to me it's such a positive thing that they can come together and enjoy each other and help each other out.

LS: And that's something you're still doing.

VS: Yeah. I was asked by Portland State to go back and train and I've gone back to teach the foster families. I love it.

LS: What are some other ways that you honor your culture or your identity?

VS: I have a strong faith so I go to the Catholic church here in Hillsboro and I try and volunteer and donate to the food bank because I know a lot of the families that go there are Hispanic. I try to stay involved with and volunteer with the cultural center. I think that's probably the biggest organization around right now.

LS: Centro.

VS: Centro, Centro Cultural. And I've even offered to volunteer with the Garcia clinic because...I started when that clinic started so it's kind of special place in my heart. We started in the garage—two car garage. I have a lot of feelings about how many families that place helped when I was there.

LS: What do you think are the sources of your personal values?

VS: My grandparents. I was actually raised by my grandparents since I was about four years old and they were from Mexico. And they were so strict and they taught us so much. I just feel like they were really the ones that kept us on track with religion, with culture, with everything. And I have a lot to thank them for. My aunts, my uncles always trying to help us succeed, because when my parents divorced we were kind of like the throw away kids and they took us in and helped us and they taught us our morals, values, you name it. Yeah, my grandparents they would be the ones to thank.

Other people in my life too that have really seen the potential that I had at work, people that I worked with that I didn't have in myself. I didn't have that much faith that I would succeed in some things. And they would say, "Vangie, you should try to go back to college. You should go to college. You should do this." "Ah, no I have kids," or whatever. And then all of a sudden I was there. I know that my supervisor with the State of Oregon who was a black woman who threw me in cold to investigations said, "I wanted you to learn trial by fire. Start at the very bottom because once you know what makes this agency function, there's no fear for the rest of what you can do in this agency." And she was right. I did it all and I have really enjoyed it.

LS: I think that covers my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about either about yourself or about this community?

VS: I think you know that even though we don't kind of come together as the Chicano and Mexican community, there's a lot of positive stuff happening because the Mexican people really want to belong. They really do. And I think it takes all of us, including the white community to accept that everyone is here for survival purposes because we were there. Been there, done that. And I think it's something very positive. I know that they've contributed a lot of money to the community. I think that's very positive because when you ask the Mexican people to help they will help you a hundred percent as long as they get treated right. And I think that even though like I said we don't have that sense of Chicanismo anymore, we're kind of like saying once again we're kind of assimilating together because there's a lot of Chicanos that are marrying Mexican guys and stuff like that. So the community is coming together I think as a whole.

LS: And at least in the class that you teach the way you describe it, it sounds like even a broader Latino community.

VS: Oh my God yes. And I have so much fun with them. I had one class one day when one of them, some of them were from Cuba, Puerto Rico and everything and I hit on one word and I can't remember it. And somebody said, "Well that's not the way you say it." Somebody from Puerto Rico and somebody from Cuba says, "No we say it this way." And then somebody else says, "No *pues aca* [well there] in Guatemala we say it this way." And I said, "Hey, hold on guys. Let me ask you something. Are you understanding what I'm teaching?" "Yeah." "Did you understand the word that I said when I was teaching it?" "Yeah."

“Okay. End of the battle. Let's move on. If you understand what I'm saying we're okay.” And they just started laughing and they said, “Good for you Miss Sanchez for putting us in our place.”

But I wish everything else across all races could be—you know the George Zimmerman thing right now is a very sad issue because I think that media and everything tend to create the negativity that exists and sometimes in a lot of cases and exacerbate everything and we're never going to come together as long as that negativity exists in the media and everywhere else.

LS: And that fear it seems like.

VS: Yeah and the fear of the unknown. Yeah, fear of the unknown because like I said most of the people, most of us come from a good place based on our Catholic religion really because that's what it's all about—humility, being honest and being just good to everyone and people are afraid of that. Sometimes I tell people if someone is standoffish it's not because they are arrogant, it's because they fear what's going to happen in that encounter. And we have to remember that many times.

LS: Is there anything else you'd like to—?

VS: I don't think so. I hope I answered a lot of your questions and sorry about my coughing and my crying.

LS: Oh no, please don't be sorry for any of that. Well, thank you very much.

VS: It's been a pleasure. You're a pretty neat young man.

LS: Thank you. Thank you for the interview.

VS: Thank you.

**Search Words:**

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Communities

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Migrant Education Program  
Needville, Texas  
Oregon  
Pasco, California  
Puerto Rico  
Tejano  
Valley Migrant League  
Virginia Garcia clinic  
Zacatecas, Mexico

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<sup>1</sup> *Evangelina Sanchez elaborated on discrimination in email correspondence (from August 3, 2013) with Luke Sprunger following the interview.*

VS: "At Hank's Thriftway in Cornelius, security accused my brother and I of stealing fishing supplies. We had been looking at them but couldn't find what we wanted. As soon as we left the store security searched us and found nothing.

"Another time my oldest son and I were driving towards Aloha from Hillsboro and three white guys started to yell obscenities at us and waved wrenches at us. They were calling us ----- Arabs. When we stopped at a red light they got out of the car and started beating on our car. My son wanted to get out and take them on and I had to sit on him until the light changed and the cars started honking. That was probably the closest I have come to fearing for my son's and my life.

"Another time...again at Hank's Thriftway, I was pushing a stroller and placed my coat on top of the shade attachment and once again was followed by security and searched when I left. Security was alerted that I might have stashed something under my coat. Again they found nothing.

"Another time I was at a gas station with my friend who is not Hispanic and she and I decided to buy snacks. I decided I didn't want junk food so I did not buy anything. The clerk went on to insist I take everything out of my pockets because he saw me take a box of Jello. A box of Jello! I told him if I was going to steal, a box of Jello would not be worth going to jail for.

"At the crossroads at Cornelius pass, I stopped to buy gas because I was taking my kids to Sauvie Island and asked the clerk to just give me \$4.00 worth of gas. That was all I could afford. He was rude to begin with and wound up filling my tank. I didn't have the money to pay and he started yelling and cussing and said all we Mexicans wanted was to rip people off and get a free ride. I insisted he siphon the gas out or call the police because he was so angry. He just cussed at us (kids in car) and told us to get out of his face.

"In Texas I had one white friend who dared to hang around with us. Believe me she paid for that. She was heavy and the white kids bullied her. I did forget to mention one thing, in spite of everything I was the first Chicana to be nominated for 'Most Beautiful' in our school. So you can see, I tread lightly wherever I go."