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Arceneaux, Grace
Knaster, Meri

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Grace Arceneaux:

Mexican-American Farmworker and Community Organizer, 1920-1977

Interviewed by Meri Knaster

Edited by Randall Jarrell and Irene Reti

Santa Cruz, California

2003

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INTRODUCTION

Grace Palacio Arceneaux, a Mexican-American resident of Watsonville, California, was interviewed in 1977 by Meri Knaster, an editor at the Regional History Project, as part of a series of oral histories documenting local agricultural and ethnic history.

Arceneaux was born in San Martin de Bolaños, Jalisco, Mexico, in March, 1920. She came with her family to San Juan Bautista, California, in 1923 during the havoc of the Mexican Revolution. The family lived on a little ranch and eked out a living farming and doing field work. Her mother died in childbirth when she was a young girl, and shortly thereafter her father died, leaving Arceneaux to care for her nine brothers and sisters. As she said, she always had a child to carry on her hip, wherever she went.

Not only did her parents not speak English, they did not want it spoken in the house; Arceneaux and her siblings translated for their parents, for their father's business deals and jobs. She attended school through the fifth grade and returned to school many years later, when she was in her forties, to obtain her high school diploma at Watsonville night school, and earned a degree at Cabrillo College. Knaster wrote in her notes of these interviews: “All those years of no schooling are not manifested in either her manner of speaking or vocabulary-she's a very articulate woman.”

After her father died, Arceneaux hired out her family as a unit, working in the fields around San Juan Bautista whenever possible, and doing whatever else was available, keeping the county from separating her siblings and putting them in foster homes. Because of serious, recurring bouts of tuberculosis, she spent several years in sanitariums and was no longer able to do fieldwork due to the permanent damage to her health.

Her narrative is rich in recollections of local history, of the Mexican and Filipino

communities and their customs and inter-relationships. She was married at one time to a Filipino farmworker and so became a member of that community as well. She also discusses the life of field workers, harvesting garlic and various other crops, and the role of labor contractors in agriculture. The period she spent among Filipinos is rich with details about a side of Watsonville life that is not well documented—Chinatown, gambling, and prostitution.

Her spirit of grit and determination shines through her descriptions of chronic hard times and poverty as she worked unremittingly to raise her siblings and to make a life for herself. Her life story shows how she made the transition from illegal immigrant farmworker to middle-class social activist.

She speaks movingly of her marriages, work life, her precarious financial situation, and the importance of her Catholicism, as she her evolved from an unquestioning Catholic into her own self-defined understanding of her religion as it embraced activism and equality.

As a mature woman she returned to school, and discovered the world of books and ideas, and gained confidence in her abilities to speak and think critically about the condition of her community, and its political and cultural marginalization. This in turn led to her involvement in community issues during which she became one of the first Mexican-American women in the Pajaro Valley to fight for bilingual education, outreach services for poor women, victims of domestic violence, and those seeking to gain educations for themselves.

Knaster noted many small, telling details of Arceneaux's life when she interviewed her in her home in Watsonville. She wrote: "there is a nice back yard, where she hung laundry on her clothesline after one interview. We met in the kitchen, a remodeled expanded, large room, with a view of the yard through sliding glass doors, a room full of light, spacious. Grace always kept her hands busy-she's one of those women whose work is never done because she does so much and is so industrious, never wasting a moment. She would wash and dry the dishes, pair socks that she had removed from the dryer or fold

cloth napkins. Another time she worked on a quilt she had gotten from someone who had died. It was too big for their bed so she removed the trim and sewed as we talked."

Knaster noted that in the background of the tape recordings you can often hear a tea kettle whistling, or water running as she washes dishes, as Grace's voice moves back and forth according to the activity she is engaged in. Sometimes she would get up from the kitchen table to demonstrate something—how she used to work in the garlic fields, or how she would carry a little brother or sister on her hip. She would unabashedly let tears flow when relating especially emotional episodes in her life, lifting up her glasses as she wiped away the tears.

Knaster characterized Arceneaux as a wonderfully warm, sharing, open person, and extremely informative as well. Despite the hardships in her life, her narration is not bitter or resentful. As her conversation reveals, she has a realistic understanding of ethnic and gender discrimination as it is manifest in the Mexican, Anglo, and Filipino communities, having experienced them herself as a single woman, a Mexican, and later as the wife of a Filipino with a Filipino/Mexican child. Her observations of ethnic and class distinctions in the agricultural communities of San Juan Bautista and Watsonville are a real contribution to the social history of this region.

—Randall Jarrell

September, 2002

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Early Life

Knaster: It's June 1, 1977. I am with Grace Arceneaux in Watsonville, California. There are a number of things I'd like to ask you about. First of all, where were you born?

Arceneaux: San Martin de Bolaños, Jalisco, Mexico.

Knaster: And when were you born?

Arceneaux: March 3, 1920. I thought it was March 2 for years, until I was in my twenties and I finally got my baptismal record.

Knaster: How long did you live in Mexico before you came to the United States?

Arceneaux: About two or three years.

Knaster: Oh, so not very long. What do you remember about your life back there?

Arceneaux: What I remember is our coming here. I think what I remember is because I heard my father and mother repeating it to people when we arrived here. We left right after the Revolution and all that havoc. My father was being followed by somebody who wanted to get rid of him. He was on the other side of the government at that time. We left on horses and I remember them telling how they almost caught up with them in one of those towns and how finally my dad decided we would hide in a place and let them pass up. Then maybe they'd lose track, and then you could go across the mountain. We stayed there and it must have been a while, because Manuel, my brother, was born in 1925. He was already born before [we lived in] Phoenix. You see, it's very vague.

No, I don't remember Mexico. But I'll tell you what happened on my first trip back. It was just a horrible, drawn-out trauma. We went into the desert, horrible poverty. The poverty here had never bothered me. I had lived that way. But I suddenly saw these little girls, yay high . . . they were just *hungry* you know . . . starving. And I thought I saw myself. It was Sunday. We were going up the mountain and we stopped at a little shrine. My husband's a camera kook and he was always stopping. He stopped and I opened the windows—we had air conditioning—but I opened the windows, smelled the air. And in the distance I saw a little hut, and children, and I realized they were coming to me. How cute, you know. I'm not patronizing. The little girl with *trenzas*, she had the baby here on her hip, the way I used to carry my brother. (I was the oldest.) She had him here straddled and she was running, and she's dragging another one. And there's others. I got the shivers. I rolled up the windows and locked the door. I don't know what it is. But it could be also that my mother and dad died young. I was not quite sixteen when my mother died, and I was not quite eighteen when my dad was killed. So I was left with nine brothers and sisters. So it could have been that. But it was those *trenzas* that got me.

Knaster: Did you use to have braids too?

Arceneaux: Yes. Oh, they were terrible. When I was going to school . . . I only went to fourth or fifth grade. I did go back years later. They used to pull my braids. Then there was the day I cut them. An American lady cut them for me, 'cause I did work for her and she cut them without my dad's permission. Well, this is how I did it. I told her that my father couldn't do it because he had no money. I wrote a little short story on that once at Cabrillo College. Got an A on that. The braids were really a focal point.

Knaster: Did you not like the braids yourself?

Arceneaux: No, because over at the school we were the only Mexicans. There were two or three Mexican families then, but I was the only one with braids. My cousin Mary never had braids. If she had them, they'd cut them already.

Knaster: I had braids when I was in school.

Arceneaux: Oh!

Knaster: And I was an immigrant too.

Arceneaux: I didn't think I was going to be happy to go back to Mexico but I proceeded to enjoy it. We were there about three months. It was all summer. We had a real fine time.

Knaster: Did your parents ever talk about the community they lived in in Mexico? What it was like and how small?

Arceneaux: It's still the same.

Knaster: Could you describe it?

Arceneaux: I don't know. We tried to go back. This was the one and only time that I went to Mexico. We came and we were here without papers all my life. We were here illegally until I was married. My marriage was annulled. One day I decided, well, I'm 27 years old. I should vote. Why not become a citizen? I knew I didn't have any papers. My parents just crossed the border, proceeded to live here. According to them when we went to Mexico in 1972, we couldn't go to our hometown because there was a rainy season. It's

up in the mountains in a canyon. The river runs in the middle in a little valley. You have to go down, and from the Jalisco side you couldn't because the roads were all out, the bridges were all out. You'd have to come in from Zacatecas from the north and they advised that we have a jeep. The alternative was to fly in. So I asked the lady how many engines it had, and propellers. She said it's just a single propeller and went like this with her arms. So I thought, oh, it's a helicopter. They're not bad; a helicopter moves down slowly, lands any place. Then the other family told me it was a plane, so I was afraid to go. And Ron was squeamish because I didn't encourage him. It wasn't the right time. Maybe I didn't want to go. I need to build up to this. But we plan to go back. And my cousins were all born here but they want to go back and find out where my uncle and aunt were born.

Knaster: What did your parents have to say about the town?

Arceneaux: Well, my mother said it's a little *pueblito.*

Knaster: Was she born there?

Arceneaux: Yes. She was a native. My father was born in the mountains; he would say that was his birthplace. That included Zacatecas, Jalisco. In his baptismal record he is baptized in Jalisco, but they came down from the mountains, so he could have been born in Zacatecas. It's a little town, a *pueblito.* My grandfather was a shoemaker, so they were a little bit better off.

Knaster: This was your mother's father.

Arceneaux: My mother's father. He never talked about working for an *haciendado*. But my father's father did. They worked for an *haciendado* who gave them everything. And then it happened that the *haciendado's* son went off to the side and got pieces of land. He took some of his best friends; they were his friends, not really workers or slaves, and took them along and let them work the land for him, and they could share. So that was my father's side of it.

Knaster: So he was like a sharecropper.

Arceneaux: I suppose. He'd talk about the dry years, and how the seed had been wasted and how they didn't have anything. That's when my father took off to break horses, broncos, train wild horses and go sell them.

Knaster: Do you what he was growing on the land?

Arceneaux: Corn. My mother, being the daughter of a shoemaker, had a little bit of prestige. My grandfather was very strict and stuck-up. They used to go to church and they always had to cover their head. My mother raised me like that. You had to have your sleeves down to here. I read a novel not too long ago like that. It's exactly like my mother taught me. How the priest used to scold them. They went to confession every week and told him everything. He controlled them. My mother wanted to get married and the priest said, "You can't, because your sister has to get married first, your older sister." Any argument they had was given to the priest. They were told what to do.

Knaster: How many people do you think lived in that little town?

Arceneaux: There were at least twenty to thirty families. But they would go away and come back. They'd go to Guadalajara, which is about twenty miles away, maybe a little bit further. They would go away and work and come back, and keep their family there. They were already doing it. They're still doing it. They're still there, some of the families. My uncle's sister is still there with her family who goes away and comes back. She's guarding her family plot. But it isn't a big town. On a map it's just a little spot, a little speck. In some maps they don't even have it down. They make their own things. People come and bring new things from the city, and then set up a little shop there and sell them all to the people who live there.

Knaster: Do you know how old your mother was when she got married?

Arceneaux: She wasn't quite sixteen. At fifteen she wanted to get married.

Knaster: And they eloped?

Arceneaux: Yes. My aunt was to be married. She was two or three years older than my mother. She was to be married in six months. My father figured that Josefa would never get married because then she'd be the head of the house because they were orphans; their mother had died. They were taking care of the rest, it was a couple of months before my aunt's wedding that my mother just packed. My father was gone, and when he came by he just whistled. She used to tell us that my grandfather was sleeping in the doorway, (he was warm) and she just tiptoed very lightly and left. She had one or two boys that died before my older brother. Each time before the baby was to be born, she

would send a message home and ask for forgiveness. And my grandfather would say, “I don’t have a daughter. Tear the note.”

Knaster: Where had they gone to when they left the village?

Arceneaux: Just a few miles, up in the hills. She started going wherever my father went. He would travel sometimes two or three hundred miles. He had his regular rodeo season. Maybe it wasn’t a rodeo. I don’t know what they call them. But his specialty was getting the wild horses.

Knaster: And this was before the Revolution?

Arceneaux: It was about the time of the Revolution, 1924 . . . horses were very important in those days. That was the transportation. And the army wanted . . . they were fighting over something else, you know . . . their leader changed and they kept fighting.

Knaster: Did your mother talk about the kinds of things that she had to do, her responsibilities, even as a young girl?

Arceneaux: Oh, yes. I was raised like that. I guess maybe when we came to San Juan Bautista, she had her sister here and her brother. After Manuel was born and my father was working on the railroad . . . My aunt Gabriela says, “We were sitting in the train waiting for the train to start, when suddenly this face appeared on the window,” and it was my father, hanging onto the window and telling her . . . “We’ll be there in San Juan. We’ll be there in two months.” And he disappeared. He recognized them through the window. That must have been in 1924, at the end of the year.

Knaster: How long did you stay in Phoenix?

Arceneaux: Couple of years.

Knaster: Did he talk about how difficult it was to get across the border?

Arceneaux: It wasn't.

Knaster: It was easy in those days?

Arceneaux: Because he paid the man. Gave him ten dollars.

Knaster: Ten dollars in those days was a lot of money.

Arceneaux: He still had to work a long time to get it. The idea was that they would still shoot at them as they crossed the river, but they'd shoot above the water. He didn't trust them. But my mother was a beautiful swimmer. He told her to go one place and he'd go another place, and they made it across. Nobody followed them.

Knaster: Were they able to carry things with them?

Arceneaux: No.

Knaster: All of you just went across the water . . .

Arceneaux: Whatever was there we were wearing.

Knaster: Did they know where to go? Were there relatives in the United States that they were going to?

Arceneaux: They were coming to San Juan Bautista.

Knaster: That's all they knew?

Arceneaux: That's all they knew.

Knaster: My goodness. What a trip!

Arceneaux: And remember, we left on one horse, carrying the two people. And he walked a lot of times. Then we went to Phoenix, and that's where we stayed, because that's where the baby was born and was baptized.

Knaster: So your mother was pregnant during this trip?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: That must have been a hardship.

Arceneaux: Sometime in there she got pregnant. On the way, or just as we left. And then we came to San Juan on the train from Phoenix. And Dad came later.

Knaster: What kind of work was he doing in Phoenix?

Arceneaux: He worked on the railroad. You know, pick-axe . . .

Knaster: Do you remember where you lived or anything?

Arceneaux: Nothing, no. I've never been able to remember. What I remember I don't trust, because you hear it. And pretty soon—did it really happen or was it told? In fact,

most of what I'm saying . . . I can't tell you that it happened exactly like this. Even when my father talked about some of his escapades, other people said he was exaggerating. You know, if you're talking to your youngsters, and they laugh . . . He danced, he was a wonderful dancer. He said he had danced in the capital; maybe it was the capital of Jalisco, not necessarily Mexico City. But we thought it was Mexico City. So you just have to bear with that. But it was good memories.

Knaster: Well, if you weren't able to carry things with you, then he must have done fairly well in Mexico to bring money . . . and then be able to provide, find a home, and food.

Arceneaux: I'm sure they had some money. But we didn't have the bare necessities. They brought in a lady to deliver the baby. And we lived with someone. He asked someone, will you let us live here and I'll pay you? That's how you lived. Somebody knocked on my door, "My wife is pregnant; I have no place to put her. [Can I] keep her here until I find something for her?" So probably that's what happened. They didn't talk about it. It was a very hard time. They never told us the bad. I think that it was psychology. We were so poor in San Juan, that I think maybe if they built up their background, like talking about their dancing and fiestas, that would make us feel like we had something, that my mother and father had had something some time. But Mother now and then would sit and cry. I remember that she'd tell us, this is very hard, to marry young. Yet they loved us very much. They were very, very, very much in love. There were a couple of ladies who used to make fun, well kind of frown upon this caress—you know, holding hands.

Knaster: (laughter)

Arceneaux: But they were jealous. I used to think, I wonder why my father holds my mother? She's not going to fall down. You hear what other people say. But then as you grow, well gee, that's what it was. It was love.

Knaster: Affection.

Arceneaux: And it was difficult to show with all these old biddies, or maybe the way they had been raised, not to show it. But you see when you go away and you only have your man, like it says in the Bible—you leave your family roost, take off and never again their folks. Well, you really love. You have nothing else. You just hold on to each other. I imagine her pregnancies in distant towns, wherever they were. How did she have them? She learned probably to deliver her own babies. Who knows?

Knaster: Do you think that back in her town in Mexico when you were born she had a midwife come in?

Arceneaux: Yes, always. She had them here in Watsonville, in San Juan.

Knaster: Really?

Arceneaux: No one was born in a hospital. No one.

Knaster: Were there any complications or anything?

Arceneaux: Well, she died from having a baby. When she did go to a doctor. That was when she had the doctor, the last baby. Maybe she had a doctor for little Joe. I think she

had a doctor afterwards. Later I think she would go and get an examination, see. But with the baby that she died of . . . something happened, she had tuberculosis already and she developed Bright's disease, which is a kidney ailment. When I interpreted for her, the doctor said that the medicine that would cure her or arrest her disease would abort her child. So she had to think it over. It was a big decision because she was months pregnant, too late, too far gone not to take it into consideration. Sometimes when you're a month, it's nothing to having a miscarriage. She went home and talked to the priest and he said not to take the medicine.

I was a very mean sixteen-year-old. I went over there and I talked. "Well, now she's dead. Did she follow the precepts of the church? Now what is the church going to do with her ten kids?" They said it was an act of God. I said, "That's a terrible God that you have." I held bitterness for many years, because I had to raise them.

Knaster: There were ten children?

Arceneaux: There were nine and myself, yes. And my father was killed in an accident two years later.

Knaster: How did you take care of them? Did they go to work too?

Arceneaux: Some of them died. In fact, quite a few of them. My mother died January 2, 1936. The following year, in 1937, my brother finds out that he has sickness; he must have told us, but I didn't hear it. Whatever he had was terminal. He went to San Francisco, and I went with him too. Although I was fifteen or sixteen I somehow was not very bright. Because whatever happened I should have been very much aware of my

brother's illness and I just found out that he was very sick and he came and told my dad, "I want to go back to Mexico. I want to die in Mexico." He set up a raffle for his double-stringed guitar, which was a very good guitar. He used to sing and he was a composer. He was a wonderful person. He was nineteen.

Knaster: When he died?

Arceneaux: Well, when he left. He died when he was twenty, the following year. He left this raffle going on. He told us, I was part of it, to sell tickets. He had so many tickets made, just enough to pay back the debt to his friends. So we sold tickets. And when they raffled it, the person that won it turned around and raffled it again and kept sending him money. He had real good friends that thought a great deal of him.

Then my father died, 1938. August the 22nd he was killed in an accident. It was a very strange accident. The car was found in San Juan. We lived . . . here's San Juan, and here's Hollister. And we lived in a little ranch here, a little hut, a little shack. It was the first day of picking prunes, a Monday. That night he went into town. He used to go into town two or three times a week. The only thing we needed was salt and tomato sauce. He never came back. He used to drink, but not when we were working. Sunday he'd sober up. Not when we were going to work the next day. Or at least not when we first started our contract. We would contract terms as a family, and pick them all. When he did drink it was in cycles. I sensed that. Well, we just knew he'd go in and we'd go later on a bicycle or we'd walk into town, it was three miles, and bring the car and bring him home and put him to bed. He never came back. In the morning I told Adolf. Now, Salvador's in Mexico already. Manuel, my next brother has cataracts. He still has cataracts because

he's partially blind. So Adolf is the one next to him. I told him, "Something happened." He said, "No. Dad is drinking." I said, "Something happened, so you have to go. I can't go." So he takes the bicycle and drives into town. The next thing I know, a strange car drives up this lane. It was a police car and he had Adolf with him. They said they wanted to talk to me. Adolf came over and said, "My father is dead. An accident. My father had an accident." I said, "Is he all right?" He says, "I don't know. They won't tell me." And ohh the little ones started to cry when they heard. I said, "It isn't true." He says, "I want to talk to you. Will you step out here?" I said, "Just a minute," and I went in and said, "What did he say to you?" He says, "He just said he had an accident." "Did he say anything else?" He says, "No, but he said he had to talk to you, that they'd been trying to find out who he was." I said, "Oh, my God." And then Molly, my sister, starts crying and Tillie . . . everybody's crying 'cause Daddy had an accident. And I told Manuel, now he was very dependable, he may not be able to see good, but he was dependable. I said to Manuel . . . I gave him the rosary. "You say the rosary. And you pray and make these kids pray until I'm back. No matter what happens," I said, "everything's going to be all right." He said, "All right, sit down everybody." They sat around and I left them praying. And I went with [the policeman]. He didn't turn to San Juan. He turned to Hollister. That's the city, the county seat. And as he turned that corner, a curb, he stopped, and he said, "This is where your father had an accident." I knew he was dead. I never had anything to do with policemen. I never sat in a police car before. But something told me, the sixth sense. Power of deduction, you know. He couldn't come home. They took me to the coroner's. They had picked up pieces of him.

Knaster: Oh my God.

Arceneaux: He'd been run over with a semi-truck. On the side of the road. Evidently, all eight tires went over him.

Knaster: How awful. So he hadn't been driving at all.

Arceneaux: We don't know. He drove the car into town . . . That's how they caught Adolf. Adolf went up to the car and was trying to start it. The police came up and said, "What are you doing in that car?" This was my dad's car. He was twelve or thirteen. And he's scared because he's not supposed to drive, but he knew how and he said, "Well, get in the car." My brother said, "It doesn't start." This is where the policeman put it together: the motor didn't start; the starter wore off at the battery; he started walking . . . But why did he go four miles past his home? I asked people in the pool hall if he had come in. They said, yes, that he had come in and said, "The car doesn't want to start. I must have choked it up." He stayed and hung around there awhile talking to them. Then he left again. No one remembers him being drunk. Somebody thinks that someone gave him a ride, even killed him and dumped him out there. I don't know. The policemen came two or three times, and we had a gun in the house, an automatic 45. They wanted to know about my father, did he have any enemies? He had enemies, from Mexico.

Knaster: I see. That's why he maintained a gun in the house?

Arceneaux: Maybe. We had received a letter once a few years back when Mother was still alive, telling him that they knew where he was and that they were going to report him to the immigration authorities.

Knaster: The whole family was living here without papers.

Arceneaux: Yes. But that happened to everybody. Now that I'm here I know that didn't necessarily have to be connected to death, could just be someone who got angry with him, and knew he was without papers. Everybody probably was. I don't know. My aunt wasn't, but other people were. So I don't know. What I did to the gun is I tied a string on it and I put it down the toilet in the outdoor privy. I always thought I'd pull it back up, because I could get money for it. But they kept coming. They kept asking too many questions. So one day I went in and cut the string. I didn't want to have it. The less we had those things around, the better off.

Knaster: You said your parents went to San Juan Bautista because you had some relatives there.

Arceneaux: My grandfather Catarino was there.

Knaster: Whose father was that?

Arceneaux: My mother's.

Knaster: Your mother's father. He had been the shoemaker.

Arceneaux: Yes. He had come because his son was coming here. You know how one family comes, and they write back and they say . . . What year did the cement plant start? I have this little cut-out about the mission and they say something about the cement plant. That's where my father worked later. But I don't think the cement plant was working when we came. I have no idea why my uncle would come here. I imagine someone from San Martin came first. And why they would come, it's hard to know.

Knaster: What did your father do when you arrived here?

Arceneaux See, the only thing I can remember is that they all worked on the cement plant. I don’t know what he did. But he could do any work, any labor. He never did learn English. But we got here in 1925. By 1928 he’d bought us a brand-new Chevrolet.

Knaster: In three years.

Arceneaux: In 1929 was when the Depression came. By 1929 the car was paid for already. So here we are, poor, with no food, but driving around in a brand-new Chevrolet.

Knaster: Did you live in town at the beginning or . . .

Arceneaux: We lived down by the cement plant.

Knaster: Did you live alone or with other families?

Arceneaux: First we lived in a big house. Evidently it was like a boarding house or a rooming house. Then after that we got our own individual house. That I remember. Then we moved about a mile outside of where the cement falls on your house. Because everything you washed, everything’s cement in the house. That’s where Molly was born in 1928.

Knaster: What was that place like when you lived by the cement plant? How large was it?

Arceneaux: It was very, very little.

Knaster: Was it used as a house?

Arceneaux: Yes, it was a house. And so we lived outside most of the time.

Knaster: Was it a wooden house? Or stucco?

Arceneaux: Wooden. And there were lots of mountains and hills around so we played in the woods and all of that. I used to get poison oak.

Knaster: Do you remember how many rooms it had?

Arceneaux: Well, the house where we first lived, they used to point to. It was a two-story house. And you went in there and it had small little rooms. But I don't remember it. The little house had just one room, but it was ours.

Knaster: Did it have facilities?

Arceneaux: No, the faucet was right outside the door, and we had outside privies. We owned a whole slew of them. And some people had gardens, flowers in them. The road was right there. Everybody passed by to work. My Dad used to stand out there. He'd start walking or else get a ride. Somebody would always be riding by.

Knaster: Did you all have to pile in together, sleeping together?

Arceneaux: Well in the first place we lived we slept on the floor. We just rolled up a mattress and slept on the floor. Was just one room, with a little table and that was it. But the shack a mile away from the cement plant had three rooms, a little kitchen and two

rooms. That's where my sister was born and that's where I began to remember many things. I was eight years old, I think.

Knaster: Were the kids sent to school at all?

Arceneaux: We were all sent. My brother was taken right away. But he stayed in the first grade, so that when I went I was in the first grade with him. So he was two years in the first, and the third year I went and he was still there. But when I went, he went ahead. When they took me to school they said, her name is Reyes, but the teacher heard "Grace." There were two Reyes that had died and they were bound and determined to have a Reyes, 'cause there's always a Reyes in the family. That was me.

Knaster: So the whole time you lived in San Juan Bautista your father worked in the cement plant?

Arceneaux: Well, as long as he lived. The plant closed during the Depression.

Knaster: Were you also providing your own food? Did you have a little piece of land to grow anything?

Arceneaux: Always, if you could. But not in that little place. There was not room. It was rock. The yard was like cement. I think it was the cement falling. But when Molly was born the back was corn and tomatoes.

Knaster: Who took care of that? Was it your father or your mother?

Arceneaux: Both. And we did, you know. Pull weeds . . . He planted it and we'd go out. She was always busy with the babies. I remember when Adolf was born. He was six or seven years younger than I. I washed diapers for him. And then for Molly I'm already an expert. I'm washing them out, they're cleared and rinsing them five times in the water. I remember every time, I hate you. I hate babies. Washing—I hate babies.

Knaster: You started to talk about how your mother was raised in a little town and the kind of things that she did? You did the same things.

Arceneaux: Yeah! And I knew it. She made me cook when I was little, to stir and make our tortillas. When we got here, it was very difficult to find corn. So we adapted, we made tortillas out of flour. White flour. We could get white flour. So we learned to make tortillas and she used to tell me that it's easier here, because we get the flour. Finally she got her own *metate* because she needed it for certain condiments, like when she broke up walnuts or almonds for the molé. She had to have it. She couldn't do without it. So my father must have found her something that was just as good.

She used to make me stir food a certain way, and you don't add this until later and you taste it and you don't blow it over the stove, taught me how to comb hair, how to make *trenzas* for my sister . . . how to start up here and then down. How to make fringe on the *rebozos*, which, by the way, is the same knot you use in macramé, which is why I can't do macramé too well. She used to make church things. Church linen. I don't know when she had the time. She taught me how to crochet, how to pull threads. I saved them. I use them for doilies. Is it like lace? What you call lace?

Knaster: It's kind of like lace, yes. My mother used to do that.

Arceneaux: Yes. You have a hole here where you take it this way and that. Then you fill it in with your thread and you make a little pattern there and follow it around. That's the seal . . . And how to sweep. You wet the broom, you wet it a little, and you stop and empty the thing like that. Methodically.

Knaster: What kind of foods did you cook?

Arceneaux: Well, not very much. (laughter) For example, *calabasitas*, how to fix squash. How to do your meat; how to add the vegetables. She used to say in the United States we don't have . . . different things that were missing, you know. So she'd grow her *tomillo*, all that, but she was always saying, we could just go out and pick from . . . you know, bay leaves . . . But in years I think she adjusted or she found treasuries . . . drive clear to San Jose once or twice a year, to the movies and to a Mexican store. They had the money; she always bought something in little packages; they were little spices that was missing. In Mexico when someone had a sickness, she could boil something, she could do this. But she was kind of deprived here of all these things that she was used to.

Knaster: Was going to church and practicing Catholicism very much a part of family life?

Arceneaux: Yes. That was the main thing in our house. The main thing. Even at the worst time in my life I've never missed church. I just couldn't not go to church, it's just part of me. My father couldn't go all the time when he was working, and so it was all right. See, this is how they raised us. Your dad can't go because he's working. But we must go for

him. We'd go anyway. Sometimes he could have gone, but he didn't go. He made us go. We all went. And when he went it was like it was a big deal—"Want to let God see me once in awhile." He was kind of above God. It was the idea we had, "Well Dad's all right because he's tough." But he was a good man, a very good man.

Knaster: Did you get the feeling in your house that you were being trained and prepared in a particular way because you were a girl, and the boys in the family, your brothers . . . were being trained differently?

Arceneaux: Oh yes. Definitely.

Knaster: Do you remember that you were allowed certain things, or not allowed certain things and the opposite for them?

Arceneaux: Yes, right along. From the beginning. But I'll be honest with you, I was a tomboy, so that if I finished all my work, and I did it, I mean, I almost broke a gut doing it, I could go out and play with the boys. They couldn't say, well you didn't do this. I had done it. I was responsible for the little ones, the one-year-old. I'd go play with them. Baseball, tag, football—I don't know what we played. We played in the mountains; we played in the hills and valleys. We used to go for hikes, and we used to pick wildflowers. We did everything. And me lugging somebody, I always had a baby. If he walked, or if he was little . . . later on we moved over into town. We lived across from the school, and actually took the baby. She used to sit. I'd sit her and I'd bat the ball and I'd run to first base and the baby would cry and I says, "Time out," and go get the baby and put him on first base. Mary, my cousin, was laughing Monday, 'cause she was remembering, "You

and your kids, you always had kids." There were only five in her family. But I went everywhere with kids.

Knaster: That you went out and played with the boys was allowed?

Arceneaux: Well . . .

Knaster: You know, they're not supposed to mix.

Arceneaux: Well no. But in my case I demanded it. I worked it out with her. It wasn't right and I think she was embarrassed. She didn't talk about me doing it. When I came in I had to clean up and pretend that I hadn't been out. My father never found out that I did those things. He came in later and I knew that I was supposed to be ladylike. We never sat down. Dad sat down first. First he'd come home . . . *buenas noches*, kiss his hand. I always had poison oak in my mouth, so I was excused from kissing his hand. Then whoever got to him first would take his lunch pail. He would always leave a little piece of taco, burrito, a little piece of food, or part of an apple, whatever he had in his lunch, and we got to eat it. That was it. So I was always there first because I was smart. I was tricky. I knew the time when he was coming and I was older. Wasn't fair. I always got it. (laughter) My brother was so docile, he was so good. But I had noticed right away that my mother was very partial to my brother Salvador. And now that I'm a mother and older, and I've watched other mothers, their first-born son is someone special, you know. It is even if you have others later. Because I see it in my sister. I see it in my friend, she was with me all day yesterday. We discussed that point. Your first-born son to a mother is special.

Knaster: Why do you think that is?

Arceneaux: I don't know. I think all your aspirations . . . see a girl pulls for her father. That was in my case. I found others who felt the same way. In my case, I liked my mother and I loved her, but I thought my father could do no wrong. It was just extra. He was a God. He did everything. Well, who brought the food, who did this? The father. And he loved me. Someday I'm going to grow up and marry someone like my father.

I have a son. But our relationship was very strange because when he was born I went to the hospital for five years—tuberculosis. So when I saw him again he was already in first grade. I missed those first years. It's just a blank, a void. And try as I can, I can never relive it. I could never inculcate my feelings to him. Just about then I don't have a husband any more, I have a son, who isn't a son, really. Who I have to train to be self-reliant, dependable, 'cause I might go back to the sanitorium any day. I wasn't able to really open up to him. It has caused much pain to both of us. Now he's thirty-one and I'm almost sixty. And we have a beautiful friendship, brother, sister, son . . . husband, everything . . . We are everything—spiritually, physically, emotionally. It's a wonderful thing. We'd laugh. He'd say, "Well, I'm your first born, but I'm also the one you want to get out of the house. The one you want to keep, the one you want to cuss." The way I see it, usually a husband wants a son to carry on the name. You love your husband, you want to do everything you want for him so that he will be happy. So you produce a son.

Knaster: Do you feel that boys were more welcome in a family than girls? Was there that kind of discrimination?

Arceneaux: Oh, yes. Because boys are going to carry on the name. Boys are going to take care of their father.

Knaster: Did you ever hear families talk about girls, that girls were worthless?

Arceneaux: Well, not worthless, but . . . my mother used to say, "She's going to grow up and get married. What does she need school for? They pulled me out every year . . . when there was going to be a baby in the house they pulled me out. I think in sixth or seventh grade my father said no more school. Our principal came to the house and said to him, with an interpreter, (me) . . . a very (laughter) prejudiced interpreter. He said to him that I was very intelligent and that I could get to be someplace. You know, to go to school is to let me go. And he says, *"Porque?"* . . . Then I turned around at fourteen and told him I wanted to get married.

Knaster: So did you go on in school? Did your father permit you to keep on going to school?

Arceneaux: Well, yes I think I went back another time . . . we lived across the street. We'd be sitting and eating and the bell would ring and we'd run, almost get killed crossing the street. We'd dash out with food in our mouth, you know, trying to finish it. I ended up going and coming and staying on half a day. They all knew about me. That didn't happen to anybody in the family. They all went to school. But I had to, 'cause I was the oldest.

Knaster: So your brothers and sisters did finish high school?

Arceneaux: Oh no, grammar school. Manuel, the one with bad eyes, he graduated from high school. Molly went to high school two years and got married; Adolf went three years and joined the marines; and Babe went ten years and joined the army. So they all at least went past the eighth grade. Salvador graduated from grammar school, but he left. You didn't have to go to high school. It was really a feather in your cap to get out of grammar school.

In 1936 I think I finally got a diploma. I don't know why. I must have asked for one. They used to give me books and things I had to do; they'd give me tests now and then. They were kind of interested in me.

Knaster: Do you remember how many kids were in your class when you were in school? You mentioned something about how you were one of the only Mexican children.

Arceneaux: In the fourth there were only three or four Mexican families going to school. That was it. See we were like a little *colonia* there, a little Mexican group that kind of clung together. In the years of 1928 and 1930 there was only about ten families at the most. And not all of them had school children. In a class there were 25. There weren't big classrooms.

Knaster: Do you feel that you were treated differently than the other children in class?

Arceneaux: Not in San Juan Bautista. Differently in that the children made fun. But we were not discriminated against, if we did we never noticed. We didn't know the difference. You know, if you're ignorant or something it doesn't exist, for you. I never knew prejudice until I came to Watsonville.

Knaster: Is that true?

Arceneaux: Yes. And I was 25 when I came to Watsonville. But I never knew about it. I remember having this big argument with one of my girlfriends; we were about eighteen and she was going to apply for a job at Montgomery Ward in Gilroy. She was bragging that she went to high school and she took bookkeeping, and she was going to be a secretary, and I says, “I bet you won’t get the job.” And she says, “I will too, ‘cause I’m smart.” You know, one of those deals . . . I said, “How much you want to bet that you, a Mexican woman, will get it?” She said, “That’s not true, I don’t look Mexican.” I said, “But you are” And I remember she says, “I don’t look.” And she didn’t . . . to me. I look at her now and she looks Mexican. But she was just a bit shade fairer than I, you know. She was fair. She isn’t, but to me she was fair. And I told her that and she didn’t get the job. She got mad at me, said I had cursed her. But what made me think that? I hadn’t an idea about the difference, that if you were Mexican you didn’t get this kind of job . . .

I remember, see my parents were already dead, I remember going to work at Vincent’s Restaurant and Ice Cream Parlor. I wanted to work as a waitress. And they told me no, they wanted somebody else as a waitress, but I could work in the kitchen. I worked in the kitchen. And they hired an Anglo for up front and I said, “Well, I didn’t want to look at them anyway. I don’t want to work up . . .” See I’m already making excuses. And back there meant that I worked so hard. I’d go in about six o’clock in the morning and work till midnight. I’d clean up the floors after they’d close up. The lady . . . one night I must have looked like I was going to faint. She gave me a glass of whiskey. I drank it and I asked whether this was whiskey. She said, “It will make you feel good. It wake you up.

I'll be all right." I asked, "What is it?" "Drink it all at once." Gulped it and I coughed and coughed and she says, "It's good for you." I felt this good feeling all over and I was able to continue work. But I was already getting TB. Because I had another attack in those years. That was in 1941. I went to a sanitarium for a year.

Knaster: You said that in elementary school there was a little *colonia*, about ten Mexican families. Did they all work in the cement factory where your father did?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: So they weren't involved in agriculture.

Arceneaux: No. Well the plant closed in '29.

Knaster: Do you remember how many hours a day your father used to work? Or how much he made in those days?

Arceneaux: No. I have no idea. As soon as the plant closed then we all started working in the fields. Everybody. My father and people left the town. They would go away and come back. See, the people who left never came back. New people came in. And I don't know who was doing that work before.

Knaster: Could have been Filipinos. Or even before that it was Japanese.

Arceneaux: Or Chinese.

Knaster: But that was way before.

Arceneaux: By the time we went to work in the 1930s we were working for Japanese people.

Knaster: Oh, you worked for Japanese farmers. Were the fields around San Juan Bautista?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: And you were still living in town, or were you living outside? ’Cause you said you lived in a place between Hollister and San Juan.

Arceneaux: Yeah, well that’s when my father died. That was later on, in the thirties. 1936, ‘37, ‘38. Let’s see, we moved from that little house where my sister was born. We moved to an old rambling, wooden-frame house where Adolf and Gregory was born and little Joe, across from the school. Then they tore the house down and we had to move back to a house that we couldn’t afford in town. We lived there only a few months. Then we traded houses with this family. They moved in here, and we moved over there, right by the Community Hall, and that’s where my mother died in 1936. So we moved about four times in a period of six or seven years.

Working in the Fields

Knaster: When the plant closed who went out to the fields? Did the whole family go?

Arceneaux: Just my father, but he soon was able to use the children, because everything’s contract in those days. It wasn’t hourly work. Like garlic, which is still being hand-picked. Now they have machines, but in those days a tractor ran through the

garlic and cut the roots, and then you go by and shake each pile of garlic and turn it upside down. The sun beats on it and dries it up. Then in two, three weeks you come back and you cut it off, and you just leave the little heads. The children could be seen picking the heads and putting them into buckets, carrying them over there and then somebody putting it into sacks.

Knaster: Did your father take the kids out of school so they could do this? Or was that done in the summer?

Arceneaux: A lot of it was in the summer. Garlic. Then also the school doesn't open until later because of the harvest. It will open instead of September maybe in October. Also you just don't send your kids to school.

Knaster: Do you know how your father worked? Did someone approach him and ask him to come work, or did he go around to farms and ask?

Arceneaux: I have no idea how he started. But once he started he caught on real easy. And he had a bicycle; before he had the car he had a bicycle. Because that's what Manuel was saying, that he used to ride around his bicycle to do things. He must have gotten acquainted with people. So one day he went away on a bicycle and came back with a car. He had caught onto the way of life. My father had a lot of native intelligence and he soon used it in this very . . . he had been dealing with people, arguing and haggling. He would just eyeball some acres of land harvesting and tell, "I'd do it for you for a hundred dollars."

Knaster: So he was never paid by the weight or by the hour.

Arceneaux: No, no.

Knaster: No matter what happened he was committed to that.

Arceneaux: And we would do it. The whole family. My mother didn't work very much. She was considered too good to work. Even my aunt used to say, "Well, if you'd go help them, it'd be better." "Well, he doesn't want me to work." She always had a little baby, but they had babies too, but she just didn't want the baby out there. If she did anything, she'd cut apricots. Now that's under a shed. Ladies do that.

Knaster: Did you work out in the garlic fields?

Arceneaux: Oh yes.

Knaster: How old were you at the time?

Arceneaux: I think I was very young. I could just walk and I was in the garlic fields. Picking tomatoes and picking prunes and oh, after they died it just went on and on. Then during the war in 1940, '41, '42, I hoed, hoed lettuce.

Knaster: So during the thirties until your father died you were always going out and working as a family unit?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: Did your father ever bring other people in, sort of become a labor contractor?

Arceneaux: No.

Knaster: It was always a family operation.

Arceneaux: He might have worked for someone but he never lasted long with those people. He didn't go for that. He was a loner when it came to work.

Knaster: Was that a fairly standard practice?

Arceneaux: No. We knew of contractors, but they would take big operations, not the little valley of San Juan. It's too small for a big thing and it's too big for a small thing, pretty unique, you know. Once you had your ranchers staked out, then you go back each year to do their thing. And if you can't, you say to your ***compañera*,** "Well, I'm not going to be able to work Batello's prunes, want to go?" And so we pass it onto someone else. You laid out your map for the following year.

Knaster: Were all the growers Japanese?

Arceneaux: No. Portuguese, Japanese. Maybe Mr. Nyland was English; he used to have a lot of potatoes and beets.

Knaster: Do you remember any difference among the growers . . . if you're working for Japanese growers was the set-up one way, and if you were working for Portuguese were the people different?

Arceneaux: Well, with Japanese I liked it because they used to share food with us. They liked our food and we liked their food. I don't know if my parents did, I'm talking about myself. I liked their daikon or radishes. Salty radishes. Oooh, I loved them. So I would give them my tortillas and beans or whatever, and they would give us that stuff. And

then they'd share little rice cakes, and they talked their language and we talked ours, and we talked about them and I thought they were talking about us. But we did their work. They were very, very strict bosses you know. They didn't take no bull about it. You had to do it a certain way, and they didn't instruct how to do it. They respected us only because we were workers and we respected them. We got along. We felt that we were as good as they were, even if we were their workers. At least I did.

Knaster: Were they good about paying?

Arceneaux: Very good. I always thought Portuguese people were nice, because we went to church with them. That was my idea. I don't know if my mother and father felt that way. My father didn't trust people that believed in God. He knew that they weren't holy holies. But I thought that because people went to church they were better. Many years later when I was alone, I went to them and told them that I needed work, and they gave me work. Or I'd tell them that I needed some money and we'll do the work for you. "Well, you can't do it like your dad did." I said, "But we'll work for you. You tell us what you want us to do." And they said, "Do you need some money?" I said, "Well, not really." They said, "well here I have . . ." and they gave me a chicken or two, or some corn. It helped. I felt that they were good people, the Portuguese people. I never did that to the Japanese. I didn't feel comfortable. Anyway, soon after the war came they left.

Knaster: The Japanese left. But when you were working for them were their farms family-run too?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: They let their whole families . . .

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: And the Portuguese too?

Arceneaux: No they were a little more wealthy. The mother and maybe the children only worked when school was out. They paid people to work for them. They went to school and they worked. They were always working. The ladies were always out there. They wore pants, which we thought was strange. We wore pants, too, but we were younger. But the older ladies were already wearing pants at work.

Knaster: That's interesting. Did the Japanese grow certain products and the Portuguese others?

Arceneaux: Not really. Japanese raised a lot of garlic. But then once in awhile we had Portuguese people doing it. And the Japanese had what we called truck farms, whereas the Portuguese had the orchards—apples, prunes pears . . . Then there was the Ferry-Morse Seed Company. I never worked for them but if you got into that, that was a good job. The women would work sacking seeds and sorting them . . . I used to go watch them. I used to say I wish I could work here. It looked easy. Didn't have to break your back, 'cause you stood up straight. That was a big agriculture section. If you ever go into Hollister, when you're driving the stretch between San Juan, all to your right is the Ferry-Morse Seed Company. Some times of the year it's like a patch quilt of flowers, blooming. You go into the mountains and look down and you see this color. Beautiful. It's been there for forty or fifty years.

Knaster: Could you describe a typical day of working out in the fields when you were kids, like what time you would get up and all the things that you would go through before even getting to the field, and then what you did in the field.

Arceneaux: Well, first of all you don't want to get up. You wake up, you hear the tortillas, you know . . . tap. Your mother was making them.

Knaster: How early would that be?

Arceneaux: It was dark yet. Dark and we had a wooden stove. Then she'd start pump . . .

Knaster: You mean a wood-burning stove?

Arceneaux: Yes, a wood-burning stove. Then she would call us, and then pretty soon she'd come and shake us. Then we'd get up, and my dad would be up. I don't know where he would be. Sometimes he'd be chopping wood. Sometimes he had already gone to the field and done some things. He'd go out and come back. Then when he came in he'd eat. And he'd take us with him. Well, it's nice in the morning because whatever you're going to do, you're fresh and you've got all kinds of ideas. You're going to beat your brother and do better than him. He says, "You did this much yesterday. Now, today try and see if you get there. We'll see. We'll see which of you can get there." And it was just like competition. He had us going then. And he just let us. He trusted us. He never told us to hurry up, he just set the pace.

Knaster: How close were the fields? If you were living in town, how did you get out to the fields?

Arceneaux: Oh, we had a car.

Knaster: Oh, you had the car, right. So, you'd have your tortillas and . . .

Arceneaux: She gave us this meal in the morning. When we were living already at the community hall all we had to do was walk about two blocks and then the ledge of the valley starts. You walk down and down, and it's only two miles out to where the ranches are. We walked, maybe the car was broken, or maybe we didn't use the car. But I remember walking single file . . .

Knaster: In the dark?

Arceneaux: No, it was already daylight. And then I remember Dad walking back to the house to get the lunch. So it'd be nice and warm.

Knaster: He'd bring back the lunch for all the kids?

Arceneaux: Yes. Or else he'd start a fire, and my mother would come in. She'd walk over and bring us the lunch. It'd be nice and warm. She'd put the kettle on the fire and serve us if it was soup, or else if it was liquidy or whatever. If we took our lunch with us, then he'd make the fire. Which was nice.

If we were pulling garlic we just got our row. We each got our row. I got a whole row but the little ones were two to a row, 'cause they were little. You had to help them so you'd put them in the middle. If we got ahead you'd have to help the ones that were behind. Dad just went ahead and came back. He was a very good worker.

Knaster: What did you do?

Harvesting Garlic

Arceneaux: God, it's back-breaking. It's like onions but they're dried already. You never had the luxury of gloves. The tractor has come by and with a knife under the earth has cut, not too close, but has cut enough so that it's cut most of the roots. Here's the ball up, and it's cut like that. Some of the garlic is leaning already because it's been cut. They cut it two or three days and then you start stacking it. It has leaned quite a bit, if it's always hot. So it's already wilting. It's wilted. It's dried like straw. You start off on your row, you grab a handful, hit it, shake it, and lay it down.

Knaster: To shake off the soil, you mean?

Arceneaux: Yes, and lay it down. But the thing is that it's two rows, two rows of garlic. It's two here and two here with a little space. So you either do this and grab this or you're doing this . . . Depends . . .

Knaster: Oh, I see.

Arceneaux: If someone, like the two children who were taking one little row each. If you're helping them you have to twist. But that's all you do. You can't bend down. You have to walk on your haunches. So it's easier to just bend over. It's back-breaking and killing.

Knaster: How many hours would you do this?

Arceneaux: Until dark. This is the first step. You pull it all out and lay it like that. It's immense, forty or fifty acres. We were lucky when we had a big field because we had a lot of work. I'd be glad if there was a little field but then you knew that you'd finish a little field and have to go look for another one. So you might as well have one. So you'd turn these forty acres. This rancher had a lot of other things to do, but then he has the same tractor, like a barge that he drags over the earth. He drags it and you throw your garlic on it. You throw it, and you run like chickens all around this and carrying it. And then he waits for you and pulls it.

Knaster: Was this pulled mechanically?

Arceneaux: Yes. With a tractor.

Knaster: So you loaded the garlic that you had already dried out.

Arceneaux: That's why it had to lay out for another two or three days. By the time you are finished over here it's time to gather this one. Then you stand up the plants. Say this is fifty acres, you make one circle here and one circle there . . . and six . . . and when you're emptying this off you stand it all up. Then it dries some more. It's in a circle. You pick up all this side, 'cause this was picked first and then you do that. By the time he takes off, then the next step is you have scissors. You get yourself a little stool or a can or a box to sit on and you grab it and you cut the roots off, and drop it in the bucket.

Knaster: You'd be doing this out in the field, too?

Arceneaux: Yes, in the field. Sometimes my dad would put up sticks, a piece of cloth or cardboard for shade, but it has to be in the sun because all the time that garlic is drying up. It has to be extremely dry by the time they stack it up. Or else it'll ferment and rot. That was the first step, pulling it out. The second step was gathering it in; the third was cutting it. The third step was when my mother used to go. She'd go sit there and cut.

Knaster: You use just regular scissors or . . .

Arceneaux: No, it's like shears, like grass cutters. The boss supplies you with them but you have to buy them from him. He charges you and you don't have the money but he takes it off your wages, and if you're not careful, you lose a pair, have to buy another one. Sometimes they lend one, but you buy them. Also the buckets—everything. You know, you're supposed to be very careful with everything or else you have to pay for them. Anyway, the children said that he could help them, too. They need help all the time, the little ones. And they drag in little buckets full and put the garlic in a big box. Sometimes you have a great big cart, wooden crates and you put your garlic in them. Sometimes you have the sacks there, and you're putting it in sacks already.

Knaster: How long would all this take? How long would you be working on the garlic?

Arceneaux: A month. Three months in the summer, June, July, sometimes into August.

Knaster: Who took care of the fields before you went in?

Arceneaux: I don't remember. Maybe they imported labor. I don't know who did it.

Knaster: During the school year . . .

Arceneaux: We still worked, if there was work. We used to work after school.

Knaster: What kind of work did you do?

Arceneaux: Well, tomatoes. That's in September and October. We went out early in the morning, and Dad would bring us into school at ten o'clock. He'd drop us off. So you'd go to school late. And then after school, sometimes you didn't have to go if you went in the morning and work a little bit. Because it's nice in the morning to pick tomatoes. And that was hard, I guess. Eat a tomato, you know, now and then you could eat a tomato. (laughter) But it made your hands so green, you couldn't take the green off.

Knaster: Oh, I've found that they're irritating, because I picked tomatoes too.

Arceneaux: You wash yourself with a tomato, and it comes right off. But then your hands, they're all grubby.

Then prunes, when we picked prunes in some instances we left town. We went to Gilroy. And that way we didn't have to send the children to school. We could work all the time, and you worked until you finished. You came back to town.

Knaster: You traveled there every day, or you'd go live there for awhile?

Arceneaux: No, you went to live there in the tent. And talk about hating camping! But it was a lot of fun, when you have a big family you have a lot of them to tell stories and at night you count stars, because you can see the sky. It was fun. It was all right.

Speaking English

Knaster: You said no English was spoken in your home until after your parents died.

Arceneaux: Well, yes. My father didn't believe in English. It was a strange tongue and they trained us that in respect to people who didn't understand it you never spoke the language. When we walked into the house we couldn't talk English any more. It was rude. My mother said it's rude to speak a language that you don't understand. So we just spoke Spanish. Yet we learned English at school, of course. Must have been difficult. I don't remember.

Knaster: Did your parents speak English? Did they learn English at all? How did your father manage to find work and be able to work for people and get tools and all that kind of stuff without speaking English?

Arceneaux: There're many people I guess, their children help them out. You know, maybe other friends . . . I wonder about that too. He knew enough English to arrange to work for someone. He spoke Spanish and the Portuguese man spoke Portuguese . . . but I wonder about the Japanese. Maybe they just used signals or something, or they just knew enough English for both sides to get along. I have no idea. My father went everywhere after 1929, when we had that pretty car. This is a story. We got a letter from my aunt who was in a little town near Fullerton. She wrote this letter that my uncle had left her and she had these two children and, "Please, Josefa, come. I want to come and stay with you, because I'm living with strangers." And my mother started to want her sister, and we have a car, we should be able to go and get her. Poor woman, she has no

money. She was afraid to come up on the bus. So my father proceeds. My mother packed him a lunch. Isn't this amazing?

Knaster: Yes.

Arceneaux: And he takes clothes and it's just like in Mexico, one of the lakes—and they go like this and they head in that direction. And there goes my father.

Knaster: (laughter)

Arceneaux: No English and we talk about this often. We bring it up. No English. Where is Fullerton? Los Angeles. And he came back within a week with my aunt. All loaded up in the car. Mattress, blankets and everything. Dishes . . .

Knaster: Amazing.

Arceneaux: Brought her and she lived with us for a year or so. The uncle just took off for awhile. I may be fantasizing on him, but many of us children have some of those qualities, we're able to do things you weren't supposed to do ordinarily. You just did them. I had a brother who managed to go out and do things that he wasn't supposed to do, being half-blind. And he did them, you know. But, no my mother and father didn't speak English. She had the hardest time because she couldn't go to confession. You see, they didn't speak English No Spanish-speaking priest. So then every so often a Franciscan missionary would come by. I guess they spoke enough to buy their groceries or pick up and know the money and all that, but other than that they didn't.

Knaster: You mentioned a story about you and your brother going to a car lot with your father and getting swindled.

Arceneaux: Oh yes. It's too bad but that's how it is. Some people make their money by taking it from those who can't defend themselves.

Knaster: You were telling me the story of your father coming into Watsonville and suddenly there was this stop sign where there had been no stop sign before.

Arceneaux: Yes. History is made by George Washington and Paul Revere, but still some history is made by people who never make it. I think that was history. Every so often we drove to Watsonville to the beach, but we stopped in the big city of Watsonville. And he must have been a wild driver, because he took chances. There was this stop sign there but he didn't stop. Got his ticket, but he never paid the ticket. I don't understand why they didn't . . . I guess for a ticket they don't chase you all over the country.

Knaster: Well, now they do. They will arrest you.

Arceneaux: But in those days. Maybe because he was from another town. They would have had to send the constable. Came in once or twice a year. You know, they wouldn't catch him another time.

Knaster: The other thing that you mentioned which I personally related to very much was that you kind of missed having a childhood of your own, because you were always taking care of other children.

Arceneaux: Yes, but you know, I remember good times. We'd go to the school yard, go down the hill and play ball. Had good times. But those children always. There were so many after us. Manuel was born in 1924. Adolf was born in 1926. Molly was born in 1927. Babe was born in 1929. Gregory was born in 1930. Joe was born in 1932, and so forth and so on. All the way down the line. I have them written down because I forget sometimes. But the older ones are the ones I remember better because there were particular houses we lived in. Later when we were orphans we used to drive back and look at our houses, "Look I was born here." "No, my house is better, look, I was born here." You know, things like that. But I don't know that it really hurts you. When you're as old as I am, you just thank your stars, God and your holy whatever it is that you are where you're at . . . and you say, so, I missed the childhood? I have other things to remember. There was a time when I really hurt because of that, but I think it wears off. Something else takes its place. Of course what makes it sad for me is that I read about people reliving their childhood with their own children. So then you come to when I get sick. Lenny is to be born, gets born and I get sick and I leave him for five years. And when I come back he's a total stranger. Then it's not very nice, so you just don't talk about it.

Knaster: Well, what happened after your father died in the late 1930s?

Arceneaux: 1938.

Knaster: And by that time you were living outside of San Juan, right.

Arceneaux: We were living in a little hut, it was like a shed.

Knaster: Was it someone else's property?

Arceneaux: Right.

Knaster: Was your father taking care of the land there?

Arceneaux: Well, we had free housing because we worked for that man. We did a lot of work for him. When we weren't in school we helped him. Such as planting, running the tractor, irrigating, but that was right in the middle of this fertile valley. He had the job all the time. He just went over next door and worked, and did this, and then went over to the other ranch, or drove a couple of miles and pruned apples . . .

Knaster: Did the kids usually go and help him on those jobs?

Arceneaux: Even in pruning, in those years they always were contract or piecework, you know. So if you pruned, then you told the rancher, "Well, I'll burn for you." You know, the trimmings. That's when we had to go and pick up all the little bits of twigs. Not the tiny ones, but the largest and pile them up on the edge of the orchard and then he would burn them. So there was always work for kids. Our kids. Not all kids. Even after he was dead we continued to do that for other people. I'd go to somebody that knew my father and I says, "Can the children and I do the burning for you?" "Sure, come on over." And we'd be Saturday and Sunday all day, and maybe during the week.

Knaster: How did you support the family after your father died?

Arceneaux: It was very difficult. If you remember, earlier I told you that this lady cut my hair. She was a beautiful person, a French lady. Little did I know I would marry a

Frenchman someday. When my mother died it was all right 'cause Dad was a very good provider. We were not rich but we were well taken care of. By the standards of other people we were considered well off because he always worked. If you worked you always had food. You always had a place to sleep. And no one's hounding you for bills. He was a stickler for paying his bills. He'd pay them off immediately. So that your honor's not at stake. Your honor is intact. Little did he know he'd raise someone who would live on credit. (laughter) The American way!

Social Services

When my mother died it was all right, because, like I say, all I had to do was go and wash . . . all that stuff that goes with the tending of the house. But when he died, it was so hard. Like I told you, we were picking prunes, so we just continued to pick prunes. Blanche, this lady, told me that if I minded my P's and Q's they wouldn't divide us and split us up. Because there was no welfare; there was no aid to needy children, all those new-fangled things in San Benito County. She said, "If you ask for help, Grace, there is help for orphan children. But if you do they will find out that you are not 21. Then they might split you up and send you away. The girls will go to San Francisco and the boys to Fresno." There's orphanages there, Catholic orphanages. She says, "If you mind your P's and Q's, you can swing it. I can get you milk; just don't make any noises or anything."

Knaster: How old were you at the time?

Arceneaux: I was eighteen. So that was the advice she gave me. I think a service club paid for milk so we got two quarts a day. I had to make a little box out there so the milkman could deliver it, 'cause the milkman didn't want to put it out in the sun. We

wouldn't be there to pick it up. I put the little box, and lo and behold we didn't pick up the milk when we should. Somebody reported us, that we were wasting the milk. The milk stood out there all day, was souring . . . So she came over and told me, she says, "What's going on? The service club got this report that you don't pick up the milk." I said, "My God. I can't spend the gas. At twelve I come home and the milk isn't here yet. He might come at 1:15, you know." "Well, does it spoil?" I says, "I don't know. We drink it. It's never been . . . it's all right. I know what I'll do." I hung up a piece of canvas on the box to cover it. But man, they never gave us anything, but they watched us like a hawk. When I found that out, it was kind of rough.

And then another thing we did, a lady from the county health department was going to come over, and she warned me, she says they'll be coming to see you every so often. She'll check to see if you have enough food, if you're clean. So the house was not neat but I got some newspaper and papered it with newspaper. My Dad had put up cardboard on the outside to keep the drafts out. So we papered it with newspaper and it looked pretty neat. We'd buy canned food and eat it, but I would open it from the bottom, and I'd save the cans and keep them in the cupboard. We'd go sometimes to the garbage cans and take good cans and wash them out, dry them, leave the label on . . . and put them so that our cupboard always had a lot of food. It was a little rinky-dink house, but all our cupboards had little curtains, cloth curtains. You just pulled them open. That wasn't what we were really eating. We were eating beans or weeds, the greens from the fields. To this day I love them. Wild spinach and other greens grow between corn. If you know which ones to pick. We used to eat meat once in a while. We had a chicken or two. I remember Mrs. Nolan coming over, this health nurse. She was a

big-bosomed woman, with a pencil and a pad in her hand. We were scared to death of her 'cause she could report us and we'd be divided up. She went from room to room, "Look clean. Yes, its clean." She'd pick up something dirty, you know. Then it didn't bother me. Years later I realized what she was doing. Then, always I was just anxious for her to get out of there. I remember she picked up the curtain and she says, "Oh, pineapple! And what's this? Hmm." Some strange fruit, she didn't even know what it was. "My, you people eat better than I do." She'd drop the . . . and I kind of pushed her over.

Manuel and I just laughed over it because he was old enough to remember. If she'd been smart she would notice it was the same cans all the time. Anyway, that's how we lived. We were able to do it. The kids helped. I started working two jobs. I got a job at that restaurant where she gave me the whiskey. I used to work there late, and in the morning I would work in the fields. One time I worked harvesting grass and I would go and help the cook feed the harvesters. I remember getting up very early in the morning—leaving the kids asleep yet. Going out there and coming back by around three o'clock and I didn't know whether they had gone to school or not. I was so scared. The one thing was that they had to go to school, or I would be reported. I couldn't keep them out of school. It was kind of rough. Then I started going to the cannery. Things straightened out a little bit after that.

Knaster: When you said you were working in the fields in the morning, what kind of fields?

Arceneaux: Well, like hoeing beets. Sugar beets. You have to hoe the weed when it's small. You try to keep the weeds down. Now they have machines that do everything. But you went by with a long or short hoe, and you just cut the weeds. It was nice in the morning, which worked out fine, because you'd do it when it's not too hot, and you quit around noon.

Knaster: What other crops did you work on?

Arceneaux: Tomatoes, I planted tomatoes. And I planted the garlic. All winter. Garlic, I love it. Around November, the same boss you worked with in the summer, he knows you want the job, and you go back to check. I want to, yes, I want to do your seed for you. So they have saved some of the best garlic for the seed. They chose it. And what you do is sit in the shade 'cause its raining or it's cold and you sit and break the heads. You hold them like this and you must break the heads. And you have to kind of take off some of the skin so that the tooth, one kernel is perfect. You keep the little ones here, and you kind of throw the big ones over there. Then they take the little buckets of seed and run it through . . . you work all of it. You might be working at the thrasher. It's a strainer, and the little ones fall through and the top is going to be the seed. You can work all over.

Knaster: How do you plant the garlic?

Arceneaux: You stand each little clove, each little kernel.

Knaster: How do you determine which is good seed? I buy garlic all the time . . .

Arceneaux: Well, all of it is good to eat. But for planting you save the largest kernel. When it went through the strainer the big ones stayed on top. The bottom could still be sold. And you just stick it. The kernels have to be planted three inches apart, and they produce heads. I don't remember if it's three or five, because it's supposed to be enough room for the head of a big garlic. But in those days I knew exactly what it was. That work takes us all the way into Christmas and New Year's.

Knaster: Just the planting. It's so small, just a few inches apart. It'd be a lot of work.

Arceneaux: Especially if you had good connections, a couple of bosses. They don't plant it all. Some like to stagger it, so that there's enough labor force to do the work. As long as it's harvested between June and July, and the first part of August. This is San Juan. And that was . . . golly, this was 40 years ago. I don't know if they still do the same. We planted tomatoes by hand. Somebody carried a bucket of water and poured water. That's how we planted a tomato. The last time I looked, a machine was making a hole and throwing the plant, squirting water and feed and everything. One man did all of that.

Knaster: Would you put the seeds directly into the soil?

Arceneaux: No, little plants, carefully. We used to contract the land. We can do this for so much. You inherit that from your father. We did it with them and so when we went and asked for work they just told us, yes you can work, and we'd do this and that. They watched over us because we were young. It's the best place to be an orphan, San Juan.

There were good people. They knew my father had died in a strange way and they were sorry for us. Anybody would be sorry for us.

Knaster: Sure.

Arceneaux: But they weren't just talking.

Knaster: Did you find there were any problems dealing with them because you were a woman. Perhaps if your father had not worked there before and you had just come in, an eighteen-year-old young woman, do you think you would have been able to get work?

Arceneaux: No. It was because of my father, and because of the strange situation. I was privileged in that way. And in many instances they say you can't do it, you know, because of this, and I say, "But I need it. I have to." I said, "We need the work. I need to have food, do you understand? Give me a chance." I never could drive a tractor. But we followed, like pulling the garlic. We couldn't do the heavy work anymore. We couldn't load the sacks, and you need to contract the whole thing. Well, we just tagged onto another family. I would talk to somebody. To let him know I didn't want their charity. I wanted the chance to work. I said, if you will let us work with you. Some would say okay, but instead of ten cents, you can do it for eight. Kind of a deal, or whatever. Then sometimes I did it and sometimes I wouldn't. Depends. Maybe we did it because we needed it badly. But by 1940, I was going to the canneries already, to Salinas.

Knaster: Oh so you were still living in San Juan and traveling to Salinas every day.

Arceneaux: A lady would drive every day. She had a real good car and she was a forelady. She liked to take girls, 'cause she didn't want to be by herself. She just made room for me. All I had to do was get into San Juan. That was a hard problem because we still had that old car, and by that time it really had troubles. We had been running it wildly after father left. It wasn't in good condition. But it always got me to town, and sometimes my brother would come and take it back. He had no business driving it but he drove it anyway. I didn't even know how old I really was so I couldn't go get my license. You had to be 21. I went to get a license at 18 and they told me I [had to] bring my father and mother's signature. I thought, oh, God, how do you do that? And so I went back. Here were the birth certificates of my little sisters that had died. One little sister had died earlier before Salvador was born. I used that. I went back and I told them that I was 22. I didn't even look 20, but I got it. Then later I found out I could have gone to another town and said I was 21, but you still had to prove it. Or I could have said that they were dead, and then they wouldn't have given it to me. But I couldn't get a license for my brother because I couldn't sign for him. He wasn't my ward or anything like that. So no one else had a license in the house, but I think everyone drove, including the twelve-year-old.

Knaster: Did you just teach each other how to drive the car?

Arceneaux: Yes. Ran over the fields and in the forest or wherever we . . .

Knaster: Oh, that sounds like fun.

Arceneaux: . . . in the meadows, yes. Yes, it was. And it was fun, too. We went places together. I was so scared to leave them alone. So I used to get boyfriends and I'd go to the dance and I took all my brothers and sisters and take a blanket, a couple of pillows, 'cause the little ones would fall asleep. They'd sleep on the benches. Then at night when we were getting ready to go I asked my boyfriends to carry them for me and put them in the car. Sometimes they didn't like this, didn't last too long. Sometimes I used to talk to them about getting married, and I would say, "Yeah, we have to get a big house because we're a lot of them." He says, "Well, I can't marry all of you." "Well, then you can't marry me either!" Ahh well . . . that was it. It was hard work.

Cannery Work

Knaster: What kind of cannery work did you do? What were you canning?

Arceneaux: Well, we canned apricots, peaches, tomatoes, spinach . . . I made a lot of money. I sometimes made the magic figure of 75 dollars a week. That was a lot of money. We would leave in the dark in the morning and we would come back at night.

Knaster: So you're working more than eight hours a day.

Arceneaux: Oh! Oh, yes, we worked twelve hours. Sometimes we worked till midnight.

Knaster: Were you paid by the hour or were you paid by production?

Arceneaux: Production. Piecework. It was boxes for tomatoes. For peaches it was the machines, they introduced machines to cut the peach. They put me on the machine and I turned out to be very good. I was very fast with my hands. There's little tricks you learn,

and you soon caught on. There were four blades sticking up, and the machine cut, cored it and threw the split peach. You got paid by the boxes.

Apricots were almost the same, they just switched the blades on it. Spinach was by baskets or something, you were supposed to sort it. You pulled out yellows and pulled out bugs. I don't know, maybe in some instances we got paid by the hour. But I remember piecework more than anything. Tomatoes came on a belt the same as the spinach. Oh, and they were hot. Had rubber gloves and just kind of grab it and kind of squeeze it . . . you core it and pull at the peeling and it falls out slimy. But it's hot, so hot sometimes the gloves melt on your hands. And you're supposed to take out anything that's dark and lay it on top. It's going down the belt and you lay the big one, the nice pretty one in the middle and the mess goes down there. And someone else is taking them and putting them in cans. That is by the hour. It couldn't be by piecework. And pears were so delicate. That was by machine also. What I can't remember, is how did they peel them? I know they peeled peaches with this solution after they were cut. Pears were probably the same. It was some solution, because they're so beautifully clean. But pears used to spoil on us so you had to stay and finish the load, it didn't matter what hours. And in those days they didn't have to get two or three crews. They weren't by shifts. If you had women there, they just stayed. They let you go out to eat. We used to buy whiskey and pass the bottle around to keep going. It was just terrible. That's where I got my tuberculosis.

Knaster: It was in the canneries?

Arceneaux: I had it, my mother had died of it. And after she died they took all the family and checked them out. This one had it, this one didn't. There was only one that didn't have it. Some had it badly. I had a little touch. So we decided that Manuel and Otelia and little Joe would go to the hospital. When they came back then maybe I'd go, you know. But I'd take it easy at home. The kids that stayed were school kids, and they didn't want them, they didn't have room in the hospital, so I was supposed to keep them in bed. I don't know, we all survived. We started to drink more milk and eat better. They told my father we had to eat better. I remember the kids hanging out the windows in their pajamas. They were in the house and they were supposed to be in bed and I'm outside sweeping or something . . . hollering at people—get in there! They're going to come and put us in jail. 'Cause we were contagious. All of us were contagious, we weren't supposed to talk to anybody or mix. And yet they survived, to die of something else. Manuel, my brother, is the one that's a history. You know he was only thirteen when he went. Out there in that county hospital he had a collapsed lung all by himself. They give him oxygen and he lived. He's a healthy, strong, robust-looking man now. But he's half-blind. But he's half blind, the one with cataracts . . . Well, anyway, if I had a touch of tuberculosis, see how easy it is to get run down in a cannery.

Knaster: What were the conditions in the cannery like? You mentioned something about it being very hot. Did they give you any breaks? Were there toilet facilities?

Arceneaux: No. Are you kidding? You could go to the bathroom but you'd have to turn your machine off and you'd have to ask permission. And they'd make such a big commotion about you turning your machine off, that you didn't turn it off, you just

walked away, and then they wanted to know why the belt isn't as heavy if something happens. So you have to let someone know. They counted the times that you went. If you were sick, which I was when I ended up collapsing there, I was sick one day and I started working less, being terribly weak and continuing to work. No, there were no breaks. They'd give you lunch hours and that must have been a whole hour, because I remember we 'd go to a little park nearby.

Knaster: What was the building itself that you worked in?

Arceneaux: It was in Salinas. It was called *cava*. It was just a big building, you walked in, a place where you got a card or checked your time and walked in. I remember the bathrooms being cold and damp. A lot of that smelly disinfectant. I also remember eating near that place and hating it, that was that smell. I don't know why we ate inside, maybe it was raining outside. 'Cause I remember eating outside in the fresh air whenever we could.

Knaster: Was this canning done mostly in the summer?

Arceneaux: No, year round. Tomato would be in October, November. Spinach would be closer to December. And then it stops. By February and March we would be thinning, working in the field again, you know, and thinning lettuce or beets. And then you started the cannery in April.

Knaster: What happened if you got sick and don't show up for work. Did you lose your job?

Arceneaux: You'd tell them, and hope they'll keep your job for you. In some instances the other girls would . . . like certain days of the month . . . this girl used to make me sick 'cause she had cramps and she'd go the car and I would just get aggravated, because I never got sick over my monthly period. I never menstruated until after my mother died. I had just started when she was sick. I had menstruated for three months; in January when she died it stopped. I didn't know who to tell. I knew there was something strange with me so I told my father the following year. My father told my aunt and she took me to a *curandera* because I might be pregnant. I don't know if you want to know that.

Knaster: Well, I'm curious because I'm wondering how that information is passed on in a family. My mother never talked about it much until one day there I was bleeding, and I didn't know what it was. I knew what it was because I'd read a little book, but my mother hadn't said anything. I was wondering whether there was any discussion in your family about sex.

Arceneaux: Never.

Knaster: About the period.

Arceneaux: No. The only reason I knew was because I was so old. I'd had school, my girlfriends were menstruating already. At twelve they do. They'd talk about this and then I'd ask my mother and she told me to be quiet. You'll know. I'll tell you someday.

Knaster: You mean you asked your mother?

Arceneaux: Oh yes. But she didn't tell me. But I remember this particular American girl told me about it, that babies came from here and the bleeding and I said, "My, but my mother doesn't have those things." She said, "She does too!" And then she proceeded to tell me how babies were made and I didn't believe her. I never did believe her. When babies were going to be born. she came to live with us or we went to Soledad. And there was Tillie who was born over there in a little tent. So, it had something to do with this lady (laughter), with a baby.

Knaster: Your mother would actually travel to Soledad in order to give birth?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: Would you be there during the birth? Did you ever watch the birth?

Arceneaux: No, but we all knew it was going on. We were told we were going to have a baby sister or brother. I'd get so mad. I'd say, "I don't want one. I don't want no more. There's enough. There's enough!" But it was always beautiful because Mother would let us hold the baby of course and let us all come in.

Knaster: Did your parents ever talk about birth control or the ideal family size?

Arceneaux: No.

Knaster: It was just whatever came, came?

Arceneaux: When Babe was born in 1929, that was my mother's sixth baby. After that baby was born I remember waking up one night to hear her crying, sitting up crying in

bed. My father wasn't there. He used to just take off. I asked her, "Why are you crying?" She hugged me and said, "It's very hard. It's very hard." I went back; she told me to go back to bed. I think she was lonely because he wasn't home yet. So when he came home they started to talk loud and I got up and listened. I stood at the door and listened. They argued and then they talked and pretty soon I heard a lot of moaning going on. I thought he had hit her. And then it didn't sound like that. It bothered me because it was strange, you know. A big question. I didn't know why they were angry one minute, and the next minute they were so happy. It didn't sound right.

Knaster: Did she ever advise you not to have so many children? Was she aware of the fact that she could limit children at all?

Arceneaux: I have no idea.

Knaster: I'm just wondering.

Arceneaux: I have no idea. But she had more children than my aunt did. My aunt just never got any more. My aunt later in life told me, "I was so sick with Johnny that I never had any until my menopause when I had little Manuel and he was born defective. It's no good to have children in menopause." But I remember she and my aunt talking and my mother would say, "Yeah, but you only have five." "Well, I'm just lucky," she'd say. No they didn't practice birth control. Maybe they had heard of it. I don't know.

Knaster: Did they have any awareness of the rhythm cycle? By the Catholic church that's the only thing that's permissible.

Arceneaux: I don't think they were advising them to do it. You know, you have to find out about it and know all the meaning.

Knaster: Did you feel that your father felt prouder the more children he had, the more masculine he felt?

Arceneaux: Oh, yes. He felt that if he had boys they would grow up and someday help him. It had to do with that. He certainly was very proud of having children, and proud of being able to take care of them. He would always talk about fathers who didn't work, who were lazy. In those days we didn't know of women without husbands. It was family units. Nowadays, it's nothing. They split up and have children. In those days you'd find a man who wasn't very industrious and they would look down on him, say he was lazy. So maybe he just wanted children. I have no idea about that. He'd want to hand the culture on to us, the music, the foods, the dances. He could dance with a glass of water on his head. He used to do it often. He'd want us to do it and some of the kids would go out there and he'd hold the glass, but of course he would balance it. We had an old Victrola. It was a nice tall one that you could open up. For the boys we'd play this *jota*. Ta ta ta [sings] . . . oh, we know them. And my mother would dance, and she didn't have castanets but she would go like this, and my father'd say, "*Olé*," and she'd dance in the room and then he'd get up there and dance with her and then we would all want to dance with her and then he'd dance . . . And then the music would die 'cause you're supposed to be cranking it. So somebody'd go crank it up and we'd start dancing all over again.

Knaster: Were these Mexican records?

Arceneaux: Oh yes. And he used to sing that song about going back to Mexico and my brother used to play a guitar, and they'd sing those *lamentos.* Isn't it strange you don't remember bad times? You only remember the good. You have to think hard about the bad times.

Knaster: Did your parents ever talk about wanting to go back to Mexico?

Arceneaux: All the time. They were always going back. They were always saving. They always had a savings started. They'd use it up and next they start again. They were always going to go back.

Knaster: Did they maintain ties with Mexico?

Arceneaux: My father had no one, but it didn't matter, he had some land back there. He had his father. And after grandfather died, I remember my father went on a big drunk for days and days. And then after that he just said we weren't going back any more. But he had some land there with a little ranch, and a little house.

Knaster: Did he want to go back to Mexico because of the land there . . .

Arceneaux: Because they felt like strangers here. They only came here because they could survive here. But they were going to go back and live where they belonged. That was the feeling I had.

Knaster: Did your father talk about wanting to have his own land here, his own farm?

Arceneaux: He never talked about that. Well, maybe it was unattainable, the thought never entered his head. I had that feeling too. I didn't become a citizen until 1969. It was all that feeling of not belonging here. I waited so long, but one of the reasons was you just wouldn't dream of becoming a citizen.

Knaster: Was that considered an insult to your Mexican heritage?

Arceneaux: That meant you would never go back. You would adopt this as your land. I don't know about an insult. It's just like cutting off ties completely. It was the wrong feeling, the wrong interpretation.

Knaster: Did you ever have the feeling of wanting to have your own farm rather than work for other farmers?

Arceneaux: No, what I was going to do during this rougher period, we were going to buy land and truck produce. I had enough brothers that could do it. We were going to do it day and night.

Knaster: Did you grow any of your own food on that little ranch where you were living?

Arceneaux: We didn't have to. We lived where there was all kinds and our boss always planted rows of corn just to break the land and we would pick that corn from the boss and keep some of it. After that he would still take a row of corn and we could do the *chilitos* right on the edge. It was the same water that irrigated his land that would irrigate that little piece of earth. Otherwise, if we did it around the house it's like a rock and it's very hard. My father never plowed it around the house 'cause it was our play yard and it

was so hard, and it was not fertile at all. By planting it close to the boss's harvest or whatever he planted, you were able to get some fertilizer.

Knaster: This corn that you would grow, would you eat it as corn on the cob, or would you dry it and grind it?

Arceneaux: Well, both. The corn on the cob you eat it, but you cook it first and you pull the shucks back and dry it in the sun. You don't take the corn off until you are ready to eat it. Then you take it off and you boil it and it's just like corn.

Knaster: So you would take dry kernels, you wouldn't grind up the kernels. It's also easier to save, because then you hang it up in a shed.

Arceneaux: It was an old barn that had hay in it, and my dad just tied them all up and raised them up there. So there was just corn, dried corn. But it has been cooked. You would make a little sautéd tomatoes and put them in, stew them. Then the meat. Greg, when he lived in town he'd make this big pit and line it with rocks, 'cause we had a pig then. When he was ready to kill the pig he'd tell his friends, his *compadres*—everybody was your *compadre* when you were about to kill a pig. He would make this hole and line it with rocks and have a fire and sing songs, and they have a long night and everybody has a good time. Then when the fire's gone, he would have killed the pig earlier, then they roll up the meat in something, in linen, or cloth, and then in burlap sack—they have salted it. In there they would throw pieces of meat wrapped up, corn, calabashes . . . neighbors would bring their stuff, and cover it up with more rocks and in the earth, and leave a big hole, pipe in the middle and pour some water in it. Whatever it is, this pipe

was all the way down, you know. Say this is where the meat and the rocks were, and the pipe starts right here. The water falls in and the steam comes out. You wait for about an hour, and then you pull all the dirt away. He had put corn in it to keep the dirt off and then burlap sacks and everything. Then you pull it out and slice the meat and have a big fiesta. Maybe it was for a baptism we'd do it. We did it more than once. I remember that very well. It was 1929.

Knaster: Were there a lot of activities for the Mexican community? Was it a fairly close-knit community?

Arceneaux: No, the few families that there were made your parties at home. When we were baptized. Even church, they didn't speak Spanish in church. You went to the movies. During apricot season in Hollister, only eight miles away, when a lot of migrant people came, there was a carnival. People lived in tents in the river beds and a circus would come, the circus would go down the main street hitting the drum and these ladies would tell you all about the circus and we would go to the circus. We would always go to the circus. It would be in the other town.

Knaster: Who were these migrants? Were they Mexicans or were they white people?

Arceneaux: First it was Mexicans and pretty soon it was Okies, 'cause there was the Dustbowl.

Knaster: Did you ever work alongside the Okies?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: In the fields or canneries?

Arceneaux: In the canneries.

Knaster: What were they like?

Arceneaux: I don't know. I just know the worst thing you could call each other was an Okie. We didn't think much of them. They weren't good workers, we thought. We thought they were just wanting to take away some of our work. But then when you went back to the rancher later, he would want you back, so we figured they weren't working as good as we were working.

I was going to tell you about the meat. My father went in halves with somebody and we dried it and you had to stand there and shoo away the flies. I was in charge of that. If I couldn't do it I was supposed to get the kids. He went to work and evidently I was careless, because he came and found a nest of flies and he was just furious. He'd wasted some of the meat, maggots, and he threw it away. I never forgot my lesson. You have to be there all day because no flies can get on it.

Knaster: Yes, it would infect the meat.

Arceneaux: Yes. We had no refrigerators. We never did. I didn't get a refrigerator until the 1960s.

Knaster: Did you have chickens for eggs?

Arceneaux: In town, when my mother lived, she had chickens. She took care of them.

Knaster: Did you ever have a goat for milk?

Arceneaux: Yes, for one of the babies. I can't remember which one couldn't drink my mother's milk.

Knaster: Was it ever your task to take care of any of the animals?

Arceneaux: No, not me. I was scared. Somebody else, I think my mother used to milk it. The pig, I used to feed it, and one day I fell in and it bit me. I have a scar. My father said I didn't have to do it any more. Then my brothers said I had fallen in on purpose.

Knaster: Oh, I can't imagine that.

Arceneaux: Scared to death of it. You know, something strange happened. One time I went into that shed, about nine or ten years old, and there was a man sleeping in there. He grabbed me and I screamed and then I couldn't scream any more and my brother came and threw rocks at him. We went away and I remember telling my mother, and she thought I was a liar, and telling my father and he got angry and he told me never to go in there. He went looking and he found the place where the man had been sleeping.

Knaster: And they never explained to you what was wrong . . .

Arceneaux: Why he wanted to grab me? But I soon found out why.

Knaster: Did you have a lot of incidents like that, where it was dangerous for you to go around because men would grab you?

Arceneaux: Well my own brother wanted me to take my pants off one day. I was nine and he was about eleven or twelve. I remember kicking and he said, “You’re dirty.” He said, “I’ll take mine off if you . . .” and then I realized it was just that. Earlier as children we took off our clothes and got a spanking. But then I wondered why it was so necessary to see each other. I couldn’t talk to my mother. She was standoffish about these things. These little things that you kept to yourself.

Knaster: I would imagine that one generation would hand down the information to another generation, but it didn’t happen. From out of the blue you were supposed to know what to do.

Arceneaux: Yes. Some friend told you . . . (laughter) I remember an aunt telling me to take off my nail polish because it looked like I had been scratching my private parts. And I thought, “What does she mean?” So I asked and she said, “You know, when you bleed, it’s blood, you scratched up stayed there.” I never forgot that. I took the polish off.

Knaster: Well, it’s very vivid. (laughter)

Arceneaux: I took the polish off. She was my *madrina*, so I had to obey her.

Field Work

Knaster: Do you remember what kind of work you saw women doing all those years? You were doing so many things. You worked in a cannery. You worked in the field; you did all the housework and you took care of kids. Do you remember seeing other women work during that time?

Arceneaux: Well out in the fields there were women.

Knaster: Were they Mexican women?

Arceneaux: Mexican women. I don't know when the draft started taking men away, 1940? During the 1940s I remember crews of women. By a crew I mean twenty and a male foreman. Always a male foreman. And I know another thing . . . the rubber was being rationed so in Salinas they started growing guayule, which was a plant that produced rubber. We would get into this truck, about forty, fifty women, packed into a truck, and the foreman was a man, of course. I never got to sit in the front seat 'cause I wasn't pretty but he would sit all the pretty women in with him and he'd drive us to Salinas and we'd work. This was government work and we'd work under the most trying circumstances. We had a plant that would have little coasters. Can you imagine a little platform with tiny little wheels here and it was about this high, and you lay on your stomach . . . I don't know how we got the plant, but you had the plant and you were able to grab and plant it and you just kept pushing yourself . . . backward. And you went back, back and you know it was being planted already. And evidently you lifted up, because you're weeding on your stomach. You needed your legs to move yourself. It was very difficult. I was very glad it didn't work out. We got the good out of it, but the plant didn't produce 'cause it fell through.

Knaster: What kind of a work day did you have then?

Arceneaux: It was a shorter workday, when we worked for the government.

Knaster: Do you remember the wages?

Arceneaux: No.

Knaster: Did they provide anything for you in addition to that?

Arceneaux: No. We took our own lunch. Insurance was unheard of. And even for the bathroom we had to walk a mile. Maybe you didn't even want to go, by the time you couldn't get up. I remember it being a terribly awkward position to work.

Knaster: Are there any physical ailments you have developed from the work you did over the years?

Arceneaux: Arthritis in every joint. This happened when I worked in the spinach. We'd work in the field and cut it, and then you hurried to the packing shed to get there in time, 'cause you had to rinse it in this big vat of water, just give it a good shake and pack it . . . I remember the water just running down your arm . . . *cold.* about 8:30 or 9:00 at night. My dad was dead already. When I got home and the kids hadn't eaten yet it was just too much. Maybe that's why I got sick. Just too much. It was just terrible. I was very fortunate. I was always very skinny. But I know other people who ended up with bad backs. I say, thank God I just survived. But it does give you arthritis.

Knaster: What kind of units did women work in in the thirties?

Arceneaux: Before the folks died I was part of the family and working as a unit wherever my father . . . but I made friends in the 1930s, field friends in Gilroy, going to pick tomatoes. We would travel to Gilroy to pick tomatoes. That's where I met Juanita and to this day we're still friends. She used to come every year, all the way from Riverside, San

Bernardino. They would work the whole coast and end up at the tomatoes and go straight home, they lived in Riverside.

Knaster: Oh, her family was a migrating family. Did your family do that at all?

Migrant Farm Work

Arceneaux: We did the first year, whenever the cement plant broke down we went to pick cotton. I think it was 1929 or 1930, whenever the banks closed. We went to Fresno, to a place called Fowler, it's a little town. We went to pick cotton, and it was a disaster because we didn't know how to pick cotton and my father didn't. He took the whole family with him. We had to live in this tent that had a floor, a wooden floor, and the water was so cold that the faucets wouldn't run in the morning.

Knaster: What month was this?

Arceneaux: Must have been in the winter time because we were there that Christmas and New Year's. We went to church. We heard that if you went to this pentecostal church you could get candies, goodies. Of course, it was unheard of that we'd go. But we went with the neighbors. We just hitched a ride with them. I don't know how we got out of the house. We hitched a ride and the next thing we know when we get back my mother is furious because she knew we went someplace and we had candies, and walnuts and oranges. She just couldn't believe it. She didn't think we had stolen them, but why did we go? Well they were giving them free, and we wanted to go. Three or four of us went. We were loaded, because we would go up to the lady and say, "I've got a little brother at home," and then, "I've got a little sister at home," and they gave us two or three, and we

got a load—that was a real, real good treat. But we were very poor, as poor as we had never been before. And my mother was very unhappy. We were there for New Year's. We sat out and waited for the new year to be born. I'll never forget having the bonfire and watching the sky for the new year . . .

You see it in the sky, you know. As soon as we could see it, we all went to bed. But we came back because Manuel's feet got frozen. We buried one of my little brothers there. He died. That was a terrible thing. We didn't have any money. My father couldn't speak English. We were out of his territory. The baby was dying and they had me out there hitting the dishpan, because you drive the death away, you know. All these things come back when I think about it. If you keep beating the thing, the baby won't die. And you're praying and praying and the baby still died. I felt very bad because I beat as much as I could and my brother was with my father looking for a doctor. And the baby died. They laid him out on the table and my mother just mourned him. My father went to find out what to do with him. Says if we were in San Juan, if we were in Mexico, I'd bury it. But they'd told him it was against the law and he didn't want to bury it there, he wanted to come back to San Juan. We had to bury it where they told us. We had the little casket with us. I don't know what car it was in, and we ended up going to the wrong cemetery and not finding . . . they're burying the baby when we get there and my mother gets there too late and they're already throwing out . . . she never believed that they had buried him there. It was a very sad experience. He was about four years old.

Knaster: Do you know why your father would go to Fresno in the first place if he had work around here?

Arceneaux: He wasn't used to working in the fields yet and people talked of Fresno, others who had gone there. Somebody came and had a good car that he'd taken.

Knaster: Did you ever migrate any place else?

Arceneaux: We would go to Gilroy and live in a tent, or sometimes to Hollister, eight miles away, so we'd be right there at the job. I don't know if you call that migrating.

Knaster: How long would you stay in one place?

Arceneaux: We would just stay there for the prune harvest; other people did that also. They would go home and pick up more clothes. Kind of like camping. Some summers we came to Castroville where my grandfather lived, and lived with them in a camp, to pick peas. But we never followed the crops. We thought we were fortunate that we didn't have to. My mother kind of bragged about it, that we didn't do that, because other people did. It seems to me that it was harder moving from place to place. Wherever we went she used to plant flowers. Even in that camp, she used to plant, take her geraniums. She'd wash her dishes and water her flowers. I remember that so well. Not at the camp where there was a tent, but if we were going to be there a month or so. She wanted a little green something.

Knaster: It's a nice touch. Do you remember what kind of attitudes people had towards women working? Do you remember hearing, a woman should do this, or a woman should do that, or she shouldn't do anything, or she should be in the house . . .

Arceneaux: You know that was very strange, the woman should always do this, you know . . . She wasn't supposed to speak, she was supposed to dress demurely, yet she could work, some of them wore pants . . . if you found them big enough to fit you. Men's pants to work, but you weren't supposed to wear pants around the house. Oh no, girls don't do that. I was raised like that. I don't know what happened. You were the same person, but the minute you got into your house you were a woman again. I don't remember my mother working as much as other women but those that did, they worked like men. They had to.

Knaster: Did they get the same wages?

Arceneaux: No, I don't think so. I don't know. I know that they didn't simply because even right now in modern times, you never do. I remember in the shoe store as a clerk I was earning 75 cents an hour and the man was earning $1.25. That was almost twice as much. And only because I was a woman. I thought I was lucky because I had a steady job.

Knaster: In the home was it left for your father to be the decision maker and the planner, or do you think your parents worked together on things like that? Were your brothers taught one thing and the girls taught another?

Arceneaux: I know that my father gave all the money to my mother. She was able to make it go. She turned around and gave him back some money. I know that my brother was special. He didn't have to pick up a towel, he didn't have to hang up his clothes, because we were supposed to do it for him.

Knaster: When you say "we," do you mean the girls?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: Were the boys ever taught the same things that you were? Did they know how to cook and how to clean?

Arceneaux: No, oh no. They didn't have to. No, even when I was left alone my father didn't make them help me. I had to do it alone. That was a woman's job, woman's work. That was strange because many a time I had to chop wood in order to get the beans cooked. They didn't chop enough and they were gone, so rather than risk not getting the food I went out and chopped some wood. My mother used to chop wood sometimes. So that's why I chopped it after she was gone. But when I was alone I told my father. I got a slap in the mouth. I said, "Look, I've got too many kids. In fact, I'm not even going to wash diapers any more." So he went and he bought me a washing machine just about a month before he died.

Knaster: Was this an electric washing machine or just the hand type?

Arceneaux: Electric.

Knaster: Wow, this was in the 1930s.

Arceneaux: Yes, 1937. It was a ringer, brand-new from Montgomery Ward. Then I wanted to wash every day. I remember doing that and going to confession and saying that I had disobeyed because I had been angry and screamed at him. He screamed at me. He slapped me around.

Knaster: Were you using a washboard?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: Did you haul water, or was there a sink?

Arceneaux: We were living in that house when my mother died. There was a faucet, but not a sink. I had to pour it in a tub and scrub. But we always had to heat the water outside in a tub. You just filled it up with water and put wood under it to warm it. There was no water heater. There was no hot water in the house.

Knaster: Did you do that for washing yourselves too? Heat up the water and do it outside?

Arceneaux: No, the washing tub was inside. It was a luxury to have a bath. Years later in the 1940s we still lived in houses that didn't have hot water. We'd visit friends and take a bath. You know we girls had a problem.

Knaster: When you had the diapers were they just pieces of cloth that you made into diapers.

Arceneaux: Well my mother made them. She used to sit at night and sew on material. She made little triangle squares.

Knaster: Did you use that material as a sanitary napkin too? I don't remember when those things were invented, when they were marketed.

Arceneaux: You had old washcloths or towels and you'd cut them up. You had to pin them to our panties. And when you changed you put them in a bucket with soap and soak them and then wash them out, hang them up, have them ready for next month. God! Wasn't that horrible.

Knaster: Did your mother ever talk about wanting a different kind of life? Did she ever talk about her own aspirations, maybe in terms of education or a different kind of life? Because you did say they talked about going back to Mexico.

Arceneaux: I don't know. I don't remember. I don't remember her talking anything about what she would like to do. She just used to talk of Mexico as the place she would like to go back. They both talked about it and they would laugh about things like that. They had good times and they were very close.

Knaster: What kinds of things did you think about or dream about when you were a child or a young woman, in terms of what you wanted to become?

Arceneaux: When I was a young woman, I was only eleven or twelve, all I wanted to do was get married. In fact, I was fourteen or fifteen when I told my father I wanted to get married. "Who are you going to get married to?" Oh! He got angry. He thought I had a boyfriend. One time we came to Castroville and at school a boy left a note for me. I took it home and I told my brother about it and I didn't show it to my father. My brother snitched on me and my father wanted to know, he saw the note, he couldn't read, my father never learned to read or write . . . he just used to have a beautiful signature. I still have his signature. I don't know how he learned that. My mother taught him. He took

that paper and he burned it and he gave me a whipping. I remember I was mad at him for burning the paper. I didn't care if he hit me. I wanted the paper. But later when I told him that I wanted to get married he was going to whip me. I said, "Wait a minute! I'm not married yet." I was so skinny and I thought, gee I'll never grow big. I thought that was the criteria. I remember when my first boyfriend danced with me at a picnic, they took me and they sat there and he came and asked for me. My father said, "You can dance with her, but don't move too far." So we could only go where they could still see me . . . and then that's the one I wanted to marry. I wanted to marry him right away. And that's strange, you know. Why did I want to get married so young? Have more kids. I hated kids as it was.

Knaster: I remember you talking about the Ferry-Morse Seed Company and how you thought that, gee, instead of doing this work I wish I could be doing that work. That seemed easier.

Arceneaux: Oh, I loved that. I would have liked that. I also wished I could work in a store. I thought that would be the epitome . . . that people who worked in stores were just . . . it was the thing to work in a store, or in a bank—that would have been something. Now I know better.

Knaster: I imagine that your ideas have changed over the years as to what kind of work you wanted to do. Was there anything you had in mind? I ask because when you're little you think, I want to be a singer, or, I want to be a dancer—things like that.

Arceneaux: I think there was a period when all I thought about was surviving. That was quite a period. Surviving with my brothers and sisters. That was it. And then they left to go into the service, and my sister insisted. Larry was in the service and he was leaving and she wanted to get married. She got married and she stayed with us, continued to live there. I was sick. After the cannery I just passed out and they carried me home. I was deathly ill for days and days and my legs were numb. The nuns came and took care of me, and then they took an X-ray and I had quite a bit of tuberculosis. I didn't know what to do. We were over in town in that nicer house in San Juan. We're paying fifteen dollars a month. The sisters and the priest talked it over. I needed care. I needed to be in a sanitarium. They decided I could go down to Monrovia to the Mary Knoll sanitarium. I should go immediately. They called and arranged. I didn't want to go because I had to take my sister with me. She was the youngest and the only girl left. The boys could stay there by themselves. I remember having forty-five dollars and I would have paid their rent for them but I had to use part of that for transportation to go. I was there for a year, from 1941 to 1942. It was November when I came back.

Knaster: So you didn't have to pay?

Arceneaux: Well, Molly went and she washed dishes. She had a rough time. She washed dishes and scrubbed and carried. She was like a waitress to the nuns. She lived in the convent. She's the only one who's never had any tuberculosis. She had never been touched by it. To this day she's never had it. The boys just took care of themselves. Later I found out . . . we had a charge account in the meat market and the bakery and I told the man to give them credit and when I'd come back I'd pay him. They just went ahead and

charged. And charged, and charged and charged. When I got back we owed a lot of money.

Knaster: Did you immediately go back to the cannery?

Arceneaux: No. And we owed a lot of rent so they told us to move. So that's when I came to Watsonville. There was only five of us. Four of my siblings had died; Joe and Adina and Odelia and Salvador. Salvador talked about having a tumor in his stomach. Might have been cancer, might have been tuberculosis but he had a tumor. He had something in his stomach because my aunt said he would bleed, vomit. Could have been a hemorrhage from his lungs. He died in Sonora, Mexico. That's as far as he got. Remember I told you that he raffled his guitar?

Knaster: Yes.

Arceneaux: And he wrote letters to me. He knew my father had died. He knew he was dying so he wrote letters and postdated them. So I received letters . . . he died in October and I received letters even into March of the following year. I never knew he was dead, but the townspeople knew about it. Somebody found out. Somebody told me and I didn't believe it.

Watsonville, California

Knaster: In the last interview I think you were just about to talk about Watsonville. You'd come out of the sanitorium and all kinds of bills had piled up and you'd left your brother there. I guess you just packed everyone up and came here.

Arceneaux: Well I have to backtrack a little bit because I have to set the scene of why we came to Watsonville. You asked me in the course of events who else worked alongside us. I remember answering units of family, but I forgot to say that in many instances when we worked with Japanese, we worked alongside Filipinos. Not women, but men, single men. And in fact when we worked for Mr. Nyland who owned quite a bit of land, we worked with Pablo Peres, his Filipino labor contractor, who knew my father. The men were very friendly, calling you names in broken Spanish . . . Juanita . . . and broken English. Some women in town did marry Filipinos, a couple of the ladies. I remember calling them Filipineras.

Knaster: Were they Mexican women, though?

Arceneaux: Mexican women, yes. I remember asking my mother, "Mama, why do they call them Filipineras?" And she said, "You be quiet. You don't call anybody names." "But why? They're not Filipinas." "They're Mexicans like you and me." They looked like us. "Well those people give names to other people and I don't want you saying that word." She said, "People don't like that they had married and didn't marry a Mexican. But it didn't matter because Filipinos were the same," she said. "They were created by God . . . and don't you say that word." So I didn't say it. But you know I had heard that word. She dispelled that thing, that fear or whatever it was, or that curiosity.

So I'm back from the sanitarium and I'm still very wobbly, because I had been in bed for ten months and then they tell me to get up and leave and go home now. And Pablo Peres came to see me at the house. He knew the predicament we were in. I guess anybody else knew it too. He told me that because of the war he had a business in Watsonville. A

billiard place—he didn't say that exactly—he said, I have a business in Watsonville. An ice cream parlor, barber shop and that. And because of the war, you can't keep a manager. When you put a manager in there, they keep drafting them. He says, "You're over 21, you can be my manager if you want to. You can't work in the fields any more. Your brother told me. I understand. It would be one way for you to make a living." I got kind of excited and I said, "Oh, my God!" My answer, the prayers, you know. I say, "Well, I'd like to see this." So we got into the car and drove us to Watsonville, and he came through the Pajaro Gap, where you look into town and all of it is lit. Imagine, to country, San Juan people . . . nine hundred people in a town, and you come to the city of Watsonville, all the lights were on, this huge Streamline Pool Hall. He passed by it once, and he says that's my business.

Knaster: What year was this?

Arceneaux: 1943. It looked . . . God. I'd never been . . . that was called Chinatown in those days. We had driven by it but I'd never stopped down there because it looked different, intriguing, but it looked like a lot of things we weren't supposed to do. I guess it was just a lot of imagination. He drove around again and showed me . . . said, the barber's shop's there and behind all this is the pool hall. I said we have to think it over and he said call, I'll come back tomorrow. I said well, I'll let you know. Wait awhile. I'll have to think about it. I had a brother in the service already. Adolf was in the marines and we used to have these conferences. We did everything by vote. We were very democratic in our house. I stacked the votes at times but we still had some kind of democracy where we voted for things. That was the way we handled our crises. So he

was coming home, and we explained it to him and he was against it. He's already a marine and he knew what a pool hall meant and all that. We had an idea too, but I had no alternative. I didn't know what to do. So I talked to my aunt, who had also worked for Pablo, and I said, "Look, he offers us this job and he says we'll work out a partnership like a half or he's 75 or whatever. He's so rich, he's got a lot of money." But Tia didn't like it. I walked away and felt very deflated. So then I went to the sisters who still were very close to me because I was ill and all that. I spoke to one of them about it. She was horrified. "Oh, a girl of your genteel . . . your mother was so sweet and so pure, and you're so nice and genteel. Oh no, you mustn't go. It's a den of sin."

Knaster: (laughter)

Arceneaux: I looked at her and I said, "I don't know if it's a den of sin but if we stay here I'll starve like an angel. I have to try out something." "Well you mustn't," she says, "you know you have a little sister." I says, "Well, no one is going to touch my little sister." That was it. He didn't come. He sent a truck. Three men came in a truck and they just carried things directly into the truck. They moved us—we didn't have too much, but then the kids got in the truck and he came in the car and drove it . . . moved us in an afternoon like that. Moved us into a little claptrap house, but to me . . . it was free . . . had a bathtub in it.

Knaster: Was it in back of the pool hall?

Arceneaux: Yes. Right on Main. Where the Regal Station is now. Just about in the same place. It's all knocked down now. They've knocked the whole street down. But it was in

the first block next to the bridge. If you wanted to go to the bathroom you had to go through the whole business to get back to our house, or come in through the back in a little alley, right through Union Street, where the whorehouses were. We stayed there. We came in the month of March and the agreement was fifty-fifty, just like that. Excellent, but I didn't know what was going on. I said wait a minute. As yet, he hadn't made his move, told me he loved me or anything. It was just a business deal. I said I'd I'd rather just work at it for two or three weeks and figure then. I knew my figures and I figured that's the only way. This man is rich and he's gotten someplace by making money off something. I want to protect my brothers; here I'm going to have my two brothers in there working and my sister, and if you're going to exploit us or what . . . you know, I was always thinking of the worst. So we went to work.

It was relatively easy; my brother Manuel was half-blind due to cataracts. He took care of the pool hall. He would set up the racks and take in money; mind you we had a janitor who came in and swept and kept things clean. Jack . . . I don't know his last name, but he was Eskimo and Filipino, six feet inches with a hook instead of an arm. He was our bodyguard. I didn't realize it till I had been there a couple of days and then I knew we had a bodyguard. Things started to happen . . . They showed me how to order beer and I learned easy. Very easy. Then someone else told me that Pablo was in love with me. He says, if you play your cards right, he'll do anything for you. I said, well what do I do now. So he wanted to talk business and I told him that I would continue to work fifty-fifty, after expenses, half to him. No problem, he says, that's fine. But it wasn't enough because four of us were working and we opened up at eleven and closed at two. We were there all the time. I carried all the responsibility all the time, whether I was there or

not. My brother worked. He had to stand there and watch, and if he got sick he still had to do it because he was afraid for us to be in there alone. My younger brother was too young.

Knaster: Were you also taking care of the house?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: And cooking?

Arceneaux: Well we ate out. Oh, we lived like queens. We'd go down the street and tell Mrs. Sanchez who had Sanchez Restaurant . . . and get us an order of Mexican food for four and they'd bring her and . . . my goodness, we didn't have a dime when we got out of there but I paid off my father's funeral, my mother's funeral, all the funeral parlors. I paid the baker and the meat man. And I started paying the Sisters down [at the Sanitarium] because we should have paid something while I was there. We made money, but then we spent it. And my sister, who was only sixteen years old, got married in July. That took a lot of money, 'cause we went back to San Juan and had this big fiesta for her. It was kind of a honeymoon for us, who had never had anything, to just reach in the till and take money. It was our money and I always saw that he got his share. Things went along fine except that he told me a few days later that he would like to marry me and I wouldn't have to work any more. I didn't say no, just that I didn't think of him in that way and I wanted to be his friend and all that stuff. He ended by bringing a ring, an engagement ring. I refused to wear it. I told him no, and he says I'm going to leave it here in the safe. Mind you, Meri, it was a big rock. It was huge. I'd look at it and [think]

my God, I wonder how much he paid for it? But I was never going to marry him, I knew. And I didn't. He was very, very much of a gentleman.

Knaster: Was he a lot older?

Arceneaux: Yes. He was forty-four. And I was twenty-three. That's all he would tell me, that he was forty-four. Filipinos don't show their age. In June a friend of mine was getting married and one of my boyfriends was going to be . . . the friend I used to really like but something had happened, we just had drifted over the tuberculosis and the children. I was going to the dance. Just as I'm leaving I says, I'm going to wear that ring and give them all a big . . . they're going to wonder, and they're going to say, well, who is going to marry her? So I went to the dance and I had a ball and they all wondered about my ring and I was flaunting it and dancing with everybody and I got home about midnight, back to the business. Pablo was there. He used to come in on Saturdays, and he didn't want me leaving on Saturdays. He insisted I not go out on Saturdays. I worked it out so that I used to still go, come home at eleven or something. He was angry because I was out. I could see he was angry, so quickly I took the ring off and slipped into a tiny little pocket that I had here. About an hour later I'm still there, working with the customers. It was just beer and soda, not wine or anything. Filipinos are not drinkers so I'd never had any problems with drunks, but they'd ask for ice cream, milkshakes and beer, soda water . . .

And suddenly the ring is gone. Got panicky and I started looking. This is very important because it was the way my life moved from that moment. When he found out what I was looking for he told Jack to close the place and order everybody out. They started

searching it. He wasn't upset; he was so happy because I was wearing the ring. I was in tears. I didn't know what to do. He kept saying, "It's all right. I'll get another one." That was the last thing I wanted to do. I wanted to find it and he was just so happy because I was so upset over losing his ring. Well, of course we never found the ring. He said to close the place. He wanted me to go eat. I went home and I cried. Nobody understood what was going on, except that he knew and I knew that I had cooked my goose.

Two days later he came back with exactly the same ring. It was insured this time. It cost him thirteen hundred dollars. It was insured.

Knaster: This was in the 1940s, wasn't it?

Arceneaux: Yes. 1943. It was just as big and ugly to me as ever. I told him I would not wear it. He said, "I know you're scared of losing it but it's all right, it's insured." And so there's the dumb ring, and I didn't know what to do. I was young and popular and I says, "What the heck, just so I don't marry him, just so I don't lead him on." I proceeded to continue to work and have a good time. Then I guess he told people I was going to get married because I started to get a lot of respect. You know, they just looked at me and smiled and said, "Well you landed a good man. How did you do it?" Every woman had tried to marry him. I went to the cock fights. I went because I never had been to one. He, knowing I liked it, proceeded to let me be the person who held the money. Here I sat with thousands of dollars in my hand, waiting for what rooster would lose and I would know how to pay back. It was very exciting because we could be raided at any time.

Knaster: Oh, it was illegal?

Arceneaux: Oh yes! They still do it, but it's illegal as all get out. I don't know why I went down there. I enjoyed the culture, the mixed culture. Mexicans like chicken fights . . . there was always Mexicans there and there was always Filipinos. Strange thing, two minorities and yet there's discrimination against one another. I'll tell you later on how it works. It became part of my life. Well, it got to the point where Pablo was pressing me to get married and I didn't want to. I couldn't. I didn't love him. I couldn't imagine living with someone. I told him. He was patient. He said, "I'll wait." He said, "If you marry me you can continue living and do whatever you want, but you have to marry me.

Well, in the meantime, Leo Silga, my husband who I married, the father of my son, had been around a few months, and always in the background, always in the background, always friendly. I knew he liked me and I liked him. Nothing exciting, but I liked him. I thought he was a wonderful, good person. There was very few people I could talk to. Every now and then I had a chance to talk to him and he would guide me . . . like he'd say, "Don't pay attention, don't do this," you know.

The policemen were very good to me too. They'd come in to take their graft. They'd pick their twenty dollar bills or whatever it was coming to. They'd tell me, be sure you give Pat Rooney so much when he comes in—we owe him money. So I gave it to him. Years later I found out that was what he took so he wouldn't say there was gambling going on in the back. Or maybe, I don't know, maybe they had women back there, but I knew there was gambling going on. Pat Rooney told me once, "You keep your nose clean and you'll never get in trouble. It's all right. Pablo is very smart in getting you because you have a good personality and you're good for the business. You smile. You're friendly. No

wonder everyone's in here all the time. But keep your nose clean, because if you get caught, anything wrong you'll have nobody to pack you up." Well he didn't know who he was talking about. He told me, so and so's not good, he's a pimp. Don't ever think of going out with him." I said, "Well, I wouldn't." You know, I didn't really date anybody. I didn't have time. They'd come in here and make goo-goo eyes at me, and I goo-goo eyed them back . . .

But anyway, Pablo catches on that I'm interested in Leo. He says, "You like that guy?" I said, "Why? It's none of your business." He says, "Oh yes it is. You like him?" I said, "Yes, I like him." He says, "You're not going to get anywhere if you marry him. Should marry me."

Knaster: Was Leo Mexican?

Arceneaux: No, Filipino. Says, "He doesn't even have a car." I said, "That's all right. I don't have much car either." Pablo says, "You're going to walk?" He argued. Well, you know, the more they tell you what not to do . . . I started paying attention to Leo and I realized that he was a very fine man for *me* . He was kind, good, gentle. He liked kids. He liked my sister very much and told me to be patient with her, things like that. After Molly married she continued to live with me and was hard to handle. She thought that she could do all kinds of things because she was a married woman. I would fret. I would tell him. He would advise me. He was about twelve or fifteen years older than me. But he was much younger in thought than any of the other men that I met.

Pablo insisted that I had to marry. I got upset with him and I told him that I would never marry him. He said I had to make my mind up because he was going to see to it that I would never marry Leo. I got worried, really worried when he came one night when Leo was visiting there with me—now we're in the house. He came and he sat there. Just sat there and both of them sat. I left them sitting there and I went to bed. I woke up in the morning and they were still sitting there, you know, sleeping together. But sleeping . . . looking at each other.

I found out that Leo had been followed that night when he left the house, he was being followed. Then they told me that they were going to get rid of him. I just got so frightened. Then I really realized I loved him. I cared for him. I didn't want anything to happen. We talked and he says, "Well, let's get married and we'll run away because he's too powerful. He owns this section of town and he says I can't stay here." "Neither can you," I said, "Well, what will we do?" By then my sister's married. My younger brother's seventeen. My other brother . . . there's hardly anybody left. "Well," he says, "we'll go to Florida. I can pick lettuce in Florida." He was a lettuce cutter. I thought it was set.

I told Pablo that I wouldn't have nothing to do with him. He says, "Well, you can quit but you have to pay me back every bit of the money including the ring." I said, "Oh my God." He had given me an aquarium with fish in it. He'd given me an orchid plant . . . things just appeared in my house. Given me a fur coat that had never been taken out of the box. He'd given my sister things. My sister wore them. I never did because I *knew* what had happened with the ring. I would get in deeper and deeper. So I had almost all

of the things ready to give him back. But how could I give him the ring? He says, "Pay up."

This was September. He threatened me in such a way that I wouldn't live to marry him, he inferred. I was scared to death. I did some really deep thinking. How am I going to get out of this? What did I do wrong? Why should I be treated this way? What did I do? I don't know what happened, but in the morning I got up and went to the District Attorney, John McCarthy. I didn't have an appointment. I just walked in on him and bared my soul to him. He already knew I was in town. He knew we were a family unit. He told me, "We knew about you, as soon as you came into town. We always check out women that work in the pool hall in Watsonville. There's no need for him to treat you like that. I'll take care of him. Don't worry." He was kind of disgusted. He said, "I'll be darned, Peres did that. One telephone call will take care of him."

He said, "Go ahead. Move out and take your things. Get out of there. Don't stick around because I don't know what he'll do to you. He would be angry and call you names or something but he's not going to hurt you. I'll make a phone call or I'll have him come in." That was on Monday and by Tuesday I got out. Molly went to live with her in-laws and we moved my brother Manuel into a little apartment over a restaurant. I went off and got married, just like that.

Knaster: Did you go to Florida?

Arceneaux: No, we went to El Centro.

Knaster: To work down there?

Arceneaux: The season had just started.

Knaster: Did you work in the fields there?

Arceneaux: No, I didn't. I never did work. I couldn't work like that any more. I got married October 13th. So all that happened, the arguments and the arrangements. I had to present all the bills and the bookkeeping had to be brought up to par and we didn't have enough money to pay our share of his . . . so we had to work an extra week because we were always behind. We used up the money. He never wanted the money, he didn't care what I did. It was only when I wouldn't marry him that he demanded the books be straightened out. So we had to work a couple of weeks to make it up. We went to El Centro and stayed there the winter and the following March, in 1944 we came back. In December 1945 my little boy was born. I went to the hospital in January of 1946.

Knaster: Where was your son born?

Arceneaux: In Watsonville Hospital.

Arceneaux: It was a very embarrassing thing for that man to have happened and he stayed away and sold the business. I heard that he got married but I have never seen him again.

Watsonville's Chinatown

Knaster: Could you tell me a little bit about what that area was like where the billiard hall was? You said it was the Chinatown of Watsonville. What kinds of activities went on there? How did prostitution fit into this whole thing?

Arceneaux: Well Union Street was where all the houses were.

Knaster: Was it considered legal?

Arceneaux: Oh no. It wasn't legal. It was illegal and they had raids every so often but it was covered up. They had to have the raids because then that way they would pay the fines and continue having it. By that time the war was getting over so by then not so many soldiers came, but during 1941, 1942, 1943, and 1944 soldiers came over and it was called Sin City, California. The town was really very exciting. There were Filipino restaurants; there were Chinese restaurants, one Mexican restaurant, La Poblamita, was the only one. I remember the smells of food. Even when we came over to Watsonville the parade of Fourth of July would turn right there. So if you came in from San Juan the streets were closed to traffic. You'd end up standing there, and I always used to think, "God, it smells good around here," and the *food* . . . Filipino food has a lot of pork so you can smell it all over the street, you know, spicy and all that. The streets were dilapidated, but it didn't seem like that. If you saw the other part of town, it was such a contrast. It was so quiet and clean, no smells. And over here, laundries. You could smell the Chinese laundries and they smelled of steam and vapors and cleaning solutions and all that.

Knaster: Were there a lot of Chinese families?

Arceneaux: Not a lot, but there were businesses. They lived behind in little closed . . . top of a building or behind it. I remember because Jimmy from the Bamboo Gardens who now owns the Gold Coin, he was a young teen-ager then. I still know him. He's married and has family and I remember him in the laundry with his sister. I tease him now. I say,

"You used to wash my clothes." He says, "I never did!" But his folks had a laundry. And the China Cafe was a popular place. It was right in the heart of Chinatown. It was real good food. There was a lot of gambling going on. And as you walked down the street you heard the click, click of the dominos. You'd walk by and [you'd think] the building was empty because it was like a business window that had been closed off. But something was going on behind there. I don't really know what. There seemed to be a lot going on that you didn't see. I think if you didn't look for them, you didn't see them. We had that little path we'd travel . . . little slats had been put on the ground because when it rained it would be muddy . . . so you walked on the slats. If you tried to sneak by, come home quietly and not make noise, if you had heels you still had that clack, clack, that was kind of strange. Back there you saw a lot of wash hung . . . I don't know how in the world . . . later on I found out. I'd never seen one of those lines that you pull and shoots the clothes up there, like a relay. It's wired. You hang your clothes on this line and you pull and the clothes shoot way up there. I used to wonder how the clothes got up there, 'cause I never had a line like that. That always intrigued me. There's all kinds of those hanging clothes like that. It was kind of exciting for someone who had lived in San Juan.

Knaster: Did they mostly stay to themselves, the Chinese?

Arceneaux: I guess so. They always spoke their language. Their English was very short, a mixture.

Knaster: Did they only live in that part of town?

Arceneaux: I imagine, unless there was someone rich. Now it's different, they live all over the town.

Knaster: There's no Chinatown anymore?

Arceneaux: No.

Knaster: Was there a big fire or something?

Arceneaux: Well they just kept . . . see, right as you're going out, on your left was that place where we had the Streamline. On your right was the Flamingo Club, and there was a Monterey Bar, which is still around, but behind this was Bardmess Courts. It was all little tiny rooms, a real rat trap place to live.

Knaster: Must have been cramped.

Arceneaux: In the late forties or early fifties they condemned some of it. Either build it up or knock it down, so they started to knock away, little by little, they'd condemn this, or a fire was here, and they never built it up, and then in the past fifteen years they've just been trying to beautify this part of town by knocking things down.

Knaster: Do you remember how the various ethnic groups related to each other in town? It sounds like that part of Watsonville has always been a corner for ethnic groups, there was a little Chinatown and now there are a lot of cantinas over there.

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: Did the groups live together at all, or did they just mix for business or social purposes?

Arceneaux: Well, Chinese kept to themselves. They had a little Buddhist building. Chinese went in there and gambled or whatever it was and they had a church.

We didn't go there. Mexicans didn't mix with them and Filipinos, I doubt it. I don't think so.

Filipinos in Watsonville

Filipinos were hard workers and they had a lot of dances. There were a couple of fraternal lodges. They would have dances every other Saturday. I don't remember going to anywhere where there was fights, but I remember hearing about it. They would fight over a girl, and shoot or kill each other. They actually had that kind of bad goings on. So they wouldn't let them have a dance for a month or so. They'd give the permit to someone else. They were boisterous. But when I married into the Filipino community, it was very much like Mexicans. I saw a sprinkling of Mexicans mixed in because they were friends. They didn't live intimately, side-by-side, but they intermarried because Filipinos had no women here. The strange part of it is that if you married a Filipino the Mexicans looked down on you. You were discriminated against because you married a Filipino. Although I was well-known among the Mexican people, when I married a Filipino they didn't talk to me anymore.

Knaster: Did they call you names?

Arceneaux: I don't know, not to my face. I remember when I was pregnant, one person hollered to me. I was walking with my sister. This woman says, "Hey, how does it feel to carry a monkey's baby?"

Knaster: This was a Mexican who said that to you?

Arceneaux: Yes. Across the street. I said, oh God. I wanted to . . . and Molly just took off at her and chased her down two blocks and all the way into her house. Molly would have beat her up because she was that type. I don't know if I would have even chased her, but I was about seven or eight months pregnant. I guess I just didn't look at it. I didn't acknowledge prejudice. But it was there. I knew it because they talk. Then I revert back to when they used to call them Filipineras, see. I don't know if they called me, but I'm sure they called me a Filipinera. The strange part of it is that I never thought any . . . I married a man that I loved . . . or maybe I was in need of a husband to protect me. For whatever reason it turned out very nicely because he was very good to me.

But the Filipina ladies who were here. I don't know how they got here. They must have had money to get in. Well, they discriminated against you because you were not a Filipina. They looked at you as an interloper. They also thought . . . because some Filipinos married bad women, you know . . . they picked them up someplace and brought them, what is it? Dignified them with marriage or whatever. They kind of stereotyped you. It didn't bother me, because I knew where I was at. At times I felt it was a shame I had to prove myself. But I felt that was the least of my problems. It was exactly one year and three months that I was married to Leo. After I was in the hospital I was out of their reach. But it was strange that you're kind of in a pecking order.

Knaster: How was it in terms of the Anglos in town, how they dealt with the different ethnic groups? Were there separate barrios for . . .

Arceneaux: Oh, yes.

Knaster: . . . for the white people and the Mexican people in the . . .

Arceneaux: Oh yes. I don't remember mixing with Anglos. I didn't know any Anglos. Only at church, you sat next to them. I remember a boss, a few . . . Maybe if you bought at Penney's, maybe somebody recognized you, you know. But I don't remember ever mixing with anybody. My teenage girlfriend used to baby-sit for a big family and when we were in town she'd say hi to them and they'd say hi back, but that was it.

Knaster: Was there ever a problem in terms of where you wanted to live? Did you feel that you wouldn't be given an apartment in a certain part of town?

Arceneaux: Oh, of course. They were always . . . That happened later when I was with Lenny, we couldn't get a place. Silga was the last name and it sounds Mexican. I remember asking someone else named Bradford to look for the apartment for me and he found it. But when I went to get it, they told me it was taken. That happened all the time. Oh, constantly.

Knaster: Were you ever refused service in any stores or restaurants?

Arceneaux: Well, I'll tell you what happened. I think you should know. It shouldn't have happened in Chinatown. There was a couple who were very good friends of ours and she was a redhead from the south, Vena. She was married to Sammy who was a Filipino

and ended up being one of the godfathers to my son. The four of us, Leo and I, and Vena and Sammy went to the China Cafe to eat and we were trying to get in when these navy boys came out. They were paying their bill and we were going in. One of the sailors got a hold of her arm and says, “What’s a beautiful girl like you doing with these monkeys here?” I was pregnant. I saw my *compadre* just grab the guy and he was a strong man and he would’ve beat him up. But someone grabbed him and pinioned his arms back. He says, “Don’t do it. You know what will happen. Don’t do it.” Because all you had to do was touch them and they threw you in the jail. I think he would have killed him, because he had done bad things to Anglos. I remember Leo and I talked it over and we said that we just wouldn’t go with them because she attracted too much attention. I was very lucky, because I looked Filipina.

It’s hard to admit that you’re not liked because of what you are. Many a time, when I was married to Leo, I felt that way. Because he was a Filipino and I knew he was good, and yet we would be worried. We didn’t know whether to stop at that motel. If I got down maybe it’d be all right, but I didn’t want to get down because I didn’t know whether after we had the ticket or whatever they would let us stay. We knew of others being refused and didn’t want to have that happen to us. So it was kind of a difficult period. I had never felt anything like that in San Juan. I never had. And if I did I always felt, well it’s ’cause we’re orphans, not because we’re Mexicans. Then to actually have to live it and know it’s because you’re the wrong color. And maybe not mine . . . I was thinking it was his. Maybe he was thinking it was mine.

Knaster: You said your son was born in December 1946?

Arceneaux: December 19, 1946.

Knaster: What happened to your husband?

Arceneaux: Nothing. I went to the hospital. I'd never married in the church because we could never get his baptismal record and this was during the war . . . and back in the Philippines his town had been burned down during the war and his church couldn't produce a baptismal record for him. He just wasn't listed, they said. But actually it came out during one of our conversations, or I found out, he'd given the wrong church so that I couldn't find out that he was married.

Knaster: Oh, he had married in the Philippines?

Arceneaux: He had left the Philippines when he was eighteen. He'd been married before he was seventeen. And he'd left to make money so that he could bring his wife over here, go back with money. They all planned to go back with money just like braceros did from Mexico. I guess the Filipinos did the same thing.

This was the story he told, and it was confirmed later. He hadn't been here but two or three years when his father wrote and told him that his wife had gone away with another man to another island, and so far as Leo was concerned to forget about her because if he ever went back it would be trouble. She married a policeman and he had moved her out of that island. So he just proceeded to forget about her, and he felt all along that she must've married again. That was in the late 1930s, so he just forgot about her. But he had never gotten a divorce.

See, this is how I thought about marriage. I had to get married . . . right away, to get out of my predicament and he was very nice, he was very good. I thought, oh God you must have sent him to me to help me in this time. I had nothing else to save me. And see, I knew you couldn't marry a Filipino if you were Caucasian. That was against the law. So if we wanted to be married we had to go to Canada. Or we had to go to New Mexico but that would only be a civil ceremony. I wanted a religious ceremony. You know, if I'm going to be married . . . I never dreamed that being married in the church would be forever, which was what had happened to him in the Philippines. Well, that's the only kind of marriage I knew. And being married in a civil ceremony didn't mean a thing. But it did mean that legally he was responsible for me. So he says, "Well, we'll have to go to Vancouver, north. I says, "No, we don't. We'll go to Santa Cruz. You wait. I'm going to say I'm Filipina. I have no father who might . . ." Because they wouldn't give you the license and you said, "I'm a Mexican." "Where were you born? In California? Well you can't get a license, you're a Mexican, you're a Caucasian." At that time you would be a Caucasian whether you were Mexican, minority or not. So we proceeded to do that. I said I was half-Filipina and half-Mexican. They gave me the license. So I married that way. But I never really acknowledged it as a wedding. As soon as we found his papers we would be married in the church. Well, after being in the hospital for awhile, I wrote and found out that he had been married. He told me, "Well, she married again and I figured she was divorced." I said, "But you lied." He said, "Yeah, well you know very well if I told you I was a married man, or even a divorced man, you would never have gone with me." And it's true. I had never even looked at a married man, date, or even

thought about it. It's true. I probably never would have even considered dating him let alone marrying him.

So there I was in the hospital, with a bigamist marriage. I got the letter from Manila and the bishop told me that there was a wedding recorded, and there was a child born. So I wrote to Leo and told him that I wanted to see him, very important. He came all the way from Arizona. He used to follow the lettuce. Arizona, or Phoenix, New Mexico, and then . . . he'd make the trip. He didn't go to Alaska to do the sardines. Not that year we were married. But otherwise he would. And he told me, "Sure we're married. I married you under false pretenses. But now you have a child. If you insist on a divorce or whatever they call it, an annulment I'll take the baby. And you'll never see him again." Well I wasn't seeing him anyway but I had visions of him leaving and never seeing the baby. Of course I couldn't insist. It was just impossible.

Tuberculosis

Knaster: You were in the hospital for five years.

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: Your tuberculosis had gotten that grave.

Arceneaux: Oh, it was all over. The baby brought it on. The child takes all your calcium for its needs. It strips you of what you have. So all my scars broke out completely and just went rampant. When I went in there I had it all over my two lungs.

Knaster: Were you in a hospital in Watsonville or where did you go?

Arceneaux: To Santa Cruz County Hospital. They had a tuberculosis unit. You see, ever since the baby was born I coughed. Right away I started to cough. For two solid weeks I coughed and I was nursing the baby and I coughed on him. I coughed on everybody. But no one got contaminated. In the first part of January I felt bad and then the doctor gave me cough syrup thinking I had a cold and it was about the second of February I went in. It was Candlemas Day, Ground Hog Day.

So what happened to him is that he proceeded to be very good. He continued to do his work, he kept the baby in different homes, he was in seventeen foster homes. After that he settled with Julia Castro, who was just the salt of the earth. She raised him for three years. She was very good to him. Leo . . . there's nothing to say bad about him. When he was in town he visited me often. He was there every Sunday, every Wednesday, some evenings.

Knaster: Did he help support the baby?

Arceneaux: Oh yes. He supported him. He paid people to take care of him.

Knaster: When you got out of the hospital where did you go?

Arceneaux: Back . . .

Knaster: You came back to town and lived here with the baby?

Arceneaux: Well no. They wanted me to have a home that had two bedrooms. So I could have a bedroom all to myself. I guess so I could be isolated because there was a chance I could break down again. That held me coming out because there was no place with two

bedrooms. You could never afford a home that big. All we ever had was two or three rooms. We were very poor. With Leo I was very poor. We lived on Riverside Drive in one of those little cubbyholes. Three rooms, the middle section was the kitchen. One room this way, one room that way. Bathroom outside, you walk out on the porch and there was a little toilet there that everybody shared and a shower that everybody shared . . . in a little courtyard, about six, seven families. That's how we lived. And he finally found a house on Ramsay Parks, right there, still is there, a tiny little house that had two rooms, and a bathroom. And they let me come home. The good thing is that he was around because they would not have let me come home by myself. I had to have a home to go to. That's another thing. He was wise. He said, "When you get out of here you're going to have to have a home. Why don't you wait until you see what happens to you?" So I came home in September, 1951. Lenny had started school. He'd gone to kindergarten and was starting first grade. He couldn't come to live with me because I couldn't take care of myself. Someone had to be with me to do anything. I could get up and walk but I couldn't cook or wash dishes. I was weak.

Knaster: You'd lived in the hospital for five years?

Arceneaux: Yes. 1946 to 1951. Five years, five months and seven days.

Knaster: That's a long time. Was it a county-supported hospital?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: So when you came out you couldn't even work. You couldn't do anything.

Arceneaux: I had had three surgeries by then. They had removed part of my lungs. They had removed seven of my ribs and crushed them. They close your rib cage so that it's small, so that the lung won't expand. So the TB is held dormant. It doesn't breathe. It's just crushed when it's being held like that. It never came back—probably has healed by now. But it only healed like that because it wasn't being used. What kept it from healing was that breathing on it. And then once they did I healed as much of the right, to hold me through surgery. The left would never have healed. It was too far gone. Nowadays they'd remove them. Pneumonectomy. But in those days we just, just as good, then I wouldn't be deformed. If they remove your lung, they leave your ribs, you know. I don't have anything here. My side is higher. Nobody notices it. At least I didn't. Nobody notices it.

Knaster: No, I haven't. It's not noticeable at all.

Arceneaux: So it's 1951. I've come home. My husband gets all panicky. He has to work and he doesn't know how to work outside of this following the migrant trail. All I could hear from this guy was, "My God, what am I going to do? I don't know how I'm going to pay this rent." I think it was 35 dollars a month. "This is bad. There's never work here during the winter." I just got to myself. "My God," I said, "What else? Let's go. I know somebody in San Juan who will come and live with me." I wasn't angry. I just felt I had to take things into my own hands. Here we go again. If I'm going to be with him I'm going to have to be thinking. Thinking and thinking. So this young friend of mine who was also an orphan, the same time we were. I knew she had had a bad marriage and was living at home with her brother and that she had a small baby. I told him, "Let's go to the

Chavez's and I know that Phyllis is there. I think I can talk her into coming and living with me. He says, "Oh, good. I can go back to El Centro." "Yeah, you can go back."

See, this is September and he's trying to leave the latter part of October and he's all panicky. So sure enough, she agreed. She had her little baby in a cardboard box behind the stove and she was sleeping on the couch. Well, when I offered her a home, a bedroom to herself and she could live with me, just take care of me she says, "I will, sure I'll go. When do you want me?" I said, "Well, as soon as possible." She says, "You want me to go with you today?" I said, "Sure." She picked up her little things and we told her brother. He was very glad. We had been friends. For years they were family friends. Our parents died. Their parents died. We had known each other for a long time. And she came to live with me, Phyllis Chavez and her little girl who was about five months old. As soon as she came then I was able to bring Lenny home. Because then someone would take care of him. See, I didn't care. They wouldn't find out. They wouldn't come and check my house. I couldn't do it. I'd tried getting up, and I'd tried walking around a lot and I couldn't. I'd get these weak spells . . . perspiration and palpitations and I was scared. I was scared to do anything. You know, after you've been down for so long . . . But as soon as she came, she took over, her cooking and she'd drive. Leo left us the car and he went with some friends. So Lenny started going to Catholic school and Phyllis would drive him every morning and the little baby . . . we stayed together.

Phyllis lived with me for two years, until 1953. In 1953 she had a boyfriend who wanted to marry her. I wanted her to get married because he seemed like a nice guy. I went in and got a job. I told the doctor I was real impatient and I felt good. I started walking,

little by little I built up my strength. And he says, “Why don’t you look for a part-time job, something easy?” Says, “You will never be able . . . you’ll always be handicapped. You will always be a convalescent. But there must be something you can do part-time. Maybe sewing. Look around for a part-time job.” So I got dressed and I walked down one side of the street and down another side of the street, just looking at the places and wondering what I would like to do. I walked by Karl’s Shoes. In those days there was one lady who sold shoes in town. You know, it was unheard of that women worked in a shoe store. And that lady, Mary Bertoni was her name. She was only Mary then. And as I walked by Karl’s Shoes he was waiting on some braceros. I walked in and listened, pretended I would . . . I heard him trying to make them understand what size and this and that. I went over to him and I said, “What you need is somebody to work here. Somebody like me who can sell shoes for you.” He says, “But I can’t . . .” I sold them the shoes, right there. I interpreted it and he sold them. When he was through I told him, “You need me right here in the store because you’re losing business all the time.” Something helped me talk that way, very sure of myself.

Knaster: (laughter)

Arceneaux: And he says, “But I don’t have the money . . . I have to work on such a thin profit line,” and this and that. I said, “Well, think about it. Right this year I would sell shoes for you.” “I can’t.” So I continued . . . I ended up going to a war surplus down towards Chinatown. I hated the place. It was part-time, it was six hours a day, and the men used to come there . . . drunks. He sold from soup to nuts, which means maybe earrings, maybe hammers, shovels . . . everything that the army surplus had, including

sheets. So one day a man asked me what size a sheet was that wasn't labeled. I opened up and it said, "Double." But I couldn't find out how many inches double was. So we unfolded it and it was a narrow little sheet. And the boss got angry at me. Because he was selling those sheets for doubles. Fooling people. That was one thing I didn't like and he didn't like it either. He told me never to unpackage things. Sell them first.

Then the second thing that went wrong is that a man asked me to show him a raincoat. We walked to the back and he asked me to feel him. "Put your hand right here." He got my hand. I was so mad I reached over and grabbed a flashlight and hit him. I don't know what happened to him. He fell down and he hollered and the owner came and told me that I couldn't work there anymore. I told him where to go and this and that. He told me that he wanted to talk to me. So we're talking and he told me, "You can't do that." I said, "Well, they can't do that to me. They can't make me feel them. I'm not going to. I'd rather quit first." It was that Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur, and he wasn't going to work but he wanted the store to stay open. He couldn't work. He was orthodox or something. He says that on Monday he would fire me. But on the day he wasn't there Mr. Forbes, Charles Forbes, who had a shoe store came into the store and offered me a job.

So I didn't go to work for that man on Monday. He offered me a job and when I got off work I went over and talked to him. I went to the library and got a book on salesmanship. And I got a book on leather. I read. I didn't know much about shoes, dear. Just the little bit that I had sold . . . maybe a pair of paratrooper boots. But I found out how leather was tanned. I found out what grades and also salesmen. How you greet, how you dress and what is utmost in your mind. I just crammed. Because I knew I had to

get out of there, that I was being chased out. I knew that. So Monday came and I went in to talk to him and I stayed and worked. I impressed him. He said that I sounded like I knew what I was doing. I told him I had never sold shoes *per se*, but that I had worked in a little hardware store in San Juan for a little time. It had been years before. But I knew how to make change. And he said he'd teach me. It was kind of strange because I walked into his store and his wife was there. He said, "You and I are going to go down to the Pajaro room of the Resetar," (a bar) I said, Oh my God. Why? He's taking me to the bar for a drink. I understood that. I did. Well that's what he says, "We'll go for a drink," and he says, "Well, you hang in there," or something to his wife. She had met me and real nice and I thought oh no, not ooh, la, la, la (laughter) But we went right through the bar and into the coffee shop. I didn't know. I had never been in the Resetar Hotel. I'd pass by there and I used to see this Pajaro Room or whatever. But I had my qualms for a minute. But anyway, I went to work for him in 1953 until 1960, when he sold it. He wanted me to go to Canada with him. I would have gone but I was an illegal alien. I didn't have any papers.

Knaster: You were never a citizen?

Arceneaux: No, I just became a citizen in 1969. I never had gone out of the country. By then I had the green card. I had straightened out my papers. When I got out of the hospital I realized the next step for me was I was going to be deported because somebody would catch up with me. I had to face it some day. So I went down to the immigration office and I told them, "Here I am. I don't have any papers. I have no recollection of who, where I am, or how I came into this country. I've been here since

before . . . if my brother was born in 1924, or 1925 . . . I was born before. And he's born here. I have no idea how old I was when I came here." And they checked and there was no passport. Well, rather than check my parents who were dead anyway, they decided I should work on making myself legal. And one way to do it was to go and prove my existence in the United States as far back as I can remember. Possibly every year. They gave me all kinds of papers and then the man says to me, "And then, when you get all these papers, put them in a wheelbarrow, and wheel them over here, and then we'll see what we can do for you. I'll see you in three years. Probably take that long to do it." I thought he was kidding.

I really thought he was kidding so I proceeded to get very busy. It took me about a year because it's very difficult to get all that together. Fortunately my mother had left a lot of little mementos. All those little papers helped, like water bills she had paid. And we were in the census. I checked back. I used everything imaginable. I went back to San Juan and the postmaster wrote a letter. The fireman wrote a letter. You know, I still had those connections. I was able to do it. I had to do it while I was still on good terms with Leo, because I thought if they send me to Mexico I have to go to someone. So it worked. I didn't have to go anywhere.

Knaster: So during all those years were you in communication with him? He was still on the migrant trail?

Arceneaux: Yes, he'd stop. In fact, he was still my husband. He came by and paid his dues. I was miserable when he was here and then was miserable when he was gone, because he was the only man I had really known then. I loved him and I knew he didn't

belong to me, and he couldn't become more attached because I knew I was going to leave him, or he had to leave me. It was very, very hard.

Knaster: Last time I remember you told me someone warned you, don't get involved with him. Something about prostitution.

Arceneaux: Oh, that was a fellow named Silver who told me, "You don't have to work this hard. You're too beautiful. You could come with me, go on the road, come with me to San Francisco." Leo's the one who told me, "Don't get involved with him, don't even talk to him because he'll put you on the line. He's asking you to go work on the line." I knew what he meant.

Labor Contractors

Knaster: Do you remember anything about labor contractors? I know your father hired out the whole family. But did you know labor contractors or hear people talking about them?

Arceneaux: Yes, I did.

Knaster: Well, what kinds of things did they say?

Arceneaux: Well, I knew a labor contractor in San Juan after I moved to Watsonville. In San Juan my aunt and uncle worked for them as cooks in a huge dining hall. So if we went to see my aunt, although she lived in San Juan, she would be out there at the camp working. I knew what they were being fed. Very cheap food. My aunt and uncle made a lot of money. The labor contractor helped them do the shopping. But then when they got

paid they had to give the labor contractor money. Money for having the job. There was graft and corruption all over, exploitation.

Knaster: Was this a Mexican labor contractor?

Arceneaux: This was braceros, yes.

Knaster: And these were braceros. Yes. And so they weren't given very good quarters or food or anything?

Arceneaux: Well, I suppose it was adequate. My brother lived in a camp like that . . . Manuel. It was just a couple of cots, blankets. Always smelled bad. No privacy. Just a huge barn with thirty, forty beds. Showers, cold water.

Knaster: I don't know if your aunt ever told you stories about these labor contractors, whether there were problems with them and the workers, that they exploited the workers and didn't pay them for the work that they did.

Arceneaux: No, my aunt never talked about it, because she wanted her job. But I knew of them and I knew of it happening. I knew that in many instances they would find something wrong with a worker and not pay him. You know, send him back. Or the contractor, charging, like he'd have his own little store there. And they'd buy cigarettes and they'd buy whiskey and beer and end up not getting any money at the end of the month because they'd spent it all. Here in Watsonville there was a few families who got quite wealthy in that time, who had labor camps.

Knaster: Were these Mexican families?

Arceneaux: Yes. You can't help but put two and two together because there's not too much money in cooking for men and feeding them. Unless you have something else to it. If you really cook well for a group of men and they pay you . . . in those days, room and board was say, twenty dollars a week . . .well, yes you can make a lot of money because you work a lot of hours. But you don't end up owning property and putting money in the bank. My aunt and uncle were almost illiterate. My uncle couldn't read or write. My aunt was the brains who could write her name down and keep some form of . . . yet, they made money . . . they were just brought in to cook. They would bring the food and then got paid for doing it. And yet she made money. 'Course they were exploited. In all ways. Washing for them. Ironing, putting on buttons for them. Sure. It was never, never done honestly. It's really a shame. Yet they used to say, "Well, we're still making money." Years later I worked at Penney's and they used to tell me, "We go back and buy a sewing machine for our wives and they're able to sew for the rest of their lives . . . on that pedal." But labor contractors, I guess it was a necessary thing. They seemed to have the knowledge of how to get people to work for them. And if you tried it on your own you ended up going to the wrong place and not knowing when to go. But they seemed to kind of congregate where the poor people were. And able to get them. Get their licks in.

Knaster: Do you remember any strikes?

Arceneaux: Maybe during the year when we used to come to Castroville. That one or two years we came to Castroville to pick pears. I remember chantings going on. It had something to do with the camp not being right or the fruit not being ripe.

Knaster: Was this in the 1930s?

Arceneaux: Yes, that was in the 1930s. You see, the 1940s, first three years, and the rest of the time I was in the hospital.

Knaster: Do you remember any union organizing? People coming in and saying, look what's going on here. We have to get together. Was there ever talk like that?

Arceneaux: No. Every now and then somebody would talk like that . . . but you kind of thought he was crazy. How could you possibly get together and be stronger than they. The big ones. I don't know. I don't remember them because now I'm not back in the fields any more. In the 1940s and 1950s I lost touch with the fields.

Knaster: Do you remember any race riots?

Arceneaux: Yes. When I was in Monrovia in 1942 and 1943, I was there for a year, one of my younger brothers came down to see us and the zoot-suiters riot happened in Los Angeles. I was so frightened because it had been going on and he decides he has enough money to come and see us. I was so afraid that they would get him because if you dressed with the long coats, finger-tip coats . . . Well, they didn't. I think some Mexicans who could afford it had finger-tip overcoats—sport coats. The servicemen would beat them up. It was terrible, just terrible. It was in the newspaper that morning, I'll never forget it. There was front-page news, this naked boy with all the servicemen beating up on him, and he was holding his arm. He was naked, completely naked. And they had just marched on the street, this group of sailors had just marched down grabbing everybody that was Mexican and beat up on them. I'm sure they beat back but I just felt resentment that that young man, not only was he beaten up but he was photographed,

humiliated. Just about then was when my brother came in. He was very smart. He got off at Ventura and took another bus in another direction, which made me worry. But he visited us for two days and then he went back.

Knaster: What's become of your brothers and sisters?

Arceneaux: Manuel and Molly are alive. Two. The others all died. I told you my father buried three. Between my mother's death and his, he buried three. And Salvador died in Mexico, that's four. Then when I was in the hospital, Adolf came out of the marines, and he'd been out about two months when he was killed in an accident. Turned over . . . the car was full of boys. He was taking them to the airport, servicemen . . . buddies. And Marillio, the youngest, went to the service, ended up in the Philippines, contracted some kind of parrot's fever. He ended up at the sanitorium where I was, because it's very much like tuberculosis, and they were trying to say that his illness wasn't service-connected, so he couldn't have that pension, whatever benefit. But Dr. Scarborough, who is my doctor, who was then and is now, said that if he had tuberculosis they had no business taking him in the beginning. So they only worsened. So it was not tuberculosis, it was service connected. He had a lung removed. It didn't work. It spread. They say inside it's like the little feather of a parrot. Just grows on top of the lung and chokes it. He died when he was about 24. Those were the healthy ones. Those were the ones that should have lived. My sister is the only one who never had any tuberculosis. I think she might have had a scar or two, but never had a big illness. And Manuel, who had such a heavy case of tuberculosis, he's still alive.

The Watsonville Mexican-American Community

Knaster: What kind of changes have you seen in the Mexican-American community over the years? Something that particularly stands out to you.

Arceneaux: It's strange. I've watched people come from Mexico, poor, no place to live, nothing to fall back on, and then they work hard and they get themselves a little place and they end up getting a little home, sometimes sharecropping and they straighten up and fly right. I've watched many of those people and they're doing okay now, but there's always another wave of them come in. It seems like there're changes, but only individual changes.

Knaster: So you think basically the situation of Mexicans coming into these communities is the same since you came?

Arceneaux: No, because the opportunities are better now for the ones who come and stay awhile. They apply themselves. The sharecropping experience is really good. If they are fortunate enough to get in with a good boss chances are they can make enough money to buy a home, whereas years ago, you didn't have that chance. Strawberries were not in. You just worked hard and eventually you saved a bit. It was much harder then. Education. It's been wonderful because if you want to, you know you can. Even as a grown-up you can get educated and get opportunities. I think it has changed tremendously. Also, I see more people coming. This town is importing farmworkers, migrant people who back in Mexico are very poor. They are not as educated as they should have been. Some can't read too well, even read or write Spanish too well. They come here and it's difficult for them to learn the English language because they don't

have the basics embedded in them, so it's very difficult. That has been the type of people. Then we had a lot of Texas people. And isn't that strange, but that's another breed. They don't like Mexicans from Mexico. There's an animosity.

Knaster: You mean the Texans don't like Mexicans to come in?

Arceneaux: No, they don't. They look down on Mexicans from Mexico. Texas people have a tendency to think they're greater than anyone. It's in the Anglo culture and it's also in . . . they feel that Texas is tremendous and it kind of gripes you to hear them say that. Then the Californians who have been born and raised here have a strange feeling about Mexico. If they've gone to Mexico they've been discriminated against in Mexico.

Knaster: As Mexicans?

Arceneaux: Yes. When you go there.

Knaster: How so?

Arceneaux: Well, they think you're a foreigner. You have no business. You must not like Mexico or you would be from Mexico. You're coming from California to flaunt whatever little bit you have. Now, this is only my observation. But I remember when we were visiting there in 1972, when we stayed three months there. One of the men in the house said he used to be a Greyhound bus driver and I argued with him about the difference. And so you know I can't help but sense that . . . 'cause I did too much community work from 1967 to now. I did too much and mixed it and I worked with them. We had a man argue about being called a Chicano. He argued for about ten or fifteen minutes until it

dawned on somebody to ask him, “Well, what do you call yourself?” And he was very strong and people were on his side. This was a good-size group of people and they were arguing [against] that word Chicano. They didn’t like it.

Knaster: Do you think that the kind of Mexicans who come into Watsonville now are different Mexicans than the ones who came in the 1950s or 1940s or 1930s?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: How are they different?

Arceneaux: Well, when the braceros came I remember meeting them because I was young and single and going to dances. Of course they could have been telling us stories, but mixed in with the poor bracero were one or two young students who came over for the experience. And you could sense that because of their vocabulary, manners, breeding . . . you could tell. I had experiences when I wrote to fellows and they criticized my Spanish and things like that. My brother, Manuel, who lived with braceros, said that there were some who had real good education but they came for the experience, they were going to write about it. Some wanted to pick up on agriculture and really take some information back. That’s one type. I think that many of those people jumped their contract and just disappeared, mixed in with the rest and never got papers. Years later they married. I know of someone who has lived under an assumed name for thirty years right here in this town, who doesn’t know what to do now because he’d like to be a citizen. I had no idea how to help him, but things like that occurred.

Knaster: During all those years that you were not actually a citizen, were you afraid at all that someone would come?

Arceneaux: No. There was the strangest thing in 1941 when they decided to register everyone in San Juan because of the war and you had to have papers or something. I helped to translate for whoever was doing that so no one asked me. I guess I never really thought about it. It wasn't that important. I never was afraid. I don't remember. No sense, I guess. But lying in the hospital little things started to fall into place and I realized that certain things have to be straightened out completely. I knew that that bigamist marriage was going to foul it up.

Knaster: Do you think that there are more Mexicans coming in now than there used to be?

Arceneaux: Definitely. When I first came to Watsonville there seemed to be a group of people that had lived here a long time. Every now and then you saw new faces from other areas moving in, not necessarily from Mexico. The dance bands were local, somebody you had heard of. Then there's a period in my life . . . like in the 1940s and the 1950s when I was gone and I came back . . . then you see orchestras from Mexico coming to play. There's an entrepreneur businessman in the entertainment world. He brings bands all the way from Mexico to make the sounds because the migration of Mexican people is heavier now and that's the kind of music that attracts people more.

Knaster: Now the Mexicans that you see in Watsonville, are they people who come and reside here, or are they migrants?

Arceneaux: Have you seen Watsonville on a Thursday night?

Knaster: On a Thursday night? No.

Arceneaux: Well, you've seen them on a Sunday afternoon . . . you've seen the lines expanding to the theaters or the plaza filled up with people . . . or two o'clock at St. Patrick's, the church is just bulging. It's hard to tell. In the summer time there's more people here. When the work is here. But it's getting to where even in the winter time there's a lot of Mexicans here. I think they claim that there's at least eleven hundred illegal aliens here, more maybe—two thousand and more. Just like that, illegal. Now they can be migrants or they can just come to watch them all get picked up and turn around and come right back. I don't know about migrants. There's a camp that fills up every summer . . .

Knaster: Is that for families?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: Where is that?

Arceneaux: Buena Vista Camp. There's 110 little houses. They have to reside at least eighty miles away. You can reserve them but you have to stand in a line for it . . . that morning. And there's a line of cars waiting. They can sleep . . . sometimes two days, in line waiting for the houses. It's a drop in the bucket for housing. It's hard to get in and it's strange . . . unless this year is different, but at least sixty of those families come from a town in Michoacan County. They come every year. The last name is Rocha.

Knaster: Do you see mostly families coming or do you see a lot of single people?

Arceneaux: A lot of single people are here.

Knaster: Women as well as men?

Arceneaux: Not as many women as men, but there are some.

Knaster: Are they young?

Arceneaux: Young. I'm amazed. You know that's unheard of for young women to go off alone. I hear they come as far as the border and they wait and wait until they get a chance or they work there and then they decide to make the crossing.

Knaster: Do you ever talk to these people? I don't know what kind of community work you do, that's why I ask. Do they talk about the conditions they're living under back in Mexico?

Arceneaux: Yes. That's what brings them. I have so many in mind . . . I want to think of a case. Well, there's a young man who has a hump back that I know of working in a restaurant washing dishes right now. He's been deformed like that since he was a child. He would like an operation . . . would like something done to him. So he ended up coming here, and he's saving money . . . and he wants to have an operation some day. He says he's been coming over here for six or seven years, and he gets picked up and sent back. I ask him how close are you to saving money? He says, "Well, I have five hundred dollars saved."

Knaster: You don't last a week in a hospital for that amount of money.

Arceneaux: I know, I know, but he thinks that maybe . . . in fact that's why he wanted to talk to me, that there could be some kind of service club that would be interested in doing the charity for him. It has happened, but not for a hunchback.

Knaster: Are there Mexican community organizations, social groups that are an extension of how Mexicans relate to each other in Mexico? Or are they Americanized?

Arceneaux: . . . almost every town that you go in, that's very strong in Watsonville. We have a strong branch in St. Patrick's [Church].

Knaster: It's mostly religiously oriented?

Arceneaux: Yes. Then there's an organization that has a drill team and the families have a group thing. They all meet and have picnics and fiestas and have a unity there. I saw that when I was younger. There was another organization where you paid for every dollar you joined, and when you died somebody donated their dollar and that offset some of those things. I don't see clubs being anglicized. I think when I see a club like that being formed, it's quickly formed because of a particular need, a project like fiesta parties, the fourth or fifth of May. Well, there's nothing anglicized about that. There's a group, the Penny Club. You know, for music. He teaches Latin music. He's from Costa Rica, so he's not Mexican, but he sticks to Mexican children because that's what he came for. It's great stuff. He teaches them very good stuff. The Penny Club you join by paying a penny. A penny according to their age. Seven cents, six cents, eight cents . . . according to . . . that was the dues each month. It started out like that. All the families belong to the

Penny Club. It's a big organization. It gets big and it gets little, expanding according . . . at one time there were four hundred new members. Right now, it isn't so big, but it's very good. In summertime they have a free recreation program because revenue sharing gives money from the county to offset supplies and he gets food from the Grey Bears . . . he does a lot of good things, Father Ross. I don't see anything that . . . 'cause even the Boy Scouts, there's no Mexican Boy Scouts. The soccer team has their boosters. There's one little club that's called the Ladies Syndicate, a teenagers' Ladies Syndicate. It's a group of young, tough girls.

Knaster: Mexican girls?

Arceneaux: Mexican girls. They get together and they're gung-ho for low-rider cars. They have a car show out at the county fairgrounds and they have a dance. Every now and then they have a talent show and that really draws attention because it's all teenage stuff. I would say that's anglicized. They speak English only. It's teenagers trying to do something for themselves. But they have a bad reputation. Unfortunately, they're picked upon. Like the Ladies Syndicate is going to have a dance, sure it's a great deal, they had a good band, but somebody went and started to fight and the fight spilled out into the street, somebody was trying to break into the dance and get inside and they wouldn't let him. They had to call cops all the way from Santa Cruz to come in. That was about three, four months ago.

Racial Integration and Intermarriage

Knaster: Do you think that the Mexican community over the years has integrated into the overall community, or does it pretty much remain isolated and separate?

Arceneaux: Yes and no.

Knaster: I asked that because you said you didn't even associate with Anglos in the 1940s . . .

Arceneaux: And then I end up marrying one. I was just going to say they're marrying. They're intermarrying.

Knaster: Was that not happening at all in those years?

Arceneaux: When I married at 23, I don't think I had ever even danced with an Anglo. Maybe a Portuguese at a Portuguese dance. Maybe an Italian at the service club . . . but the soldiers . . . that was something else. You went on a bus and they'd pick you up three hours later. You never saw them again. Nowadays in the beauty shop where I go there're four operators that're all married to Mexican boys and only one girl is Mexican. That's strange. I just realized it two weeks ago.

Knaster: So you see much more integration now?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: What about in terms of neighborhoods?

Arceneaux: Also. I was the first Mexican in an area of three blocks here. But within five years they have the money; they can buy it.

Knaster: Are there strictly Mexican neighborhoods in town?

Arceneaux: Yes and no, they've knocked down most of them. But I think that Riverside Street is pretty much Mexican. A scattering of Japanese.

Knaster: What about Rodriguez?

Arceneaux: Some blacks. Rodriguez Street is a long street. There's a lot of Mexicans on there. But there're still Anglos intermingled. It's an old street.

Knaster: You said blacks.

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: I've never seen blacks in this community. Have there always been blacks? Or is that something recent?

Arceneaux: I've known Mary Green for about twenty-two years. Mary and Willie Green. They have four boys. And Willie's sister lives here, and Wille's mother passed away a few years ago. She'd lived here many years. The sister is married.

Knaster: Do you remember seeing blacks when you were living in San Juan?

Arceneaux: Never.

Knaster: And then, maybe just driving into Watsonville?

Arceneaux: I don't remember seeing blacks. After I lived in Watsonville a little while, I met black women married to Filipinos. I met two of them.

Knaster: I imagine there was a lot of discrimination there.

Arceneaux: Right. For both of them. From Filipinos. There were no blacks to discriminate. I don't remember a lot of blacks, but I know that Filipinos were not considered too bright. You know, slurring remarks. I caught on to the dialect and you could tell the words that were used when he walked in. They weren't very complimentary.

Knaster: Have you seen any intermarriage between blacks and Mexicans?

Arceneaux: Yes. One, two. I don't know if they're still together. I don't see that as often. In Monrovia where I was that year one of the ladies that cleaned up, she was married to a black. But here in Watsonville I haven't seen it. If I have, they're musicians. And they're not here anymore.

Knaster: Have you seen any mixing, aside from the Filipinos, between the Asians and other groups?

Arceneaux: Japanese . . . up to a few years ago . . . but just lately Japanese are marrying more whites. In San Juan a friend of mine married a Mexican. Chinese, no. There's not many Chinese. But you asked me about the Mexicans. I find that the Mexican who comes from Mexico is the one that has the old customs. You go to Mexico and they don't have those old customs anymore. In Mexico City they're living like Anglos do, practically.

Mexican-American Women

Knaster: Do you see any differences in Mexican women from when you first came? What was okay for women to do, work, education or roles, do you see any changes in male-female relations in the Mexican community?

Arceneaux: I see a change but it seems to bring unhappiness. It seems to cause family problems and separation. The most obvious changes are when they go to work, and unfortunately not having seniority, they put them on the night shift.

Knaster: You mean, girls?

Arceneaux: Women. So you go to work on night shift in the canneries. That's the first place they have to take over. If you don't want to work in the fields and you can't get on at a nursery . . . the nurseries are year round. Field work, right now it's picking berries, but it's not year round. What you want to do is work in a cannery, because that could be year round and then you can draw unemployment if it isn't. So you go and you get a job and they put you on the night shift because seniority works days and graveyard shifts. Then what happens is the husband is supposed to stay home and take care of the kids. That's when you find out that they're not, they're leaving the kids alone and taking off downtown. Then in many instances they drink. In some instances, let's say they drink and they come home, the wife isn't home yet and he goes down and raises Cain because she hasn't come home, it's two o'clock in the morning, where have you been, you know, stuff like that. Distrust that she wasn't working. And it causes problems because the wife is tired. She doesn't have to stand for that. Pretty soon others at work tell her, "Well, don't do it. Do this, do that." And there's a tendency to start fighting back and pretty soon the husband leaves. Or she leaves. She finds herself a boyfriend, who promises a better life. She's tired of what she has. This has happened. Or some just have a boyfriend which balances out the unhappiness. Now, this isn't everybody, but I've seen it happening.

That's one of the biggest arguments for night care for children. There's no need to make the children suffer also. If you had a 24-hour place where you could drop the children, then at least they're sure to be taken care of. I've seen a lot of changes. Simply because the women have to work there. There's very few that don't work. They have to, because they know that if they can work they can get that extra bit that will make life a little bit easier.

Knaster: Do you think that more women are working now than they used to?

Arceneaux: Most everybody works here. See, years ago, in my mother's time, if your husband told you not to, you just worked with what he brought you. You made the best of it. But now the husband expects you to work. I used to talk to a friend about Planned Parenthood. You can have your tubes tied. Just put a bug in her ear. I told her if she wanted that she could talk to her nurse and explain what she wanted. I said here in this country you can get help in that way. Lo and behold when she had the baby, a few days later they had her tubes tied. I asked her how did it happen? How did she resolve the argument, because he had refused. She says, "I don't know, the nurse told me to tell him that it was necessary, that before I left the hospital it had to be done. Either that or I'd have to come back." This was after thirteen living children and she had seventeen pregnancies. She's 41 or 42. I'm sure it was necessary.

Knaster: Do you see any change in terms of sex, sex education, maybe sexual relations between people and contraception?

Arceneaux: I worked with Planned Parenthood. We're volunteers in many instances and she has lots of calls for instruction, for contraception, for abortions . . . all kinds of things. It's strictly for Spanish-speaking, so there is a need. It's being used, but not as much as it should be. There're still a lot of them that come without their husbands knowing, scared to death that they'll find out and wondering how they could possibly do anything without the husband knowing.

Women want to but are afraid to, and they are eventually going to do something about it. On the other hand, I remember a particular instance in 1971. At Radcliffe School there was a parent meeting and the principal invited someone from the health department to come and talk to them about health. I didn't go. I wasn't at that meeting because for some reason I was busy elsewhere. The woman brought an interpreter, a health aide, and she proceeded to talk to the families there about contraceptives. She told them about foam and the IUD and the diaphragm . . . vasectomies and all that.

This translation was going on, and a friend told me it was very embarrassing because the people were nervous, and there was whispering going on and this couple got up and walked out. I called the lady that walked out and told her to tell me what had happened because I was angry that they had invited that woman. She had said that there was no need for them to have so many kids. Says you know our schools are filled. She gave the impression that it was genocide, you know? That was another way of discriminating and forcing the issue on people and I was very upset. So I called this particular lady and asked her reactions to it. I knew this woman from the health department. She was Japanese and she did not like having to deal with so many Mexicans at the clinic. She

was telling them not to have so many kids. I wouldn't mind it being done, but if it was in a sensitive way, in a cultural way, to fit the culture.

Knaster: When you were a kid, did your mother and your aunts ever talk about contraception?

Arceneaux: If they did, I didn't hear it. I remember finding among my mother's things, a douche bag. A douche pump, not a bag. Little, with a tip on it. I just wondered what it was, looked like maybe for an enema, you know. I didn't know. Now I know that it was a douche pump.

Knaster: Did you ever hear any talk about abortions. Did anyone give natural herbs?

Arceneaux: I heard about miscarriages. I heard about *la curandera*, how they had to go see a lady because they thought something was still inside of them. Possibly it was an abortion brought on by herbs. I have no idea. No, I don't remember. You see, my mother was a very religious person. So was my aunt. If they did even think about it, they might have to get around to it.

Knaster: Do you think that the Mexican community resorts to *curanderas* now?

Arceneaux: Not now, because they have their medical card. But a *curandera* still is very, important . . . just last Sunday my cousin who is 47 years old had slipped a disc in his back and he'd gone to a chiropractor, but he went to a *curandero*, and it made him feel better. My compadre Al drove clear to San Jose to get his knee rubbed. I know a lady who massages your back so that the pain goes away. They're still very much used.

They'll resort to pills and all that, but eventually if they were here they'd be used. I know a lady who comes from Texas about every six months and she stays at a house on East Lake and the people just crowd right in to see her. They drive clear from Castroville, Monterey. It must be profitable or she wouldn't come and stay here for a month. I know of her because my *compadre*, is always asking me to talk to her.

Cultural Traditions

Knaster: Do you see that certain customs have been phased out, customs and traditions that were important and popular before and are no longer practiced?

Arceneaux: A lot of them. I think a lot of them weren't really planned. For example, I was raised in a home where manners were so important. You greeted people in a certain way, and children didn't enter a room if there were grown-ups. I guess that's old-fashioned. Manners have been phased out. I don't say the Anglo culture doesn't have them but maybe it got lost. The idea is that you were like that if you were Mexican. If you didn't do that, maybe you wouldn't be a Mexican. There's a tendency in young people not to want to be Mexican. They want to be like the others. We see it in the schools. This little Luna girl who we knew five years ago couldn't speak good English, now makes fun of the ones from Mexico who can't. She's trying so hard to be anglicized.

Knaster: Are there holidays or festivals that used to be very much looked forward to and that are no longer carried out?

Arceneaux: Well, in Watsonville we are fortunate. We still have our Fifth of May and our Sixteenth of September. We've caused the fathers of the city to have heart attacks because

they will give the permit for the Fifth of May but they don't understand why . . . and here we've never had a Fourth of July celebration for years. We start getting all these letters in the paper—why are these foreigners celebrating the Fifth of May? Suddenly somebody decided they'd better have a Fourth of July. And like Our Lady of Guadalupe, it's still a big thing around here. At the crack of dawn we go down to sing to the Virgin in the dark. We go over to San Juan and we have a pageant for her, three or four, five days of pageantry going on in the city. So that has remained strong. Outside of that, I can associate church things, like Easter and things like that. We still do it. Lent is very, very heavy. Everybody goes into the Lent phase. I think they still have dances but some families don't go to dance during that period and the restaurant starts serving no meat . . . Some customs though, like long hair and braids, I guess it's impossible to keep this simply for health's sake. They arrive here with beautiful long hair and now that it's fashionable they keep it. In the olden days they used to cut it.

Knaster: Have you seen changes in terms of how people dress?

Arceneaux: Yes, right immediately they buy, as soon as they can afford it they dress like here. But it's nice to see them still with their . . . You still see people with *rebozos* here. Down the street. And that little sack, shopping bag. And it's beautiful to get on the bus and hear the chattering going on in Spanish. It's just nice. It's very warm, full of life. You get on and they're all Anglos and oh, no. They just look around, just look under their eyebrows at you. It's beautiful. Watsonville is a wonderful town for Mexicans. I tell them over and over, we're being infused with brand-new Mexican imports every day. Come over here and reinforce our culture.

Labor Organizing

Knaster: I wanted to ask you. Since you said there wasn't much "talk" about unionizing, about organizing in the earlier days, do you remember when it started to develop around here? Even though you weren't in the fields, was there a sense that for the first time Mexicans were organizing? Did you feel like Mexicans had been quiet for a long time, just plodding along and then from somewhere, something surged?

Arceneaux: Oh, all I can think of César, you know, César Chavez. I'm trying to remember before. I remember the Mexican people were working in the garbage department here in Watsonville trying to get together and unionizing and being fired.

Knaster: Was that in the 1950s?

Arceneaux: Yes, that was in 1953 or 1954, something like that. I knew one of the fellows, he was one of the leaders and he had a very articulate way of speaking; he got everybody riled up and at the end what happened was that they were fired. Someone else got their jobs. That's what I can remember. It just comes right out. I don't know about the fields, really.

Knaster: Do you think people wanted to organize but were afraid over the years? Were they being squelched in some way?

Arceneaux: Well, you would lose your job. I remember picking tomatoes, how we would talk of how they just didn't pay us enough. And then one would say, "Well, yes, what if they fire us, though? Remember what he said, that we had to finish?" They would pay you, I don't remember the price, but say twenty cents. But if you finished the whole

harvest it would be another nickel extra. Well that nickel kept you in tow. Because if you did everything, he'd just fire you and you'd lose all those nickels that would be coming as a bonus. You earned it but they held it in tow. I remember those kinds of things. Way back then.

Knaster: Do you know of a Filipino woman named Mama?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: What do you know about her?

Arceneaux: Apolonia Dangzalan. Yes, she's going to serve thirty days for receiving stolen property. I don't remember too much about her until this building went up on Union Street. It was a fine building in those days because it was concrete. It wasn't wooden and shacky. It was concrete and it was painted.

Knaster: Was this in the thirties or forties?

Arceneaux: This was in the 1940s, late, maybe after I came back, maybe in the early 1950s. It was right across from the prostitution houses, madam of the houses. It was a boarding house for single men, yet she had arrangements so that married couples could live there. I remember going there because friends of mine were married and they were living upstairs. And I thought to myself, what a fine building, because I was then living in a very small wooden structure. I thought she was rich that she could afford it. I don't remember bad things about her. Now on Main Street she was part owner or owned a

building on Main Street. And in one of the corners was a cigar and tobacco thing. I knew she owned property there. I knew she had money.

Eventually that building deteriorated and it looked quite messy with old cars parked around and all that. I think she owns it to this day. I never thought she lived there. I didn't know where she lived. But she had some granddaughters. I don't know how I got acquainted with her granddaughters. I was gone for awhile. One especially was heavy-set, very nice and very good to her grandmother. She had a child and you always saw her driving her grandmother to the store and walking with her. She's a little woman, a very small woman and awfully friendly. She knew me and I knew her. I just wondered if she was a businesswoman. Evidently she had a bar, a pool hall . . . I really don't know.

You asked me about Mexican customs and Filipino customs . . . I want to go back, because after you think about it you remember things. How right away the food was different, and yet it became part of your life so that you integrated the beans into the tortillas into the rice into the *sopa* and pretty soon . . . it's just living. We started eating with our fingers rather than with a spoon. Your hands were clean and you reached . . . chicken was finger food. Chicken adobo or anything . . . it's finger food, you pick up the rice and pick up food. It really tasted delicious. I remember when I did it before I married, at a party, everybody was pleased. You sensed it. I did it because I was curious, you know? Well, Mexicans would pick up a piece of tortilla . . . like that . . . So it was nothing new, but I noticed at other places, and I don't know if I should have done it at that party. But they commented on this saying, "Oh look at her, she even eats like that. Are you sure you're not Filipina?" They were always asking that question. I thought it

was kind of smart-aleck . . . But I thought it was interesting. Children began eating rice with their hands. It didn't matter. You didn't insist that they use a spoon or a fork. In fact, in many instances you'd reach and grab and make a little rice ball and give it to a small baby. I would wonder if the rice could choke him or something. But the little baby would just chew away on the ball of rice and it was very nice. I fit into it real well. I remember this particular food which I love was a dish that's meat cooked with blood in it. And when they kill the pig, for sure it has to be real fresh blood and they put a little vinegar in the pan and catch the blood that comes out. They slit his throat. It's a horrible thing, but they kill pigs quite often. They saved the blood and divided the meat. Usually two or three persons had brought the pig. But in the neighborhood we lived like crews of lettuce pickers. I guess you'd call it a gang or a crew . . . usually from twelve to fourteen people worked. Well, that meant twelve or fourteen families working. And if they killed the pig, it was usually that group that gathered . . .

Knaster: Did you live in the same neighborhood?

Arceneaux: Not really. But the workers were close. And it was very difficult. If one dropped out then somebody could get into the crew. But it was difficult to get a job right off the bat, walk in and say I want to work lettuce, because they dropped the ones that weren't good workers. They worked by piecework and made a lot of money because they worked very hard. The way they worked they would get an order of, I don't know, it was by carloads and I don't know the amount of crates in a carload, but you would hear, "Oh, we got six cars tomorrow." I knew immediately we'd have to get up at two o'clock in the morning to send them off to work. Six cars meant that they'd come home

late in the afternoon. And they would be very, very tired. But it was possible to make a hundred dollars a day. This was in the 1940s.

Knaster: In the forties, and they could make a hundred dollars a day?

Arceneaux: Yes. It was known. It was known that they could do it. When it was good, right and everything. But you know it didn't last.

Knaster: When you say they worked in crews, since they were family men and didn't live in a labor camp, were they still under some kind of labor contractor?

Arceneaux: The boss would get a penny on each box. One of the Filipino men would be the boss for the others. That's how it was. Occasionally you saw a Mexican working in the crew. Now, some of these men would be single. You know they weren't necessarily all married. But many of them were married. Anyone who didn't work hard enough was told we're going to replace you. How they divided the money was, the cook was one of them. I can't remember exactly, but it had to be pairs. I don't remember how many would be in a crew. Too big would be too much. They liked to keep it small, so say there were eighteen . . . and the cook and the crew boss, so that's twenty, and they just count all the money, and at the end of the day it's divided among twenty people.

Knaster: Would the crew man then get something on top of that?

Arceneaux: Yes. He would get his penny.

Knaster: A penny on each box?

Arceneaux: Yeah, and he would make a lot of money. A lot of money because the boss is paying him something to keep track of payroll and to be sure that it's done right. So he's getting a salary.

Knaster: He's getting a salary, plus one-twentieth share . . . plus a penny on every box. So labor contractors in fact could make quite a bit of money.

Arceneaux: They always ended up having beautiful homes or marrying very nice women, having a big wedding. I remember attending one. Johnny Romero married a young woman, very nice person, fantastic wedding. He always drove beautiful cars. Other people came and were loaders. Now, they were different. Although they were Filipinos, they were independent. Many wanted the job, and yet many couldn't do it.

Knaster: Loading is very heavy work.

Arceneaux: Yes, a couple of years and they had to quit because it was too hard. But there was a lot of money in loading and they would be paid by the crate. So they did make a lot of money, but one of my *compadres* is still crippled to this day. It was just too heavy. They didn't have a lot of loaders, they just had a few.

Knaster: Do you remember how people viewed the labor contractors? Were they considered good crew bosses, or were they considered exploitative? Did you ever hear stories about labor contractors running off with the men's wages?

Arceneaux: Not among the Filipinos, I didn't, but among the Mexicans I did. I know of a particular man who told me later in life what he used to do. It wasn't very good, but he

had changed, converted, and now he didn't believe that he had done right. But he talked of bringing truckloads of people into California from Texas and the border. They were Mexicans, I'm sure. I doubt if they were all Texas. Bringing them and delivering them to the camps in Fresno and all along the San Joaquin Valley. And being paid a dollar a head for them.

Knaster: Just for bringing them in.

Arceneaux: Just from bringing them in. I wanted to hear more, so I said, "My goodness. That wasn't very much, a dollar for all the troubles." "Oh no, but I made us so much money. I had bagfulls of money on each side of me. And I carried two guns. So I was never molested." I said, "But weren't you scared?" "I was never molested. I carried two guns." He said that they would tell him don't deliver them now, bring them later. So they must have been illegal, or whatever. And he said he'd throw a big tarp on top of them and just keep going. What he was doing was bringing people to earn more money and to make a better life. He didn't think he was doing wrong. And maybe he wasn't, you know? I don't know. Because a dollar doesn't seem much, whereas nowadays it costs five hundred dollars to get brought to Watsonville. You know, illegally. And the thing is, that they never did make much money. For any excuse they would fire them, before the harvest was over.

Knaster: And then not give them their wages.

Arceneaux: The second part of their wages. Well, a lot of people did that. I can't tell you that it happened to me, but that was among the Mexican people. Not the Filipinos,

because they were united. There was a feeling of being oppressed by everyone, and they had to really stick together. The Mexicans might have had that feeling, but they just went for the wages, whenever they could find them.

Knaster: I wonder if it had anything to do with numbers. That there were many more Mexicans than Filipinos . . . that much greater competition.

Arceneaux: Of course. Yes. Filipinos were concentrated along the coast. I don't think they were much down in Arizona until the lettuce started to become such an important crop.

Knaster: When Leo was working, was this in Salinas?

Arceneaux: It was in Watsonville. When he came in the 1930s, he began in San Francisco and he worked at the Woolworth store loading and unloading, cleaning in a stockroom. He couldn't handle it. He didn't have too much of an education, and he didn't speak English very well. He couldn't make it. So he went to a restaurant and washed dishes and then he said he just bummed around, bummed for years, until he went to San Jose and started picking strawberries and then he came to Watsonville to pick strawberries.

Knaster: Do you think he first came to the United States with the intention of making money and returning to the Philippines?

Arceneaux: A concerted effort was made in the Philippines to bring laborers here to California.

Knaster: Who made that effort?

Arceneaux: The government.

Knaster: The United States government?

Arceneaux: Well, he said that he heard the United States needed workers. Male workers. All he had to do was be eighteen.

Knaster: Were they given free passage to come here?

Arceneaux: I don't know. I can't tell you that, but it wasn't hard to come. Just so that you were eighteen. You had to prove that, and it was difficult to try and sneak in without being eighteen.

Baptisms and Godparenting

There was another thing I was going to tell you about, the baptisms and the weddings. I was used to Mexican baptisms where you have a party at home and lots of food and dancing and all that, but in Watsonville, as soon as I got married, their custom was having huge baptisms. Huge weddings. In fact they saved money, like Mexicans do now for *quinceaneras*, you know if they have a particular daughter they want to give a big party. And the baptisms, not only do they have a big wedding, party, dance, food, but they have a lot of godparents. I became a godmother, ended up with about 22 godchildren. These godparents help fund the party, share in the expenses. You have to buy new clothes if you could afford it, and if not you still dressed up and went and ate and the poor baby was lost in the crowd, but there was a dance and all that. Well I never was the godmother with Leo because I was not married in the church and I had particular feelings about that. Anyway, I didn't consider it, that I was the godparent,

unless I was the first. The first one who was being written down in the book. The others were honorary. They asked me, they always had. I told them, “Well, I can’t,” and then Leo would say, “Well she can’t, she doesn’t want to because we both don’t want to.” He didn’t want to because then he would have to share in the expenses. And they would come back and they’d still ask me because they had a partner for me and so I would go. I guess you could say I was popular because I ended up with 22 of them, of which only two, I was first, probably.

Knaster: What was your responsibility as godmother?

Arceneaux: I can’t tell you because I thought it was an honorary thing, just like being a hostess and having a good time. But Emily’s the only one that I was first. I was standing for a woman that wasn’t there, who couldn’t be there. As I godmother I would be watching that she is taking care of . . . while their parents live there’s not too much to it. But if he or she is not being sent to church, then it was up to me to invite her or take her. It was up to me to see that she learned her catechism and received the sacraments of the church. But in some cases, like Emily, I said, well, you have to send her, or you have to teach her. Say, “Well, we don’t drive. All kinds of excuses, but I still feel, she’s 25 years old and I still feel very, very responsible. I keep in touch and I have a lot of them that I did baptize and I keep in touch. They’re too old and they don’t pay attention to you but I did try. My responsibility is to see that they practice their faith and if they wish . . . that’s what it is, once they renounce it I can’t do too much.

Knaster: Are you involved in any kind of gift-giving or their education? As I recall, in Latin America, if you were somebody's godparent you really had to be involved in raising that child.

Arceneaux: Right. That's the reason why Ron doesn't let me be a godmother anymore. Because the custom is that you remember their birthday and Christmas time and if they're going to graduate, you check that they have a enough clothes and if they haven't you find a pair of shoes. There's been times when I bought three or four pairs of shoes, all at once. Charged them in my shoe shop, because they needed them and I wanted them to look nice at this particular time. The parents don't have it and I've done it. Not to the extent that I've paid for their schooling, but I imagine in Latin America . . . books and pencils . . . Like a particular one, he's in a boy's camp right now. He's given us a lot of heartache and his mother just . . . Ron has helped a lot. You know, he's part of us. You're responsible for him. That's why it's very serious to do it. But in those days when I was being a godmother, I felt that it was something, you know, like an honorary thing. And then I realized that they did it because it costs so much. So they had to have as many as 12 godparents. It was ridiculous. Then when I realized the men were dishing out their share of it, I said, well, it's pretty good, no wonder, it's easy to have a party that way. And I attach no responsibility to it.

Knaster: Were the Filipinos that you were in a social relationship with practicing Catholics?

Arceneaux: Yes and no.

Knaster: Do you know if they follow any other religion?

Arceneaux: They did. (laughter) I remember in conversation them saying that they liked to go to the Pentecostal church because the women were so friendly to them. And that they sometimes kissed you and hugged you, you know. But I'll be honest with you. They were Catholics; they always used to say they were Catholics. But when you went to church it was very cold; that happened to us, to Leo and I when we went to church and a lady acted badly because we sat next to her and she moved away, you know? Things like that. That's one of the things that I told the priest when we were trying to get married. He told me that I couldn't because I didn't have all the papers and this and that and I told him that I thought he and all his parishioners were prejudiced anyway. It was because we'd been in his church and they don't accept people with brown color. No one ever made an effort to encourage them or to invite them, make them welcome. If they're Catholics, and they don't practice it, but they kept it up. You know, baptizing their children and marrying in churches whenever possible and observing certain feast days. It was still part of their background.

The Filipino Community

Knaster: Do you think that having all of these single Filipino men in a community created a social problem?

Arceneaux: Well, of course. I imagine it did.

Knaster: Because you said that when Leo was in the Philippines the request went out for single, young male workers.

Arceneaux: Well, they were supposed to come here and work, and they figured, well, they'll earn some money and help us during the crops and then go back. Just so they don't come and start having more Filipinos, you know? Babies. So, what happened is that they intermingled into the white, Mexican and black communities . . . I heard of one Japanese marrying a Filipino and moving away. But anyway, in many instances it split up families over the controversy. There was a law that forbade Filipinos to marry white women. You went to Canada or you went to New Mexico. That was the closest place, and if they saw a white with a Filipino. Mexicans not too much . . . I guess they figured, well, they deserved each other, but . . . A few were white. It was difficult, much more difficult for a blond girl to be married to a Filipino than a Mexican, and for their children it was difficult.

The problem is that they yearned to have a family as much as anyone, and in many cases they had left someone back there. I understand many of them had been married and just never went back. But the feelings were still there, of wanting to have a home and establish some kind of a family. What really bothered them was when they went into places where they were definitely not supposed to go in. If they stayed in their own backyard and did whatever they wanted to do it was perfectly all right, but if they ventured into an Anglo establishment . . . very rarely did they, but even among themselves, I remember that they would have fights over a new girl in town, and they'd fight.

Knaster: I remember hearing something that there were quite a few Anglo women who really liked the Filipino men, they were nice men and they were very gentle.

Arceneaux: Gentle, yes.

Knaster: . . . and then they would be harassed by white boys who didn't like it, as though they were possessions or something like that.

Arceneaux: Oh, yes. I know the comment that was made. I had known a fellow for many years and we had been friends, whatever you want to call it. He had known me and been good to me and my family and he had always said, "Someday I'm going to marry you and put you away and take you to a mountain where you won't run around like this." He was always scolding me for taking chances in the car not running good. He had a ranch; he was a young fellow, very nice. He was friends with me for years. Off and on I'd think of marrying him, but I would have had to live his way. And when he found out I was married, he couldn't believe it. It'd been years and maybe he really would have married me in time after the children left. But he said some remarks that weren't very nice.

Knaster: Because you'd married a Filipino?

Arceneaux: Yes.

Knaster: Was he Mexican?

Arceneaux: Yes. He said something like, "I didn't know she was that desperate." My girlfriend who told me said, "Well, you had your chance and if you didn't take it what are you crabbing about?" See, that was someone who really knew me and knew that I

didn't marry in desperation and yet he did say that. Because he didn't think too highly of them.

Knaster: You know, going back to Leo for a moment, you said he came here in the early 1930s?

Arceneaux: No, not early 1930s, about 1935 or 1936.

Knaster: Well, that would have been later. Because I understand there was anti-Filipino race rioting in Watsonville in 1930. And then there was some kind of a strike in Salinas around 1934, and that Filipinos got together.[1] I was wondering whether he was part of that at all.

Arceneaux: No, he didn't come to Watsonville till around 1940, something like that. Because he stayed in San Francisco.

But I wanted to tell you more about the dance bit. There was a lot of trouble over women, because many husbands moved away, and if they had children their wives stayed in Watsonville

Knaster: You mean the men moved because they were on the migrant trail?

Arceneaux: Yes, for labor. They'd go down to the Imperial Valley for the lettuce, and then maybe to Ventura on the way back to Watsonville. Then they worked awhile here in May. But some of them in May went to the cannery in Alaska and they didn't get back until August, and they stayed around for awhile and then went down to the valley in

1. There was a race riot in Watsonville in 1930 and another disturbance in Salinas in 1934.

November. Wives stayed behind because of their children. That sometimes caused problems, which was bound to happen. This particular young woman that I knew after I came back from the hospital, that would be 1952, she was killed by her husband. She was fooling around with her crew boss who had a lot of money and had paid her a lot of attention while her husband was in Alaska. He cut her open with a knife and he chased her down the street and she ran in this Oriental cafe for help, and there was a sort of circular bar for the restaurant. If she had run down to the right she could have run out the back way. But she ran to the left and that was closed off, she died there in the corner. It was a terrible scene because she was only about 22 or 23 years old. Her four sisters had all been married to Filipinos. They were very popular, very pretty women. The mother was a very nice-looking woman; she was married to a Filipino. And that was tragic but it had something to do with not enough women.

When a real formal dance with Filipinos took place many of the men wore varong shirts, the Filipino shirts; you can see through them. It's a shirt that fits over the pants and has slits on the sides, kind of a flimsy material. They're very pretty. They would wear them and the women would wear the butterfly sleeves, huge beautiful sleeves. Many times the people who had more money would import their clothes and they'd wear an authentic one. But many times from one of the older dresses you'd take the sleeves off and make yourself a formal, and put the sleeves on. It was a custom. At the banquets at the social clubs and the installations of club officers, the ladies wore formals and you tried to get a dress for that. I remember going to one or two. I made myself a dress once. I made my own sleeves and embroidered them, but it never looked authentic. Then in the early 1950s, when I came back to Watsonville I became active in the Filipino

community. Leo and I were terminating our relationship; we didn't know what to do with it, still he wasn't around very much so I didn't have to face that. I just went right into the social activities that the women had. Ladies who had visited me all the time that I was there kept in touch with me. I liked to be more active.

Knaster: What were the things that they did?

Arceneaux: They had a Filipino Community women's club. It had a president and a vice-president and they used to have family picnics and dances. They gave scholarships to the high school for a young person who had Filipino blood. There were very few full-blooded Filipinos, but they had to be a mestizo, and there was also a very active Filipino Community Club. The president was a retired navy man and he still was around and every now and then protested if something happened in the newspapers, like the day that Pipin Soriano killed his wife, it says, "Filipino kills wife," you know it came out in big letters. He formed a committee. We went before somebody and asked that they not do that, you know, you don't have to write "Filipino kills wife." You don't write, "White kills wife," or Englishman stabs . . ." things like that. It was an effort to stand up for themselves. I joined that and I felt pretty good about it.

I didn't have anything to do with the Mexicans. I didn't know where to begin, because I still had the child that was half-Filipino. I didn't know where to go so I stayed and it was nice. Very, very nice. They were gentle with me and very kind, and it was easy to raise Lenny with people like that that had watched him being raised in the community in many foster homes and then they knew that he ended up at Julia Castro's house, the lady that raised him the last three years.

Then of course I got the job at Petulia's, the shoe store. I was earning 95 cents an hour. That was considered good wages. I have no idea what other people were earning, but the man felt I was getting very good wages. I think at the war surplus they had been paying me 75 cents. I told you before I was the second woman to start selling shoes in town, and I did a very good job. He never treated me as less than anything, you know. The one thing I told him when I went to work for him was that I couldn't come to work for him unless he took an X-ray on his wife and child, because I was an arrested tubercular case and I did not want later on they had something for them to blame me. I said, "On that condition I'll work for you." he refused and then he agreed. I don't think he ever took an X-ray, you know, he was very stubborn about it. But his wife and child did and that was enough for me. Anyway, I wanted to tell you that in 1955 when my small brother died, Maldivio, he died, he had been released from Livermore Hospital and he died at home. My brother, Manuel, was living in Aromas in a labor camp, a Filipino labor camp.

Knaster: Do you know whose it was?

Arceneaux: Yes, Frank Barba. I guess Manuel also got involved with Filipinos and found them easy to live with and easy to work for. They were kind and gentle to him. He was a man with cataracts and had to wear heavy glasses, yet they allowed him to work with them. They were doing hourly wages, field labor.

Knaster: So he lived up at this labor camp in Aromas? How long did he stay there?

Arceneaux: My goodness, he must have stayed there five or six years.

Knaster: Did he ever talk about the conditions of living in that camp?

Arceneaux: He had nothing bad to say about it. It's when he went to live in Salinas that he lived in a Mexican labor camp is when he talks about the food being so bad and the hours being so bad. But he doesn't complain very much.

Knaster: Did he ever tell you about Frank Barba?

Arceneaux: Yes. That he was good to him. They were very good to Manuel, to this degree, it's a two bedroom house with a sort of attic. He lived on the second floor and the attic had an empty vacant top. He was taking radio or something through a correspondence school, trying to study radio and they allowed him to have the house wired with all kinds of electricity. I remember that the attic contained a lot of exciting equipment. He had this little room and Mrs. Barba used to tell me, "Oh Manuel doesn't sleep at nights, he stays up late. You can see the light in his room, studying." I said, "I hope he doesn't blow up your house someday," 'cause he used to actually fool around with electricity. "Oh no," she says, "he wouldn't do that," like he was too good to do that. But I was talking of an accident. She says, "Oh, no, he's too nice, he's so good. But he works hard and then he stays up late at night reading and doing—I don't know what he does in his room." So I got the feeling that they liked Manuel and Manuel liked them. And he didn't get tired of eating pork. But he got sick so many times in Salinas because all they fed him was tripe and it was so greasy and smelly.

Labor camps. Manuel lived in them. There was a period after he left Frank Barba's, we went to the funeral to bury my young brother. He came home with me and a few days

later Watsonville was flooding. It had been raining for days and days. It had rained about 5 1/2 inches by Christmas Eve, and the river was rising and you'd just listen to the radio because of the inches. The Pajaro River was already level with the bridge. And they had evacuated all the people that lived along the levy. And Manuel went down there and was working on the levy. I don't know what happened to him. They brought him back in a day or so. He worked around the clock and he had a nervous breakdown. Complete. I called a doctor and he just sat there in a stupor. The doctor came and gave him an injection. We dressed him and they took him away and a week later they had a hearing. My sister and I had to appear before a board of directors and we were to sign him into an institution. My sister refused to do it, but I signed it. I didn't know what else to do. I could see that he was just gone, never spoke again. They took him to Agnew and he was there for three years. For three years I visited him every two weeks. And he never spoke. He never talked. But you know, what he had gone through was my youngest brother dying. He wanted to go into the grave and we held him back and he said, "Why do they all die and me, who am crippled, I should be the one going." And he did strange things after that, so he was on the bridge already from the death, and then the strain of the flood and all that.

Knaster: But he only stayed in three years and then came out?

Arceneaux: Yes. I was sitting there in the park visiting with him and chattering away and then he was off playing in the bushes, and he turns to me and says, "I want to go home, Grace." And I was just floored. I said, "Manuel, of course I'll take you home. Why

haven't you said anything before?" He said, "I'm tired. These people don't know anything."

And he was clear as a bell. My God. I went in and told the nurse and they didn't believe it. He wouldn't talk to them. He would just talk to me and I said, "He wants to go home." They said, "Well, we'll have to talk to the doctor." "Are you sure he talked?" I said, "Yes, he talked." You know, they had tried all those years, they had given him shock treatments, everything . . . they had psychoanalyzed me two or three times, asked questions, called my sister in. Anyway they told me, yes, I could bring him home, but they wanted to talk to my husband so that they would know who was responsible in bringing a man home who was not completely cured. I had no husband, you know. (laughter) This is 1959 and I hadn't seen Leo for a couple of years.

In 1955 I applied for citizenship because we had parted peacefully and he too was going to apply. I helped him with his application. We did that in 1954 as a sign that we weren't living together and that independently we were going to be citizens. So we were called in 1954 and we both used the same witnesses because we knew the same people. It got as far as calling us in together and telling us that we were both ineligible because we had been in a bigamous marriage. We were not suitable to be citizens so we would have to do something about it, voiding the marriage. I said, "But we don't live together." He says, "Well, it still can't be. We're going to put you on probation for at least five years."

Knaster: So how did you get to be a citizen?

Arceneaux: Well in 1960 the five years was up and I went back. I applied again. I got my annulment. And they said, “You can’t be a citizen.” I said, “Well, I got my annulment. You have a copy, I have a copy.” He says, “But as of now we’re going to put you on five year probation. It has to do with you living a clean life for five years.”

Knaster: Goodness!

Arceneaux: Well, that takes me up to 1965. Anyway, this is 1959, when I’m not even talking to Leo because somebody might find out and take away my future citizenship, you know. He was considered completely out of bounds. So I wrote to him. I found out where he was and I asked him to call me. I wrote to him and told him what I needed. Would he please come? Could he do me that favor? I’ve never asked you for anything, but could you do me this favor, come with me to Agnew. And he did. He came and he signed the paper, and I brought Manuel home and he left. That was all he was supposed to do.

Knaster: It’s interesting that you alone, his flesh and blood sister, you were not considered sufficient for signing a form. They needed a man’s signature or they wouldn’t release him. Someone who was not even related to him.

Arceneaux: They didn’t even bother to find out if this man was my husband. Now that I think of it I could have gotten a friend to go with me and say . . . But I was already very frightened because I had lied about being Mexican, about being a Filipino and I knew enough that was perjury. I was very law-abiding. I wanted to be a citizen. I don’t know why I wanted to be a citizen but in the back of my mind, that’s why I never broke more

laws. There were so many little ways of doing things. The system is just made to hamper people, to keep the poor down. But anyway, back to my story.

Knaster: So you brought him back.

Arceneaux: I brought him back and mind you, there was no outreach, no social worker, nothing for Manuel. They just sent him home. That must have been the very beginning of 1959, because by the end of 1959 I can't stand my brother. I don't know what to do with him. He sits and sits and sits. He does not move an inch out of the house. I'm earning about $1.05 and now I'm supporting three people, and he eats a lot. You know, this is cruel to say, but he would sometimes eat our supper. If it was cooked, like we had leftovers, and I thought, well tomorrow I'll fix with this, and when I got home it'd be gone. And then Lenny started to say, "Well, Uncle ate all the bread, drank all the milk." I was just pulling my hair out and I didn't know what to do. He wasn't any better. He would just sit. He would talk, yes and no, but it was very difficult. Very, very difficult. So I went to welfare and told them that I needed help with my brother. Surely there must be something that could be done. I said, "You either help him out with something or all three of us are going to be on welfare." I couldn't handle it. So this lady came, and Manuel refused now, he woke up enough to say, "We have never taken welfare, even when my mother and father died we never had welfare. We've always paid our way. I don't need any welfare." My God! I called up and asked, "Well, what happened?" They says, "Your brother refuses to apply." And then I roared . . . poor guy, it's a wonder I didn't send him back to Agnew because I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He says, "I'm going to work." "All right. Where?" "I want to go to Salinas." He had worked in Salinas.

Off and on when Barba didn't have work he would go to Salinas and work. He had even gone to Imperial Valley a couple of times. I think that's how he got to know Salinas, by going to Imperial Valley with some of the Filipinos and finding contracts. The England company and Church company were his companies.

So I put his things in the car and I drove over to Salinas and I left him at a labor camp. He went in and he asked and they recognized him and he came back, says, "It's all right. I can work, so you can go home." I left him.

And five days later he was back at my house. He came back. And poor fellow, he looked bad, his shoes, everything was tattered and torn. I didn't do anything about him again for another six months. But I went back to welfare and asked them. And they said they would get a psychiatrist, they would do this and that but they didn't do very much. So again, around July of 1961, I took him to Salinas. Which was a good time because Big Week is over there. Big Week is the rodeo. It's a fun time and he woke up enough to realize it's Salinas; he liked Salinas and he stayed. This was 1962, we moved in '62 from Madison Street. My brother is out of my life. He's doing fine. I just hear rumors. I ask, "Yes he's working," "I saw Manuel." "How did he look?" "Pretty good. He was at a bar. He was having fun. He looks good." I figured, well, he's living, you know, I don't want to know anything more about him because I'm having to struggle. Lenny's in high school and he needs more money and I'm working now weekends as a cashier at a restaurant. Did I tell you about my *compadre* who used to be a coyote?

Knaster: Yes.

Arceneaux: Well, he owned a restaurant and told me I could cashier for him Friday nights and Saturday and all day Sunday. And I'm making at least 25 dollars over the weekend, which is big money for me. I'm earning about $40 during the week. In 1960 I got my annulment. I went back where I got my application and I'm told come back in five years. So I'm still thinking of becoming a citizen. Because the boss had gone to Canada, the one of the shoe store, and he was always writing off and on, "Come to Canada. You can work for me. I have a big store and you'd love Canada." Lenny would say, "Let's go to Canada, Mother." And see, I can't go anywhere because I'm not a citizen. I'm scared. That's the reason I think I wanted to be a citizen. I really don't know. So by 1960 when he sold the store he found me my job. Believe it or not, he went to . . . I told him that I would like to work at Penney's. He says, "No, I want you to work at Ford's. They'll pay you more." And so he went to the two of them and he told them that he was paying me $1.25. He wasn't paying me $1.35. He was paying $1.15. He says, "I'm paying her $1.25 and you'll have to pay her at least that much." And then he told Ford's, "If you don't get her, Penney's is going to get her, in their shoe department. So I was offered the two jobs. I was offered more money at Ford's, but I took Penney's. I had the clothes that went more with that type of place.

I was to be the shoe clerk, to help in shoes and in November I had the first confrontation with the manager of the shoe department. He didn't want to buy white sandals to have in March. Things that I knew. I told him that we usually buy sandals in March and finish them off by July. "It's too early in March." I said, "Well, even before Easter you should have sandals, and that's the way we buy." So he took me to the boss. The boss called me and says, "You've been arguing about shoes?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Don doesn't think

you know about shoes but I know you do so it'll be all right." So I knew my days were numbered because Donny was the assistant director.

Sure enough, by the first of that year, I was put into the office. I was offered the job of bookkeeper. They needed office help and they wondered if I could be a bookkeeper, I had kept books at the shoe department. In my hospital period I had taken a correspondence course in bookkeeping. I don't know. It's kind of Mickey Mouse because you could cheat if you wanted to, you know, but it was a good practice thing that I did and I had kind of kept in touch with numbers and I liked numbers very much, so Mr. Forbes allowed me to keep his books, his everyday books, and he had a regular bookkeeper that picked up other things. And they knew it, so they put me back there and I was really very successful at it, because when I left the job four or five years later they put in two girls to do what I was doing. I was very good at it because I had my own system. So help me, I don't know percents. I don't know how they work. But I can get you a percent figure that is correct. I'm a stickler for organization and for neatness. The only help I had in those three or four years of bookkeeping was in many books. I was merchandise bookkeeper, which means you order and you buy and you find out the net that you lost and buy for next year. It's a big job.

Knaster: Why did you leave that?

Arceneaux: I got married. That's the best part. I'll tell you. He paid me the dollar and a quarter. But he kept me at a dollar and a quarter for years. They would give you a raise of three or four cents. It was horrible! This evaluation they'd give you and everything is excellent, and I'd say, "Well, do I get a raise?" "Oh yes, he'd say, "You're going to get

seven cents raise." Seven cents is nothing. Seven cents, eight hours—that's about forty-something cents. I don't know what it is. 50 cents more a day, it was nothing, but they kept you that way. They did it to everybody. We used to talk about unionizing but we were scared because we heard in San Jose they fired everyone. Many of us, believe it or not, were women that were supporting families, see, so I noticed that. Well in fact after I got married I noticed many of the women that worked for him had no husbands. Because those who had a husband wouldn't take that kind of treatment. I got married in 1964. Lenny was going to the high school. He went to Catholic school all this time. Lenny went on this retreat and Ron was the retreat master, like a counselor. One of the things that was bothering him was how he wanted to leave home, his career's coming up, he has to decide, but he doesn't know what to do with his mother because she's going to be all alone, and Ron asked him, "What about your father?" "Oh, he doesn't live here; sometimes he lives here but he doesn't live here. My mother lives alone. "Well, what's wrong?" "Oh, it's a long story, a long story." So then Ron knew I was single. He didn't know the particulars but then he really came on strong.

I rented an apartment for $45 a month. A large amount of money that I didn't think I could pay. But I was able to swing it. I'm living in this spacious apartment. It's a cement building. I finally get into a building that's concrete. All the others had been a wooden structure. I don't know what I had about that. And that's where Lenny started, he was going to Moran, and that's where Ron met me. That's where I was living. That was 1963, and Lenny graduated from high school and went on to Cabrillo. He wanted to go to the University of San Francisco, because he was a basketball player and it was Catholic but

we didn't have any money. He decided to go to Cabrillo, but he lost interest in school right away.

In the meantime, in the following year, Ron met me in the priest's house. I was there for some business with Monsignor O'Connell, and Ron had heard that I had been in a little accident. I rear-ended somebody. Monsignor came in and he had always asked me to find myself a man, and he said, "You gotta get yourself a man, a young man, who will take care of you, Grace, then you don't have to work so hard." And I used to think, "Oh, Monsignor, what do I want a young man for? I want somebody that knows what it's all about. I don't want a young man. I want an old man who will take care of me." So Ron comes in and says, "Hello, Grace." Monsignor says, "You want *him*? He's single. You want *him*?"

Knaster: Oh no, right in front of you!

Arceneaux: Yes, right in front of both of us. I says, "I don't want him." You know I had seen him, he was a teacher. I said, "I don't want him," just like that, out loud, and Ron says, "But there's nothing wrong with me!"

After Lenny's graduation he asked me to go out with him. We proceeded to get pretty serious. That was 1963, and we kind of fooled around hemming and hawing. I got married July 2, 1964. He quit teaching at Catholic school. He was a Christian Brother. He had been in a religious order for eight years. The thought of marrying was really bothering him financially, and having to look for a job, and he started working at a public school. I think he started at $5600. I was making about $3000. But together it was

something because I had an awful lot of bills. I don't know how I did it, and I paid everything. I had a very good credit rating. I paid everybody a little bit. I had just bought a TV and paid $20 on it, a nice TV. I did it in May and we got married in July. Paid $20, and so he always says that's why I married him so that he'd pay off the TV. But it was very difficult because he also owed money, and I'd owed money, and then he realized how much I owed, and we had a miserable time. We lived in that apartment; he had his own apartment and was paying $45, and we decided to stay in mine because it was a little more airy, larger and Lenny was still going to Cabrillo.

I had to continue working, there was not a chance of me quitting. From 1964 to 1965 we were always looking for a place to move. In October we found a place in Corralitos for a hundred dollars. A hundred and ten, but we took a lease on it for a years and they gave it to us for a hundred dollars a month. It was a nice place, very nice. The location was beautiful. One of the reasons why we wanted to move was because right near us . . . we lived on Carr Street, which is half a block from the Veterans Hall, Watsonville, and Saturday nights they used to have Mexican dances. It was really just terrible. Every Saturday night they ended up right under our window, arguing, fighting, hollering, and oh, Ron used to have a fit. Sure it bothered me when I was there, but I just thought it was part of . . . I had to live that way. Under Ron's way of living you don't have to take anything. It was wonderful. It was like being lifted . . . just having lived under these horrible chains, you know, and accepting them. And in my own attempts to break them I had had successes, but it had been so difficult that at times it wasn't worth it. It was easier to continue doing what you were doing rather than to struggle, because it was such an enormous job.

So we moved to this place up in Corralitos and Thanksgiving Day is when Lenny came home from school and told us he had a surprise for us. He was going into the navy. I thought it was good for him. Ron was very happy and I was mad because he was happy but I knew it was good for him. He needed to go. He had signed up but he wasn't leaving till the day after Christmas. So he got a chance to help move us and he got his room and he liked the place. He had an old beat-up car and we moved everything up there. Lenny goes off to the navy for four and a half years and he leaves me there with Ron. I remember him saying, "You take care of her. 'Cause if not I'll find you wherever you're at."

Knaster: Oh my! (laughter)

Arceneaux: You know, that was kind of nice. We had a big party for him to leave and that's when he said some of those things.

Knaster: Did you find that there was any difficulty personally because Ron was not Mexican; were there cultural differences that you had to get over between the two of you, and was there any flak from the community?

Arceneaux: You couldn't have asked a better question. That was my next topic. You remember all these years I'd been going to St. Patrick's Church, never missing. I always attended the church mass on Sundays. If I skipped a Sunday for some reason it was 'cause I went to San Juan or something. I look back on my life. I've always been faithful to the church whether I was living outside of it because I had married that man out of church which is considered a no-no, and I never had the sense to realize that would have

been straightened out if I had talked to a priest, but there were no friendly priests that I knew. The one that I met in the hospital told me that I couldn't go to communion until I could say I was sorry I had married this man and I asked, begged for forgiveness. Well at that point I wasn't sorry enough. Before I would get that sorry I think I would have gone to hell, because if a priest can do that to a person lying in bed who wants to have some words of consolation . . . evidently that's the feeling I had about it. He said, "Well, you'll just have to live without it." I'll take my chances between that God and I. And many is the time I went to church and sat there and cried because I was being kept from the sacrament because of this. I knew I couldn't do anything about it because it would have to be a very understanding priest who would do something for me. Now of course I knew different, but this was the ignorance that I lived in. So I had raised Lenny like that, going to church but seeing me suffer and I know that many a time he said, "When I get big and I get married I'm never going to get married in the church." Because [his] Daddy had been married in the church in the Philippines, could never get a divorce to marry me. So the way Lenny figured was, don't marry in the church and you can marry. That wasn't supposed to be the true thing but . . . so all these years that I went to St. Patrick, the warmest thing I got out of that was that Monsignor would, every now and then I went to confession and I talked to him. He would tell me, "Why don't you find yourself a nice young man?" That was the warmth. And then some hellos and some smiles. No sooner did I marry Ron, then in about two or three months I was invited to join the Young Ladies Institute which is Catholic . . . which had single or married women. It's a social thing, a nice thing, and it was strange that nobody invited me to join anything, but as soon as I was Arceneaux I had invitations to church things. The Catholic Daughters of

America invited me to join. But I wasn't good enough with the other name, or as a single woman.

But I needed that social contact with other people. Ron was very innocent about prejudice between Mexicans and Anglos or Filipinos or blacks . . . all the prejudice he knows is black and white, from the South. He soon found out that there was others. The first inkling, I suppose, was contact with me. Because people told him, "Not her! Don't you know? She's been married before and she has a child." "Oh yes," he says, "I know that." "Don't you know about Mexicans?" And they told him that when you marry a Mexican pretty soon the relatives come live with you and they never leave. And they're lazy and they don't eat the same as we do. This is a Slavonian lady who's talking to him. Their customs are different. He couldn't figure it out because he knew me and he had been coming to my house and eating there and he liked what he ate.

He couldn't understand. So Ron told the lady that maybe they don't really know her. You know, Ron was very eligible, 38 years old, never been married, a teacher. One of his dates was J.J. Crosetti's sister-in-law, Lucille, she's never been married. The other one was Ida Bobita who owns the store down there in the village, she's never been married yet. Those are the women that he was dating. And he started going with me and married me.

Knaster: People were maybe resentful.

Arceneaux: Yeah, sure. He talks about families having a dinner and inviting him because there was a single girl in the family, and actually trying to get them together. But then he

just got attached to me and it didn't take very much, we just hit it off. We had an argument and we didn't see each other for about six months, but the next time we saw each other we got married. It was very, very interesting and very good in that I could mix, I guess. He had nothing to offer me that I couldn't overcome. Like food. I'm a good cook. I'm a good housekeeper and I wait on him hand and foot—what could he say? What custom did he have? The custom of talking like a schoolteacher . . . I still resent to this day when he talks to me in that tone of voice. But he's a very kind person, very sensitive at times, and at times he isn't. And there's things we have always and we will never quite understand about each other—the innuendo. But I think that's personality, not necessarily Anglo and Mexican. He loves Mexican customs. He loves the Mexican food, loves dancing. That was very important, that he danced, because I love to dance. He probably didn't know that he was a dancer when I met him but he likes to dance. The only thing he can't do is the cha-cha-cha. But he can do everything else.

Being married to Ron, it's a total new world out there. He knew that I wanted to go to school. But I kept working. He told me, you're not going to work hard. When I was tired he went to the boss and he said, "You're not paying Grace enough money." I think I was earning about $2.00, maybe I was up to $2.00, maybe a $1.95. He asked that I be paid $2.25. "Either pay her $2.25 or I'm going to pull her out, she's working too hard. Too much! Too much!" Within two days they raised my salary to $2.25.

I talked to this lady there and she told me, "Grace, after you're married life is going to change for you in this store, just because you have a husband. You're going to see." And sure enough, the change was tremendous. There was not the respect, I mean they always

respect you if you act dignified, but I used to say, “I have to leave at 4:30.” I couldn’t wait till 5:00. Ron refused to wait out there till 5:00 for me. So I had to leave at 4:30 and I was short half an hour, and he said we didn’t need a half hour’s work. He’d pick me up at the door, and no matter what happened, at 4:28 I closed my books, shoved it in and walked out. I said, “I have to leave,” and I did it! I was afraid to, but I tested it and he didn’t say boo. And then Ron decided that he would rather I quit at 4:00 because he’s staying at school half an hour in order to leave me at work half an hour. so he decides, because he dropped me off in the morning and he picked me up in the afternoon. We only had the one car. I told Mr. . . . “I can come a half an hour earlier,” ‘cause he would drop me off at quarter to eight. I said, “I can come to work at 8:00 and work that half hour. “Well okay.” Then I’d have to have a key of my own and work. The store opened at 8:30. I’d go to church and then just walk two blocks to work and that’s our routine.

In the meantime they gave me help from the high school. They hired a high school girl that would be tested when there was bookkeepers, and they wanted to have a job after school so they would come directly to our office and I would train them to keep the books and whatever I knew I would train them because they would be good workers. This started in 1962, ’cause I had three or four girls come through. To this day I meet a couple of them and they’re still good workers. They don’t chew gum. They don’t wear perfume. That was the kind of training; besides teaching them bookkeeping I taught them how to act in the office, how to behave. That’s when we started to get the girls to come in and work more hours because I was cutting off. He sure changed his tune when I got married. Within another three or four months I had another 25 cent raise. When I quit I was making $2.75, it was 1965, I think, and then I started school.

Education

Knaster: Where did you go to school?

Arceneaux: Well, I thought I had to go to grammar school. I really did. Until talking to Ron, "You do not. You don't even have to go to high school."

Knaster: Oh, did you go to night school?

Arceneaux: Yes. He said, "You take a GED test and they'll find out where you're at and how much you need. You probably belong at Cabrillo. You probably don't need much to get a diploma." So I start going to school and it was glorious! All the books I wanted, and someone telling me things—and English. I knew I couldn't speak good English. I knew that it was incorrect. So Ron says, "No, you can't," he's bossy, he's a real bossy person, "you can't go to primary." He's an English teacher. "You can go into English II. "No, I want Basic English." So I went in and the man couldn't teach me anything because all I learned was grammar. I found out that you don't need them. Once you know . . .

Knaster: Once you know how to speak?

Arceneaux: Yes.

In the meantime, my history was fantastic. You can't imagine, you can't, because it would have to be a person who's been starved for almost forty years for this, the schoolroom, and at my age everything just started popping. I knew so much. I got straight A's throughout my career in high school and through Cabrillo, always had straight A's. But chemistry, and learning about rocks and that. I was a woman you know,

and the men in the class would say, “Well her husband is a teacher.” I was furious because Ron had nothing to do with it. I didn’t think so.

Knaster: Right. They were jealous.

Arceneaux: Well, yes, but it made me feel like I wasn’t getting any credit. I didn’t want them to think that I was cheating and that I was getting all the information from him, you know. That kind of hurt my feelings. I graduated in 1969. I went three years to school, 2 1/2, really.

Knaster: You mean to night school.

Arceneaux: To night school. Ron started teaching night school because it was so difficult for me to come. I used to get out real late and drive clear up to Corralitos so then he taught two years. He would teach English. I never had him as a teacher, thank God. But the driving part was easier. I think it was 1968 when they gave me a test. They gave us all a test. I was into the highest English I could be. They gave us a test of English comprehension, language vocabulary, all the works, and I did excellently. In spelling I went off the thing, ’cause I got a hundred and I didn’t misspell one word. That’s when I got angry because the teacher gave me the results and one of the students said, “Well, she’s married to an English teacher.” Then the teacher says, “Well, after all I’m her teacher. I’m her teacher right now. So it’s my credit that she got these good notes.” Then the man that was standing there came in and he says, “Yes, but I introduced her to English,” ‘cause he was my first English teacher. And I got so mad at all . . .

Knaster: No one gave *you* any credit.

Arceneaux: And I said, "Doesn't anybody realize that I took the test? Do I get any credit or is it just the *men* that get it?" I was mad.

Feminist Issues

Knaster: You know, from so many of these things that you've told me, it sounds like all along the way as a woman you were not given equal respect, or credit, or wages or consideration, unless there was a man around by your side. Did you sense this at the time? Did you feel you were being discriminated against as a woman?

Arceneaux: Well, I don't know. Now you hear all this stuff. But all I knew was that if you had a man, it would have been much easier. But I refused to have a man in order to get that. I had friends, I had boyfriends, or whatever you want to call them, gentleman callers, or whatever the word is, but I wouldn't settle for what I was looking for . . . I just couldn't. I figured, well, I could do it. Heck, if I could do it when I was 16 or 17 and handled it . . . The rough part was Lenny. I think he suffered by not having a man in the house but it was better than having a stepfather that might have beat him up.

Knaster: Did you ever discuss this with other women? Were other women having similar problems, let's say not having a man around they just weren't getting equal treatment?

Arceneaux: Oh yes. Of course there was a group of us that went places, that did things together. As Lenny got older I was able to tell him that I was going to go dancing and I would call Juliet and say, "Can Lenny come over?" Sometimes he wanted to go over there, sometimes he wanted to go to the neighbors', you know . . . Just so he would be

sleeping in some other house, so he wouldn't be alone. I didn't want someone coming into the house because my privacy was very important to me. I didn't want them to know what time I came in. So a friend, some of his buddies were always inviting him to sleep over and occasionally I'd let him go on a Saturday. And this group, two or three of us, were all in the same predicament. They were having the same problems. All of them. Maybe made bad mistakes and gotten pregnant without getting married. Oh, it was a hassle. I think that helped keep me straight and be wary, leery of any bad judgments. Of course in retrospect it could have been a good judgment.

You know, when you're that poor and you're that discriminating, you can kind of blend into the misery. I remember a friend of mine, she was so darn lonely and she started going with this fellow and she got pregnant and he was married and that's it. So she carried the child, and she had six other children. Six other children, and she has this baby. And up to this day, I guess her oldest daughter who's about 12 or 13 knew, but the day she's leaving for the hospital instead of calling me she calls a neighbor and pays them to take her to the hospital. And my feelings were hurt. But then she told me, "How could you leave your work? You would have lost your job? My neighbor, he brought me." I mean, to go through all that alone. To the county hospital. Of course when I went, I tried to go see her in the county hospital, whoever takes you there is the only one who can visit you. So only the neighbor could visit her from that day on. She was home within two days but I think of that as the utmost of sacrifices for a woman alone, to know that she's bearing his child. Of course she gave it the name of the former husband. But how sad, how difficult. And to come back and face the public, you know people aren't very forgiving, they always remind you, or tell the kids, or something.

Knaster: Do you think there was any support group for women?

Arceneaux: None.

Knaster: Any kind of a support network?

Arceneaux: None whatsoever. Even right now I've worked with the parental stress group and women complain of ill treatment, beatings at home. And then you insist that they go to the police and they refuse. They feel that you have to take it. I think it's been inbred in Mexicans. There's some that don't. But the ones that don't do that, don't come to parental stress. But right along, yes I felt, what you asked me, that it had to do with me being single, and being a woman in most instances. I think that the years I put into Penney's that he had me over a barrel and I thought I was worth more, but it was just a very convenient thing for him that I happened to be a single mother, otherwise he would have had to pay me more. And he would not have abused me.

Knaster: Sounds like the discrimination was on so many different levels—being female, being single . . .

Arceneaux: Being Mexican.

Knaster: Being Mexican, having been married to a Filipino and having a Filipino man's child.

Arceneaux: Right.

Knaster: I mean everywhere you turned there was something else . . .

Arceneaux: Right.

Knaster: That's real difficult. I admire your courage.

Arceneaux: Well!

Knaster: And your strength to get through all that.

Community Activism

Let's talk about how you got involved in community affairs. When you got married suddenly all the Christian ladies were inviting you into the various organizations. But after that it sounds to me like you got involved in a lot of community service.

Arceneaux: I did join the Young Ladies Institute, and I was only the second Mexican in there. I thought, well, I'm going to join and I'm going to make my friends join and turn this into something. I don't know what. At least five other friends of mine joined, but there was no purpose to it. It was just getting together about once a month and talking about raising funds for the church or a burse for the Bishop. (eech!) I don't know what a burse was, but evidently they give him money once a year, and the more the better.

Every now and again they'd receive a letter asking for volunteers to work at the clinic or at this or that, interpreting or helping out. And you'd hear the comments, "My God, can't they help themselves." This was very annoying to me and heartbreaking because even before I married, in 1961 or 1962 I got involved working in a migrant clinic. But it wasn't called that. Monterey County and Santa Cruz County opened a clinic at the Pajaro School. Every Wednesday you could go there and get attended by a doctor who

was donating his services. There was a particular amount of money and the volunteers weren't getting paid, meaning myself and the others. So the line would form of people with their children with a fever, with blisters, all kinds of things. I would go after work. I'd be there by six o'clock. Sometimes we'd be there till 11:00 at night. These doctors were very good and there was a nurse there, it was the county nurse. One Wednesday would be a Monterey County nurse and the next Wednesday would be the Santa Cruz County nurse.

Knaster: And these were all migrant workers who would come . . .

Arceneaux: They were supposed to be workers. I don't know whether they were migrant, but they were farmworkers. Every now and again you'd see someone you knew wasn't working on a farm, but they went there anyway. It was very difficult to keep them out. We had a lady, Marie Finney, she was a retired welfare worker, social worker, who was keeping anybody out who didn't work in the fields, cause the money came from that department and HEW, definitely for farmworkers. So all we did was give them a fictitious ranch. She didn't speak Spanish anyway. There's two or three of us that spoke Spanish, that's why we were there, 'cause no one spoke Spanish. So one would work with the doctor translating what the ailment was.

That's the kind of work I had been doing while I was working at J.C. Penney's. Then I get married and I continued . . . Ron didn't mind as long as I came home early and then one day he just made me stop. Which was good, because it was too much. Well, these YLI's were asked to help out and they said, (Gasp) "Why don't they just recruit among themselves, I see a lot of young women walking the streets, you know, why don't they

help themselves?" It hurt me, it really hurt me, because here we were a religious organization, and they talked like that. So I told them that I didn't appreciate it and I said, "Those people that you say are walking the streets, they haven't got the time?" Well, why should we have the time? The thing is that they're working and when they go in the afternoon to go shopping, that's their only joy is walking up and down the street. You know, they're maybe allowed an hour and then they have to go home. As long as you don't help them you have no right to talk. I've worked there and I know." Of course, that didn't set off too well. They told me I shouldn't be so vocal. Later somebody told me, "Well, you hurt their feelings, Lois is angry." I said, "I'm sorry, but she was very vocal." I didn't think I belonged there, and then I talked it over and Ron of course said, "Get out of there, you don't belong there," you know, he always encouraged me that way. And that was my experience with the Catholic Religious Social Club.

Soon after we were married we moved to Corralitos, that would be 1965 or 1966. Ron is working in Echo Valley, which is in Monterey County, and he's commuting back and forth. I was still working at Penney's, and my position has improved because I'm married. Ron keeps pressuring him and I get more benefits, but I wasn't feeling too good about my manager because I saw him with different eyes. He was exploiting the rest and he wasn't doing it to me any more. One day I just quit working so I could go to school.

But before I went to school I got involved in Corralitos teaching catechism. I had a natural instinct to teach. Years and years before in San Juan I had taught catechism, so this is what I started doing. I studied for it and I got a little diploma, and I taught that. I was very involved in the church over there, but again I had a feeling of not being where I

should be, especially when I taught the children about being good to the poor and sharing, and I had a hard time because these kids didn't know what I meant by "poor." Corralitos is an affluent society up in the hills and although we weren't rich we were still living in this nice part of the country. It's not even touching Watsonville 'cause you only come down to buy your groceries and you don't hear the noise, you don't hear nothing. One day this little girl said, "But I don't know anybody that's poor." I said, "Well, there's a lot of poverty in Watsonville. You ask your mother about it." This is a third grader. So Mrs. Hansen calls me and says, "What am I teaching the children? That has nothing to do with catechism. Here my daughter insists that we have to know somebody poor so she can talk to you about it, now what do you mean? What are you trying to teach them?" I said, "Well it's just part of being charitable, part of being Christian." "Well, I don't appreciate it because I'm too busy and now my child insists that she wants to meet somebody poor. I don't know anybody poor and I don't understand it and I don't see why this is so important." I thought to myself, Well, this is terrible. What am I trying to do? So I dropped that. At the end of the year that was it, and I started going to school and I really, really enjoyed it. Oh, I just was crazy about school. It was like a new world, and although Ron had been telling me that I could go, I was afraid to go.

Knaster: This is Cabrillo?

Arceneaux: No, high school. Evening school. It was great. I remember thinking that it was like a new house, you just get to peek in, and then you step in and look out and there's different rooms, different shelves, and everyone had a surprise. It was really the most beautiful time in my life. Other things have happened since but it was very, very

good, and I had the time to study and I just read avidly. I had always read before but I started trying to read Tolstoy. I didn't even know what it meant but I wanted to read it and I shouldn't have but I did. I got pretty involved in school and I had time for no one, just school, so that takes me into 1969.

The church is still very important and the citizenship is hanging over my head. I've never become a citizen. Ron wanted me to, he says, "Well, you're married to me and it's all right." But in the back of my mind I wanted to be married to him five years, that magic number, remember . . . I'm always on probation for five years. So when I was married five years to him I applied and I received citizenship. That was 1969.

Another thing that happened in 1969 was I graduated from high school. In fact I received a scholarship to Cabrillo because I was a straight A student and they did a feature article on me. "Dropout Drops In," was the headline. It was a nice article and they had my picture. It was good for the community. It might inspire somebody to go to school. Which did happen, by the way. A couple, one lady in particular says, "Well, if you can do it I can because I'm smarter than you." So, okay they went to school, and that was fine. Then also in our church, our spiritual growth has been pretty good up to then, and we attend a *corsillo* movement which is good for any Christian. I find those three things in 1969 were very important to me.

Knaster: *Corsillo* is a little course.

Arceneaux: Yes, in Christianity. It's a three-day retreat. And it changes your way of looking at things. The *corsillo* is what opened my eyes to taking up an apostolic, meaning

I had to do something to prove myself as a Christian. It had to be something definite, even if I was just a housewife, which I ruled out immediately. I was not going to be just a (laughter) housewife. So I was already into education and I liked it and I wondered, well maybe I could teach. I thought of being a teacher but it seemed so far away to get there. I could have done it but it seemed like I was in a hurry. I had to do it *now*. This is when UCSC gave a grant to make a study on the dropout. In fact, that's why that dropout thing came up. A dropout study in the Pajaro Valley. I think it's 49% of Mexican-Americans . . . so they wrote a letter to Ron and asked him to participate. I don't know why they chose him but he was a teacher at E.A. Hall School.

Pajaro Valley Schools and the Mexican-American Community

He wanted me to go so he asked permission if I could go because he felt that I belonged there even if I hadn't been invited. So that's how I happened to attend those seminars.

For four months we would study the problem and have a big conference at the end and get together—all these groups would divide. We had a big presentation and Dr. Arthur Pearl was there. That was my first touch with him. He's up at UC right now. He gave this fantastic keynote speech, and a Japanese doctor came up from UCLA. So we divided into groups and we have seminars. Every week we met for four months. There was about six or eight of us. We were frank, we just talked and brought up subjects and studied and brought in young people to talk to us and question us, and then discussed again and made resolutions and had all kinds of arguments. Sometimes we argued and walked out on each other and came back. At the end we had a report and it showed that, yes, there was a dropout problem. That was the result. Well, in our group, we had a smaller

gathering, they divided it into two, and our suggestion was—make a resolution that more positive images of the Mexican-American be inculcated into the teaching at the high school level, at all levels.

In the back of my mind I thought about a PTA, without the T in it, a Mexican-American parent school club to teach them, tell them about school. The school could be open to having these people come to the school, ask questions. It had to be done because there was no one in the schools speaking Spanish except at the secretarial level. I gave that suggestion; Ron and I had talked about it. It fell like a ton of bricks. "Oh, that would be good, yes." Nobody said much. At the end of that , about ten or fifteen minutes later, Ron got up. He was furious. He said, "My wife just suggested something positive instead of all this other talk. And you insulted her by not acknowledging her as an important person. She's the only Mexican in here and surely what she says has some weight." The fellow says, "Oh, yes, yes." Ron says, "Well, are you going to help her? She wants to start a community thing, you know, we need help. And she needs it. So we're all going to volunteer. Mrs. Arceneaux would you step into Room 7 and all those going to work with her project go in there." Well I went in there and I sat and pretty soon Ron and Dr. Ken Larsen, Elena Borden and Richard Carmichael came in. Four and myself, five. We never knew whether they volunteered or whether they were coerced into it, but they *did* volunteer, all of them. We sat down and we decided that we'd have a meeting here in this house the following Tuesday, and I would invite a couple of my people. We met in the front room and we talked to them about this. And that's how COPE got started. Comunidad Organizada Para La Educación (Project C.O.P.E.). That was in 1969.

Knaster: Is it still in existence?

Arceneaux: Only the child care center. But it started out with the meeting here and another meeting with a few more people and we had to meet in town. This is not grassroots right here. So we went to Rodriguez Street and 42 people showed up . . . on the third meeting. We were all sitting on the floor and just letting everything out. You should hear the people wanting to do things for their children, wanting to help. It just took off like wildfire. We continued. Every week we had a meeting and every week we had people showing up. Of course I had a little gimmick. I wasn't working and I had a telephone. So I started writing the names and calling them on the phone. All day I was on the phone conversing with people and usually they would commit themselves, the husband or the wife to come to the meeting. It was a really personal effort in the beginning because it had to be proved that people wanted something in the schools.

So by the fourth or fifth meeting Mike Garcia, who worked in the schools told us, "Why don't you meet in the school?" I said, "Would they let us?" Ron sometimes didn't go to the meetings 'cause he was busy teaching. But he was also new at this; we didn't know we could meet at the school, that it was public property. We'd never been told. Maybe Anglo people knew, but Mexicans considered the school as sacred land. You just walk in only when they have a complaint you come in to try to get your child back in. Or to a play, because he's going to be the little *Mexicanito* in the play, something like that, or maybe they would borrow the auditorium for something . . . but many of those people had never been in the school.

So we started having meetings in the school. We had fantastic meetings. We would bring the teachers and they wouldn't want to come because it was too many people. A couple of times we did get teachers there and it was good and it was bad, because they came sometimes with a chip on their shoulder. One particular incident was a fiasco. Barbara Felco felt that she had been a good teacher, and she probably was to her capacity, but she made the mistake of saying . . . a teenage girl asked her, "How long have you been working in this school?" She said, "Seven years." The girl says, "Do you speak Spanish?" She says, "Oh no! It's so hard! I have such a time, I can hardly pronounce the names." And that young girl said, "How dare you! How dare you not be able to pronounce our name, when you kept my little brother, six years old, you kept him back in the first grade because he couldn't learn English. You with your certificate at college can't even learn to pronounce Spanish, how dare you teach in this school?" And then of course the teacher got upset and accused the girl of being rude. She turned to her principal, "Is this why you brought me, so they would abuse me?" Then Ron got up and tried to console her and then we all said it was true. It was not good and after that no teacher would come to our meetings. So it was not easy. If they did come, the people would not talk. They wouldn't complain. We wanted them to come to hear the complaints of some of these parents, how frustrated they felt about the teaching, about their children losing their identity, their children not wanting to be called "Esperanza," they wanted to be called "Hope."

Knaster: When was this organized?

Arceneaux: 1969.

Knaster: How long did it run for?

Arceneaux: Oh, it went all the way to 1975. In 1970 Mercedes Garcia came with anti-poverty community development. They had a little office here and they latched onto us. They had the paid personnel who then maneuvered everything. We started working on the proposal for a community school into which we would inculcate all the hopes and dreams of the Mexican-American people of the town that we had gathered. We had all these notes and minutes of different meetings and all these verbatim reports of what people had said. We would try to send home notices through the school and the teachers would refuse to pass them out because they were in Spanish. Not the teachers, the aides. The first thing we did we took the aides out of the schools. We demanded that they have Spanish-speaking aides, which meant they lost their jobs, the Anglos. 'Cause they were getting Title I funds for disadvantaged children. I don't know if you know about it, Title I as the famous last word. Everything had gone into Title I. So we researched the Title I and they were breaking so many laws that we were able to have them dismiss those Anglo aides which came with that money deal and hire Mexican-Americans who spoke Spanish. Then they decided that they had to be citizens. Well we overcame that in court and they hired them. The children started to react to that. For example, they'd be walking down the street with their mother and they would say, *"Mira, Mama, es mi maestra."* This was favorable. We knew we were on the right path. So that's the first thing we did.

Then second . . . really, so much happened, we were fighting on every front because there's a lot of bigotry then and now and it'll continue to be, I guess. The proposal for the

community school was very important, which we funded in 1972. We were trying to get planning money. We had no money to pay somebody to do it, so we needed the planning money. This is for the center, for La Coalicion. All right, in 1971 we went before the board with our proposal to try to get the school district to take our proposal and start a school for us. There were at least 600 people who attended. This started even more trouble for us because people felt threatened. No matter where you went, what you did, they were quoting us. Then the 45/15 idea came into being and they kind of played us against each other.

Knaster: What do you mean by 45/15?

Arceneaux: Year-round schooling. Half of our district would be year-round schooling. That would be hard on the farmworkers because they need the children to go to the fields and work. So that kind of split our ranks because the farmworkers didn't want that kind of schooling, whereas some of us agreed that if they had 45/15, they would have one school empty for us to make it into a bilingual school. So they played up on that and really divided our ranks, and the farm workers took off and started their school boycott at about the same time. 1971 is when we opened the child care center. The same year, 1971, is when we started the newsletter and the same year is about the time when the Penny Club comes into existence. Because of the same people.

They were really, really hectic years, and for me very satisfying, very hard, it almost wrecked you physically. And so by 1972 we have the planning for the Coalicion, which was the Service Center now. Mercedes Garcia and I went to Washington, D.C. . . . I think that was in October of 1971 just before we opened the center. We went looking for funds

for a school and for a center and for a newspaper. Of course we didn't find it, but at least we met a lot of people.

Knaster: Had you been getting funds from the county or the state?

Arceneaux: No, we never had any money. I was always a volunteer. Everybody was a volunteer except those two or three people from the EOP office that had that Community Development Program. And their money was running out. When it did they stayed on and worked as volunteers and got another job. It really was exciting. It was very exciting.

We were all over the place, trying to do so much, it was so hard. We were raising money for the UFW grape boycott; we were boycotting Safeway; we were marching, raising food for hungry people here, hungry people in Delano. Cabrillo was very involved, UC was very involved. I worked 80 hours a week. I never went to sleep before 11:00. Ron would quit school and just go straight to a meeting. We were crazy. Yes, we were crazy. But, you know, it was all done with an altruistic motive, we were doing it, we thought we were right, and we did a lot.

It ended up so that the school in 1972 or 1973 got funding. The school district said you can get money if you start a bilingual school. But you must have the proposal in by March 15! And they did not have anything to work on. So he calls COPE, he calls me and the directors and we went in, and they gave us our ideal situation, he says, "You have the proposal, we have the money. And we'll work together." We had been fighting like cats and dogs up to then. We had gotten an advocate, finally, because we couldn't

understand the district, so we had gotten 600 people together and demanded that they hire somebody who would speak the Spanish language in the community.

So they hired Mercedes Garcia, which was like a lamb being led to slaughter. Here she was fully equipped to be a teacher, and from that day on she has not been able to get a job anywhere, because she became a controversial figure. She was the only one among us that had a credential, in a Mexican-American. So we used her certificate to get a license for the child care center. She couldn't work down there because she was at the other job and every time the state came we pulled out her certificate. I was the acting director, but I'd say, "She's away for the day but what can I do for you?" If she was there she had a hard time explaining things because she wasn't there all the time. We did a lot of finagling and it all totalled out that the Radcliffe School came of it, that was our proposal. It was watered down and they threw out half of the things. We lost interest when they took it over because it became their school and they did not leave the community part in; they just did it their way. The newsletter continued. It was still sheets we sent out every month. We continued to do it until La Coalicion got funded. That was in 1974.

Knaster: What do you think COPE has achieved for the Mexican-American community in Watsonville?

Arceneaux: Well, the Radcliffe School is there . . .

Knaster: That's a bilingual school.

Arceneaux: Bilingual school. El Centro Familiad is over there. What is achieved is to show you that if you can organize yourselves you can get something done. It can be done. You just have to have a leader.

Knaster: So COPE, except for the child care center, is no longer running?

Arceneaux: No. I don't think so. I was told by Dr. Guzman, because he came down and gave us all classes on community politics, how to work in the society we live in, I was told that an organization didn't have to last.

Knaster: That's right.

Arceneaux: He said you're lucky if you last two years, two, three years. Don't worry. Don't fret. I was the only president, I was always re-elected. At the end, Liz Fernandez took it over in 1974. I was shaky. I don't know if it was a nervous breakdown but it was a physical . . . all those two or three years . . . I have one lung. And I was working night and day in the kind of work that takes all of your spirit. It's not just a physical thing. So that I lasted was a miracle, but I feel it was meant to be that way. I'd never regret one minute of it. I regret that I wasn't strong enough to continue. Anyway, when I came back I refused, and then Liz Fernandez got elected, who still works in town up there. But it was never the same. I dropped out. I felt that I failed her because I didn't help her and then she quit. It just dwindled. . . just faded.

What I think it shows is that it can be done, that all the lies that they say that Mexican-Americans don't care were proved to be untrue. There *is* a lot, but the thing is that they are working people. Also, I think that what is happening in this town is that the ones that

have been here a long, long time have assimilated to a degree, not necessarily given up their ancestry, but they are comfortable. And as soon as you're comfortable you don't do . . . So the ones that are poorest right now are from Mexico. That is another page in the book. Their problems are a little more basic.

I'm not a philosopher, but I found that when you're hurting is when you move the hardest. Not necessarily for me. My thing started way back in the 1930s. When I came out of the sanitarium I was doing income tax for people that couldn't read or write. For free. People would tell me, "But I went down and he charged me ten dollars." "Ten dollars to fill that little thing, come on I'll do it free for you." At J.C. Penney's they used to come and wait for me until the boss told me, "What do they want? What do these men want?" I said, "Well, they want me to translate for them." And Ron being so generous with his time and giving up his life to follow me. We did a beautiful thing together and it was very nice. I don't regret one bit of it.

Knaster: At that time were you involved in Parental Stress, too?

Arceneaux: No, that was later. In 1973 and 1974 I was still involved but I don't go to meetings but once in awhile. La Coalicion had problems, I'd go down to the courthouse, invited to sit on the board and things like that . . . I kept in touch with different things, just because I read everything and know who's there and who's not. At the end of 1974 Mercedes Garcia was working there and became head of the education department. With her I've always worked real well, so there's CETA money and she wants me to work with her. I said, "Never again. I have to get paid. I've done my bit." She says, "I don't blame you, but you know what, I can get you paid." I said, "Okay" Oh, even

before that I met Calvin and Fields in 1972, who thought it was terrible that I never got paid for it. I couldn't draw a salary, whenever we got funded. Twice we got funded for different studies and I couldn't draw a salary because I was president of the board, and you don't pay your presidents, you pay a director and then you have to drop your board and I didn't want to drop the board.

I applied for a position as outreach worker, I don't know how she did it, and I got on a contract with the county. So for three months, April, May and June of 1972 I got paid. That was the first time I got paid for doing what I loved to do. And then in 1975 is when Mercy got me that job and I became a consultant in La Coalicion's education department, and we did what we had been doing, fighting . . . I hate to say the word "fighting" but . . . what else do you say? It's writing, keeping in touch with the schools and seeing that . . . any complaints about the schools, that people knew they could come there and give us their problems. We didn't deal with good things. So I did a year of that. That was in 1975.

Then the money was running out. I went to Louisiana for the summer and we decided to stay for the year, and I didn't come back so I resigned my job. And Mercedes was doing radio programs for KOMY, like explaining agencies, interviewing for agencies. So when she got married and moved away I was asked to do the program. So that's what I started doing in 1976. And I'm doing that now. I do one program a month or more. I'm a free agent about that.

In 1973 I was called by Donna Gletcher from Volunteer Service. She was always calling back in 1969 or 1970 telling me about this fantastic program, this Volunteer Service in

Watsonville and the county wanted it and everything. I says, “Fine. I have need for your services. Can you help me? We have lots of needs.” “No,” she says, “I’m calling you to see if you can get me volunteers among the Mexican people to do different types of work in the community.” It blew my mind because they don’t understand that people can’t be volunteers; they need to be paid, the people that I’ve worked with and that I still work with need to be paid. Only rich people can volunteer, or people who have security. You know, then you can volunteer. So over the telephone we had our discussion and we didn’t part very friendly. Still, I had to talk to her again and we established some kind of relationship where she would inquire, she got to know me better and we helped each other out. But I never did anything active with her until 1973. She invited me again to go to a banquet and I realized that here is a group of Anglo-Saxon women who are trying, in their own feeble way, to fill some of the unmet needs of the community, and they’re not even touching where it’s really at. Maybe flowers at the hospitals or shut-ins, which is nice. So in the back of my mind I filed it.

I said someday I will tell them what it’s about. But I was busy. I was very popular as a lecturer, went to different classes. I went up to UC and talked to different classes about CORE and there were questions. I was real popular; that took my time, I was not needing much more limelight than that, and whatever I was doing, keeping in touch with the child care center and checking with them now and then.

In 1974 I got involved with Volunteer Service. I went to Each One Teach One, which was an English language program. I talked about the needs of the Mexican-Americans. I still get involved in the schools, the 3.3 program, which was in 1974, it was very heavy in

1975. The state comes out saying you must teach Mexican-American history and things like that. Just what we had been talking about way back then. So I became part of that group in the school district, that working group. That kept me busy, meetings, and oh, the boring things that are necessary. You mustn't give up. They tend to bore you to death, so you quit and then the small groups decide what they're going to do with the program. But I stuck with it and so did others of my caliber, stamina, you know (laughter) and stubbornness, and we worked with the school district over the 3.3 program, implementing it and it was a fiasco—and yet again it wasn't. We had volunteer men, fathers who would come to meetings, but the nitty-gritty was being done by women.

Knaster: After the 3.3. program was that when you got involved at the Parental Stress group?

Arceneaux: No. I got involved in Volunteer Service first, which I got into by going and lecturing and making contacts. I knew Mexicans who wanted to learn English and it worked. Although I never learned the method, it's the Laubach method. I mean to do it but it's a strenuous workshop. A person can learn to speak English in about a year. Anyway, it works. So I was intrigued by that.

I got involved and then started working with Volunteer Service back in 1973 and 1974 and I'm very much involved in it; I'm on the board of directors. Well, Gloria Pateto got this job in Parental Stress in 1974. She had an office and she had a little reception. Then they told her she had to have volunteers from the community. I didn't understand that because they only had that money and if she needed more help, why couldn't they fund

her? Well, there was no money. I said, "I'll be a volunteer. But for the sake of the record. I'm not going to change. I'm going to continue doing what I'm doing. And I'll just record all my visits, my work and that'll be part of your program." And that's how we're doing it. I'm in the Parental Stress but I'm doing my thing and I turn it over every three months, she knows the people I talk to . . . I really put out a lot of hours on the telephone and visiting, and they come here.

Knaster: Now does Parental Stress work with Mexican-American families?

Arceneaux: Gloria does. In Watsonville she's the only salaried person, until just recently. Christina Valevia, under CETA, is working with her. And that's the only thing in town that is Spanish-speaking, the only agency that is geared to go into the home, or a where a woman can go into the office and talk about the problem. You have mental health, but that isn't fair, because nobody wants to go to mental health with their problems. And then you have the Family Services Agency, but there's no Mexicans in there. Then you have Planned Parenthood, but if you don't have a baby or you're not in trouble, why would you go to Planned Parenthood? So Gloria's the only one in this town that you can go to if you're a Mexican and have a problem and don't speak English. It could be a problem like your husband beat you, or you don't have food or money to pay your rent. It's really rough and she gives me some assignments when she has something that she needs to follow-up on, or she has to be at this meeting and then this person's waiting and I'll fill in.

Knaster: Do you think the needs of the Mexican-American community here are being met?

Arceneaux: No! But, then again, they claim, whoever 'they' are, that the more you give them, the less they go out and look for. I don't understand that. How can that be so? Like welfare people, there's a lot of people that are being given money. And instead of going out, working to get off welfare, they get into the rut of receiving their money. I wish I knew if that was so. It's hard for me to believe, because I've worked with people on welfare, and it's no picnic. It's a job just to fill out that monthly report and to keep track of their money . . . so scared that they might take it away. But then again, whose needs are being met? I don't know.

I haven't gotten any answers. You know, years ago, I used to think, "Well if education were fixed, so that kids could learn!" And we're watching something happening in the schools. The children have aides in the schools that speak Spanish. They come up and they help these little children who don't have help, who can't help themselves. They go on to the next grade and they have another aide. There's a tendency for that child not to be able to do things by himself. He's waiting for an aide to help him to get started. I don't know if this is true, but it is an observation. Then at Centro Familiad last Saturday they had dedication of the new building, little kids came in 2, 3, 4, 5 years old that didn't speak any English. I spoke Spanish to them. They looked at me and said, *"No quiero hablar Español."* And one of the things that the Centro is, because you taught them, you reinforced their Spanish, and their Mexican background, cultural things—food, dance, costumes, stories, and everything, so that they wouldn't lose it. Still, that school is taking it away from them. What's being taken away is rich, and what's being given is so phony, so superficial. You see a bunch of students walking around after school wearing black jeans and black jackets. I mean, where did that come from? Not from Mexico and not

from the University, where did they get this idea? Dressing like that and thinking that they haven't been born that way. Because they don't have something to fall back on. It's been taken away.

Knaster: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your own experiences, or about your work?

Arceneaux: My goodness. I've told you plenty of everything. I think I've said enough. It's quite an experience to be putting it down on tape . . . wondering what I've said and what I should have said; but I think it's healthy not to know what I said. It came out the way I was feeling.

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Randall Jarrell, who edited this volume, was born in Los Angeles and lived in the San Francisco Bay Area until moving to Santa Cruz in 1970. She received her A.B. in History from San Francisco State University in 1969; an M.A. in History from the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1978; and an M.A. in Clinical Psychology from the University of San Francisco in 1987. She worked as a journalist before her appointment in 1974 as director of the Regional History Project.

Meri Knaster, who conducted the interview(s) with Arceneaux in 1977, worked as an interviewer for the Agricultural History Project oral history series for the Regional History Project. She is also the author of *Women in Spanish America: an Annotated Bibliography from Pre-conquest to Contemporary Times* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1977).

Irene Reti, who edited and coordinated the publication of this volume, was born in Los Angeles and moved to Santa Cruz in 1978. She received her B.A. in Environmental Studies from UCSC in 1982, and has worked for the Regional History Project since 1989. She is currently a graduate student in the doctoral program in history at UC Santa Cruz.

Doris Johnson, who transcribed this volume in the late 1970s, was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, and moved to the Santa Cruz area in 1965. She worked for the Regional History Project from 1967 until 1989.