Voices From the Past

Mexicans and Spanish Speaking in the Upper Snake River Valley

By Phillip Madrigal

March 3, 1982

Tape #4A

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Devon Robb     October 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho
HF: Side one of tape two. Mexican Americans and Spanish speaking among us here in the Upper Snake River Valley. This tape contains brief interviews with persons of Latin American background, who have chosen to live here in the Upper Snake River Valley.

HF: On this 3rd day of March 1982, here at the Madison County Courthouse rather early in the morning and on a rather wintry day I am going to visit with Philip Madrigal and interview him concerning the matter in question. Phillip how do you spell your first and last name?


HF: Now you say, P-H-A-I-L?

PM: P-H-I-L-I-P.

HF: Oh, okay. P-H-I-L-I-P.

PM: Yeah.

HF: So it’s pronounced Philip?

PM: Yes, but I spell it in English but it’s pronounced different in Spanish.

HF: Right. How would it be pronounced in Spanish?

PM: I don’t know (laughs) that’s why I don’t…

HF: Philip, you were born here in Madison County?

PM: Yes.

HF: On what date?

PM: May the 15th 1927, out in Burton.

HF: In the Burton community.

PM: In the Burton community, yes.

HF: And your mother – your father’s name was?

PM: Lucas Madrigal.

HF: How do you spell Lucas?

PM: L-U-C-A-S.
HF: Ok, it’s kind of Anglicized too.

PM: Um-Huh.

HF: And your mother’s name?

PM: Was Rosie.

HF: Was Rosie and where had they come from?

PM: They came from Old Mexico but I don’t know what town they come from for sure.

HF: They were Mexicans.

PM: Yes.

HF: They had papers to be here.

PM: Yes.

HF: But they were not citizens.

PM: No, they were not citizens.

HF: And can you give me the approximate time that they came here to the Valley?

PM: Well I don’t know for sure, but it must have been about – and I’m 55 and he was here before about five years more.

HF: You were born in ’27 there.

PM: Yes.

HF: And you think they could have been here two or three years before that.

PM: Oh yes.

HF: Now, do you know why they moved here to the Upper Snake River Valley?

PM: Well just, there was no work around anywhere else and Dad used to work in the railroad and then he gave that up.

HF: Had he worked in Pocatello before?

PM: Yes. He worked in Pocatello.
HF: And had the family lived there for a little bit?

PM: No, no. Just him, himself.

HF: Oh, I see.

PM: He met mother here in Rexburg somewhere. That’s what she used to tell me.

HF: I see. But she was also from Mexico?

PM: Yes. She came down here at Burton and she had a husband, you know, and her husband died and then dad met her and then they got married.

HF: I see. Did she have any children?

PM: She had one.

HF: And what was her name?

PM: Juanita.

HF: Juanita. And do you remember what her name was? Juanita?

PM: Juanita Cortez.

HF: Cortez. C-O-R-T-E-Z.

PM: Yeah.

HF: I see, but through her marriage with Mr. Lucas Madrigal, she had two children, yourself…

PM: And my sister Dolores.

HF: And your sister Dolores. Now your parents are both deceased.

PM: Yes.

HF: Did they both die in this area?

PM: Yes both. Dad died here in Madison Hospital and mother died in California.

HF: But she had remained a resident all these years?

PM: Oh yes, she would come home during the summer and then in the winter she would go back because she couldn’t take the cold climate anymore.
HF: Did she go back to California and stay with a daughter or something?

PM: Yes with Juanita.

HF: Juanita, I see. Now what type of employment did your father have?

PM: When he hit this country here, he got a job with Conard Waltz, a farmer out there in Burton. And this gentleman was a Bishop out there for 25 years. So, you know dad was there over 25 years with him. He would do farm labor and take care of the ranch for him and work on the ranch and had a dry farm up here on the bench and he’d come up in the summer and work on the dry farm in the bench and then in the winter time and in the fall he would come back in the valley and work with the cattle.

HF: He worked a lot with the cattle?

PM: Yes.

HF: But he continued to live right here in the valley.

PM: Yes. They made us live at home there.

HF: The Waltzes did.

PM: Yeah, about a quarter of a mile from their big home and we lived there until they both passed away.

HF: Describe that home. Was it two or three rooms?

PM: Two rooms, kitchen and a bedroom and then later on dad made a little log cabin for us kids and we lived in that little log cabin till the flood hit.

HF: I see.

PM: Since we moved into town after that – mother and dad passed away. But I lived out on the farm then and then I farmed a place myself.

HF: Now did your father ever acquire land?

PM: No, no he never did.

HF: He just rented from the Waltzes.

PM: And then after we rented from the Waltzes then they sold the place and they said me and my mother could live there as long as she was alive you know.

HF: And who bought the place after?
PM: Rex Waltz.

HF: Rex Waltz.

PM: Yes, that was Herman Waltz’s son and Herman Waltz was Conard Waltz’s boy, son.

HF: So it was the grandson who, Rex, who allowed you to stay there. Did you work for him?

PM: No, no.

HF: Who did you work for?

PM: I leased H. Lester Petersons’ place. That’s jointed next to the Waltz’s place there.

HF: I see.

PM: And I run that about 14 years.

HF: And you leased that.

PM: Yes.

HF: What did you grow on that?

PM: Used to grow beats, potatoes, hay, and grain.

HF: Did you lease equipment from some of the farmers in the area?

PM: No, when Dad took Waltz place, he bought the equipment.

HF: Your father had some equipment.

PM: Yes, when he passed away we had all the equipment.

HF: And that was – first I guess it was horse drawn.

PM: Oh yes, horse drawn I remember that, horse drawn yes.

HF: Then afterwards maybe a tractor.

PM: Tractor yes, smaller tractor. And I can remember those horses and he’d tell me to go and harness them and I couldn’t put the harness on and he know I couldn’t. You tell people about that and tell them about horse days, they couldn’t believe it.

HF: Now did you ever attend church down in Burton?
PM: I used to go to Primary when I was a kid, yes.

HF: But you people were not Mormons were you?

PM: No, no. They tried to convert us but we never did. I’m Catholic and that’s what my dad said, “We’re Catholics and we’ll stay that way.”

HF: Did you ever come to Rexburg to attend the Catholic mass?

PM: A couple of times.

HF: I see.

PM: Mother wanted to come all the time but we never did and, nahn, we were too busy it seemed like. Seemed like…

HF: Did your dad have pretty good health?

PM: Yes, yes. He had awful good health. He was never sick, well mother too until recently, you know, until she got older.

HF: How old was she when she died?

PM: She was 85.

HF: Do you recall how old your dad was?

PM: He was 65.

HF: Oh, so your mother was a widow a long time.

PM: Yes.

HF: Well now, so you farmed up until, what about 1975?

PM: Yes.

HF: And then you got a job here as a Janitor here in the Madison County Court House.

PM: Yes.

HF: And you’ve been an employee of Madison County since that time.

PM: Yes, I have.
HF: And Dolores I know has worked for the banks, some of the banks as a secretary?

PM: A clerk.

HF: As a clerk.

PM: I mean a teller.

HF: As a teller. Did both of you go into High School?

PM: Yes, she graduated but I didn’t graduate. I went two years and then I went to the Army. I got drafted.

HF: I see. So you went to High School?

PM: Yes.

HF: Do you recall in those years when you were in public school Phillip how you were treated?

PM: Well we wasn’t treated like the rest of the people. They would kind of shy away from us. They were always calling us names, you know how it is.

HF: What kind of names?

PM: Oh, you Mexicans and all that junk.

HF: I see.

PM: If that’s just mean or not I don’t know. This is the bigger kids, you know, that were always picking on us.

HF: You got into a few fight over this.

PM: No, well they were too big (laughing) and they knew it, and they knew it and that’s why you had to take it but other than that, after start growing up and the times changed then people started changing too.

HF: Did you know any other families?

PM: Well we used to know the Melendez but just by name.

HF: This is M-E-L-E-N-D-E-Z probably.

PM: Yes.

HF: Melendez. What that the Lewis?
PM: Lewis, yeah, that’s the dad’s name and then the oldest son Lewis, he was named Lewis too, he was a president of Madison High School at one time.

HF: Was he about your age?

PM: I think he was a little older. I think he was two years ahead of me or something like that.

HF: Oh, was he?

PM: Or maybe no, he was out of High School when I went so he must be older.

HF: I see.

PM: Because I remember my sister, Juanita, tell me that he was the president and then from there on we never associated with them you know.

HF: They lived here in Rexburg.

PM: Yeah, they lived in town as long as I can remember and they all went to school here.

HF: Some of them have joined the church, the Mormon Church.

PM: I think they have so I don’t remember how many there were but I know that there was a few of them.

HF: That joined the Mormon Church?

PM: Yes, in the family too, I don’t know.

HF: But you really didn’t have too much contact with them.

PM: No, no.

HF: Was there anyone else out in the Burton area that were of Mexican descent?

PM: Well and then later on my uncle, that was on my dad’s side, they were, well I would call him uncle because my dad and his dad were brothers and I just called him uncle, you know, because we’ve related way back. And he was a bachelor for years and years.

HF: Did he live out there?

PM: No he lived in Independence.

HF: In Independence. Had he come up about the same time as your dad?
PM: I think so but I never did know where he was until we grew up, you know.

HF: And what was his name?

PM: Ike.

HF: Ike.

PM: Madrigal.

HF: Madrigal, I see. And he never married?

PM: Yes, he married a woman here from Rexburg and they had a girl and she went to High School and she got married. He died about five years ago I guess.

HF: Ike Madrigal did. What was the girl’s name?

PM: Cookie, Cookie Madrigal.

HF: I see. And she went to High School with you?

PM: Yeah, she went to High School and graduated.

HF: Does she live around here now?

PM: No, I think she lives in Anthony now. They moved.

HF: And who did she marry?

PM: I don’t know what his name is.

HF: Probably married a Mexican?

PM: No, no.

HF: A white.

PM: Yes.

HF: Anglo. I see. Now is her mother living or…?

PM: Yes, I think she lives up in Montana somewhere. She’s around her 80’s and they put her in a rest home, I heard.

HF: Now do you know of any other early families in the area?
PM: Well then there’s another one named Madrigal but they wasn’t related to us at all and I was a baby. I don’t know what year it was, you know, but I was a baby. You were baptized when you were about a year old, something like that, or six months. Well he baptized me and they lived out there in Independence too and his name was Pete Madrigal but we wasn’t related but I don’t know where they come from, I know they must come from Mexico but I don’t know what part.

HF: I see.

PM: And then that’s the only people we ever visit because, you know, every Sunday we would go over to their place or then next time they would come over to our home after I grew up, you know, as I can remember, you know. And then later on in the years they moved to California, he used to work for a farmer out there but I don’t know who it was, who he worked for. And that’s about the only ones that I know.

HF: Did the farmers in the Burton area always treat you pretty good?

PM: Yes.

HF: They would allow you to work and you were employed.

PM: Yes, and went to the school with the kids.

HF: Went to school. You got along pretty good with the people out there. Well… The Nef family.

PM: Yes they are right there across the road from us. (Inaudible) Nef and Albert Nef and then everybody from there on, we raised up their kids and treated them us just like their own but just other people when you come into town you know, different schools, they were the ones that give you more trouble than the people you were raised with because you know.

HF: Now in your homes you grew up Phillip, was the Spanish language used all the time?

PM: Yes, because mother couldn’t speak English. She could speak a few words, she said she could understand it but she couldn’t speak it. And we always spoke Spanish at home, all the time. Never did use English.

HF: I see, but of course in the schools you used English.

PM: Yes, all the time.

HF: Have you enjoyed, do you feel that have appreciated living in the Madison County area?

PM: Yes. I wouldn’t trade it for nothing.

HF: This is your home.
PM: Yes.

HF: This is what you’ve known.

PM: Yes. Like I said, when I went to the army – when I come home I gotta tell you as soon as you hit Pocatello you know you was home. There was a feeling there you can’t explain it. Especially, when you come right with your home, even though you had a two to a room house but it was your home.

HF: Now you didn’t marry?

PM: Yes.

HF: Well just…

PM: Oh, how long? Oh since the flood.

HF: You’ve been married since the flood. But you were single up until that time.

PM: Yes.

HF: And you married an Anglo lady?

PM: Yes.

HF: Now, of course, you have no children…

PM: No, no.

HF: From your marriage. I would like to comment here that Mr. Madrigal has always been very helpful to us here in the Magistrate Court and to the Sheriff’s Office as well as the Rexburg Police Department in serving as an interpreter. We have a lot of Mexican nationals that come up in this area, some with papers, some not with papers, illegal or legals. And, the occasion of course is that they have been cited for some type of a traffic offenses, the usual situation and they come into court and Phillip, if we need an interpreter, is willing to come in and interpret from the Spanish into English so we as the officers and judges can understand what’s going on and then he can take the English and convey it to, in Spanish, to the individual who has been cited. And through this means we can communicate and the business matter can be taken care of. Phillip can tell them, in case of a plea of guilty, how much money and so forth. You know it’s an interesting thing, the Spanish speaking people, they’re usually quite humble when they come into court. They, rarely do they plead not guilty. Have you noticed that Phillip?

PM: Yes.

HF: It’s usually a plea of guilty and they agree to take care of their obligation and they usually do.
PM: Yes they do.

HF: They come back. They might have a little time on it but they usually come up with that money and they have demonstrated honesty and integrity and down through the years has it been your observation that the Spanish speaking people, the Mexican Americans, have been pretty law abiding?

PM: Yes. They have, as far as I know, yes.

HF: Fire water is a problem though for a lot of them.

PM: Yes.

HF: Drinking isn’t it? It’s a problem for them. It seems to be one of their weaknesses.

PM: Yes.

HF: Now, things are a lot different now than they were thirty years ago.

PM: Oh yes, I should say.

HF: Rarely did you see Mexicans then.

PM: No.

HF: But now they are everywhere.

PM: Everywhere. You walk down Main Street and the only ones you’d see was the Madrigals. Nobody else. (laughing)

HF: That was the only family up here.

PM: Yup, but we went to the Falls, you could see one or two, not many.

HF: A few up in St. Anthony.

PM: No, not a one in St. Anthony.

HF: No one up there in St. Anthony.

PM: No. No, they didn’t like them up there and that’s why nobody come up I guess and eventually they start coming up and now there’s more up there than there is in Rexburg, St. Anthony.
HF: Yeah, I don’t know how many Spanish speaking families or... Well, let’s see, let’s run off some names that you can think of that are in the area, Spanish names. Do you know Pacheco’s? Do you know the Pacheco family?

PM: Yes.

HF: The Chavez family?

PM: No.

HF: Sanchez?

PM: No.

HF: The Vella family?

PM: No.

HF: No, don’t you.

PM: No, I don’t know none of them but I know them by face and see them by face, but I don’t know the names you know.

HF: Oh, I see.

PM: And I don’t speak to them unless they speak to me and the only time I ever speak is when they’re in getting their drivers license or here in the court house. They say, “Hi Phil,” and I say “Hi” but that’s as far as – I never associated with them.

HF: Well Phillip I appreciate your comments. Anything else you would like to say?

PM: Well that’s about it too you know.

HF: You like the country?

PM: Yes.

HF: You like the people?

PM: Yes, you bet.

HF: And this is your home?

PM: Yes and I like my job.

HF: Well thank you Phillip.
PM: You bet.

HF: I appreciate that.

PM: You bet, thank you.

HF: Mr. Madrigal commented about the Lewis Melendez, M-E-L-E-N-D-E-Z family, that was here in the Rexburg area and this family had several boys and girls who grew up, apparently attended the public schools. I’m assuming that the children at least were citizens and Lewis Jr. was very active in sports, in football, and track, etc. And it 1944 here in Madison High School was the student body president, suggesting that the Melendez family were a very honored and respected family, very active. The court understands, or the interviewee, interviewer, Harold Forbush understands having chatted with Mrs. Chapman, Verla Chapman, and also the former Superintendent Mr. Stucki, that these people and this family was a very excellent family [talks to another person, “I will be right with you.” “Ok.”] and we are anxious to see that the young people became educated and that they perform well and this they did.

[Tape stopped]