

Oral History Interview with Sabino Sardineta
Washing County Museum
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S= Sabino Sardineta
O= Michael O'Rourke

O: Sabino, I thought we would start out talking today about your very first travels to Oregon which I guess occurred in 1960 when you came to Mt. Angel. You want to tell me how you happened to come to Oregon? What were your circumstances when you came?

S: Sure. When I finished my high school I had an opportunity to, for a scholarship that I earned while I was one of the first [?? 01:55:0] to come to the States. Now in Mexico I had studied languages, classical languages like Greek and Latin. So my first thought was to travel to another country, to the States. It wouldn't be very difficult. I never thought that English would be so difficult. I didn't think that English would have a major impact in my life. But, actually it was. I came to Mt. Angel in 1960, in the fall. That's when I started my college. Actually, I came by car. A priest by the name of, last name is Clemons. Right now the name escapes from my mind. He drove the car to Mt. Angel because he knew the way and he was from Montana. That's how we arrived. It was very long, difficult travel.

O: This is from Cuanavaca?

S: This is from Cuanavaca. Yes, a long car journey. But anyway, the struggle of the language and the studies were the very first cultural shocks that I received with the language. Needless to say, even the food... I was accustomed to eating tortillas, we had bread and so forth... So all those experiences of something completely new were fairly shocking. Perhaps the most shocking experience was that there was nobody to talk to in my own language. There were no [?? 04:14] I was the only one who spoke Spanish and at that time nobody even had a dream of learning Spanish. At that time to learn German, learn Russian, to learn French... that was the "in" thing to do. Spanish was something like a poor language. At school they would not teach it. So I had to struggle a lot. I remember having a classmate who (his last name was Donovan Skalinski). He was a very fine man. At that time, I thought he was just huge, a giant man. When I would walk with him in evenings, he could easily rest his arm on my shoulder cause I was just a tiny little thing compared to him. He was huge. But he was the very first one who would sign language. He was able to teach me a few words. The very first word I remember he talk me was "moon" and the second word I learned was "crickets". We would walk in the evenings around here and over here and crickets were, you know, you could hear them. This is how we became good friends, you know. He was my interpreter in sign language. Pointing to things

O: So non-verbal communication?

S: Non-verbal communication, yes! That cultural shock that we talk about today was something I experienced very clearly. When you come in and get immersed into another culture,

everything, everything, customs, way of doing things, looking at things. Your mind, which is another world, you don't even know where to start because everything seems to be so advanced to a point of "Where do you start? How do you start?" This is something that now, as I reflect back, it's When you talk about acculturation, when you talk about being bi-cultural I have my doubts and my concerns, because even though I have lived in this culture for so many years, I don't ... I still feel stranger to the culture. It is something where speaking the language is not everything. The language has a great value behind it, but to be like the other person it's impossible. That experience is still there. I like to be keeping your own culture, sharing other's culture, but you cannot become the other culture. That's something that I have experienced, you never change your inner self into something else. I feel very comfortable with people who speak Spanish. I identify with them real well. I get along and I also function very well you know with people who don't speak the language in another setup. But still, you feel different. And I'm saying this [9:12.8] because this what is happening today to understand and to be able to work with a community, with the Hispanic community here inside the Cotral [?? 9:23.6]

O: Because you understand what they are going through?

S: Because I have experienced that. I graduated in 1964 and there was one priest from Mt. Angel who spoke Spanish. He went to Spain and learned Spanish and so I would go with him to visit Spanish families in the Mt. Angel area. That's how I became acquainted with families that ... the very first time I met migrants in those years, in 1963, '62, and they did not settle in Mt. Angel, for instance, they were two families. I think they were the Garcia families. But it is interesting that just a couple of years ago I met this lady at the Chancellery office in the Diocese of Portland and in talking to her, she happened to be the secretary at the Hispanic ministry. She was a daughter of the people I met back in 1964 at Mt. Angel. I was very excited to hear about the success of this family, because there were about 9 children of this family. And it was the very first one that I met that settled in Mt. Angel. Between 1963 or 1964 and '68, there were just a handful of families that settled around Mt. Angel and Woodburn. In 1967 I believe, Between 1964 and 1968 I worked for the Archdiocese of Portland and my job was to visit the migrant camps in the Willamete Valley. I traveled around visiting the camps. In a way setting up centers of Christian doctrine, of catechism .. So I traveled all the way from Stayton to Albany to McMinnville, Portersville, Hillsboro and back to Woodburn. My center of operation was Mt. Angel and Woodburn. It was in those years when I visited the camps there was real migration. People came from Texas, from different parts of the Southern states and they came and they continued their journey to Washington, Idaho and they went back. Some back to Mexico, so back to Texas.

O: But no one stayed here?

S: But no, they really didn't. In those years I met only 5 or 6 families that settled in Woodburn and Mt. Angel. The very first community and the oldest that settled was I know of was Woodburn. I made some real good friends in Woodburn. That was the very first community I encountered. It was that community that the Jesuit priests ... actually my first contact with the Jesuits was with Jesuit High School here in Beaverton. It was through them that we, a priest who has now passed away a couple of years ago. Frant Duffy. He's the one who used to teach history, and who loved ... But he was with me and I would talk to him, and we would travel and we would go to different places. He would celebrate mass. He wanted to learn Spanish. We would talk in Spanish, and he would learn some Spanish, and he would learn how to read the Eucharistic prayers and stuff like that. He would just recite them. That's how the celebrations took place in different areas. We traveled a lot. But the first community was in Woodburn. It was a very small community. Of course, I cannot say I counted every time.

Certainly it was perhaps 15, 20 families scattered around there, in town, that settled . I stayed at McMinnville one summer, and that's when I met many other families that were still in the migrant stream but they were looking for ways to settle here. That's when I met most I should say that in the meantime, the Garcia movement [? 16:15.9] was very strong. The Garcia movement in the Catholic church was a movement that attracted the men to be more interested in the faith, and to live the faith to the full extent of commitment. That movement was a transplant from Texas. The Garcia movement was very strong in this area and it was very strong in Woodburn, and we know that we had some Garcia movement and retreats for a weekend in McMinnville. I participated in one too, because if you were not a Garciasita you didn't know what you were talking about. That was kind of the idea. If you talk to a Garciasista you actually ... they say " No, you don't understand, you don't even know where I'm coming from or where I'm going. If you are not a Garciasista, you better become a Garciasista. So I did that to avoid this kind of thing. I also worked at the Gorcio [? 17:40.2] . But that is something that brought the people together, that was something that really kept the communities as a community. There was nothing else, no cultural agencies that served the community except the Catholic Church, in visiting the camps.... There may have been other churches too, but I really wasn't aware, but I know I met several people in different areas in particularly I remember meeting a lady just a precious lady that lived in Hillsboro who was very passionate in going to the camps, and it was through her I visited most of the camps in Washington County .

O: What were the camps like at that time?

S: The camps at that time were almost like the camp the Campazul [? 18:47.0] camps it is today. It was like Campazul. And Campazul, it has improved a lot, but Campazul about 4 years ago was what the rest of the camps were back in 1960's or between 1965 and 1970. There was, if I remember, most of the camps had a common faucet, where you would come and take you water to your cabinet. The camps were exactly like the ones you see at Campazul where children and the parents would live in just one little room. Common bathrooms and It was not all that healthy. There were some where some of the growers kept their camps nice and clean, but it was a hard life. In my travels, I remember encountering groups of migrant families from one town in Texas. In most of the people I encountered in the '70s were people from Texas, from Edinborough especially. I remember one particular camp in Monitor that everybody came from Edinborough. They traveled together.

O: Sort of a traveling community ?

S: Yes, it was interesting. Of course ... to me, I was not even aware that people from Mexico were coming over here. The people I encountered in those days were from Texas. And some from California, But most of the people I encountered were from Texas. And now that I have met professional s like Hazma Comboya [? 21:29.8], who specialized in oral history and the history of the Hispanic community in the Northwest I understand that this were the years the Brocero movement stoped in 63, 64 and Mexican Americans had to take over the picking of the crops. I'm aware of the reason and it makes sense. This is the people I met and I remember the camps in Forest Grove. I used to travel from McMinnville and the camps from Forest Grove, and there is where I met the people who are today from Texas or on the borderline between Texas and Mexico, from Monterey. They are the ones who founded Centro. At the time, there was no dream of that. Most of the people, in fact I know all of the founders, I met in the camps that were very active in civic groups with the idea of keeping together the family, to network and to share what they had. It was a fun time, really. They did it for fun. They were very active,

they belonged to clubs. They got together. These people had a real, lively, hopeful something.

O: And you are still talking about this period in the late sixties?

S: Yes, late sixties and to seventy. Because I left Oregon in 1970, and I did not come back until 1980.

O: Didn't you also leave for a couple of years before your bachelors degree at Mt. Angel.

S: Yes, 1964 and 65. There was a practice in the diocese of Coravaca that anyone who finished there philosophy, their bachelors then you have to serve, do social work for one year before you continue, because that's when that took place.

O: So you went back to Mexico for that year?

S: Yes.

O: You did your high school at the Diocese of Cordavaca?

S: Oh, yeah. Before I came to Mt. Angel in 1960, yes.

O: Was the motivation for your entering the Catholic Church at that age was it to get an education? Or were there other reasons as well?

S: Well, in those years, if I go back to how it happened, it was just the circumstances. The roots,... it is more than just what happened, you know. There is history behind: my parents, my father was a very strict, kind of a right wing Catholic. In those years, back in the '50s, the Catholic Church was very strict in teaching that Communism was bad, and there was a question of education, there was such a thing as Christian education. Therefore, my father in the line of thinking of the Christero [? 26:59.7] movement, (the Christeros were radical, traditional Catholics), he would not even allow me to work at public schools. My grandmother was the one who actually taught me to read and write because she was a product of the revolution. Actually I never met my grandparents because they were in the revolution. My grandmother on my mother's side, she actually was a revolutionary. She moved around Mexico with the soldiers. With this background, do you understand that because my parents were so firm believers in what the church said, even public education was bad. So I, in not being able to get education in public schools, because in his mind the only good education was private education and education that was provided by either nuns, or priests. At that time, we had parochial schools, like here. So, of course, that came to an end and soon, because it was very difficult for the church to support a school. What emerge after the parishes could not handle, not provide support for the schools was a private school of the nuns or the religious orders founded but they became very exclusive types of schools. But in my time, back in the fifties, the private school I went to was called the Minerba [? 29:18.4] school. My father talked to the priest and his sister to assure him that there was no Communism, that the faith was being taught there. So that is why I entered this private school. That is where I finished. I had professors from other places say "Why don't you continue your education? It looks like you have some good material for the church. What a better way than being a priest. It all comes together with this teaching and recruiting people for the church and community. I love that, this education. So that's how I got further into this field of the church. Is that what you were kind of looking for?

O: Yeah. You mentioned your revolutionary grandmother. Was that on your father's side?

S: No, my mother's side. They ... actually my parents were born in a tiny little village in the east of the state of Morelos and the name of the town is Attichipeeko [? 31:23.3]. That little town was founded ... the family that founded that town were stranded from the revolution and my grandmother on my mothers side (her name was Philamatina (?)) I loved to hear stories from her and how they'd enter the towns and they really [end of tape 32:52].... My uncles, about nine, and they are from different husbands. She settled in this little town and she had lots of land. But, of course, the land which was the cause of the revolution, has always been The revolutions in Mexico have been connected with agriculture. The type of setup of land is you had to walk to where the fields were, which were one or two hours away so you travel back and forth every day. This is the kind of setup we had and this is how we lived. I lived there for a very short time. But my parents, or my grandmother on my father's side, she was a revolutionary, but she had to hide from the revolutionaries. It was interesting to note that several times she had to save the whole family by having everyone on the floor, and telling the government "I have all these children who are sick". There was a time, she said, they actually set the house on fire.

O: Government soldiers or the revolutionaries?

S: Well, during the revolution, each one claims a territory. The government comes and says "You are a Sabitista." So then they burn your house. If the revolutionaries come, they say "You are a government supporter." So they burn your house. Its one of those things that no matter what you say, it's wrong. So this is the kind of thing I heard from my father's mother.

O: So presumably it would be the Sabitista soldiers that would burn your house?

S: God knows. I have not really.... All I know is that it makes sense. And there you are in the middle, and there is nothing you can really defend yourself with. That's how they were able to survive, by hiding in the mountains, in caves, until the revolution was over. So, my story starts right from that experience. So it makes sense that my father was very much taken with what the church taught at the time, because he was actually educated by the church. The first readings you did, ... the education was actually provided by the church. So that's why today I see the institutional church as a very strong potential of changing the lives of people. In those years, back in 1950's the church played a very important role. The preachers were actually social workers. They were the cause of change in social thinking. Of course, I can't say that we can very well say that today. The church today doesn't have the same ... justice and peace...whoops ... I think that's an earthquake.

O: Is it time to go outside?

S: Well it's five to 11. [38:51.]

O: It's still shaking.

S: I think it's stopped. That was like a train. It's still doing it.

O: Well, we are capturing an earthquake on tape.

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[40:40]

O: Did your father have any problem with your mother's mother's revolutionary past?

S: No. Actually I don't have any remembrance of a bad experience as far as my father or my family in opposite ways of thinking because he had to really work hard to provide a living for us. The times were very hard. He was a farmer. As a family we helped each other. I remember that you were raising something beans, squash, pumpkins and yours were not ready yet, you come over to your neighbor and you get something to eat and that kind of thing. No, no, it was actually a very nice family relationship. But when I say right-wing it is not really like today we think about right-wing. More in the sense of a very traditional minded and completely opposed to any changes that even today would not even,... now that communism ... we lived with that word ... communism ... today that we didn't twenty years ago. This fear of communism. And I guess that was what was in the mind of my father, cause I don't even really know what he meant when he said "communism" . But that was something that the church taught, it was very common in the teachings. Education was the heart of it. If you were not allowed to talk about God in schools, then that was communism. And therefore you should not go because that is wrong. That was the kind of thinking in those days. Because the church was basically the teacher. Parochial schools, that was something the church covered as their mission to teach all of us how to read, how to write, the very basics. This is just how I remember from my experience. But there are some things you hardly reflect out loud with the family because everybody is so worried about tomorrow that to sit down and reflect about yesterday is not something you think about. You talk about stories about yesterday but to pass the time before you go to bed or on weekends. I wish people would really reflect on all the world's histories, reflect on the past because those things bring understanding as to why today we are where we are. When I reflect a little bit about that history that story in my past, I appreciate and say "Well, gosh, no wonder I love the soul.", for instance. Because I do. I love the puns. But there is a tradition. My father was in love with the fields. When we had problems with our family, my relatives tried to take over my father's land, instead of fighting back, my father said, "Let's go from this town." And that's how we left that town and moved to the city, cause relatives (I think they were on my grandmothers side, my fathers side) that tried to kill him to take the land. So my father said, "Enough. Let's go." So we left and that's how we started in the city. Not in Guanalaka (?), but the town Qualquala (?), which is the second largest city in Moralos. That was the experience of people, the family coming from my farmer tradition. From a small group of families in a village, coming to an urban set-up. That was also a problem: adjusting. And even finding work. I mean all those things my father used to leave the house and not come back for day's and days cause he was looking for work, and the work he found was in the fields. That's was he wanted, that was the only thing he knew how to do well. So he would do work, then come back to the city where we were living. And we moved around the city, until we arrived to Guanavaka . When we arrived in Guanavaka, because my father started, moved from the fields to selling fruits and vegetables. Starting this business is how we came to Guanavaka. I was very young. I must have been around four years old. But I barely remember. That's how we ended up in Guanavaka. In the meantime, my father was very sick at one time. My grandmother had to do some work. She always loved to sell things, fruits and vegetables. That's how we were raised. From then on Guanavaka was were we stayed and now we have a couple of lots of land, our home and so on. Following the economic trend how to make a living. Moving from place to place until we settled.

O: Getting back to what we were talking about: your work with the Diocese and working in the camps: I had just raise the subject of the founders of Centro. And I have here a note a newspaper interview you gave a few years back that in 1968 there were about 15 families that

came up with the idea for Centro, but it didn't actually happen for several years later that it got started. 1972?

S: 1972.

O: Can you tell me a little bit about the original families that had this vision.

S: I think I already said something about meeting the families in their farmer camps. And that I talked about the Garcia movement. And that Garcia brought the people together. It was in the context of this religious meetings that people knew each other, that they shared. Again, the church was a place, that provided a space for people to really share. Of course, the Garcia movement was very strong and brought families together. The founders of Centro were also part of that movement. Either the Garcia movement or with a social idea belonging to a club. The sense of belonging was very strong. The very first thing that people paid mind, was to serve in the church. The families that founded Centro, with a couple of exceptions, all of them were very involved with the Catholic Church. And the very first thing they were called was "Let's have a celebration, have a mass, people can bring food and then share, have some music. We want to keep today." That has always been part of the culture, part of getting together. Remember that I mentioned my contact with the Jesuit priests, especially from the Jesuit High School, Daffey, that was an introduction to was later became a commitment on the part of the Jesuits to work with the Hispanic community. I remember the first year, it must have been about 1969 that the Jesuits took over St. Luke's Catholic Church in Woodburn became a Jesuit parish. I'm not exactly the year, but it's around there the the Jesuits took over. There's where I met and I worked with Cardinal Peezer [?]. Cardinal Peezer was, he came to pastor, or if he wasn't pastor, he was certainly very active because he spoke Spanish. And it was a time when I left Oregon. I left Oregon in 1970. But he became a pastor of St. Alexander's church. Now in the meantime, all these people I have talked about in the camps, coming together in meetings with around the church, they were the ones who grouped around Father Peezer here in St. Alexander's. They helped with the Luka fiesta, the fiestas, and raising money for this. The great thing about Father Peezer is he had a vision and he said "What you should do is put your energy now not so much in the church but do something for your own community. He's the one who had the dream of a cultural center. Father Peezer went to Gaunavaka to visit me and we talked about the cultural center. I didn't quite believe that he was going to do it. I was very surprised and my respect for him became very strong when I came back in 1980, and I knew about the center the families had founded. It was the initiative of Arno [? 0:56:59] gave to this group of families that they started from that very, very basic steps to organize. It was a natural organization, they were always together, they were compadres. They knew each other, even the work was common. They knew about the workers, so they shared this idea. That is why I understand now why in the very first documents I read about Centro, the founders have two things in mind. One was to have a place where people could gather to share their concerns. The second was to find opportunities. And the third was to celebrate. They never had in mind feeding people. They never thought about, "Gosh, we've got to have a place so we could distribute heaters during the winter." But "Where are the opportunities? Where are we going to get ahead in life." It is interesting that even in those, back in those years, churches, not only the Catholic Church, but other churches, became very involved and interested in helping this young presence of a, Hispanic presence in this area. I'm talking here in Forest Grove and Hillsboro. They were the vehicle through which the first families that settled here received help from the church not only with the rent, paying for the rent, but also with refrigerators, with whatever they needed. The church adopted families and that's how they helped them to get off the ground, to find work, too. It was the churches, especially the Episcopal church, I think it was a Lutheran church, but certainly the Episcopal church, that I know for a fact, that they helped to give them,

buy their homes. And they also found places where people could go to work. This is how we should understand that it was not just something that happened all of a sudden, that the founders like the families of Emilio Hernandez, like Travillo, Marguerito Travillo, families like in Gaston like, when the names escape me. They found work like in Tektronix. Emilio is a great example of years of service, he worked at Tektronix. It is also understandable how they in turn, in order to find opportunities, they in turn set up in 1973-74, the "ORMETEX" (Oregon, Mexico, Texas) Enterprise, was a piece work operation, and Tektronix provided the piecework. Centro, which was just a 2 story house, on the corner of Bare (?) and Eleventh, it was through this work they were able to make more money and be able to buy more land. Actually they bought 4 acres in Gaston. These families from the very beginning opened the doors, the churches opened the doors and this group of people were very active in selling food after the services in the friend churches. That's how they raised money. That is why from the very beginning food like tacos and enchiladas and cozollay [?] those were the things that brought in penny by penny, nickel by nickel, our collection so that they could start, they could buy the first lot here. With the help of the churches a lot, you know. It was a great community affair. It must have been ... today I think it's in a different type of activity, a different type of participation, but at that time it was hands on. Churches, businesses, people, it was interesting.

O: Father Peezer was in the middle of all this?

S: Father Peezer at that time, the Jesuit volunteers, the Jesuit Order had what they called the Jesuit volunteers, they were like brothers. They belonged to the Jesuits. Today the Jesuit volunteers are, it's another organization now based in Portland. It's a spin-off from the original Jesuit religious order. But at that time, they were the ones who were the coordinators and the real ... they were giving direction. So Father Peezer took advantage of the fact that the Jesuit volunteers were people well-trained with education to be able to come and help this young group look for money, to search for money with churches, with participating organizations, with foundations, they wrote grants, they brought a lot of money to buy that piece of land. That's how it all came about. But the families always stayed together and certainly Emilio and Margarita Travillo and another family that I should mention, the very first two families that I met in Hillsboro that Father Peezer in his celebration at mass, the two families were the Inajosa (?) family, where Mr. Inajosa passed away a couple of years ago, and Mrs. Inajosa is still living in Hillsboro. That was one of the very first timers that attended church back in 1966-67, around those years. And the other family that was very faithful to St. Matthew, and later on he became the Oregon Migrant Education director, Jose Garcia. [1:05:49 End of Tape]

O: So you were saying Jose Garcia?

S: Jose Garcia. That was one of the very first families. And I remember the Travino (?) family was another one. The Travino, the Inajosa, the Garcia, those were the very 3 faithful families that came to church. There were just a handful. Maybe 15 people, maybe 20 people at most that got together at church. But people were not settled yet. They were the very first families and I know them well from way back because it was in a conference church that the families came together.

O: A real example, I guess, of the power the people can have, even if just a small number of people if they have a good idea and work on it.

S: Yes, if they find support. So that's how I met ... talk about the families I met back at in those days, and I know all the families at Centro because of my collection at the camps. [1:07:11]