

**EI-828**

**MARIE ARANDA**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, Ph.D.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM**

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LEVINE: Today is November 25, 1996, and I am here with Marie Aranda at her home in Manhattan and Marie came from Mexico when she was nine years of age. At the time of this interview, Marie Aranda is 82 years of age, and Peter Hamm, who is the audio engineer is here with us, and we're really looking forward to whatever you can remember, Marie, because ah, you're the first person from Mexico that I've had the privilege of interviewing . So it'll be interesting from that perspective. Ah, if you would give your birthdate. Your birthdate.

ARANDA: October the 15<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

LEVINE: And where were you born in Mexico?

ARANDA: I was born in Mexico City.

LEVINE: And then where did you live up until the time you came to the United States?

ARANDA: I went from Mexico City, I had to go to Veracruz, because I was coming to the States.

LEVINE: Well, before that, where did you actually live? Up until you were nine years old?

ARANDA: Oh, I lived in Santa Lucia,

LEVINE: Where is that?

ARANDA: It was in the city. It was in the city. Cause after my father passed away, I must have been around four years old, and my mother decided to sell the house and to look for a place where it was, could be cheaper, and that's what she did. So she found this place and we moved there. And then her brother decided that he wanted to come to the States. So it was such a quick job, overnight she decided to leave, which I didn't know nothing about it until the following day. I was told that my mother had gone to the hospital. So time passed by and I said, when is my mother coming home from the hospital? Says, well, you might as well know that your mother's not here. She left to the United States with her brother and his wife and your cousin.

LEVINE: And how old were you then, Marie?

ARANDA: I was nine years old. Oh, at that time?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ARANDA: I was six. Six years old.

LEVINE: And you were living in Santa Lucia?

ARANDA: Yes. With some, with a neighbor that I made friends with and she decided she will keep me until my mother will send for me and that's the way it was. It was rough, because the lady was very nice. She was very Catholic, but she was rough because at times, you know, as a little girl I wanted to have time to play and everything so I didn't do the housework. She used to get angry, so finally she locked me up. (laughs)

LEVINE: Where did she lock you?

ARANDA: She locked me in the house so I won't go outside and play with the kids. So, then I decided well, she ain't going to do that to me. I'm gonna get my friend and I went up the roof. Had a little step ladder and I went up the roof of the house and I called my friends and they brought the ladder from the Super. (laughing) I came down and then, I was

having fun. But she come home, there was no cleaning done, no cooking, no nothing and I got a real spanking. And this went on and every time I did something bad, disobeyed her, well, that's what she would do. Don't take me nowhere, and don't give me no supper, no, so that was my punishment. So I said, well, someday I write to my mother, and I'm going to tell her she better send for me because I'm going to run away from this lady. I'm not going to stay here. Her husband was very nice, but ah, she was rough. She was tough old lady.

LEVINE: Do you remember her name?

ARANDA: Conception. Conchita.

LEVINE: And was Santa Lucia, was that in Mexico City?

ARANDA: It was , it was the house, it was like a big, big yard with different apartments. And that's how we lived in one of those apartments, and the next door neighbor was her. And they became friends.

LEVINE: Well, now I'm confused a little bit. Was Santa Lucia the name of a town?

ARANDA: No. No. It was the name of the house. Only I can't remember the number.

LEVINE: But where was the house? Was it in Mexico City?

ARANDA: The house was in Mexico City and my school was right around there. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So, were you an only child?

ARANDA: Yes. I was the only child. My mother was married at 36, or she had me at 36, I'm sorry.  
Yeah. And I was the only child.

LEVINE: I see. Did you go to school in Mexico?

ARANDA: Yes. I went to school after the second grade. Cause I was most of the time sick. I  
suffered from intestinal fever. So I used to get sick. Sometimes I'd miss my school.  
And in Mexico when you miss your school like that, after you missed a whole year. So I  
only had two years of school in Mexico.

LEVINE: What kind of treatment did you get for your intestinal...?

ARANDA: No. The doctor just used to give me little, tiny pills. And that would take care of it. But  
then, I came here with the same story. And also the doctor for my uncle, the family's  
doctor, they gave me some kind of medication and up to this day, I never suffer from it.  
Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember as a little girl in Mexico, where there any folk remedies? Did they, did people, instead of like a physician, were there other kinds of people who treated like with herbs or with any other kinds of...?

ARANDA: Yeah. But I never took anything. They never gave me nothing like that. Was just this doctor that gave me those pills and that took it away. And then I came here, you know, and that was it. No more.

LEVINE: So you were expected to do all the house work?

ARANDA: Yes. I had to do the cleaning of the house. You know, like making the beds, sweeping. And it was only one big room and the kitchen was outside. It was a small house, low rent, I guess. And , and I had to cook, what she told me to cook. But like I said, sometimes I play and I forget to do anything.

LEVINE: You say the kitchen was outside. Could you describe it?

ARANDA: Yeah. Like this was a big room, then you come out. Was like a little hallway, very small. And then the kitchen was right there. You had to make ah, with coal. That's another thing that I didn't know how to do. So I used to go to the other ladies in the other house and ask for the coal that was already, ah, burning so I put in a couple of pieces and I put some kind of a wood there, and that would bring up the fire. And then I can cook. But I had a very hard time. I couldn't. (laughs).

LEVINE: So what did you cook? What were the kinds of things that you cooked?

ARANDA: Well, it was like, you know, poor, but substantial. It was like cabbages with, chickpeas, potatoes, and carrots and a little white rice, with the beef, meat, pieces of meat. And that's, that was called caldo.

LEVINE: Caldo?

ARANDA: Caldo, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you know you to spell it?

ARANDA: C-A-L-D-O. And then, make a piece of meat. You couldn't eat steak. It was so expensive, you couldn't eat that. So maybe just a piece of meat, cheap, you know, or or, pig's feet. Pig's feet. We, I made that too, with tripe. Also with chickpeas and potato. And let me see what they called that. Um, I don't recall right now, but I know what you call it, what they called that. It was very, very nourishing.

LEVINE: What would you do?

ARANDA: Well, everything that you make in Mexico use a lot of stuff like all the vegetables. All kinds of vegetables. And ah, like the flowers from the, from the ah, pumpkin. You

know, it gives those big, big flowers. Well, you use that to make like patty cakes. You mash them with mashed potatoes, and put a little piece of cheese inside and then you fried them in oil. See? And like I said, a lot of vegetables. And rice and beans and tortillas. I couldn't make them. I had to buy them. (laughs)

LEVINE: Did you have a favorite dish that you particularly liked eating?

ARANDA: Yeah. I used to like, like in the morning. I liked when you boiled the milk. It makes like a crust on top. Take that out, put it on a little dish, with a little sugar and just, you know, with pieces of bread. That was my favorite. And rice pudding. (sirens in background) And sometimes, you know, nothing fancy.

LEVINE: Do you remember playing with your friends? Do you remember what kinds of things you did for fun?

ARANDA: Young, young. Well, there were young boys and young girls. We played doll-house, you know. And I'd be the cook. And there's the husband and the kids, you know. What we do here. Almost the same thing. And jump rope. And I loved to skate. I used to borrow the skate from somebody there and I would skate around the place. And jumping rope. Yeah.

LEVINE: And you described that you lived in an apartment. It had a courtyard, did it? What was it like?

ARANDA: Ah, no. No. As you come out -- see the houses were like this. This is one house, then the next one, the next one, the next one.

LEVINE: Like in a row.

ARANDA: Yeah. And in between there was like a little, like a little hall. You know like a hall outside? Something like that. And the kitchen, much wider than this. And that's where we played around there with the kids of the neighbor, there. That's how it was.

LEVINE: How many stories did the houses have?

ARANDA: No. No. Everything was on the ground. No stories. No. No.

LEVINE: And what were they made out of?

ARANDA: Oh, I guess, well, I guess they were made like they're made here. Something like adobe. They call it adobe; mix, I guess, with cement and all that. They were strong. I mean, you didn't have no, like if it rained and all that, you're not going to get, you know, ah, carried your house away. No. No. It was settled. And, I don't remember how many houses. It must have been about over sixteen. About. Yeah. And it also had an opening to the back of the house, going like, let's say, to twenty four, and twenty three,

you could go through the other hallway. It was a big, big house, a big, ah, yard. It had a hundred, they, you wash on the stone. You know, with the washing.

LEVINE: So tell me about what it was like to do that.

ARANDA: Yeah. There was a hundred. That's why they call it the house of a hundred lavaderos.

LEVINE: What's a lavadero?

ARANDA: Washing stones. You know, and you had to kneel down and there was a big, big like a pool, that was where you get the water to do your washing.

LEVINE: Would you do the washing?

ARANDA: Yes. I did the washing. You soak it overnight. (laughs) The next morning you wash, you know, like from side to side, cause I had to go to school. And ah, there was a hundred. So they had to call it the house of a hundred lavaderos. There was a sign up, Casa de los Cien Lavaderos Santa Lucia. That was the name of the block there. That's what it is, see? And, and when it opened, the Super used to open a big, big door, big white door, that you, was like a, like a double door but together when it close.

LEVINE: Where was [ ].

ARANDA: And my school was right around there too, the school that I went.

LEVINE: You mean the door was to the whole apartment?

ARANDA: It ah, no, they opened the door and you come at night. They used to close the door at night.

LEVINE: Like a big gate, to get in?

ARANDA: No. It was wood. Big wood doors. But the Super, when anybody came late, they had to knock at the Super's window so they tell you to come and open. Cause by ten o'clock that door was lock. So anybody that came after ten, they had to knock at the Super's window, so they come out and they had to open the door so they can come in.

LEVINE: Now, was there like a curfew of ten o'clock? Why, why were, why...?

ARANDA: Why'd they lock it?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ARANDA: Well, I guess maybe that was ah, they had to lock it because no people wouldn't come in. They come late they had to knock at the door. See?

LEVINE: It was for safety.

ARANDA: During the day it was open, wide open. But at night, at ten, they closed the doors. Anybody came late they had to, you know, get the Super to open. And I guess if sometimes if anybody came later than that they must have had to tip him to open the door. Like everything, you know.

LEVINE: Now the hundred lavaderos?

ARANDA: That's the thing that I tell you...

LEVINE: Were there a hundred people?

ARANDA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There were two yards actually. There was the big, big yard and then you went through a hallway, then you had more houses there. That's where we were, in the small yard. I think it's because the first yard that you come in and you see those apartments, they were people that could have electricity. See, the sun's coming to me. They had electricity. Now, on the other way that we were, we had no electricity. We had to light by candles. We had no stoves. We had no stoves. Our stove was ah, made out of a brick. That's why you had to bring the coal. That was, I guess, lower rent. The people in the big yard, must have paid more rent because they had electricity and they were better houses, I guess. You know, the poor and the medium. So I guess we were in the medium.

LEVINE: What else do, do you remember? Were you religious? Did you have a religious background?

ARANDA: Oh, yes. I went. Yes. And then there was a lady in that big yard, that was a lady that lived out there, yeah. right hand side and she taught us the catechism. I made my communion in Mexico.

LEVINE: What was that like? Making communion there.

ARANDA: Ah, I made, we have a plaza named Tipito, and in the back of that plaza, you know plaza where they sell all, stuff, everything, and clothing, things for the house, everything. What they say here, from soup to nuts? (laughing) That's it. And behind that was the church, the Lady of Conception. That's where I made my, I was bapt-, my mother was married there. And I was baptized there. And I went my communion there.

LEVINE: Was your mother there when you made your communion?

ARANDA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. She was there. Let me see. I made my communion, when, let me think. No, she wasn't. Cause I made my communion, I was ah, I was about six I made my communion. No. No. I must have been going on eight. See? Little by little, you know, it comes to me. Yes. Because I have a picture, dressed up, you know, with my

communion, which I brought to New York and they used to tease me in school.

(laughing)

LEVINE: What do you remember about your communion, what was it like?

ARANDA: Ah, I had a lot of little ruffles, and I had cut my hair. It was short. It was dark, because I was blonde, and then my head changed all the time. I don't know why. And, very simple. White shoes. White socks. The shoes had a little strap, two straps with the buttons. And they had a hook where you put it in to pull the button into the eyehole. So, anyway, so

LEVINE: Do you remember what making a communion was like for an eight year old in Mexico City at that time?

ARANDA: Well, I know we had to receive, you know, the host. And we had to be very nice that day, behave ourselves. You know? (laughing) I don't know why, but anyway. And then we had a good breakfast. We had chocolate, with fancy ah, pastry. That was luxury. That day. And then you know, I changed and then I was allowed to go and play with my friends. That day. That was that.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other rituals or any other ceremonies in Mexico City when you were a little girl? Anything like weddings or funerals?

ARANDA: Oh, no. I went, I remember, yes, I went to two funerals. When my ah, when the lady ,  
Conchita, sister passed away, and the baby, so we went to the cemetery.

LEVINE: What was a funeral like there?

ARANDA: We didn't go by car. We walked it. We went to the cemetery walking. I don't know  
how far it was, but we walked it. And it was the Cemetery of Dolores. That was the  
name of the cemetery. So they were buried and all and we had to pray at night, and for  
nine days we had to say the rosary.

LEVINE: At home, did you say it?

ARANDA: At home, yes. At home. And then I remember, which I have pictures also, going to our  
Lady of Guadalupe, it's way up on the mountain.

LEVINE: Oh, tell about that.

ARANDA: And we didn't want to go up the stairs, you know, like, cause we like to crawl up there.  
And like a picnic we went up there.

LEVINE: What did you do when you got there?

ARANDA: Oh, then we ah, walk around places, and then we went into a cave. They said there was money buried there from Montezuma, so we put a rope on, all of us. And I was always the last one because I was the tallest. And we went in there and our candles went out, and when we got scared, because we start to feel things on the floor, you know, like, we're screaming, let's get the heck out of here. (laughing) So I was the first one out. We got out of there fast.

LEVINE: Was this connected with the Guadalupe?

ARANDA: Yeah. That was in, in, there was like a cave in there. So we went around and we wanted to investigate, to go inside, but we got scared, but we came out. We used to go there frequently. It was nice, you know. To get out of the house anyway. (laughing)

LEVINE: What about Christmas? Did you celebrate Christmas?

ARANDA: Oh, Christmas, yeah. And Christmas Day, oh, they make it big. They get the prettiest girl to be the Mary. Then they pick the nicest guy to, to be, you know St. Joseph. Then they pick out the little kids to the pastors, then they get dressed up nice and all, and then they go around singing. They sing, like looking for a place to sleep, because she was going to have the baby. So. I remember that. And that was a big feast for us, you know.

LEVINE: What hap-, what was the feast like?

ARANDA: Um, well, the supper. Twelve o'clock. I made a big salad.

LEVINE: Christmas Eve?

ARANDA: Yeah. Yeah. That was the day before Christmas. They made a big salad. We ate that. And ah, pastries, and chocolate. And we sang and we danced around, all of us kids. And then, of course, they had the little high ball, I guess, you know. Because they have a drink in Mexico. It's white like milk. It comes from the cactus. Maguey. And that, if you drink a little bit too much and you get dizzy. It's pulque. I don't know if it still exists. But anyway, that was that.

LEVINE: And people drank pulque on this occasion.

ARANDA: Yeah. Mm, hm. The big people. You know, there might be little kids, you know we use to sneak a little snip, you know, with your little fingers. (laughing) Just like you do here. Just like my kids did.

LEVINE: How about Easter, was that a big occasion?

ARANDA: Easter, yes. It's a big celebration. Oh, my mother put up a little altar. She used to take the lentils, put it in a little plate with water and that would grow like grass, and that would adorn the little church that my mother made. And she put flowers, and it was

another big day for pastries and good food. And you went a little bit, you know, more than other days. You saved, and I guess that's how they did it. And the kids have fun. But they make all kinds of pastries with different designs, like the skeleton's face, and bones, you know, and things like that. They make it all into pastry.

LEVINE: Oh. Do they do, ah, decorate the pastries, the way we decorate, ah, Easter Eggs?

ARANDA: Yes. No. No. No. No. They didn't used to use that. Maybe today yes, but at that time no. Everything was in pastry. Pastry was a big thing in Mexico. Making different designs and all that. Pastries.

LEVINE: Did you ever make pastries there?

ARANDA: No. No. Mm, mm.

LEVINE: And, let's see. What else, when you think back to those first nine years of your life. Are there any other things that you remember about Mexico?

ARANDA: Well, like I said before, it was sad and meant sometimes. Because, like when I used to get punished, because then she want, she says, if I didn't behave myself she was going to send me to an orphanage. So, she packed up my clothes and told her husband to take me over. And he was so nice that he didn't have the heart to do it. He says, why don't you do what my wife tells you? Why do you always, you know, go like this? You know, I

don't know, I don't know. You know she don't like for you to do that. And why don't you obey? I said, but I'm a little girl. I want to play. I don't want to do all the work all the time. Yeah, but she works too, and I work. I said, yes, but then sometimes you go out and you have a good time. I like to have a good time too. Besides, she's not my mother. She's not supposed to do those things to me. I'm going to write to my mother and I'm going to tell her what she's doing. That's all I had to open my mouth. And I did. I wrote to my mother. I had to give her the letter to mail it, right? So she read the letter (laughing). So then somebody in the big house, that used to be friends with my mother, they had a butcher shop, they were from Spain. I went and knocked at the door one time and I told her, where my mother was, and they wrote to my mother, to the States. So my mother then find out what was happening. So she tried her best, you know, to get me away from there. So she finally, she finally did. She worked in the National Biscuit, which the main office was in the ah, in Queens. That was the name, in Queens.

LEVINE: Ah. Now, did you communicate with your mother at all while you were still there?

ARANDA: Yeah. But those letters didn't say nothing about the lady, you know? So yes, as a matter of fact I think I have a letter somewhere. I know I didn't throw it away because I saved it as a souvenir that I could write nice, you know? In Spanish. So.

LEVINE: Was it in your mind that you would be going to the United States at some time?

ARANDA: Well, she wrote to me and she says that soon we'll be together, that I'll soon be coming here. And ay, every time I go to a movie and a I see a boat, you know, and I said, gee, maybe someday I'll be on that boat. Or see an airplane, I said, oh, maybe someday I'll be in an airplane. So I got here by boat, by ship.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought about America or about the United States before you came?

ARANDA: No. No. I just wonder how it was. And I said, there they don't speak Spanish. They said they only speak English. What is that? You know? (laughing) I don't know. So, yeah.

LEVINE: So it was through your mother's friends who wrote and told that you were being mistreated, and so then...

ARANDA: She hurry up. And she was living with my uncle. So she, she this way she could be able to save money to bring me here, you know? And then she got a little apartment, three rooms, cold flat, toilet outside, but it was her, her apartment. I was going to land there, in that, in that house. In that apartment. In 119 Bank Street.

LEVINE: Did she send money then? Or did she send a ticket?

ARANDA: She used to send me like a dollar. But then the lady used to take it, said she was going to save it, you know, to buy me something.

LEVINE: And did she?

ARANDA: I don't know. Yeah. She gave me money when we went to that church with that, or a holiday, you know, to buy candy or something. But not all the time. (laughing)

LEVINE: So, when the day came, do you remember when you found out you were going to the United States?

ARANDA: Yes. Because my mother wrote to her and she told her that my uncle or his wife were going to go to Mexico City, they were in Veracruz, they had a home there. And they, he was the one that was going to bring me here. So you know, told the lady to pack up my clothes and have everything ready when they arrive. So they did. I think they came in the afternoon. Cause it wasn't dark yet. And they talked and this and that. So then finally, you know, he says, well, say goodbye, and I left. And I came to Veracruz.

LEVINE: Do you remember how you felt when you were saying goodbye?

ARANDA: Well, I was happy, in a way. And I like her husband very much cause he was funny. Anything I didn't know he used to cover me up.

LEVINE: What was his name.

ARANDA: Augustine.

LEVINE: And do you remember the last name?

ARANDA: Batista.

LEVINE: He kind of covered you?

ARANDA: They had a son. They had a son about about twenty, twenty or twenty-one year old. He worked in ah, in a shoe factory. He used to bring me my shoes from there because they were cheaper. You know, bring them from the factory.

LEVINE: Did he live also in the same place?

ARANDA: Ah, yeah. Yeah. And ah, he used to take me out sometimes at Chapultepec. It's a big lake and they had those rowboats, you know, some of them are fancy and some of them you have to row. And he was studying photography. So he used to take a lot of pictures of me, you know?

LEVINE: And what was his name?

ARANDA: I forget. I had his name. Alfonso.

LEVINE: Alfonso Batista.

ARANDA: Right. The only son she had.

LEVINE: And how, was he, he was nice to you?

ARANDA: Yeah. He was nice. I used to, sometimes, you know, he used to come in at 5 o'clock from work and get changed and all and then leave to go, to go out. So that time, you know, I stayed outside, he said, leave the house open. Don't put the lock on. So at that time, you know I went out or something, and my mother came out and saw playing. And she says, why did you leave the door open, you know you're not supposed to leave it. She goes, you play. You don't do the work, you don't cook. So he says, he didn't pay attention. And they used to give me a nice cold shower, six o'clock in the morning. That was another punishment. (laughing)

LEVINE: That was a punishment.

ARANDA: Yes. Cause I didn't want to get up early in the morning. So they give me a nice cold shower.

LEVINE: Where was the shower?

ARANDA: But you know, on top of all, now that I'm 82, I think of all those things, but yet, she made a little woman out of me, in a way. Because when I came here to the States, I was my mother's right arm. Cause she had to go to work. So I had to cook, but I knew. And then what she taught me, I learned more. And also I had to do the same thing. And Saturdays, when she didn't work, then the two of us would clean, give a good cleaning to the house. So in a way it helped me, you know. But at that time you don't understand. You feel hurt. You just seem to hate the person. But it helped me on the long run a lot. Cause I been on my own, I been a loner, even now, even though I have my kids, but I'm still a loner. I learn a lot. You know, this is what I tried to show my kids. I said, you know, you boys are very lucky that you didn't have the life that I had. I said, it was tough for a little girl. Just imagine if that man would a had a bad mind, and he would have done something wrong to me? Right? They didn't know if he was good, he didn't ever hurt me. And her husband was good, and she was rough and tough. But maybe because I had to learn.

LEVINE: That you did. Yeah. We're going to continue in just a minute, but Peter needs to turn the tape over.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay. So in a way, you're saying that even though it was hard for you as a little girl, it taught you something and it made you able to help your mother.

ARANDA : To help my mother.

LEVINE: And so you said, your children, you tried to instill that...

ARANDA: Yeah. I taught that to my children. That they were very lucky. That I stayed home. I could have gone out to work and earned more money, cause his father was a merchant marine, then he quit the ship, and by the time he got a job here it was hard. It was making very little money. And I could have gone out and worked, but I didn't. I stayed home with them, to know their friends, and to see that they get to school in time and, and that they do their homework. And to, you know, so they have a different life than what I had. I didn't take it like, because I was punished and I was through,... I have my children, I can take it out on them. No. I wanted to be different. I didn't want them to go through what I. When I said, thank god that god granted me what I asked. I wanted boys and I got boys. I had seven miscarriages. And after my last son Richard, I, the baby was born dead. So, I said, I think I done my share. This is quits now. The doctor says, no I couldn't have any more children. And I'm thankful, you know. But I was wishing that I had a big family. Cause being by myself, I, it's hard at times. But yet and all, I said, thank god that I didn't have girls, because they're much harder and I didn't want them to go through what I did. I said, no. So I'd rather have boys, and this is the way I was. And I tried to teach them and show them the difference. And I used to tell

my husband, you know, your boys are growing up, why don't you start to tell your sons what they have to do, I said. Here they're reaching that age that they want to go out, you know, and meet girls. I said, you have to. He says, my father never told me that. I said, but that was your father. This is not their father. This is your children and it's our children. So it's your place to show them, to teach them. He couldn't. He was a weak man. He was a good man, and every, but he was weak. I was his right arm, too. So I used to get one by one and explain to them about life, and I said, you see, when Mama is pregnant, see when you plant the seed in the soil and the plant starts coming out? I said, that's the way your baby's once in the mother's stomach. Start getting bigger and bigger until the baby is born? Well, how is the baby born? I said, well, you know, I have to get up and do something because your father will be coming home and I have to get supper ready. So I didn't know what really caught me there. I didn't know what to say, but we talk about it some other time. And that's the way, little by little, I got to talk to them and teach them. And they really grew to that certain age and I said, you know what, get a cab. Tell the cab driver to take you, you know where, and they know where to take you. (laughing). I laugh you know, because I didn't know. I was ignorant in a certain way. Because as I became a young girl, my mother never told me nothing. Everything was just what I heard outside through girls and this and that. But she never sit down and talk to me. Things about life. So I didn't know what to tell my boys. Especially boys. But I, I, think somehow, I think I did very good. Because yet and all, my husband passed away, he left me three good sons. They're good. They're not angels. I don't expect them to be, but ah, they're good. They were good sons. They still are. And they're good husbands and fathers to their children. And I'm very grateful that ah, I had no big

trouble with them and all this, with the drugs and things, you know, alcoholics, and all that thing are, that everything has been right. You know? They had their little problems. Like all married couples. I sit down and talk to them. I don't butt into their marriage lives, unless they ask me. I said, it takes two to tango. So you two are the blame for anything. So you sit down. You talk it over. And you don't spoil your children. Because I know, I love you very much but I did not spoil you. As to what we had, you was never left without eating. You never had holes in your shoes, or your socks or your pants. You were always neat and clean. I said, I worked very hard to raise you kids. I didn't work outside, which would have been better than to be at home working, but at least I'd have more time to rest, but I feel proud. And I'm very happy, but we didn't have much from the start. But little by little, we got you know, getting new things for the house, and whatever the boys need. They always came first. My husband always said, my sons come first. So you get them whatever they need. We're last. So that's the way it was. I never expected my husband to give me something that he couldn't afford. It was to what he earned. Because he gave me the money. I had to be the judge of the money, to see that there was food on the table and, and you know the boys be clothed and everything. That we had to pay something to the school. They went to St. Francis Xavier. We had to pay a little something. Some books had to be paid, and when they had raffle tickets, I didn't go around the neighbors because I, they come to you, but when you go to them, they give you stories. I said, no. I don't want to go through that. I'll pay for the tickets. So that's what I used to do. And...

LEVINE: Let's just go back a minute to, to Mexico and when you were leaving. You left, did you travel by yourself?

ARANDA: No. I was with my uncle.

LEVINE: Oh, that's right. Your uncle and your aunt?

ARANDA: Mm, hm. My uncle. My uncle, no, no, just my uncle came.

LEVINE: Just your uncle. And that was...

ARANDA: My mother's younger brother. Yeah.

LEVINE: And so, where did you go? You left Mexico City. Do you remember saying goodbye to everybody? What was it like to leave?

ARANDA: No. Just the lady that, just, oh yeah. I remember. A little young fellow, that his father was a shoemaker. He was supposed to be my boyfriend. He was in the Academy.  
(laughs) And I went to say goodbye, he says, I'll come back. I said, no you're never going got come back because now you're going to the United States and you're going to come back talking with, like a dog's language that I don't understand (laughing hard).  
So I said, well, I said good bye and that was it. Which was true. I never saw him again or nothing. And ah...

LEVINE: So then you traveled -- did you know this uncle? Did you remember that uncle?

ARANDA: My uncle?

LEVINE: That you traveled with?

ARANDA: Oh, yeah. I remembered my uncles, yeah.

LEVINE: But I mean, when he came and got you, did you know him? Did you know him from before that?

ARANDA: Oh, yes. Yeah. Because, yeah. Yeah. I knew, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So it wasn't a stranger to you.

ARANDA: Oh, no, no, no, no. And so was my aunt. And so was my aunt. See? And ah, then we took the ship and we came here and that was, as I said, we had that problem with the money, that I couldn't get out.

LEVINE: Well, first let's ask, let me ask about the ship. What do you remember about it?

ARANDA: From the ship? Oh, I remember that ah, they ah, in the morning we had a, they gave us, what do you call that um...? A poached egg on ah, corned beef hash. And a poached egg on top, and a glass of milk, and graham crackers. We used to get this at night too, before we went to bed.

LEVINE: Were you traveling...? Was it a ship that had first class, second class...

ARANDA: I was on first class. Cause my mother thought that by getting first class tickets I wouldn't have no problem. (chuckles) But I did run into problem. But anyway, it was fun. I was young, so we didn't, none of us spoke the language, so we played around. Run around there, the stairs and everything.

LEVINE: You mean there were other children on the ship?

ARANDA: Yeah, sure, yeah. Yeah, there were other childrens. But we, we, you know, we couldn't talk English, couldn't speak English.

LEVINE: Now, was there a group of people that were down in the bottom of the ship?

ARANDA: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that? About them?

ARANDA: Well, I remember there was some older people, some young ones. Sometimes some of them were crying, you know, like, says, oh, we're never going to get to the United States. Supposing that we have problems? And then they send us back and everything, you know. So, but as a little girl, I just listen and then... I felt sorry for them. But ah, you know, I went on my own way to the other kids, running around.

LEVINE: And this ship was the Monterey?

ARANDA: Yes. The Monterey, because they had a new one, but this was the old Monterey. Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: And do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor.

ARANDA: Yes. And my uncle says, come on, come on. Because pretty soon we're going to be close to dock, you know to dock, and then you're going to see your mother on the platform. And my mother was standing there with her, with the other brother, you know, Roman. And my ah, aunt, his wife, and my cousin was not there, she was in school. So I, looked and you know, I said, that's my mother? Ooh, I said, she looks so tiny. Thinking that my mother was, you know, big, big tall woman. And she wasn't. And there's my uncle, yeah. So he says, wave at them. So I wave, you know. And then I start feeling something, like I wanted to go back. You know?

LEVINE: What were you feeling?

ARANDA: But then at the same time I said, no, that's my mother. Oh, thank god, I said to myself.

Thank god. I'm going to be with my mother, nobody's going to do nothing to me.

(laughing) Then, you know, then I felt bad when I couldn't come out of the ship because she had to get the rest of the money.

LEVINE: Why don't you, for the tape, tell the rest of that story.

ARANDA: Which?

LEVINE: The story about why you had to stay overnight at Ellis Island for that evening, for that one night.

ARANDA: Mm, hm. The reason I stayed overnight is because my mother didn't have the four hundred dollars that they were asking for. So my mother had to go and borrow the money and come back the next day. And that's what she did. So then, that's the time that they let me out.

LEVINE: Now, where was your uncle during this time.

ARANDA: With me right there.

LEVINE: He was at Ellis Island?

ARANDA: Oh, yeah. He had to stay there. Yeah. He stay there.

LEVINE: He stayed too.

ARANDA: He stayed too, yeah. And then after, both of us come out and I hug my mother, she kissed me. And I was hugging my aunt too, and my other uncle. Then we came back to their house, we ate there, we had supper there. And then we went to my mother's apartment which was gonna be our apartment.

LEVINE: Well, just going back to Ellis Island, do you remember anything about Ellis Island, and the time that you spent there?

ARANDA: I remember that I was, I slept on the top bed because I was the bigger girl, so I slept on top. There was some lady, or little old lady sleeping down underneath. And that was the reason I slept there. And the tables, there were no chairs. There were just a long table and benches. That's what they had. No movies, of course, at that time. Maybe some people played their violin or something that they could play, you know, their own. And we dance around, hop around. And...

LEVINE: And do you remember how you felt? Because you probably didn't know exactly what was happening.

ARANDA: I guess not. All I know is, well, I coming to the United States, you know, and I'm going to see my mother, and then things gonna be different, I guess, you know.

LEVINE: Were you thinking of any of the things in Mexico that maybe you would miss?

ARANDA: No. No. I don't think I did.

LEVINE: No.

ARANDA: No. I think that when I started school two weeks later, I started my school here on PS 41, on St. Charles, 10<sup>th</sup> Street. That was my school that I started here. They put me on the fifth grade. I didn't know nothing about it, cause I was the big girl. But ah, then they said, no. So I started from the second grade, up to the seventh grade I went. I went to [ ? ] you know [ ? ], 18<sup>th</sup> Street? No?

LEVINE: Well, you had only two years of schooling in Mexico, and then you were in the second grade here.

ARANDA: And I didn't know no English at all, whatsoever.

LEVINE: Well, when you first got here and the ship docked and then you left Ellis Island and you went with your uncle and aunt and everything. Do you remember any things that struck you about this country? About things that you saw or heard?

ARANDA: Well, I thought it was big, you know, a big place. And I said, now things were here, I wonder how it is over here when you go to school and you when you gotta meet friends, and to play with. I wonder how it is, but I don't speak English. I think I was worried about that, because I couldn't speak English and I'm gonna feel funny. Maybe they'll make fun of me. (laughing) So they, they did. In the beginning. And all. But somehow I looked forward to learn that language so badly, that I learned it fast.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about learning it?

ARANDA: Yeah. My teacher's name was Mrs., Miss, Mrs. Costello and she took a liking to me, very much. And she gave me a book to study, but then who's gonna hear me? Who's gonna help me with my homework? Who was going to help me to hear me read? And yet, I was good.

LEVINE: Did your mother know English?

ARANDA: No. No. No. No. Nothing. She didn't know no English at all. That's why she had a hard time getting a job. My uncle had this job in the biscuit company because she was just lucky. And the boss seemed to be very nice. And she knew, she did her job very well, and I think that's the reason that they kept her.

LEVINE: What kind of job did she do?

ARANDA: She worked on the crackers and then she put with a spatula, you know to put the cream on the Oreos? That's what they did. Then you know, they had to pack 'em. And she did a good job. She used to get, used to work on Saturdays, because the boss knew that she was going to bring her daughter, and she had to save money, so he gave her job on Saturdays, overtime.

LEVINE: What was it like for you being with your mother after not being with her for so long?

ARANDA: Oh, wonderful. Took me out shopping. And of course my aunt went with her because my mother didn't speak English. So we went to Orbach's. I got a whole for Easter. A whole new outfit. Beige flat shoes and a nice big brim hat, with a black ribbon around it hanging down in the back. Oh, I felt like a millionaire. (laughs) Yeah, I felt great, you know.

LEVINE: And what was your mother like? What was her personality like?

ARANDA: My mother was, you mean in looks?

LEVINE: Well, whatever.

ARANDA: No. My mother was, she had that French look all right. Because my grandfather was French and my grandmother was Mexican.

LEVINE: So, now your mother, was she already remarried when you came?

ARANDA: No. Oh, no, no, no, no. That's the reason she took a chance coming here, because she figure everybody's talking about going to the United States, so let me try. Being that her brother was coming she was not alone, so she came with him, you know. But ah, she looked forward to a better living. Something that I would have for the future.

LEVINE: And what was it like when you started learning English and she didn't know it?

ARANDA: Well, I talked to her in Spanish, but then I got to the point that my uncles all spoke Spanish, my aunt was German but she spoke fluently, Spanish and write it and read it. But my cousin didn't know Spanish. So I had a hard time with her. Because she didn't speak Spanish, so we were together most of the time, but by signs, you know, then little by little, you know, I start learning words and she probably must have helped me, in that way.

LEVINE: Did she help you study?

ARANDA: How?

LEVINE: Oh, cause she couldn't speak.

ARANDA: No. I start to look at the book, you know, and I tried to make out the words. But you see, when you know Spanish, some words are the way you spell it and pronounce it. That's, I think that's what really helped me. The way it was said, and then, but English, you write it one way but you pronounce it in a different way. In Spanish, you don't. And then don't forget, we had, which I had forgot, those little hyphens on top of the "n" and all that. And the alphabet was different. See. So, but little by little, you know, I start saying, well I see, this is there. And I said it in Spanish and I said it sounds this way. And that's the way I gonna put it, especially when we had spelling tests. But you know, I swear to god to you, I tell you. I used to get 98, 79, 100 in spelling. My papers used to go down to the principal office. And as a good reader, I was a good reader. They used to put me in front of the class and read. And my pronunciation was quite good.

LEVINE: So you must have been proud of yourself in school.

ARANDA: Yeah. Because most of the time I did it by myself. See, now, even in arithmetic was different than in Mexico. So that was a little hard for me. I tell you, I wasn't that bright. I was slow. A little slow student. But I was good. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: You didn't catch on real quickly but you learned it well.

ARANDA: Right. And what I read stayed with me. You see? And then I had no, at that time there were really no Spanish people around. So that was another help. And most of my

friends were all either Italian, Greek, you know, public school, different races, right?

There were no black people.

LEVINE: Were they immigrant children?

ARANDA: I was the only Spanish girl in the class, in the school (laughing).

LEVINE: Were there other immigrant children, even though maybe they were from Italy, or Greece?

ARANDA: No. No. No. No. No. No.

LEVINE: You were the only one.

ARANDA: Yeah. And this is what helped me. That most of my friends, you know, they were from here. So I had to. I had to speak the language. And I picked it up good. I picked it up so good that then I forgot my Spanish. Then I used to talk half and half. And then my husband helped me to write again.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

ARANDA: I met my husband through a friend of his which he was really a friend of the family many years back that my mother knew. And he, this man was here. And when we were

introduced to him, my mother, when he mentioned his name, he says, oh, wait a minute, are you ah, the son of ah, of ah, Fieritos? Fieros is ah, your mother and father? He says, yes. He says, I'm Louis. Louie. And he says, oh, my gosh, I know your parents. So then he had brought a friend for dinner, when we were invited for his birthday, the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, 1934. Well, when his friend knocked at the door, and he came in, we just looked at each other, and I was very shy, very shy. And I know my face got red, because I don't know, the minute I saw him, I, you know, he attract me. Gee, he's good looking. He had green eyes. Fine curly hair, you know. And ah, he introduce, and he says, this is my friend Carlos. Carlos Aranda. Oh, I say, how do you do? You know. And then I went and sit down. And I didn't speak one word. Then he started to talk, and we start to talk and it end up that we had dinner, we danced. And my cousin was there and she like him too. She was fifteen, I was nineteen. And well, that was ah, a very bad time, what happened. That up to this day she hates me because even though she, she marry a Southerner, but she really care for Carlos, but Carlos didn't care for her. Number one she was too young, and he didn't care for her. He says it was me. So I was sort of shocked, you know. And that's when we became girlfriend and boyfriend. And the other fellow used to tell him, yeah, I knew. That's why I never, he always asked me if he wanted to be introduced and I never wanted to bring him to the house because I knew this was going to happen. And he left for Mexico. He was broken hearted. He left for Mexico.

LEVINE: This was your...

ARANDA: 1934.

LEVINE: In other words, this was the person that had been your boyfriend? The person who introduced you to Carlos. Who was that?

ARANDA: Louis Fieros. From the family that my mother used to know. And he was in love with me, but he never said anything. He seen me since I was about fourteen, through friends, and he always thought that I was gonna be his wife. But when he spoke to me about it, number one he didn't want to get married by church. You know this is a dream's girl to get married by church, you know this, especially when your mother was so strict and everything. And then he says, well, then I'll go to Mexico and see what kind of business I'll find there and you stay here with your mother. I said, oh, no. That's not it. If I get married, I go along with my husband. I don't stay behind. And you don't want to get married by church, well, that's, you better think about it. Because I want to be married by church. And that time, I already had feelings for this guy. (laughs) It was love at first sight, I call it.

LEVINE: Mm. Well.

ARANDA: That's the way, we were married in 1937. It was small wedding, but very nice. We had everything. Then I had a lot of friends. I used to sing in the choir in the Spanish church, Our Lady of Gaudelupe on 14<sup>th</sup> Street. And my girlfriends sang the Ave Maria. And then the, we only paid the fellow that played the piano. We paid him five dollars. The

rug, the priest gave it as a gift because I was, you know, from the church. And then I used to go to dancing. I used to love to dance. So my mother liked dancing too, so she used to take my cousins and I to dance.

LEVINE: Where were the dances?

ARANDA: On 14<sup>th</sup> Street, in ah, it was a small place.

LEVINE: Were they mostly Spanish types of music.

ARANDA: Mix. A mix. Mix of American, you know, most of those folks spoke English. Most of them.

LEVINE: Was it a dance hall?

ARANDA: Yeah. Small. On 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Now today, I don't know what it is, but that's where it was. And we used to go there. I don't know how much we used to pay, but ah...

LEVINE: Were there immigrant people who would go to those places?

ARANDA: No. No. No. None of them.

LEVINE: Well, we're getting, we're getting close to the end of time here on the tape. But when you think back about coming here as a nine year old and really making your whole life here then, how do you think about that? Coming to this country and starting a new life here?

ARANDA: Well, at nine years old I didn't think much about Mexico. I was, you know, getting so involved here now with friends and going to church and singing in church and all that, I ah, and meeting, to my mother's friend I met some other girls, you know, and I didn't think of Mexico. I really, you know, it was like another world to me. But maybe some day... You used to ask me, do you ever think of going back to Mexico. I said, I don't think so. Because when I get married, it's going to be an American guy. I don't want to marry a Mexican. Well, I did marry a Mexican, but he was very Americanized. I think that's what did it too, you know? So anyway. Then he had a big family. He came from a big family. He was raised in New Orleans. So once we became boyfriend and girlfriend, I started writing to his sisters and when am I going to go down there and this and that. And he had a girl down there, and then he wrote to her, look I met a girl and I'm thinking of getting married, so our friendship is over . (laughing). Quite a story. Would you think awful of Peter? Oh, is it boring? No. Maybe you'll learn something.

LEVINE: So in other words, you really, did you try to become American or did you try to hold on to some of the ways from Mexico.

ARANDA: I feel this about voting, you know, and a lot of people, oh, I have to go and vote you know, for the new President. And you know, you listen to all these things, and I start, I wonder what they mean by they have to vote? Oh, you have to become an American citizen. And I so I said, oh, I see. So then ah, I was working in a perfume factory. I did a lot of other jobs, but this last long there. And I said to myself, you know Marie, you're married now, you're having your children. You don't have no intentions of going, maybe you go back to visit, but to live in Mexico, I had no intentions. My life is here. Luckily my mother re-married in 1931, so I didn't think back on Mexico. This is my place now. I should become an American citizen. So March the third, 1948, I became an American citizen.

LEVINE: And how was that for you?

ARANDA: Oh, I felt so good. I said, now I can vote. Now I can vote! (laughing) I was so thrilled about it. You know, now I'm an American citizen. Yeah, but you know what you done? You sold your country. What do you mean, I sold my country. I didn't sell my country. I'm Mexican, blooded. I'm a Mexican. But I am American citizen and this is my country now, and this is where I stay. This is here. My children are born here. My mother's here, even though she remarried here. So that's it.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else you can think of that pertains to coming here and becoming American, Ellis Island, anything?

ARANDA: I always thought of that you know, when I first came. I said, gee, you know, maybe some day I should go back to Ellis Island and see how it is. But now, who's gonna take me. You get that into, you knew that there's nobody to take you and so I really very thankful to, and I appreciate that ah, Frieda did this. I call that being a good friend.

LEVINE: And tell how you felt when you did go to Ellis Island that day?

ARANDA: I said, gee, I remember when I first came here. I was a little girl, but I remember. I wonder if they still have this and they still have that. Of course, the place naturally has changed all these years. I didn't expect to find it the same way, but it gave me, it gave me a little sadness, but happy. That I'm here. This is, this is my country. I know Mexico, they say it's beautiful and everything, but this is my country now. This is where I stay and this is where I die.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to end it on that note. I want to thank you so much for a very, very interesting

ARANDA: Thank you for listening to comment.

LEVINE: Very interesting interview. I've been speaking with Marie Aranda, who came from Mexico in 1925 at the age of nine. And this is Janet Levine for the National Parks Service, on November 25, 1996 signing off.

END INTERVIEW