

## 8. Start of the Bracero study

**Henry:** Before I take up the chronology I want to say a couple of things about the Anderson family. I haven't said much about them as I went along, but there are some things of sufficient importance that I'm going backtrack a bit. In the summer of 1952 I had just about decided to take a break from what I saw as the ongoing treadmill that would lead me to PhD in sociology, but would actually lead me away from the real world as I saw it. It was in that summer, when I was still living at home, my mother took me in her confidence about a letter that she had received from my aunt Mabel, one of my father's sisters – he had 3 sisters, Mabel, Agnes, and Pearl – and Mabel lived in Davenport, Iowa, which is where he had been living ever since he left Palo Alto in 1937. In this letter, my aunt Mabel said in so many words – I never actually saw the letter, but my mother told me that Mabel was relaying the fact that my father had been seen around town, going to the movies or walking in the park or whatever, with this other woman. And she knew that my mother and father had not divorced, and she thought it was scandalous, and she thought my mother would also think it was scandalous, so she assumed that my mother would send an angry letter to my father, telling him to stop disgracing the family, and to stop seeing this woman.

Well, Aunt Mabel was a member of the old school of family relations, and she assumed that my mother was also. It's true that my mother did not believe in divorce, and in fact she had kept nurturing the hope that eventually my father would come back. She hung onto all his things in the course of several moves during the intervening years – this had been fifteen years since he left, and he had a lot of stuff, not as much as I do, but still quite a lot, so she kept it all, moving it from place to place. But Aunt Mabel did not know this aspect of my mother, which was that she was the most kind-hearted of people, and the least vindictive of people, and she had no interest at all in making my father unhappy if there was any possibility that he might find happiness with somebody else. So she composed a letter to him which, far from telling him what aunt Mabel suggested, said to him that she had decided that he was not ever going to be coming back, and that therefore it was time for both of them to become free. And so she took it upon herself to make it look as though she were initiating the divorce, which is exactly what happened. And she could, among the causes of divorce, have said desertion, which is a universally-recognized cause in all jurisdictions, but as it was I think she probably just said "irreconcilable differences", which are not fault-finding.

Later on, he did marry this woman – I guess there was a waiting period required in Iowa – and after Eugene was born, and his mother and I and Gene were living on Berkeley Way, and I had started my job at the school of public health, my father and his new wife came out and visited us, and he was a different person. He must have been like the person that my mother had fallen in love with back at the high school in Arizona where they were both on the English

department faculty. A very relaxed man, with a twinkle in his eye, and altogether likeable, unlike the unhappy man that I had known in the mid-30s, when he had lost his job and was feeling inadequate by comparison with my mother, who was running a highly successful nursery school.

The reason that I mention this is because it verified one of the things I learned from my favorite sociology professor, Herbert Blumer, who always insisted that human beings are changeable, and I saw that in my everyday life, and it was good feeling that he died a happy man, because he didn't have too much longer to live. I was able to visit him once before he died, in Davenport, and got to know him even better. But then he died from leukemia, which apparently was brought on by his lingering exposure to poison gas in WWI.

Now, back to the chronology that I left off with. I had, thankfully as it turned out, I'm glad that I was turned down by the anthropologist at the University of Wisconsin or wherever it was, and did not go to Kenya because it was in the very midst of the Mau-mau rebellion, and it would have been absolute lunacy. So I began at the Univ of Cal school of public health as a teaching associate, a step above a teaching assistant, where you only had to deal with a small section from the large class. In my position, I delivered lectures to the entire class, which my mentor, so to speak, he called the class Medical Sociology. In fact it had very little to do with Sociology, as I had come to understand it under the guidance of Herbert Blumer. It mostly consisted of drawing statistical relationships between certain variables, like geography and age and gender and race, education, income, and certain measurements of health and well-being, or rather illness, deaths, infant mortality, maternal mortality, and eventually longevity, as though they were causative factors and actually they had very little to do with human inter-relationships, which is what I was interested in. However, I did my best, and found that I was able to do a lecture to fill up a full 50 minutes, which I hadn't been sure I could do – it was a new experience, kind of scary at first. I got by OK with that.

I was only a half-time position, and yet I was being paid more than I had been paid at the state dept of health as a so-called Junior Public Health Analyst, which was just counting up births and deaths and marriages. I was going to classes at the same time I was preparing these lectures, but even so I found time to stay interested in other things. I found among other things that I was struck by the number of physicians who had become writers. And there were a number of other writers who were not physicians but who wrote about the world of health and medicine. So it struck me to maybe prepare an anthology, to be called "Healing Hearts in Literature" or something like that. Because I had library privileges, which entitled me, as a quasi-member of the faculty, to roam in the stacks at will, and to check out as many books as I might want. And I'm afraid I abused the privilege, because there came a time when my mentor got an irate call from some member of the library staff, thinking that I was engaged in some illegal or immoral

activity with all of their books. I had over 100 books checked out at one time. I still have those excerpts stacked up somewhere.

This was a 2-year appointment. Along about April of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Dr. Rogers, which was his name, said to me one day, "it's about time that you begin lining up your ducks in order", I guess an allusion to the amusement-park game where there are ducks on an endless belt, and you're given a rifle to try and pick them off. Anyway, what in fact were my possible ducks at that point? I was in line to get a 2<sup>nd</sup> Masters degree, one in a social science, and the other in an applied science, or health science, whatever you want to call it. A Profession, supposedly different from the academic profession.

In other words, I could have returned to the department of sociology, either at Stanford or at Berkeley, where Dr. Blumer was now the chair. But I wanted to do something outside the main track, and began to try to figure out something that would call jointly upon these two masters degrees. I had tried to do somewhat of the same thing in my application for the research in Kenya, which would have called upon my experience in the state dept of health, even though I had no academic training in it. But now that I did have the academic training, I returned to the concept of folk medicine in a society that is coming into contact with western medicine, and to see what happens. As I've mentioned before, I was always more interested in social change than in social stability.

Now, my wife at that time was David's mother, who went by the name of Pam, and I'll call her that because that's what she was called by everybody at that time. She had spent a year in Ecuador, where her father, who was a colonel in the Army, was a military attache at the US embassy in Quito. He took the children with him. The four children all learned Spanish, including Pam, who was the second oldest. And so between the 2 of us we tried to figure out some kind of research problem that would call upon her knowledge of that language, and my background in both sociology and health.

And we hit upon the idea that there were a number of Mexican farm workers who came up from Mexico with a background in the folk medicine of that country and while they were in this country they may have been exposed in way or another to western-style medicine, because they probably did not have access to folk healers in this country, of the type to which they were perhaps accustomed. So then when they went back to Mexico, did they carry with them a memory of and perhaps a preference for what they learned about western-style medicine? And thereby reflected a form of social change, which may have rubbed off on their colleagues who hadn't been in this country. It was a very tricky subject, full of variables that would be extremely difficult if not impossible to statistically control. But I was so anxious to find a research problem that I could get funded that I was willing to stick my neck out.

But here's the kicker: I didn't know anything about farm labor. All I knew was that I had read in certain exposes that there was a problem of illegal immigrants, or as they were called in the popular press, wetbacks. So I proposed to somehow or other try to find a large sample of wetbacks who would represent the experimental group, and the control group would consist of people in Mexico who had never been to this country. And all of this was supposed to take place back in Mexico itself, on the theory that to try to interview them in this country would be virtually impossible because they were here illegally and would be afraid that we gringos were all representing the government.

So everything hinged on my being able to carry on in Mexico itself. So I did a good deal of research on the different parts of the country that were agriculturally-based. I eventually found that a lot of agriculture took place in the state called Michuacan, which happened to be at an elevation where the climate was quite salubrious, and one was not likely to get malaria, as one might at a lower elevation. It was in other words a nice spot for a family. So that was the aim. And I drew up a research proposal, and learned, in fact I probably knew in advance, that Dr. Rogers sat on one of the committees of the National Institutes of Health, which was the government agency that funded research in all kinds of different areas, and many of the institutes were devoted to one particular type of illness; there was the national cancer institute, there was the institute of cardio-vascular conditions, there was the institute of mental health, and then there was kind of a catch-all institute, the institute of community health, something like that, quite vague. That's the one that Dr. Rogers was a member of, and so he was among those who met twice or 3 times a year and passed judgment upon proposals for studies.

So I submitted this proposal to his group. Now for the sake appearances, of course he had to recuse himself when it came time for voting on my application. But all of the other members of the committee knew that this proposal had his blessing, and that of course is how things get done in the wonderful world of bureaucracies. Sometimes it works to your benefit and sometimes it doesn't; in this case it did. We talked about my application for a study, which later became a study of bracero health, but at the time I was so ignorant about the facts of agricultural life, that I thought that all the Mexican farm workers in Calif were here illegally, and were known as wetbacks, and in fact I even used this term in my application, being so dumb that I didn't that among Spanish-speaking people, it's a dirty word, it's as though I had used the N word. But everybody else in the whole system was so dumb that they didn't know that, and so they approved it. (laugh) Oh Dear. Fortunately there some people in the faculty at UC, particularly a grand old man named Paul Taylor, who had done pioneering work in farm labor back in the 20s and 30s, who enlightened me to the fact that most Mexican farm workers in CA were no longer illegal, but were so-called braceros, who were here under contracts, all perfectly legal. And there were still some domestic Spanish-speaking and even a few domestic

English-speaking farm workers, but more and more of them were being imported under these contracts.

So I had to begin educating myself under this system, and here once again a friend of Pam's, from Stanford, his name was Paul deCarli, suggested that I talk to his mother, who was a social worker in Stockton, who knew a good deal about farm labor in that area, and might have some ideas about how I should proceed. She in turn referred me to a catholic priest in Stockton, who was deeply involved in the farm labor situation, because he had a special dispensation from his bishop to spend full time among the Spanish-speaking and particularly among braceros. His name was Thomas McCullough, and he became one of the great influences in my life.

He may have introduced me to a colleague name Father McDonald who was based in San Jose. In any case I met him before very long, and he was also extremely influential in my thinking. And father McCullough introduced me to a young woman in Stockton who was very active in an organization called the CSO, standing for Community Service Organization, which was a private group set up by a man in Chicago named Saul Olinsky who believed in a certain type of community organizing based upon beginning very small with house meetings and finding out what people really were concerned about, rather than imposing it from above.

The young lady was Dolores Huerta, who later became quite well known. At the time she was very young and pretty and full of pep. She was interested in helping my study in any way that she could. So I began drafting a questionnaire because braceros would come into the office of the CSO with problems of various kinds and she would try to help them as best she could, and she still had energy left over to volunteer to interview braceros as they came in with this questionnaire about health and their attitudes toward health and their ideas about what one should do if one had a pain in the intestines or pain in the throat, or whatever; the whole thing was very crude at the beginning. I remember one of the questions got into the subject of venereal disease, which raised a question as to whether she would feel uncomfortable asking a man anything in this area, but she had absolutely no qualms about it. That woman was fearless, as she later proved in many ways.

So I was struggling with the whole approach, and before long it became apparent that I needed to move away from the Bay Area to an area where there were more braceros close by. For various reasons I looked into the facilities in Claremont, which is where I had gone to college, although I hadn't been there during the interim. I graduated in '49, and we're now talking about the spring of '57.

One of the 2 sociology professors that I had been quite close to was now the chairman of the department. The old chairman had retired, although he was still in town. There were newcomers to the department, including some young fellows who happened to have an

interest in Mexico, and I learned a good deal from them, and I was given access to office machinery in the department, and the whole thing just looked beautiful, and since I had been there they had built a large library which brought together all of the Claremont colleges, and there several in Claremont. There was Scripps College, Claremont Men's College, and Pitzer College. It was based upon the so-called Oxford plan, in which each of the colleges was independent in many ways, and yet they had certain facilities and personnel that they shared.

So it was there that the third and last of my children with Pam was born, on the drive to the nearest Kaiser hospital. She was born in the car.

Now, the nearest Mexican consulate was in San Bernardino, a little bit closer than Los Angeles. In any case I didn't have to worry about the traffic in San Bernardino. So I submitted to them an application for a visa for the purpose of going down into Michuacan to conduct scientific research. And of course I had to describe it in some detail. While I was waiting for a reply, I busied myself with research in the library at Claremont, which was quite well stocked with materials relevant to my interests. For example, they had an excellent supply of the records of Congressional hearings, and every time that the bracero program came up for discussion in Congress, which it did every year or two, it needed more funding for the Dept of Labor to administer the program. At these hearings, there were always witnesses from the grower's side, who claimed that they had to have the program or else they would all go out of business. There were a few also from the labor side, who argued that it was depriving that it was American workers of their rightful jobs and so forth. So they had all these hearings in the library, and I studied them, and copied a lot of them.

I waited and waited. I began visiting some bracero camps in the area. There were quite a few within easy driving distance, and found a number of camp managers who were very happy to have me inspect their facilities and some of them weren't bad at all. But of course I was not able to communicate directly with the braceros themselves, since I didn't have any grasp of the language. I began trying to study Spanish with Pam as my tutor, and I learned that it's not a good idea to try to study with somebody with whom you're emotionally involved, any more than it's a good idea to become financially involved. It's not a good idea to lend money to loved ones. Pam naturally thought that I should apply myself and work hard at it, and I thought she was being unnecessarily hard on me. So we had our differences of opinion and eventually gave up the effort for me to learn the language that way. I don't know how I thought I was going to learn it if I had gone down to Michuacan with almost no grasp of the language at all.

However, eventually the letter came through from the consulate, saying in Spanish, that it was not possible for me to get a visa for the purpose I had mentioned. I had a part-time secretary by then, who was able to translate it for me. And that was that; there was no avenue of appeal. I had to rethink the entire project.

I began to interview Spanish-speaking person in the area as interviewers, with the thought that they would be going into the bracero camps, and that we would find plenty of informants there, since I seemed to be having no difficulty getting the cooperation of the managers of some of these camps. I gave a number of people trials, using early drafts of the questionnaire, but most of them dropped out. A few were sufficiently interested in the subject that they then took it upon themselves to do studies of their own. A couple of the fellows were graduate students at the Claremont graduate school. In that way I had an effect upon other people that was rather gratifying. Because one of the things that I learned as I went along, feeling my way, I can hardly believe, yet it seemed to be true everywhere I went, that there was this large program, a very large program, involving altogether 100s of thousands of men every year, that very few people knew about, and that nobody other than I was trying to study, although it seemed to me that the field was ripe for people in various disciplines, not only sociology but politics and economics and anthropology and history – nobody was studying it in any place that I could find. That continued to be true no matter how far I traveled in my attempts to find somebody with whom I could talk about what they were doing and finding, and tell them what I was finding. But it was very lonely.

Then I found that there was a so-called reception center for braceros outside of the town of El Centro in the Imperial Valley of CA. One of 3 reception centers near the border of the US and Mexico, for which there were streams of prospective braceros who were being funneled through from what were called migratory stations in the interior of Mexico. There was one near the Pacific coast at a little town called Empalme, through which prospective braceros began, and they were screened in various ways at that point, and those who passed were sent to El Centro, where they went through 3 more screens. Then they were sent to all of the bracero users in CA and Arizona and Oregon and Washington.

I interviewed the manager of that El Centro reception center, and told him that I was working under a grant from the National Institutes of Health, and that I was interested in studying braceros' ideas about health and sickness. He had no objections to that. I guess he said, knowing how these things work, that he didn't personally have any problems with it, but he'd need to get in touch with the people above him, and there were several layers. One of them was in SF and then there was another layer in Washington DC, probably several in between there that I can't remember.

This seemed like a good way to solve the problem of methodology, with the one exception that I wouldn't be interviewing any men who had had no experience at all with the US ways of doing things. However, there would be some who were coming into this country for the first time, whose only experience would have been these brief physical exams that they received, and

blood tests, and chest X-ray that they were given at El Centro, and I didn't think that that would contaminate the before and after comparisons too badly, at least I hoped so.

Now, I guess I have not been altogether forthcoming. In the time between my meeting with Thomas McCullough, which probably took place about Oct of 1956, I didn't receive my MPH until Sept of 56, so my research couldn't have begun before that, I think – anyway, beginning with that profound meeting with Father McCullough and the time that I got turned down by the consulate in San Bernardino, I had seen enough and heard enough and talked to enough people that I had formed definite opinions about what I called the bracero system, because it seemed to me that to call it a “program” was rather benign, and made it sound like a vaccination program or something with a legitimate social purpose.

In fact, it seemed to me, it was a system that served a conglomerate of economic interests, all of them on one side of the scale. It involved the entire apparatus of corporate agriculture. Family farmers didn't use braceros, they did most of the work themselves, or had family members help, or in a few cases year-round hired men. It was a program largely of benefit to industrialized agriculture, and as part of their system they seemed to have friends among the government agencies that were supposed to be administering the program, or the system as I called it. It was administratively lodged within the US Dept of Labor, which according to its congressional charter, dating back to 1915, was supposed to advance the interests of American working men. I don't think by any stretch of the imagination could the bracero program be said to advance the interests of American working men. I didn't think it was even advancing the interests of Mexican working men, but that's another subject.

In Dec of 56, very soon after I met Father McCullough, I met another very influential man, on my thinking, named Ernesto Galarza, who had a PhD in social economy or some such general field. He was very knowledgeable about all the social sciences, and had devoted most of his adult life to try to organize a farm worker's union. He lived in San Jose. I found him absolutely mesmerizing. Very brilliant speaker in public or in personal conversation. Brilliant writer. He was very much the way I wanted to be.

I tried to keep my personal feelings out of the research. The wording of the questions didn't have anything to say about how they were treated on the job, or anything of that sort, although in keeping with what I conceived to be perfectly legitimate research practice, there was at the very end an opportunity for them to expand on anything that they wanted to related to the subjects we had covered. When it came time for me to interview people who might possibly become my interviewers, I tried not to express my personal feelings to them. I daresay that it's not altogether possible to disguise strong feelings by your tone of voice and facial expressions, or gestures, but I tried to impress upon them that fact that we were trying to get an objective answer to the question underlying all that had nothing to do with whether the bracero system

was good or bad; we were trying to get at a perfectly legitimate of whether exposure to western medicine is having an effect upon the 3<sup>rd</sup> world, is what it boils down to.

So we went along, still trying to get a full-time interviewer or two, and eventually I did; I found a fellow who lived in Calexico, which is on the border right across from Mexicali, and a little bit south of El Centro. He had been a shoe salesman in Calexico, and had lost his job because the local people were no longer buying shoes, because their jobs were being taken over by braceros. And if braceros needed shoes, there were guys who would drive around from camp to camp, selling shoes out of the trunks of their cars. So Louis needed a job, and I found he was very good at getting people to open up. So I hired him, and he began interviewing guys who were at this El Centro reception center, waiting for their chest X-ray, or for their blood to be drawn for a syphilis test, or to be loaded onto a bus to be driven to the place of employment.