

## Carmela

*In Carmela's hometown in the state of Oaxaca, children begin working at a very young age. Spanish was her second language. "I used to kernel corn for the nixtamal and I helped my mother to cook as well. And the next day when I could not grind any more, she ground, but when I was in eighth grade I was already helping her to make tortillas." She was thirty-seven years old at the time of this interview.*

ML: At what age do the children in Ojo de Agua begin working with the family?

C: There they start at eight, nine years old. If there is a corn maize, they have to pull the weeds or put fertilizer in the plants. They have to collect *capulines*, pick peaches, help bring the wood with the donkey, and load firewood. Sometimes at that age, we would throw the little bits of firewood in the *tenatito*, which was a plastic bowl that we put on our shoulders or on our head and loaded with sticks or, if we found *piñita de los ocotales*, we would load it as well. Ever since an early age we were good workers because the work was hard there. There was no waiting for you to start; one begins to work even as a small child.

ML: At what age did you start attending school since you began working at eight?

C: I started preschool or kindergarten when I was almost five years old; four or five years old.

ML: So you had a busy childhood. You went to school and then you also had to help with things in the—

C: Yes, when I was in elementary school, almost in the last years of primary school, I used to kernel corn for the *nixtamal* and I helped my mother to cook as well. And the next day when I could not grind any more, she ground, but when I was in eighth grade I was already helping her to make tortillas. I was eleven, twelve years old when I was making a lot of tortillas myself; I helped my mother a lot.

ML: Not only did you help with the chores that had to be done outside, but inside the house also.

C: I helped her with the house chores too. I helped with my mom's lambs, cows, and donkeys and took care of the animals on the weekends and after school around noon. We got in at nine o'clock in the morning on the weekend and left at two o'clock in the afternoon, and coming from school, I would take out my animals and take care of them.

ML: Tell me about when you started school at age five. What was your school like?

C: My kindergarten was nice because it was a program that, when it first arrived, had floors and it was well protected from the cold and the heat, but when I was in first or second grade, the school was not nice. It was made of *murillo*, a type of *ocotales* that you cut, and there was not

floor there, only one made of dirt and dust. We also had a bench, but what our dad had made as a bench, the others called *butacas*, so we had *butacas* that our dad made for us to study.

ML: So if your dad did not make you a *butaca*, you did not have a seat at school.

C: We did not have a seat to sit on.

ML: And, who were your teachers?

C: My preschool teacher, I think I remember, was Antonina. The teacher, Antonina. I remember that she taught me how to sing and everything else.

ML: And when this teacher taught you, did she teach in Mixtec or in Spanish?

C: She taught me in Spanish, but I was very shy. I was afraid to learn Spanish at that age, so I was very scared.

ML: And then in first and second grade, did your teacher teach in Spanish as well?

C: When I was in second and fourth grade, I had a bilingual teacher who spoke Mixtec and Spanish, but they spoke to me more in Mixtec than in Spanish.

ML: And what did you like the most?

C: Mixtec, because I was intimidated by Spanish. I felt embarrassed to speak in Spanish because I felt that I could not speak it correctly, so I spoke more in Mixtec.

Carmela, Interview by Marina López, January 26, 2016