

Translated Transcript of Original Interview with Mr. Alfonso Guzmán (Translated from Spanish into English)

Date: Monday, April 15, 2024

Start Time: 1:00pm

Location: Ford 122 (Film Studies Theater)

Interviewees: Tania Lopez Flores and Teresa Hernández

Interview Run Time: 43:58

Hernández: Perfect. Mr. Guzmán, thank you again for giving us the opportunity to talk to you about your contributions to Willamette University. We wanted to start off with your personal story. What first brought you to Oregon, or the Northwest—and I just want to tell you as well that this is for an audience that doesn't have that familiarity or does not know your personal history—how can you [give us] that story?

Guzmán: Well, I got here in Oregon because I had a brother that worked in agriculture, and we lived in California—my family—and the work ended over there and he invited me to come over here and we came here, to the Willamette Valley. And I started working with him in forestry, planting Christmas trees and trees from the mountains. Later on, I saw in the newspaper one day that they were hiring workers here [at Willamette], and that is when I applied. I had two daughters at that time, and I thought that it would be good that they went here [to Willamette] for school without me having to pay anything. That is how it happened.

Hernández: Oh, that is nice—do you remember what year it was when you applied for the position here at Willamette?

Guzmán: I applied in [1992].

Hernández: In [1992].

Guzmán: It was like November, December—something like that. And then they [hired] me here on January 3rd in [1993].

Hernández: Ah, okay.

Lopez Flores: We understand that your two daughters attended Willamette University, how was that chapter in your life like, having your daughters close to where you worked?

Guzmán: There are three.

Lopez Flores: Oh, three.

Guzmán: It was beautiful because I would go, ah, to the Department of the Grounds at 5:30 a.m. –no, sorry–6:30 a.m., and I would turn on the lights and I would see my daughter in a window and she was like this *made a hand waving gesture* and that gave me a strong emotion like she was here with me. And there was a time when they were both [going to Willamette] at the same time—it was a large savings, not because of the money one earns here, but when they are in school it adds up and then it is a large benefit.

Lopez Flores: How has your relationship with the university changed as a father and as a member of the community?

Guzmán: For me it has never changed; I am always the same person. My moral is to work and work and keep moving forward. My parents have always instilled respect in me—that is how I have always done it.

Hernández: We also wanted to ask, what has your relationship with the environment through gardening been, whether you are on or off the Willamette campus? So the relationship doesn't just need to be about the work you've done here, [but] maybe you also have it at home in your free time.

Guzmán: Oh no, it has been so big to make, uh, a place that a few years ago was more beautiful than it is today because we have lost workers and also because of different situations. But the people that know me know that I am an employee for the university. They have tried to take me to their houses to work and it has been positive. What I have done has always been positive, you just tell them that you work for Willamette and [they say] “come help me.” There has been [like] in everything—ups and downs—because there have been people that want me to work for them for less money and there are others that try to do it fairly, as it should be done.

Hernández: Those people, that have tried to contract you, have they also been employees from the university?

Guzmán: Yes, professors from here—that try to contract you so you can do the job for them for like *hand gesture indicating little or no pay*...I do not understand why.

Hernández: Wow, I did not know that.

Guzmán: Yes.

Hernández: Do you also have your own business outside of the university? Or is it more informal? Like for you—if someone comes and they [solicit you for a job], can a work arrangement be made?

Guzmán: No, I have my own license for 20 years, but I have been doing this job since—for around 35 to 40 years.

Lopez Flores: How did the idea of vegetable patches or community gardens start at Willamette? And if you want to share, is there a reason why the gardens or patches are located in certain parts of campus?

Guzmán: This started because I had no space to cultivate [plants] because [the space] in my house was too small. And I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Agriculture so I have always liked to farm. Here there are lots of spaces to do [farming/growing]. I started putting *chiles* here and tomatoes here hidden between trees—between plants—and I saw that they liked it. A lot of people, faculty and everyone here in the university liked what I did and they saw that they benefited like the students did. Because students arrive here with a very high sense of themselves but sometimes some very poor students come and they don't have enough to sustain themselves. And to see [fresh produce] here is a satisfaction that anyone should feel—that there is something that they can eat and it is edible and they use it.

Hernández: You had said that they were sort of hidden, all the seeds that you had planted—was there a reason why you felt that you needed to keep it hidden at first?

Guzmán: Yes, because I thought that maybe they were not going to like to see tomatoes between flowers. ***laughter*** Or another plant. But after seeing that they did not reject me, I then decided to use spaces that were vacant—where there was nothing planted—and well I have continued to treat it like that.

Hernández: I also have a question that I think is close to what you are already talking about. [The] needs that you have seen of the students – for example what you had said – that there are students who arrive and who do not have enough access, for example, to the fresh produce or vegetables or fruits; have these needs changed during the number of years that you have been here or what needs can you see right now that are here on campus?

Guzmán: No, I have always noticed this—for example, there were students before who came from China and Bangladesh and some other countries that I have forgotten...from Pakistan. And these ones, [they were] very poor and had nothing. And what we planted here was always a wealth for them and to this day I have noticed it because there are students—even if they are Americans born here—also feel the need because their parents [cannot] give them anything. And I feel

satisfied that it can be utilized by anyone. The same for the Hispanic families who come here and see that I have chiles and that I have these other [plants] and they ask me for them. Same with Bon Appétit employees. There's been times that it's been that way. In the past at the Bistro they cooked quesadillas and pizza and all that—they would come to see if I would give them tomatoes and well, of course I would.

Lopez Flores: We want to know whether there are plants, vegetables, or other herbs that you have planted that have a special meaning for you or for the Latino or Indigenous community?

Guzmán: Yes, the *nopales*. There are some *nopales* that do not freeze; that you plant and they don't die from the cold. And I always see that people like them, it makes some of them curious because the weather brings snow and they are still good. And even though they are very thorny, they use them.

Hernández: Yes, I remember that a project that one of the students from my first year here did—she went to ask you about where the *nopales* were located on the campus and made a recipe with the *nopales*. She cooked them with housemates....what were the first plants or vegetables that you planted or that you all planted here at Willamette?

Guzmán: We planted potatoes, roma tomatoes, chiles, and pumpkins such as zucchinis and squash. And there were fruit trees, there are some figs.

Hernández: When you plant something, for example *nopales* or an herb or the fruits that you plant on campus, what is the intention—do you plant it because you like the plant or are there different reasons for why you plant that in particular?

Guzmán: It is something that I and other people like. Even if they are not from here, there are people, for example, by where Gatke is, many homeless people come to pick from there. I have planted tomatillos and we have not been able to get any because they take them first. ***Lopez Flores laughs*** But no, no that does not bother me. If something is being used, it is fine. It doesn't matter who, so long as it is being used.

Lopez-Florez: In the fall, we had the opportunity to take a tour of the gardens with you for our class, and you told us that there is a plant that is used as a remedy for a cough—are there other herbs available in the gardens that can be used for remedies/healing? And if you could also tell us [the name] of that plant?

Guzmán: This plant is called “gordolobo”—it is used for bronchitis, for a cough, and there are also other medicinal plants, but those are in the botanical garden here. Such as oregano,

peppermint; although right now they are unattended because of the construction that's been happening, but they are still there and there are others like blueberries that are also there.

Hernández: With all of the changes that have happened on campus such as with periods of construction, as there is a lot of construction going on right now, has it changed the location of these plants or have you had to move them?

Guzmán: No.

Hernández: Okay.

Guzmán: There still are some places where I have not put many plants because there are many homeless people and some homeless people come here and what they do leaves the space very dirty. So I cannot plant where I know that they are. Because it does not feel pleasant that they came here and relieved themselves or something else. (**Hernández: Ah, okay.**) So then no, it does not sit right to me that things are like this so I have moved [the gardens] closer to the center of campus.

Hernández: What type of support did you get when you initiated the idea of the gardens, for example were there other employees who assisted you?

Guzmán: My boss, Jim Anderson, had the opportunity one time of buying seeds from the University of Arizona to have for all over campus. And, uh, we tried for some products to grow but when they are seeds that come from a place in which they grow in the heat, like it is very hot there and like here the temperature is cold in comparison to there in Arizona. No, they don't grow. For example, *maíz* that we have brought, *maíz* from Mexico, and there it grows well and here it does not because it has not adapted yet. We have to sow it one time and then that *maíz* gives around like three grains. One has to store it and sow it again and then from those three grains from the *maíz*, then it is almost full—but not until it adapts.

Lopez Flores: When the university found out about the gardens, what was the reaction of the administrators or the other workers?

Guzmán: They told me to share, that I should give to everyone or tell everyone where it was. "Of course," I said, "here they are." Some came and left with buckets of tomatoes, others were left without—but always everyone did what they felt would be best for them.

Hernández: Which groups or groups of students have volunteered or have been in communication with you about the gardens—like those that were close to the library, for example,

did [those students] correspond with you to see how they could best volunteer or work in the gardens?

Guzmán: No, they worked for a girl who was in charge of Zena [Farms] and did the community gardens for the [broader] community, and they all worked but were apart [from my efforts]. They were more or less over by the side of biology, over there. They did what they could.

Hernández: Has the support or help been constant? Or, how have they helped with the gardens? Or, is it only in the time in which they are in [classes], for example [during] the school year and later [students] disappear during the summer?

Guzmán: Yes, they always disappear. There are times when there are student workers from our department and I teach them how to do it [groundskeeping] and they work with us in different parts of the university. And they are those that come to recover what they need. But help us? Only those who work in the Grounds. And really they learn—like how to do it and they discover things. Because when [the students] come here and they have to water a plant, they think that they can sprinkle a little water and it will be enough. ***Hernández and Lopez Flores laugh***

Hernández: What are the types of—what is it that one learns when someone... applies for the job of being an assistant to you, what is it that you had to—what is it that they learn in the process?

Guzmán: They learn how to plant a plant and what you need [for the plants] to have sufficient nutrients. Because—for example the tomato, if you do not put calcium, it grows sick and the bottom of the tomato turns black and it becomes useless. So, there are some nutrients and they learn about how to use them and when [to use them] and to plant from day-to-day.

Hernández: What type of student, um, applies for this position?

Guzmán: Whoever wants to work. At times they are, um, the children of university employees that apply even if they are not students. Or they come from Willamette Academy as well.

Hernández: So we are on the same question of who maintains the gardens—mostly we want to know who maintains them throughout the summer or the winter, when there are not [as many] students on campus.

Guzmán: One of my coworkers - those who work with me - if I am not there, and we need to water [the plants] or do something else that they need. Efen [insert last name].

Hernández: Efen?

Guzmán: Mhmmmm.

Hernández: And then, almost similar to one of the first questions we had asked you was about if there are organizations or students that have helped to maintain the gardens? So you had mentioned some from [Zena Farm]. Have there been other students or groups of students who have offered to help?

Guzmán: Yes, yes they have offered and at times they start a project, but it's very difficult because [the students] leave, and the season in which they leave is when the plants grow.

Hernández and Lopez Flores laugh In the time of heat (**Hernández:** In the summer) Yeah, so when they come back sometimes I help them with what they plant even when it is not something that I have planted. But I have helped them if [the plants] are dying from thirst or something else. And when they come back—they come back again time, but well, it is not like when there's someone here present all the time.

Hernández: The garden ... which is the largest [garden] that is located here [on campus] in your opinion?

Guzmán: The one that is by Gatke over here. (**Hernández:** Okay.) But there is a problem - there are some nutrias and those nutrias come and they eat all the *maíz*. (**Hernández:** Okay) There are some plants that they don't like, which are the *chiles*, the red tomatoes, the potatoes, the green beans, and the beans. So then I have to look for something that they don't like because last year I planted *maíz* on all sides, and I planted it around four or five times and it sprouted, and by the time I came around they had already eaten it. And if [the nutria] weren't there—the rats, there are a lot of rats. Since there are, like, containers of trash here, by the, by the lands that are here and then those that are there in Goudy--there are rats in many places. But no one can, uhh, put any kind of poison. The only thing they do that keeps this under control, a little box, and I don't know how...they do it for the school, they have a company that comes and is responsible for that. I grab this box and I bring it to this garden to protect what we have. But no, no, no, we cannot use any chemicals at all.

Hernández: And here we are thinking that the nutrias look very (**Lopez Flores** laughs) ...very...

Guzmán:they look very...

Hernández: ... very pretty, very cute!

Lopez Flores and Hernández laugh

Hernández: but they are causing...

Guzmán: Oh yes...

Hernández: ...but they are causing problems.

Guzmán: Before this there was a coworker who gave them bananas to eat there in the stream. In the creek. And that's how they sustained themselves but now no one gives them [food] to eat and now they go everywhere and they walk outside. And there are so many.

Hernández: We have talked a bit about the support that they have given, that other employees who are your coworkers have given you, but we were also thinking about the funds it truly takes to be able to maintain the gardens and the vegetable patches (like the seeds or different types of materials that you need). How has the university responded in giving you these materials or is more support needed?

Guzmán: Well, I never have asked them [for support]. I have always done it from my own pocket, but it is not a lot. Because at times I go to Goudy and they give me tomatoes and from those I get seeds. The chiles—I have, like, more than 20 years that I have cared for and propagated them. And this is how things are, but asking for help from the university? No. Yes, sometimes we have gotten materials from the greenhouse like the soil that comes in some sacks—potting soil.

Hernández: You have gone to Zena Farm that we have here, that is located in Salem, right? (**Guzmán:** Yes.) Or is it farther from the city?

Guzmán: It is located around twenty miles in West Salem in that direction, and I don't know how many acres there are but it is a lot and at times we have had to go to cut the grass around the house because it is a hazard for wildfires. (**Hernández:** Yes, of course.) Sometimes we have maintained the cutting of the grass. Last year we went many times but since our team over here in the school was very small, we could barely manage [the work] here, but now they have contracted two other guys, so we'll see what happens.

Lopez Flores: Going back to talking about funds, has anyone gotten in contact with you about giving you any funds for anything?

Guzmán: No. Like I've said, sometimes I will grab potting soil that they have for practices, tasks, or whatever. David Craig has a donation from a company called Highway Fuel Company, and they gave him a truck full of soil. And sometimes I've asked if I could have some and he has

let me have some. They donated it to him—he uses it for the native trees like oaks and he said I could use what I wanted.

Flores-Lopez: What have been the most prominent changes you have seen or witnessed in the environment of Willamette?

Guzmán: There have been big changes, like how the administration changes, so have people who arrive into the administration and they don't quite know what they are doing. There was a time when we didn't water [the landscaping]—we didn't use water—nothing. So, since we stopped watering, we had to pay a company from the Grounds budget to come cut down trees. Why? Because they would dry out due to the lack of watering. The university spends about 100 thousand dollars on water a year, and because they wanted to save money, they told us to not use the water. So because of that, there were various big trees that died out. Instead of saving, we lost [money] because there was now a need to pay for someone to come cut the trees down. And well, that's not a good thing. Not just trees but also plants that were blooming, they dried out and died. But yes, it has changed. Not until they realized that what they were doing wasn't okay. The people who come here, the students who come here, would come visit the school and everything was dried out, the grass was dry. They would ask “Why?” because we were saving water. And no, no it didn't work out. So then they told us that we could use the water that was necessary. And they told us once more the green light that we could use water to maintain the school once again—for it to look nice. So yes, there were big changes.

Lopez Flores: Do you remember the year when that happened?

Guzmán: I believe it was around five years ago. Yes, something like that. Like in [2018] more or less.

Hernández: When they have made those changes, like saving money through the water [regulation] as an example, but also when they have wanted to do another initiative to have more plants or flowers. Do they get into communication with the team that works in facilities or is it a decision that administrators make without thinking and just say “plant all of this”?

Guzmán: No, the administration just says that: “there's no money,” “don't spend money,” and “don't buy anything.” Before, a while ago when it was graduation season we would plant about 3,000 flowers each year. On the signs, every sign that says: “Willamette University,” in each sign, there's about four of them. We would plant many different flowers. We would plant 3,000 flowers in a week so that it would look beautiful. That [expense] has been cut, so it doesn't happen anymore. We no longer use that money.

Hernández: What's the most important or necessary thing for you to maintain the gardens?

Guzmán: That it looks pretty. That people like it. Because there are a lot of people who come here to the school and they get very excited and say “what a beautiful place.” “I like it here.” And it's that way everywhere. Go to a restaurant and when you arrive and you see their gardens, what's outside and you see that it is dirty and or littered with trash, and dried out trees. You're not going to have the appetite to eat there.

An example of this: there's this restaurant named Shari's in Keizer. We would go daily, to eat breakfast and everything. Well later, we would see that with arrival of Covid, everything changed. Less people, dirty tables, dirty floors. You didn't feel comfortable [anymore]. We would ask for a pie to take home, the pie was filled with [bug/unclear naming]. Why? Because people didn't have the money to maintain a clean [space]. So then, one feels like you're not thriving. A clean place is a secure place. Anytime that you see a place that is clean and well maintained, it brings people in and they like it. It's how that saying goes, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

Hernández: What type of support is needed from the university or our community here at Willamette to continue with the effort you have started over the next several years?

Guzmán: Only that there is someone interested in continuing to help maintain the space.

Hernández: You mentioned that during Covid, various things changed. How has the team changed, the size of the crew of workers [for example,] and how has that impacted the initiatives of the gardens and [vegetable] patches?

Guzmán: Things were greatly impacted when Covid arrived, the people who were older, more susceptible to getting sick were sent home in order to avoid them getting sick. I don't remember the name of what that leave is called when you're asked to home to be cautious but were still getting paid because the worry was that if you got sick you would die. So then they sent some [workers] home that were [immunocompromised] or had a propensity for cancer or something like that. They sent them home so then there were only three of us left, no more. It was all that we could do. There was a time when there was an ice storm and many of the trees were damaged because of that. And well we didn't have much help. There were only three of us workers, that was it. And the rest were at home. Why? Because the government told them to be there. But yes, it changed all of that. One would eat here, the other would eat there, and another over there—we were very far away from each other.

Hernández: Even outside—when you were outside, I remember.

Guzmán: Even outside! And if one person started coughing— then off you were back home! It didn't matter what sickness you had—you had to leave. “Dont be here.” You can still see it on the

door handles [on campus], they are all tarnished because of the bleach we used. A person would arrive to [a place] and there they'd go using the bleach and clean everything. But yes, it was a different change. And more work for us. Because of that, many of the things that we had well maintained, well it started getting behind the other work—piling up. One can't keep up.

Hernández: You mentioned that they've recently hired new workers, like, [are they] in the same area as where you work? Or how are those workers going to support what you all are doing?

Guzmán: Well, everyone has an area. Like I am designated to the Service Drive. Everything up to there there—until Human Resources over there. Up to here at Montag. This [area] belongs to me. And then another coworker from Service Drive up to the stream up to here (Ford Hall) and from the stream another person [maintains that] up until Winter Street and from Winter onward [belongs to] another [Grounds worker]. And we also have to maintain, Tokyo [International University], [and] the street, Tokyo. So then, one of them maintains from way over there, because there were three people who retired and they were never replaced. So then we had to take over their jobs. We couldn't do it all. So then instead of it looking good, it didn't. We didn't have the time. But now that they are here [hopefully] they each put in their own perspective and we can move forward.

Lopez Flores: What is your goal or wish for the gardens? [From] now to the future?

Guzmán: Well—it is to progress and make them better. And to see what we can cultivate that can serve people. For it to do good.

Hernández: How have you felt—during these decades—that you have contributed to the university. How do you feel, because you had mentioned, previously, that you are thinking about possibly retiring in the future. Not now, we're not ready to let you go, but once you're ready to retire, how do you imagine [not only] how the university might change, but also yourself? What are your plans?

Guzmán: My plans...umm...are that I will retire from here. I want to be able to travel now that I can still walk a bit. **(laughs)** Because once you get older, you can't even get on an airplane and travel anywhere. Before, I would drive everywhere, to Mexico—and anywhere. But you never know so I want to try to get out before I really can't do anything. Because one of my coworkers, once they retired from here...they are sick, very sick. One that worked over there in Kaneko—a man who was very strong got sick. And now he doesn't even weigh a third of what he used to. He weighed about 150—sorry around 250 pounds and now he weighs like 70. And he can't even eat, so that is why I say while we can we need to move forward and try to enjoy what little of this life we have because there is no tomorrow. What can be done now, needs to be done now. And you all too—enjoy what you can now because we can't guarantee there is a tomorrow.

Hernández: When you go to Mexico, do you still have family there?

Guzmán: I have two sisters there.

Hernández: Where?

Guzmán: one of them is in Lagos de Moreno (Jalisco) and the other is in Yahualica, Jalisco. Where... I grew up.

Hernández: You're from Jalisco?

Guzmán: mhmm.

Hernández: Okay, and where do you want to travel? What are the places you imagine—on a cruise?

Guzmán: I want to travel to, um—we only have granddaughters-two. So, what we couldn't enjoy with our children, like taking them out places, taking them to play baseball or soccer, or whatever because, look, we were working. So we want to give that to our grandchildren. Because with your children you can't savor anything. (directed to **Hernández**) Don't tell me that you were able to really enjoy [time] with your daughter? No.

Hernández: No...

Guzmán: No, why? Because it's work and work. Right? So that is why what we did not do with our own children, we can do with our grandchildren. Right now, last night, we were in, umm, Palms Springs, [California]. I arrived at 2 in the morning. (**laughter**)

Hernández: You drove all the way there?

Guzmán: No, on a plane. But I came to work because I knew I was going to be with you all.

Hernández: Well, thank you, [hopefully] you did not cut your vacation short to be here?

Guzmán: No, no, I didn't cut it short.

Hernández: Okay!

Guzmán: But I could've had the day off. Yes, my granddaughters were over there in Disneyland, and I went to go see them.

Hernández: What are your daughters up to now that they have graduated? Have they stayed here locally in Salem or did they move?

Guzmán: One works in Maui—she stayed over there. She works in a solar electricity company. And the other two, one works as a nurse and the other works with immigration lawyers. Yes.

Hernández: Also in Portland or?

Guzmán: In Portland.

Hernández: That's great. So for you all—your plans are to stay in Salem or perhaps move closer to...?

Guzmán: No, not in Salem very much. I want to go to Mexico when it's cold and when the weather changes, I'll come back. **(laughter)**

Hernández: That's nice. In Texas, when “los americanos” would come to Texas they were always called “Winter Texans” because they would arrive like birds in the season when it was very cold [up North].

Guzmán: Oh, “Los Snowbirds,” correct?

Hernández: Yes, “Los snowbirds.” And in Florida, too.

Hernández: Well, umm, [those] were the questions that we had prepared. But, is there anything else you would like to share about what you have – honestly what you have done has been tremendous for the students. When [you and I] were leading that class, and when you came to visit with the students, in particular, they were very responsive to the work that you have been able to do throughout all of these years. They are very grateful, I think, me, for all of the effort that you have taken on. And they have wanted to find a way to record and remember all of this work that you have put into place. So I don't know if you have any other comments, things that you remember, or that you might want to be a part of this interview?

Guzmán: No, I don't have anything else in mind to share.

Hernández: That's okay, then the only thing that I wanted to say is that the goal that the students have is to be able to take what we recorded and begin to translate and transcribe for the students

that don't speak Spanish or that can't read in Spanish, so that they can also have a translation of the whole interview. And to start the process of writing the longer essay that we are going to archive here at the university. So our goal is to finish this all during the first half of the summer, so that way we can have a ceremony and have everything completed that will be published—by the end of August or at the beginning of September. Everything that we will collect like photos or other materials, if you want to see them before they are shown to the public, please let us know. I can also share the images that we will use during this process. Do you have any other questions about our plans?

Guzmán: No. (laughs)

Hernández: No, okay. Very well. So then we're going to go outside with you. We don't have to go to all of the gardens today but we can go to some of the gardens to take pictures of where they are located. That way we can begin to create like a map of where they are all located, and we can have that information be accessible for all the students and other visitors that come to the university. Okay, perfect.

END