When Mario T. Garcia, a history professor at University of California, Santa Barbara assigned his students to generate oral histories an elaborate project emerged. After reading a student’s paper about her aunt Frances Esquibel Tywoniak’s journey from a migrant workers daughter to a university student, Garcia wanted to meet the narrator. What followed was roughly 35 hours of taped conversation, followed by Migrant Daughter: Coming of Age as a Mexican American Woman the transition of her oral history into a written work.

Tywoniak traces her memories from early childhood in New Mexico through her college graduation from UC Berkeley. Tywoniak begins by discussing her early childhood in New Mexico, “there always seemed to be a lot of people around, all family. That’s one of my most reassuring images of New Mexico.” (8) Although Tywoniak was required to speak English at school, her father insisted that Spanish be the primary language at home, “his angry assertion that ‘here in my house Spanish is spoke) was delivered with a menacing look.” (21) Similarly to Richard Rodriguez’s discussion in Hunger of Memory, public and private language play a role in Tywoniak’s world as well, “functioning in two language worlds – Spanish at home and English outside my home – made me very wary and restricted me in my natural inclination toward openness.” (83) She even references Rodriguez’s public versus private world later in the work.

At age seven, Tywoniak’s life changed drastically when her family left their Spanish speaking world in New Mexico in hopes of finding a better future in California. Settling in the San Joaquin Valley, her father found a job as a migrant worker, but the family moved frequently.

Although addressing many issues similar to Rodriguez’s work including language, education and family life, Tywoniak’s account is more personal as she addresses issues of menstruation, dating and sexuality. Around age 10 Tywoniak got her first period, “I expected reassurance but instead encountered my mother’s silence . . . we did not discuss what was happening.” (54) These differences in how much the authors are willing to share is common in oral history – different narrators will inevitably be more comfortable with sharing their story than others. Rodriguez steered clear of puberty, dating and sexuality in Hunger of Memory. This difference between Rodriguez and Tywoniak, or any two personal accounts, remind an interviewer to be aware of the differences in the people she will encounter.

In high school, Tywoniak becomes more interested in reading and begins to make Anglo friends at school, “While I was becoming more acculturated – more Americanized – I still at times had to confront the dualities of my young life.” (82) During this point in her life she has her first serious relationship. However, despite her strong feelings for Peter, Tywoniak realized that “a future with Peter would mean the end of a future for me. . . Success in school made me want something more than marriage and Visalia.” (92) Although a successful student, Tywoniak reflects on the challenges of reconciling her two distinct worlds, questioning whether such a thing was even possible. Her acceptance to UC Berkeley following high school graduation meant a drastic change in Tywoniak’s life, “I missed my parents and family but I also knew there was no going back for me, at least not in a literal sense.” (171) While at Berkeley she also met Ed Tywoniak and briefly discusses her courtship and their marriage. Although he was of Polish descent, “The fact that I was crossing ethnic barriers was not a consideration.” (216)

While Tywoniak’s academic achievements led her into a world that, at the time, was predominantly white, a good portion of her memories would be shared by a large population of Mexican American woman who grew up in California during the 1930s and 40s.