

### 3. The Setting and Participants.

#### 3.1. Overview

Literacy practice is situated within a culture and serves the purposes decided on by those who are involved in it. Thus, in a qualitative study such as the one reported here, it is important to understand the participants' background and characteristics, the context in which they live, and the relationships they have formed. In this chapter I first present myself, because it was primarily through me that the data was collected and interpreted. As a researcher, I aimed to understand the literacy practices from the participants' perspective; I carried with me my own set of experiences, beliefs and interests, which inevitably affected my collection, and analysis of the data.

I then present and describe the community in which the three families live in order to understand how their home literacy practices might be socially situated in relation to the community.

Third, I present the three families separately. Because the amount of time and the degree of trust I gained with each family varied, one family is presented in greater depth than the others. It may also be relevant to note that this family has experienced the migration of a family member most recently. As Portes, et al. (1999) point out, it is through individualized, local studies of migrants especially at their incipient stage, which are most effective in exploring the bases of transnationalism.

I attempt to situate the reader in each family's history, presenting the conditions under which the migration occurred, the goals which accompanied it, and the changes the migration had on the family in terms of their economy, work, roles, relationships and

organization. I also discuss each family's education, personal interests, religious life and health because I found these factors integral to some aspect of migration and/or literacy.

### 3.2. The Researcher

I grew up in an all-Caucasian rural community in the Midwest of the U.S. I studied at a liberal arts college, took two semesters of Spanish, and did an internship connecting migrants to social services. After graduating, I came to live in Mexico and studied Spanish in an intensive summer course. Since then, I have continued learning Spanish, mostly through everyday experiences over the past 23 years. I consider myself a fluent bilingual. Coming to Mexico at a relatively young age, I was flexible enough still to adapt to a new culture to the point that friends on both sides of the border comment on how Mexicanized I am, not only in speech, but also in my attitudes and actions. I have made my home in the research community's neighboring town for the past twenty years.

Because of these experiences, I began this study confident I would be able to relate with people at every level – the teachers, the students, and the parents. My two children are now adolescents and I have had first-hand experience of being a parent of children in the Mexican primary, secondary, and high school education system. For over twenty-two years, I have also been a teacher of English-as-a-foreign-language to students of various ages and backgrounds at both private and public schools. My own desire for professional development led me to study a master's degree in applied linguistics. Furthermore, as a migrant myself with many migrant friends in the community, I was sensitive to the issues facing transnational families. I believe these personal experiences

were important factors in developing relationships of trust with the participants essential to the collection of rich data.

Because I live in the same community as the participants, I also encountered some personal/professional coincidences. Shortly after the interview with the fourth-grade teacher, for example, we discovered that his nephew (who lives with him) and my son are good buddies and frequently spend time at each other's homes. Also, after discussing Mariana's family of origin in more detail (she is the mother of one of the case study families), I later deduced that her brother was my son's work-study boss.

The personal aspects of my relationship with the community were therefore an added motivating factor for carrying out this research. Returned migrants, many of whom open businesses, love to brush up on their English while we conduct business transactions. Those who have family abroad are eager to find out where I am from and to talk about their loved ones in the US. Over the years I have seen and felt both the increasing linguistic and personal effects of transnational migration on this community and on the families, motivating me both professionally and personally to be a part of advancing our understanding of the phenomenon.

In the next section, I present a description of the research community where the participants of this study and I live. I present the literacy and educational profile of the inhabitants and the educational services available and a discussion of the community's economy and incidence of migration. Finally, I offer evidence of the effects of migration on the community.

### 3.3. The Research Community

The research community is the seat of the municipal government and home to nearly 30,000, over half of the municipality's population of 56,000 (Municipio de San Andrés Cholula, 2004). The town and the municipality share the same name. The municipality borders the capital city of the state located on the high central plains of Mexico. This community has also been described in Vance (2005a), Teague (2004), Ballesteros (2003), and Jiménez et al. (2003).

Being a community with a long history and yet a growing modernization, it is helpful to first consider Bonfil Batalla's (1987) thesis of the existence of two Mexicos. He refers to that which is Mesoamerican, rural, and indigenous as *México Profundo* [Deep Mexico], and that which is western, urban, and "de-Indianizing," as *México Imaginario* [Imaginary Mexico]. He proposes the *imaginary* rejects the *deep* by imposing western economic, cultural, political, social, and environmental models. We can find both these Mexico's in the research community, which is a historical/archaeological center. The oldest archaeological vestiges of the area date between 500 and 200 B.C. Since then, the area has been populated continuously for over two thousand years (Suárez & Martínez, 1993), retaining traits of pre-Columbian culture in language, religion, and family and community organization which in turn affects practices involving literacy.

### 3.3.1. What's in a Name?

One obvious proof of the community retaining the *deep* is in the names of its people. In Table 3.1, I present 35 Nahuatl surnames found on three classroom student lists that teachers from Alfonso Cano Elementary School shared with me. In Mexico, people are

given two surnames; the first is the paternal and the second the maternal. For example, Salazar Oaxaca, Tenahua Tlatehui, and Nava Romero, are the surnames of the children in this case study. Of the 113 children on the three lists, 68 carry one or two surnames of Nahuatl origin. Of the six surnames for the three families of this study, three are Nahuatl. Not all of them are native of the community, however, and the community has a reputation for being exclusionist. According to Olivera (1971), there are historical, religiously based reasons for this. I have heard people with origins in the community clarify that a certain person with a certain last name may *live* in the community but be *from* the neighboring community, not from *this* community. Origin and identity are linked to these names. Five of the six parents of this study were born in the community, and, the one who was not admits to having few friends in the community. She does have a Nahuatl last name, however.

Table 3.1

*Nahuatl Surnames Found in Three Groups at the Alfonso Cano Elementary School*

Aca	Tenahua	Huixtlaca	Tecuatl	Tome
Acuca	Cuatzo	Izcoatl	Tentle	Tototzintle
Cocolotl	Cuautle	Izmoyotl	Tepetl	Toxtle
Coexcua	Cuautli	Ocototxtle	Tepeyahuitl	Tzili
Tlatehui	Cuaxiloa	Quechol	Tlachi	Xicale
Cuacuas	Hueytletl	Tecpanecatl	Tlatehui	Zacatzontetl
Cuahuey	Huitle	Tecaxco	Tochimani	Zacatzontle

Only one of the 113 children's first or middle names is Nahuatl in origin – Iluhicamina. In fact, several are based on English spelling or pronunciation. For example, names such as Brenda, Brian, Cynthia, Denisse, Elizabeth, Erika, Jenry (pronounced Henry), Karen, Karla, Jaquelinne, Jessica, Jonathan, Nancy, Marlene, Mary and Richard all appear on the rosters. While surnames reflect identity of origin, perhaps given names reflect a modernity that

people connect with English. The rest of the names and surnames in the roster are principally Spanish.

Spanish is the first language for the majority of the municipal population, with just under 5% speaking an indigenous language (INEGI, 2004). In the sociolinguistic census conducted by COSOLEM with 218 families, just 3% reported having at least some contact with an indigenous language, and this contact was most often a grandparent who speaks or spoke the language. In contrast, 17% reported being able to speak at least some English.

People's everyday lexicons also include Nahuatl-based words, which take on the morphology of Spanish. In this community, one can hear words for household objects, e.g. *molcajete* (mortar), *temolote* (pestle); descriptive adjectives, e.g. *apoxcahuada*, (spoiled); particular foods, e.g. *zapote*; food by-products, e.g. *xaxtle* (coffee grounds); plants (*epazote*); animals (*tlacuache*); toys (*papalote*), soil types (*tezontle*), etc. A typical homework assignment is to write a list of Nahuatl-based words. As a parent, I can vouch that this is a homework assignment at least once a year throughout primary school. In some families, this assignment becomes an intergenerational cooperative language exercise between children and elderly speakers of Nahuatl.

### 3.3.2. Religion in the Research Community



Figure 3.1. Welcome sign for a religious *fiesta*.

Religion affects the structure of the community in which these transnational families live, and places responsibilities on families to organize many events involving the whole family. Literacy practices are found embedded in many of these religious activities (Murillo, 2005). *Figure 3.1* shows a decorative arch made by people of the research community and placed in the *zocalo* [town square]. The displayed words welcome the venerated visiting image, in this case, the *Madre Santísima* [Most Holy Mother]. Mlade (2001) reported that nearly 94% of the people of the community profess Roman Catholicism as their faith, and religious traditions remain strong. Religious rituals, which mix Mesoamerican and Roman Catholic religious practices, are an integral part of community and family life (Murillo, 2005); they follow and shape a complex social and religious network based on *barrios* (Mlade, 2001; Bonfil, 1996, Olivera, 1971).

Mlade (2001) defines *barrios* as “the smallest division of a town, made up of mostly-related families that are protected [by] the same patron saint (p.72).” Religious events are typically called *fiestas* and include both the religious aspects, such as ceremonies and their elements including flowers and fireworks, as well as more mundane aspects, such as meals and music. Participation in the religious *cargo* system, the framework giving organization to religious events, fulfills obligations in both the religious and the social realms (Mlade,

2001). Participation allows a spiritual venue for maintaining or requesting “well-being from a spiritual source” (Mlade, 2001, p.25). Participation also allows a social venue for gaining status and prestige in the community (Mlade, 2001). In the family, Mlade (2001) mentions “a home is not complete without a family altar full of religious images of Jesus and the family’s favored saints, rosaries, incense (p. 18),” and flowers. *Figure 3.2* depicts the family *altar* in the Salazar Oaxaca home. Within the family descriptions in this chapter, I will present the role religion plays specifically in the lives of these three transnational families, and in Chapter Four, in their literacy practices.



*Figure 3.2. Altar in the Salazar Oaxaca home.*

### 3.3.3. Family Structure

Yet another aspect of *México Profundo* is that of family structure. The family structure affects which family members come in contact with each other. Less experienced readers and writers draw from the knowledge of more experienced readers and writers in forming their own understandings of literacy (Kalman 2003). The family structure provides the opportunity for contact in literacy practices and thus for appropriation of literacy to take place. Robichaux (2002) describes the Mesoamerican family system. He notes that (a) a couple’s first home is virilocal; (b) the youngest male, referred to as the *xocoyote*, is given the privilege of inheriting the family home plot, but also the responsibility of caring for his



aging parents; (c) male offspring are given priority in inheritance, with sons receiving equal shares, while daughters may also be included in receiving shares of inheritance if there is enough to go around; and as a result, (d) patrilineally-related male heads of households have their homes contiguous to each other. Murillo (2005), Mlade (2001) and Olivera (1971) found all these traits within the research community.

Olivera (1971), based on interviews with a reported 70% of the families in the community, suggests that strong tradition of patrilocal residency is beginning to break down. Nearly 40% of the respondents in her study acquired property through buying rather than through inheritance, yet 74% of the male heads of family continued living in the same *barrio* in which they were born. Partial results from COSOLEM's sociolinguistic census conducted at three schools in the community, indicate that the trend of owning homes still predominates regardless of general socio-economic level, as seen in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2.  
*Sociolinguistic Census Results of Three Schools in Research Community\*\**

School (number of respondents)	Alfonso Cano (82)	Centro Telpochcalli semi-private (65)	*Public School (69)	The three schools (218)
Phone	56 68%	55 85%	40 58%	151 69%
Cable	6 7%	6 9%	0 0%	12 6%
Internet	6 11%	23 33%	0 0%	29 13%
Own a motor vehicle	27 33%	52 80%	10 14%	89 41%
Own their home	60 73%	47 72%	51 74%	158 72%
From the community area	49 60%	12 18%	42 61%	103 47%
Finished primary school	74 90%	61 94%	69 96%	204 94%
Finished middle school	52 63%	60 92%	23 33%	135 62%
High school / technical career	25 30%	53 81%	10 14%	88 40%
At least some university	6 7%	34 52%	2 3%	42 19%
Graduate studies	0 0%	8 12%	0 0%	8 4%
Family living abroad	38 46%	34 52%	24 35%	96 44%

\*She did not name or use a pseudonym for the school.

\*\*Data were gathered at \*Public School in fall of 2003, at Centro Telpochcalli in spring of 2004, and at Alfonso Cano Elementary School in fall of 2004.

### 3.3.4. Literacy and Education

The number of pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools in the community has increased in recent years (Mlade, 2001 and Olivera, 1971) reducing the need for families to send their children to neighboring towns to study, a fact that was evident in completing the Family Social History Forms with eleven families in this study. Several universities and

institutes of higher learning are also located in the periphery of the municipality (Municipio, 2004). Within the city limits, there is one private university offering 5-year undergraduate programs and several graduate programs. A rich symbiotic relationship has developed over the three and a half decades since the university's founding, with the city gradually meeting more of the consumer needs of the relatively prosperous academic and administrative members of the campus, and with the university offering jobs, a limited number of scholarships, and cultural and educational support to the residents of the community.

INEGI calculates the self-reported literacy rate for the municipal's population 15 years and older at 92.3% in 2000. Referring once again to Table 3.2, Public School, is a large primary school established in the community over forty years ago serving 627 students in 2003 (Ballesteros, 2003). Four of the six participating parents in this study studied some of their education at this school. Centro Telpochcalli was established in 1985 (Vance, 2005a), and in 2003, the student enrollment had reached nearly 400 (Jiménez et al, 2003). Alfonso Cano Elementary School, also a public school, was established 22 years ago and during the 2004-2005 school year, served 335 families, with an enrollment of 529 (personal communication with the director). In-depth descriptions of the schools themselves and results from studies on literacy practices carried out there can be found: for Alfonso Cano Elementary School, in Sullivan (2005) and Vance (2005b); for Centro Telpochcalli, in Vance (2005a), Teague (2004), and Jiménez et al. (2003); and for Public School, in Ballesteros (2003).

Results presented in Table 3.2 also reveal a wide variation in formal education among the populations. Completion of primary school varied only six percentage points between the three schools, at an average of 93%. The percentages having finished secondary school

however, showed wide variation among the respondents from the three schools, and an even wider difference was found for completion of high school. Vance (2005a) notes that it is understandable that families from the semi-private school appear to have higher socio-economic and educational levels since those families pay monthly tuition at the school, while at the public schools, of which Alfonso Cano is one, there is no monthly charge. Nevertheless, Centro Telpochcalli offered a sliding scale for tuition based on income.

Recent studies of literacy in local schools show great variation between literacy practices and attitudes. Teague, et al. (2006), Zamora (2005), and Jiménez et al. (2003), found that writing in the wider community seemed to favor meaning over form. The opposite occurs in the school-based practices, where form receives more attention than meaning (Jiménez et al., 2003 and Ballesteros, 2003). In attitudes, however, both form and meaning are valued both at school (Vance, 2005b; Teague 2004) and home (Vance, 2005a). Few data on school-based literacy practices have been collected at the secondary school level in this community.

Public secondary schools in Mexico include computer classes as a core requirement. The community also offers computer classes at the municipality's center for Integral Family Development (DIF, for its abbreviation in Spanish, but also thus called by residents), and at least ten cyber cafés offering computer services can be found in the town (Salazar, 2005). In a recent case study of the digital literacy development of one university student from this community, Payant (2005) found that the availability of computers in the home, school, and commercial Internet businesses positively affected this student's digital literacy development. This university student had developed digital literacy practices for both work and pleasure. As mentioned in Chapter One, Levitt (2001) and Portes, et al (1999) suggest

space- and time-compressing technology are a necessary pre-condition to the proliferation of transnational practices. Digital literacy practices concerning the three case study families will be discussed further in this paper in the family descriptions of this chapter and the results in Chapter Four.

English is also a core requirement in public secondary schools and, according to results from the three-school linguistic census, a high priority for local parents. When parents were asked about a second language for their children, English was the language most often mentioned. They also gave reasons as to why it is important: to improve opportunities for future employment; to allow more complete access to computers; to make their profession, job, books and technical activities easier for them; and for travel and entertainment. The local, private university's international influence and the transnational profile of this community have also contributed to the presence of English in the community.

### 3.3.5. Socioeconomic Profile of the Community

Most people in the community make their livelihood in agriculture, animal raising, commerce, construction, industrial manufacturing, or non-government services (Municipio, 2004). Álvarez, Corro & Landi (1992) reported the percentage of residents dedicated to agriculture had diminished. Teague (2004) reports “a denser population and the construction of houses, businesses, and streets have made parcels of land and open fields increasingly scarce within the city limits (p.24).”

Mlade (2001) and Olivera (1971) both report the community itself is economically subordinately linked to its closest neighboring city. Olivera (1971) reported that at that

time there were only twelve general stores in the city, three corn mills, five barbers that were open only on Saturday and Sunday, but no drugstore, hardware store, nor doctors. Today there are at least three hardware stores, three drugstores, several barbers and beauty salons open everyday of the week, and many more general stores, among other small businesses. Furthermore, professionals such as doctors, dentists, lawyers, veterinarians and at least one notary public offer services in private offices, usually from their homes. One can also find family-run auto repair shops and other businesses.

The growth of the local university has also spurred much recent economic activity and growth. Some of the newest and most visible buildings in this community are five-story apartment complexes. These apartments are rented to university students. Many students hire out for cleaning services, and most often women from the town fill these positions. There are also laundry services, carwashes, cafés, restaurants, bars, and, *antros*, where young adults go to dance and drink. Two banks have also opened branches in the community. Nevertheless, there are no wire transfer services and the three families participating in this study travel to the neighboring town to collect their remittances.

Within the agricultural sector, the raising of traditional basic food crops such as corn and beans may be decreasing, being replaced by the economically higher yielding edible *nopal* cactus and floriculture. Puebla is the largest producer of flowers in Mexico, with production increasing 120 times between 2000 and 2003 (Proal, 2005). While local producers of *nopal* see potential in the national, and especially the international market, they have not found economic backing to support such an enterprise (*Productores*, 2005 and personal communication, 2005).

Mlade (2001) cites significant progress in social and public services in the research community since 1997. She mentions a cultural project to restore and protect historical architecture and an improved waste management plan. Some projects, such as a health center offering mental health services, basic physical health check-ups, and specialized disability care, were built and equipped together with a local, private foundation. The DIF provides a variety of services for adults and children at minimal cost, including classes in English, computers, basic education, machine embroidery, and also legal counsel. I found several families actively attending community classes and utilizing community health services. However, Mlade (2001) also reported that only the main streets were paved. Since then, the government has paved several more kilometers of streets with cobblestone, or, more precisely, *adoquines*, hexagonal bricks made from *tezontle*, the red dirt found locally. The effect is that of a quaintly finished look, which is purportedly ecologically friendlier than blacktop pavement (conversations with residents). Mlade (2001) found the people of the community were very proud of the accomplishments of recent years, and through the home visits I made in this study I found this also to be true.

According to the sociolinguistic census conducted by COSOLEM (Table 3.2), 69% of the families interviewed have telephones, above the national average of 50% reported by Cofetel in Domínguez Ríos (2005). Moreover, the percentage of homes with telephones may be even higher now. Between December 2004 and April 2005, a telephone company offered, free the installation of telephone lines and telephones to families wishing to have the service. Two participating families had no telephone at the time of the census, but had obtained telephone service by the time of the home visits. Public pay telephones, shown in

Figure 3.3 are still easy to find, however, and telephone cards make calling easy, but not cheap.



Figure 3.3. Public phone in the community.

The interplay of factors – the prime agricultural resources versus the lack of interest by public or private investment in agriculture; the consumer needs of the affluent university population together with the townsfolk’s need to survive and will to flourish; – may explain in part how this community has become both a receiving and sending location of migrants as reported by CONAPO (2005), Lozano (2005) and Smith (2003a). In the following section, I present a profile of the community in relation to migration.

### 3.3.6. Migration in the Research Community

INEGI places the average annual growth rate between 1990 and 2000 for the country of Mexico at 1.9%, while for the state of Puebla at 2.11%, and for this municipality at 4.05% – that is twice the average growth rate as for the state or the country – yielding a 48% increase in population in ten years, as seen in Table 3.3. The research community,



perhaps because of the proximity to the capital city, the intellectual, industrial and economic hub of the state and an important hub of southeastern Mexico, has become a recipient zone for migrants (Lozano, 2005 and Smith, 2003a). The increasing immigrant profile of the people of this community is reflected in the INEGI statistics in Table 3.3 and the sociolinguistic census results shown in Table 3.2, with over half of the respondents coming from areas other than the research community or its surrounding areas.

Table 3.3.  
*Mexican National Census Data for the Municipality\*.*

population living in the municipality	in 1990	in 2000
# registered	37,788	56,066
% born in the state	92	84
% born in another state	7	10
% born in another country	0.5	0.75

\* INEGI 2000

Simultaneously, the community is also within the new expulsion zone of migrants (CONAPO, 2005). People from this municipality leave their homes to work in the nation's capital; cities solely geared economically to *grand* tourism, such as, Cancun, and various locations throughout the U.S. and Canada (CONAPO, 2005). In the *Querida Abuelita* migration-literacy activity several children spoke about their relatives working in Cancun and Mexico City.

Although national census figures show less than one percent of the municipality's population living outside the country (INEGI, 2000), 44% of the respondents of the sociolinguistic census reported having a family member living abroad. At the Alfonso Cano Elementary School, 38 of 96 respondents answered affirmatively to a question on

family members living abroad. Eleven families reported a member living in New York, and six each for Chicago and Los Angeles, while other places mentioned were Arizona, Nevada, North Carolina, and Texas. Some reported not knowing where the family member lived. Because responses included extended family, and because respondents may be related, reference to the same emigrant may have been made more than once. Nevertheless, these figures suggest that many local children have some relation to the migrant experience. INEGI's migration figures may be low because respondents decided not to inform the census-taker for some reason, for example mistrust of government institutions, avoidance of complicating the information, etc., or perhaps because respondents actually consider that the migrant still lives at their house since it *is* the migrant's home.

In the community we find an abundant presence of material capital gained from the migration experience in the form of trucks, vans and sports utility vehicles with US license plates. Also visible are non-traditional (for this community) architectural styles being incorporated into the construction of new homes. Malkin (1998), from her studies of transnational migrant circuits spanning Mexico and the US, suggests this is actually a material culture representing the symbolic capital of a "privileged knowledge of modernity" which comes with the migration experience.

Other manifestations of migration can be found in the community. For example, the ad in *Figure 3.4* appeared in a local newspaper published in May 2005 offering advertising space in "the only Mexican newspaper" which is published in New York. The advertisement stresses that '*LA VOZ DE MEXICO*,' [The Voice of Mexico, which is the name of the newspaper] circulates in the city (New York) where nearly one million Mexicans live and where 80% are *Poblanos* [from Puebla]. In the next section, I tell the

stories of three transnational families to show how migration has affected family life and the community.



Figure 3.4. Local newspaper advertisement for ad space in Mexican New York newspaper.

### 3.4. The Case Study Participants and Their Households

#### 3.4.1. Tenahua Tlatehui Family

##### 3.4.1.1. Overall description

The Tenahua Tlatehui family makes their home just over a kilometer due east of the town square. Ernesto, the father, 34 years old, residing in the Los Angeles, California area for the last year, keeps in close contact by telephone with his wife, Licha, 33, and their three children Jaime, 15, Jesus, 13, and Belen, 10. They have converted what used to serve as the kitchen area into a small general store selling basic household goods, canned, dried, and fresh food products, and bottled drinks. Licha and the three children alternate tending the store with other daily activities of housekeeping, studying, and, for the boys in particular, tending to their small collection of animals –a few turkeys and hens, and recently, fighting cocks.

In the following section, I present the Tenahua Tlatchui family before Ernesto's migration, focusing on their family history, education, personal interests, religious life, health, economy, and work history. I then describe the reasons motivating the migration, the goals they had in mind, and the actual leave-taking experience. Finally, I present the family as they have been since Ernesto left, noting especially their feelings and observations about the changes in their lives.

#### 3.4.1.2. Family history

Ernesto, the eldest of five siblings, and Licha, the eldest of six, grew up in farming families in the same *barrio*, just a few blocks apart. The Mesoamerican virilocal family patterns (Robichaux, 2002) are evident in both families. Both original home plots abut land owned by paternal relatives. When Ernesto and Licha were first married, they lived in a room at his parents' home. Licha told me that she worked hard making fresh tortillas for the extended family and doing washing and other household tasks, examples of the extensive labor assigned to daughters-in-law (Robichaux, 2002) mentions.

The Tenahua Tlatchui family has since made their home on land inherited by Licha. That a woman inherits land is not a total break with the Mesoamerican virilocal pattern however. Land may be given to daughters if there is enough to go around. Also, the plots, which Licha's father left in inheritance, were not contiguous plots, but scattered in the area. The growth of the capital city led the government to expropriate land in this community to build a thoroughfare, as a peripheral highway to the growing city. In the transaction, Licha's father received a quantity of money, which he decided to re-invest in land, bequeathing a plot to each of his six children, male and female alike. Perhaps the power of the virilocal tradition led her father to buy strategically, because one of the plots lay directly

across the road from Ernesto's family's place. The siblings were able to choose the plot they preferred, and Licha chose precisely the one contiguous to her in-laws' property.

The unfenced yard and the one-story brick house sit high up off the dirt road. The yard contains a well and a few wire pens for hens and turkeys. The house's main entrance leads directly into a large front room. One end accommodates a three-piece living room set, a rectangular table with a few straight-backed wooden chairs against the far wall, an *altar* above the table, seen in *Figure 3.5*, just as Mlade (2001) describes. adorned with a candle and fresh flowers as and another smaller rectangular table in the corner lined with reference books, loose papers, smaller agenda-type books, and family photographs as seen in *Figure 3.6*. At the other end of the room there is another rectangular wooden table, and wooden chairs of the same design, and a refrigerator. This front room gives access to two bedrooms, which are curtained off, to the former kitchen, which is now the store, and to the bathroom, which now serves as the kitchen. The floors are finished with large tiles and the walls are painted white. Our interest lies in the people who live between these walls and their relationship to migration and literacy.



*Figure 3.5.* Tenahua Tlatehui family altar.



*Figure 3.6.* Tenahua Tlatehui family's *Esquina de lectura* [Reading corner].

#### 3.4.1.3. Education and personal interests

3.4.1.3.1. *No sé nada de secundaria*

Licha says she first learned to read in the parish kindergarten. Both she and Ernesto studied through the sixth grade at what was then the only primary school in town. Licha says she would like to study more. About eight years ago, some youngsters came round inviting adults to study secondary school and she registered, even giving them copies of her documents. She received a package of books and began studying, but the people never returned. She had the following to say about this experience.

*Aprendí lo de la raíz cuadrada que era lo principal de matemáticas, que del otro de los pronombres elll todo eso (...) del Estado de México, así los límites, el Golfo de México, este, donde estaba, cuántos continentes eran todo eso pues ya me lo aprendí y resulta que llegan los tres meses y nada, no llega (...) ya no encontramos otra escuela abierta, en otra por mis hijos, también como tenía yo a la niña chiquita, pues, también para dejarla (...) estaba canijo. [I learned about the square root, which was the main thing in mathematics, about pronouns and all that (...) about the state of Mexico, the boundaries, where the Gulf of Mexico was, how many continents there were and all that I learned and in the end, after three months, it all comes to naught (...) We didn't find another open school [a school offering a general education equivalency program] and besides, because of the kids, and too, since Belen was so little, well to leave her (...) it would have been tough].*

Licha felt confident helping her children with homework while they were in primary school, but she foresaw difficulties for secondary school. Licha told me, “No sé nada de secundaria [I don't know anything about secondary].”

Her family did not completely understand her reasoning for continuing education. When she left the baby with her mother to do the paperwork, her father wanted to know, “¿Para qué quieres estudiar más? Con que sepas leer y escribir ya está bien [What do you want to study more for? Knowing how to read and write; that's enough].” Licha remembers telling him,

*Por mis hijos que ya orita como vamos al, quien sabe, al rato, ni voy a poderles revisar las tareas porque no voy a saber ni qué carambas escriben*

*y pues es lo que me pasa porque luego Jaime hace sus cuentas, que pone una “x”, pone un número y luego ya un resultado y le digo –ajá y este ¿cómo lo sacastes o qué? – No, pues, que la “x” le menciona el valor de no sé que y pues según él me explica pero pues yo no le entiendo a veces ni que es lo que me está diciendo, le digo pero a lo mejor si hubiera yo estudiado secundaria pues si ya me daba- me recordaba a lo mejor lo que pregunta y sin en cambio luego ps’ me quedo porque pues no sé ni lo que me está hablando [Well, for now I’m fine for my kids, but who knows. Later on, I won’t even be able to check their homework assignments because I won’t know what the heck they’re writing, and now, Jaime is doing his math and he puts an *x*, he puts a number and then a result, and I ask him, and how’d you get this and then he explains it to me, but sometimes I don’t even understand what he’s saying. Maybe if I had studied secondary, well I could probably remember something from what I’d studied, but instead, I’m stuck and I don’t understand what he’s talking about].*

Licha has opinions on school policies. She thinks it is important to adhere to norms requiring attendance with complete uniform, short hair, good grooming, and punctuality. She is quite proud that Belen has never been sent home from school because of arriving late. Licha believes discipline is important, but also personalized attention. Quality is more important than quantity, she says.

Licha attends school meetings and functions when she has been informed of them in advance. The schools operate in large part with cooperation from the families, and a monetary donation is required of each family at the beginning of each school year intended for general maintenance and certain improvements of the school. Typically, there is a committee composed of parents to manage the money collected. The parents volunteer their time for this committee. During the 2003 – 2004 school year, Licha served as treasurer for the committee at what was then both Belen and Jesus’ school, Alfonso Cano Elementary. The quota that year was \$450 pesos (approximately \$45 USD) per family, a figure that was decided upon by the committee after consulting the director and analyzing previous years’ budgets and the year’s foreseen needs. It was Licha’s

responsibility to go to the local public education (SEP) offices to account for all the money collected and spent, and she sometimes had to attend meetings in the capital city. She also answered parents' questions on these matters, including an incident in which a board member claimed fraudulent expenditures.

We can see from Licha's attitudes and experiences that she is a woman who values formal schooling and assumes responsibility within the community. At my first meeting with Alfonso Cano parents, Licha was the first to openly accept home visits. The following is what I learned about her children's education and personal interests.

#### 3.4.1.3.2. *La escuela: para aprender cosas y divertirme*

Ernesto and Licha's three children attended the municipality's DIF kindergarten and then the Alfonso Cano Elementary. Jaime, the eldest son, continued at the local technical secondary school, but he failed his second year there, and, according to his father, did not want to repeat the year at the same school because schoolmates would make fun of him. With 68 to a classroom at the technical secondary, Licha does not think the teachers can give all the attention the students need; group size and teacher attention were important to Licha and Ernesto when looking for another school. The school at which they finally chose to register Jaime, a 30 – 45-minute bike ride away, has an afternoon shift in which there are only 18 in a group. Still, in order to pass second grade this year, Jaime had to take three make-up exams over the summer, paying \$30 pesos (approximately \$3 USD) for each one. He studied on his own over the summer to prepare for them, and was able to start the third year of secondary this year. Last spring he convinced his parents to get him a bicycle, with the understanding that he does his best at



school. During my visits to the family home, I often found him tuning the bike up. Jaime says he might like to be a diesel mechanic in the future.

Jesus is studying his second year at, according to Licha, “*una escuela de lujo* [a luxury school],” the newest secondary school in the community, just down the road from their house. Jesus likes that his school is so close to home, however, in December 2005, his advisor told Licha that if Jesus failed one more class he would not be able to maintain his place in the school. Licha was also informed that Jesus had been going to classes without all his homework prepared and without school supplies, a serious omission in the eyes his mother and teacher. Like his brother, Jesus had to pass two make-up exams this summer in order to pass the first year of junior high. He attended summer session offered at the DIF to prepare for the exams and did well enough to be able to register for second grade this year. Jesus is more sociable than Jaime, and I often find him riding one of his grandfather’s horses with other friends in town, or grooming the horses after riding.

Both boys take computer classes at their schools, but Jesus’ classes are purely theoretical, that is, there are no computers to practice on, so, as of mid April, he opted to take afternoon classes twice a week, at twenty pesos (approximately \$2 USD) for a two-hour class. Licha tells me how excited he was when after just five classes, he came home announcing “¡Ya hice una casa! ¡Yo la armé [I’ve made a house! I put it together]!” It is not the first time that one of the boys has taken an after-school class. When Jaime was in sixth grade, he won a partial scholarship to study computers at a private institute. He studied there for seven months, also taking English. Currently, both boys study English three hours per week as part of the required official secondary school curriculum.

Belen is now in fifth grade at Alfonso Cano Elementary School. She says she likes going to school, “*para aprender cosas y divertirme [to learn things and have fun].*” It seems this is the case. Near the end of last school year, her fourth-grade teacher, commented that she has grown socially with her classmates, who gave her emotional support when she was having difficulty dealing with her father’s absence. He notes that she has also advanced scholastically. “*Se refleja en su participación en clase, en su trabajo dentro de clase, en sus tareas, ahí se refleja, vemos que ella ya empieza a cumplir, empieza a participar y antes no lo hacía [This is reflected in her participation in class, in the work she does in class, and in her homework, we see her starting to achieve, starting to participate, and before, she didn’t].*”

Belen is inquisitive when something catches her interest and she wears a mischievous smile when planning to get what she wants. For example, the first time I went to their home with the camera, she kept asking questions until I showed her how I took the picture, changed lighting, focused in, managed the menu to look back at the pictures we took, and finally, erased the ones we didn’t like. In the process she initiated several photos of her own composition. By the second visit, she assisted in taking all the photographs, and again composed a few herself. By the third visit with the camera, Belen was enthusiastically taking the photographs by herself.

All the youngsters help out with chores at home and the boys also help out with chores and fieldwork on their paternal grandparents’ farm. Their newest interest is in fighting cocks. Licha says, “If it’s time for Jaime to do homework, the next time I check in on him, he’s asleep with his school books in front of him, but if you give him a magazine on raising fighting birds, he’ll read that (my translation)!”

#### 3.4.1.4. Health

In general, the four members I met of the Tenahua Tlatchui family are strong and healthy. In eight months, Belen has missed school for being sick only once, and then she was so sick that the doctor prescribed various intravenous-administered medicines. Licha has taken a First Aid course and, with experience in managing intravenous feeding, she cared for Belen herself. Licha went to the school to show the prescriptions to Belen's teacher, and so have the absences justified. Soon after, Licha was diagnosed with pneumonia. After receiving intravenous medication, she was sent home where she then treated herself.

Two school years ago, a psychologist at Alfonso Cano Elementary School diagnosed Belen as having an attention deficit. The psychologist would take Belen out of her regular classes for half an hour during the school day for therapy and Licha saw how much help it was for Belen. She was able to complete her homework assignments faster and, according to her teacher; she was able to concentrate for longer periods at school. When the service was discontinued, the psychologist gave Licha her business card and Licha took advantage of it. At the clinic, there were also psychiatrists, and Jaime also began receiving treatment after fainting at school. Licha was paying only ten pesos (approximately \$1USD) per visit, but the medicine was costly and the trip was time-consuming, requiring two hours each way. While Ernesto and Licha were willing to pay for the medicine as long as they could afford it, it was the impracticality of the trip, which led Licha to seek alternatives. She eventually found a doctor at the local community health center to continue therapy, so now, Belen goes twice a week, missing only a half hour of class per day.

Belen does “*ejercicios de motriz y memoria, así como adivinanzas, sopa de letras y rompecabezas* [exercises to develop motor skills and memory, such as riddles, word puzzles, and picture puzzles].” They are working on developing Belen’s concentration and memory. Licha says that Belen likes going to the classes but that it hasn’t been easy for her. The psychologist has also guided Licha in developing ways to help Belen at home. Thus, Licha asks Belen questions about what she remembers from the day before. After a bicycle ride, for example, she asks about what they saw, so that Belen notices her environment. They also “work her memory” with reading. Both Licha and Ernesto give their children’s health a high priority. There are other family matters, however, which they do not see eye to eye on.

#### 3.4.1.5. Differences of opinions

According to Licha, she and Ernesto have their differences of opinions, especially concerning family life. She explains he did not spend time with his children and he did not lend a hand with family things like taking time to put up a basketball hoop.

In the telephone interview, Ernesto expressed that he and Licha approach disciplining differently. It seems Licha took a more active role in disciplining the children while Ernesto was more lax in his expectations.

According to Licha there were also differences of opinion in expectations for the children. She said Ernesto “doesn’t understand why the kids need certain things; he grew up without them and so why can’t they,” whether it is a school trip to the pyramids or a students’ day present? For Licha, she wants their children to have the things they did not necessarily have growing up. Overriding these differences, however, are their similar upbringings. For both, family and community involvement adds richness to their lives.

### 3.4.1.6. Extended family relationships and the community

#### 3.4.1.6.1. *Entre todos sale todo.*

Despite disagreements in the past between Licha and her extended family, she generally speaks well of them.

*Cuando hay un bautizo vienen y nos avisan. Vamos y lavamos todo el día antes. Luego vamos y molimos y echamos las tortillas y llevamos la carne enchilada y la envolvemos si se va a hacer mixiotes. O, (indicando a sus hijos), van y se matan un cochino. Entre todos sale todo.* [When there is a baptism, they come and let us know. We go and do all the washing the day before. Then we grind the corn and make tortillas and we get the seasoned meat and tie it up in bundles if we are making *mixiotes*. Or, (pointing to her sons), they go and kill a pig. Everything gets done with everyone doing his or her share.

Likewise, Licha's own family depends on cooperation from each member. Licha invited me to one religious celebration her family prepared— a mass, food, drink and music for approximately 200 people. As Mlade (2001) and Murillo (2005) have found in this community, religion is a social force in the Tenahua and the Tlatehui families, with both assuming responsibilities which require large investments in time, effort, and money, and which involve literacy practices.

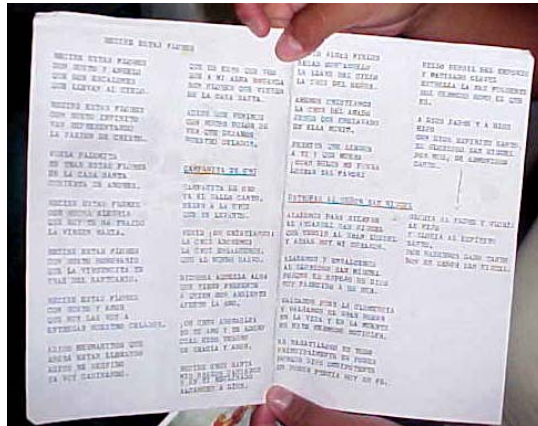
#### 3.4.1.6.2. *Derecho y privilegio*

The Tenahua Tlatehui family also participates in religion within their own home. Every spring the *barrio* organizes a pilgrimage to a religious destination in a neighboring state. Ernesto went on the pilgrimage four years ago, and Jaime decided to go on the pilgrimage himself this year with his new bicycle. As a result Licha said, it is their right and privilege to receive the image in their home. People who go on the pilgrimage receive the venerated image in their homes at different times during the year. *Figure 3.7* shows Licha, Jesus and Belen with the sacred image in the background. The community

gathers wherever the image is to communally pray. When the image is at their home, Licha leads the prayers. Although there are prayer cards and booklets, she rarely uses them because she knows them by heart, as do her children. *Figure 3.8* shows a booklet of prayers of the kind they might have available for communal prayer. Belen also attends catechism classes, although she will not celebrate her first communion until her father returns from the U.S.



*Figure 3.7.* The Tenahua Tlathui family with the venerated Señor de Tepalzingo.



*Figure 3.8.* A communal prayer guide.

### 3.4.1.6.3. *La golosina*

Ernesto’s family also live close enough to keep an eye on family order. According to Licha, Ernesto “*tiene el carácter cerrado y tiene la golosina de seguir tomando*. [He’s got a serious disposition and the itch to keep drinking].” On one of those occasions, relates Licha, when Ernesto came home drunk and began raising a scandal, his parents came over, as they had done on other occasions to calm him down. As usual, it just made him more upset. Eventually, Ernesto’s father called the police, who then took Ernesto away. Ernesto stayed in a detoxification center for three months. During that time, Licha earned enough to support the family by washing and sewing clothes for other people. When Ernesto returned and continued drinking, Licha gave him a choice of calming his

ways or going on his own way. According to her, that calmed him down, but later he decided to go to the United States.

#### 3.4.1.7. Economy and work history

##### 3.4.1.7.1 *El trabajo que caiga*

Licha tells me Ernesto is a welder. Before he went north, he was making cement roof blocks for a business in a nearby town, making between \$900 and \$1200 (approximately \$90-120 USD) pesos per week. Before that, he was working in an automotive plant as an assembler, but lost that job in a lay off in 1995. Between jobs, Ernesto welded iron rods and made cement beams for roofs. Now, he is in Los Angeles where “*hace el trabajo que caiga* [He does the work that’s available].” Mostly, he works construction, and Licha receives between \$2600 and \$2900 (approximately \$260-290 USD) pesos per week. Ernesto says he would like to have his own business, “*dependier de uno solo mismo, o sea, ya no tener patrón* [to depend on one’s self, or, not to have a boss anymore].” He mentions setting up his own business for making roof beams when he returns to Mexico since he already has the basic equipment for it.

##### 3.4.1.7. 2. *El día que no puede mandar dinero...*

Ernesto’s wages have already given impetus to a family business. Licha says she followed Ernesto’s advice on opening a grocery. She says Ernesto wanted her to have the business primarily as a fallback. Licha says, “*Pues, el día que no puede mandar dinero...* [Well, the day he can’t send any money...].” She continues on, explaining their business savvy. “*Además, no hay tienda hasta aquí. Y ya la gente no tiene que ir más lejos.* [Besides, there’s no other store this far out from town, so people don’t have to go any further].”

Licha has been working with a lawyer to obtain a business permit. This lawyer is setting up a business cooperative which would facilitate the opening of businesses. One day she had the papers nearby and she waved them in the air but set them aside shaking her head. Supposedly, the cooperative makes the paperwork easier, faster and less expensive. Licha said she did not know what number they were working on but hers was #618. At that, she dismissed the issue. Another day Licha showed me a flier the lawyer had given her, seen in *Figure 3.9*. The flier is an invitation to a fund-raising event for the cooperative. Once I photographed it, she promptly tossed it in the garbage. She also mentioned paying dues but that she had been to the cooperative's office three times and had had no luck in finding the lawyer. My perception was that Licha is interested in registering the business through the cooperative because of the lower cost and because of the service the lawyer would provide, that is, reading the documents and assuring her that her interests are protected.



*Figure 3.9* Public Invitation to Fundraising Event for Business Cooperative.

Licha told me that the money generated from the store's sales is reinvested in the store. She also buys food and household products, pays for school supplies, and buys shoes.

Ernesto and Licha both expressed concern that their children should be constructively occupied, but without the responsibilities of a formal job. The store



provides a reason to stay close to home, lessening the chances of them getting into trouble elsewhere. Jaime tends the store in the mornings when his mother runs errands, attends meetings, or does housekeeping, and Jesus and Belen tend the store in the afternoons when Licha is sewing or doing other activities.

#### 3.4.1.8. Migration

##### 3.4.1.8.1. Reasons behind Ernesto's migration

Ernesto is not the first member of the family to travel north. Licha's brother, Pablo, lives in the New York area with his wife's mother and siblings. Soon after leaving for New York, he sent for his wife, leaving their two children behind. Licha tells me that it took several trips by the children's maternal aunt and much paperwork to unite the children with their parents in New York. This was a huge disappointment for Licha's family because the brother who emigrated is the *xocoyote* of the family, that is, the youngest son. Licha explains that when the siblings were given a choice of plot to inherit, her youngest brother chose the home plot; with the understanding he would be living with his parents. Licha explains that it is important for grandparents to be able to interact daily with grandchildren. It is not the same as living close by. That her brother left for the U.S. was bad enough, but that he took his family with him was a gross family disappointment. Aware that this was a sensitive issue, I did not ask her to speculate about the future.

On Ernesto's side of the family, two brothers and an uncle currently reside in the U.S. Ernesto's uncle emigrated to the Los Angeles area about twenty years ago and one of Ernesto's brothers emigrated a few years ago. Ernesto, together with another brother, Santiago, left Cholula in October 2004.

#### 3.4.1.8.2. “*Para salir un poco más adelante*”

When I asked Ernesto how he had made the decision to emigrate, he reflected on his hopes, “*Para salir un poco más adelante, para que no le faltara nada a mis niños.* [To get ahead a little, so that my kids wouldn’t have to do without].” When I asked Licha about the decision to emigrate, she explained that since his brother and uncle were already there, he and his brother decided to go. She also mentioned school expenses, as described in “Reasons for migrating” in Chapter One.

There were no apparent discrepancies between what Licha and Ernesto independently gave as their goals to achieve through Ernesto’s migration. In two or three years, they hope to be able to wall their plot of land, to build another house or a few rooms on the east side of the yard, to finish off the kitchen, and to have the business grow. Meanwhile, as Ernesto stressed, they hope to “to get ahead a little, so that my kids won’t have to do without.”

#### 3.4.1.8.3. The leave-taking

Ernesto’s leaving came as a surprise to Licha and the children. Licha tells me he would, in joking, sometimes threaten to go away if they didn’t treat him well. One day, after work she was surprised when he went into town with his brother, and, when he came back, he told her to fix some supper and that the kids would be eating with them. This must not have been the typical evening event. She said Jaime even went in and told them he wasn’t hungry, and then his dad put his arm around his shoulders, and led him to the table. Once around the table, he began by telling the boys to take care of their mother, to look after their sister, and to be good because he was going to the United States with his brother, Santiago. In her surprise, Licha rebelled, saying there was work here. He let

her know he would still be there for them, supporting them, but that right then, he needed her to get a dark pair of pants, a shirt, a cap, and a jacket, all of them dark, ready for him. The only dark jacket she could find was a little worn, but he told her that would be even better because if it got torn, it wouldn't matter.

That was on a Thursday night. At three o'clock Friday morning, just seven hours later, a taxi arrived to take Ernesto and his brother to the bus station in the capital. From there they went to the airport in Mexico City, where they caught a flight to Tijuana. In Tijuana, Ernesto's brother paid a *pollero*, to help them cross the border. By Sunday afternoon, he telephoned Licha's parents' home to let the family know he had arrived safely at his uncle's home in the Los Angeles area.

One of Ernesto's brothers lent him \$2000 pesos (approximately \$200 USD) to pay the *pollero*; he also received a loan at 7% monthly interest from a man in town to pay for airfare. This is approximately twice that of bank rates for loans. Ernesto left in October and it was May when Licha used one thousand pesos of the remittances to pay part of the loan; there were still \$2500 left to pay. In this way, Ernesto and the family had taken on the risk of migration. What would be the payoff? In the following sections, I present the family since migration, taking a look at their working situations, the family's economic situation, and how roles have changed and been maintained in immediate and extended family relationships.

#### 3.4.1.9. Present family life

##### 3.4.1.9.1. *Sacando la familia adelante*

Arriving in Los Angeles in October, Ernesto says he went a month and a half with hardly any work. Heavy rains between December and January meant few constructions

for another month. Standing on the street corners, “*como lo que pasan en la television* [like they show on T.V.],” he says,

They come by in trucks and ask ‘who knows how to work with concrete?’ Or, ‘who knows bricklaying?’ Little by little, they start to get to know you and how you work and they come looking for you and they let others know how you work. A job might last a week or sometimes two. A lot of migrants don’t like working in construction [my translation].

These are kinds of jobs Ernesto does most in Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, Licha complied with her husband’s wishes to set up the store. By phone, Ernesto inquired as to how the business was going. He said when he left they had renovated the space, but that they offered a very limited variety of goods and produce. I told him the shelves looked full, offering a wider variety of goods.

When I interviewed Ernesto, he was just short of fulfilling a year in the U.S. I asked how he felt about the goals he had set for himself and his family. He thought they had accomplished about thirty percent of their goals. As an example of being “*un poco más adelante* [a little bit further ahead],” he gave the example of registering the kids in school. Whereas, in 2004, he had trouble getting together the money to cover registration fees, in 2005, the family was able to pay for registration and to obtain the required school supplies including new school bags a week before school started.

For school, the youngsters don their respective uniforms, starting out their school days neat and clean. They carry new school bags, complete with new school supplies, and Jaime rides a new bike. During non-school hours, they wear clothes of no particular brand. Licha and Belen occasionally go to what is known as the cheapest place to buy clothes, that is, a large market in a community about thirty kilometers away. They have acquired no new fancy gadgets or appliances since Ernesto emigrated. The family has

recently considered investing in a computer for their own home although Belen would prefer a big screen television. If they do choose to invest in a computer, they would purchase it here in Mexico.

One week in May, nearly seven months after Ernesto left for the US, I asked Licha just how they were using the week's remittances. That week in particular, Ernesto had sent a larger sum than usual, \$4328 pesos as compared to between \$2600 and \$2900, because he wanted to make a larger dent in the debt incurred for his airfare to Tijuana. \$1000 was set aside to pay toward the loan. Licha also deposited in their savings accounts, mentioned in Chapter Two. She deposited less in Jaime's because they had had to buy shoes for him that week. Since he chose a pair that surpassed the \$300 limit she had given him, she deducted it from his account. She says they opened the children's accounts in case they should decide to study a professional career. They also used the money that week to pay electricity (a bi-monthly bill), the Coca-Cola purchase for the store (usually approximately \$1200), and \$2000 for weekly expenses including fabric with which to make shirts – the children's shirts were showing wear – and Jesus' dancing boots. Licha related the expenses from memory.

At that time, Ernesto was sending the remittances to a bank, but more recently, they have tried a commercial money exchange business because the transaction is the same day rather than a few days later. More than money is involved in migration, however. In the following section, I present the family in respect to family roles and relationships since Ernesto's migration.

#### 3.4.1.9.2. Roles and relationships

##### 3.4.1.9.2.1. The father's absence

Ernesto's leaving implied several changes for the family. Because Ernesto imposed a policy of not spending time or money on sending letters, packages, or gifts in either direction. Belen had an especially difficult time dealing with her father's sudden absence. He had always taken her to school in the mornings on bicycle, and this was a bonding time for them. Only occasionally were there telephone calls, which they would receive at one of the grandparents' homes.

In December, a very fortunate transaction occurred – the offer of a free telephone and telephone line. The family liked the idea and the telephone was soon installed. They say they buy a phone card for \$30 or \$50 pesos that usually lasts three to four weeks. Once they had the telephone installed and the family was able to incorporate more regular calling into their life, Belen's concerns about her father's well being were assuaged. They keep their uncle's phone number taped to the phone, where they are able to leave messages for Ernesto. Calling from a public phone, he often times calls two or three days in a row. Recently, Ernesto has gotten his own cell phone.

Licha thinks it is funny that she and Ernesto have gotten along better since he left. Ernesto calls to give the remittance order number, and to confirm its arrival. They make decisions on permissions and investments over the phone. She sometimes passes cooking hints or recipes to Ernesto, and they often discuss the children's behavior, and then he will ask her to pass the phone to the boys. The boys also mention asking their father about their English homework.

#### 3.4.1.9.2.2. *Ha de ser igual estando aquí, estando allá*

When I asked Ernesto about his role in the children's education since he left, he said,

*Orita' ps' yo digo una cosa, ¿no? y puedo mandar y todo pero ps' más que nada, ps' no sé, allá está mi esposa pero ps' no sé si se lleven acabo pero ps' yo creo que sí, ha de ser igual estando aquí, estando allá ¡verda'! como somos una pareja pues yo creo que debe de seguir igual los pasos [Right now, I can say one thing and can be in charge and everything, but, more than anything, my wife is there and I don't know if they carry it out, but I think they do. It must be the same whether I'm here or there, right? Because we are a couple, I think that the steps should be the same].*

Licha brings up matters over the telephone to involve Ernesto in the family's daily activities. One of the principal changes Licha has seen since Ernesto emigrated is that she is freer to help the children with homework. Before, she would begin helping one of them when Ernesto would instruct her to let them be, to serve him supper instead, and “*¿no por eso van a la escuela para que allá les enseñen [Isn't that why we send them to school, so that they teach them there]?*” She says then it would be very late when she would review their homework, and if they had not understood something, “everybody was really too tired and it was too late to do anything about it.” Now, she can tend to the children's needs as they arise, and this adds to the family's peaceful functioning. The other critical change, according to Licha, is that they are not subject to tensions related to Ernesto's heavy drinking.

During my visits, all three children openly expressed their affection for their mother, giving her hugs or quietly standing behind her with arms lovingly around her while she told the family history in her genuine, story-telling way. They sometimes interrupted with a comment, clarification, or question, but mostly listened. At other times, they did household activities and Licha alternately gave them or reminded them of their chores. On several occasions, she had the kids in charge of the store and they popped their heads around to ask the price of some product. Belen often had doubts about the names of the

different types of chilies and about whether she had correctly calculated the amount owed by the customer.

Both boys have expressed interest in migrating someday. Their father has told them that it is not a decision to be made lightly and that there are risks involved. Ernesto does not want them to consider it at this point. Both he and Licha want them to finish at least secondary school, and Licha thinks it would be fine if they wanted to study a profession at the university level.

#### 3.4.1.9.2.3. *Déjalos que digan lo que quieran*

The Tenahua Tlathui family continues daily interaction with the extended family and in community life. Licha offers both families moral support by assuming responsibilities that are part of communal religious events, especially food preparation. Now, however, she has to keep the family business in mind, too. If the business is closed, they cannot earn a profit, so she turns to her mother-in-law for support. For example, when Licha was sick, her mother-in-law tended the store and cooked the meals. Nevertheless, relationships with the extended family have not been problem-free.

According to Licha, her mother-in-law tried to convince Ernesto to send the remittances to her because she did not trust that Licha was using the money wisely. Ernesto also mentioned being pressured by the family. He said they question him on how they are spending their money. “*Hablo con mi mamá y me (...) dice no que ¿qué pasó? que yo no he construido, que quien sabe que, que a ver mi hermano ya está haciendo un cuartito y yo que ¿qué pienso hacer* [I talk with my mom and she says, well, what’s going on, that I haven’t built anything, that who knows what all, that my brother is already building a little room and what do I think I’ll do?]”



He goes on to say what he told Licha.

*Ps' déjalos que digan lo que quieran, que hable le digo pero que se ponga a pensar que nosotros ya tenemos dos en la secundaria y Belen- Belen en la primaria y mientras él apenas tiene uno en primaria ¿no? (...) le digo para qué vamos ... a querer correr, mientras váyamos [así pronuncia] no tenemos porque estarnos cotejando cada rato. Vera' le digo, ¿para qué vamos a querer volar tan rápido si la cosa es calmada (...) despacito (...) pero ps' ellos no saben nuestras metas (...) cada quien piensa diferente (...) siiii así mero es [Well, let them say what they want, let them talk I tell her but that she should remember we have two in secondary school and Belen, Belen in elementary and meanwhile he just has one in elementary, right? (...) I tell her, what do we want to run for? While we're at it, we don't have to be comparing all the time. You see, I tell her, what do we want to fly so fast for if the thing is calm (...) slow (...) but they don't know our goals (...) everybody thinks differently...yep, that's how it is].*

The family seems to disapprove of how they spend the money in Mexico, and Ernesto mentions that people have started questioning how he spends the money in Los Angeles.

*La gente de allá piensan que porque está uno acá que gana uno mucho dinero (...) ¿cómo ha de pensar que acá o no mas' se pone a trabajar uno y gana bastante dinero ¿verá? Pero ps' también (...) a veces como que ganas también a veces se gasta, ¿verá? (...) Como siempre yo le he dicho, pos' deja a la gente o sea' que sea tu papá o sea tu mamá o sean los míos, déjalos si ellos hablan pus' déjalos. Como nada mas somos nosotros los dos y nuestros hijos los que vamos a- que tenemos un problema pos' nosotros somos los que tenemos que sacarlo porque ellos a lo mejor nos pueden ayudar económico, verda? Pero, pues, más que nada nosotros lo tenemos que resolver entre los dos [People from there think because a person is working here you earn a lot of money (...) they must think that here either a person just works and earns quite a bit of money, right? But, well too, sometimes, as you make it you spend it too, right? (...) Like I've always told her, well, let the people, be it your dad or be it your mom or mine, let them talk. Since it's just us two and our kids who are going – that have a problem, it's us who have to figure it out because they can maybe help us economically, right? But, well, more than anything, it's us who have to solve it between ourselves].*

Although Ernesto tells Licha not to worry about what his family says about their decisions on how they spend money, from his tone of voice and his doubtfulness, I suspect it is a concern for him. He asked me several times if I did not think he was right

in his way of thinking. This is perhaps reflective of Malkin's (1998) point that gossip and criticisms are particularly wearing on migrants' prestige in the community.

#### 3.4.1.10. Conclusion Tenahua Tlatehui family

Ernesto's migration may be solving more than economic hard times. It also seems to give the family a respite from the tensions caused by alcoholism. Migration has also given the couple new, challenging situations to deal with, which makes for interesting telephone conversation. As Licha mentions, her relationship with Ernesto has improved since his migrating. Ernesto talks about his family pushing him to speed up the process of reaching his goals, but he says that he is comfortable with the progress he is making. He has his own calendar for his own reasons.

Licha is a responsible and an ambitious woman who is sure of herself. She is a savvy businesswoman and loving mother but also a strict disciplinarian. She is a caring daughter, sister- and daughter-in-law and a demanding wife. She is a mapmaker and an eloquent storyteller. Licha values formal education and Ernesto does not try to restrict her imposing these values on the children. She is also a gifted and persuasive speaker. Like the women participating in D'Aubeterre's (2000) study of a transnational migrant circuit in the same state, it seems Licha plays an active role in maintaining family solidarity and creatively involving Ernesto in taking part in obligations and in continued affection toward the children as well as creating an environment propitious to learning. Licha is there to answer her children's questions and when she does not have the answers, then to guide them to resources where they can find them.

When I first met Belen, it was just four days before her father left. She was quiet and serious and her desk was the nearest to the teacher's. It has been heartening to see

how she has overcome what was a difficult period for her. A few rows behind Belen, sat Roberta, a member of another transnational family, whose father had left to try his luck in Las Vegas four years before. In the following section, I present Roberta, her family, and their experiences as a transnational family.

### 3.4.2. Salazar Oaxaca Family



*Figure 3.10.* Salazar Oaxaca Family

#### 3.4.2.1. Overall description

The Salazar Oaxaca family lives five blocks south of the town square. Cesar Salazar, 36 years of age, has lived in the Las Vegas, Nevada area for the past four and a half years. He keeps in close contact by telephone with his wife, Mariana, 32, and their four children Figo, 13, Oswaldo, 12, Roberta, 10, and Giovanni, 8, seen in *Figure 3.10*. The two older boys attend secondary school and the two youngest attend Alfonso Cano Elementary School, a block from their home. Following the virilocal residence pattern described by Robichaux (2002), they have their own home, contiguous to and sharing a common patio with Cesar's father's and sister's homes. While Mariana occasionally picks up work at a local factory, she prefers to fulfill the obligations she has at home and

with the children, keeping family unity a high priority. The children enjoy their time together in the household. Mariana describes her family, as *muy hogareños*, that is, they like to stay at home.

I follow a somewhat different format in presenting the Salazar Oaxaca family because their experience with migration began years before I started collecting data, and also because the level of trust which I was able to gain was somewhat less, and so there is less data. Thus, rather than presenting different aspects of their lives in separate before- and after-migration sections, I begin with events surrounding the initial migration, and then continue with the different aspects of their lives before and after migration including family economy and work; roles, relationships and organization within the family; education; personal interests; and their relationship with the extended family and community.

#### 3.4.2.2. Cesar's migration

##### 3.4.2.2.1. The family background

Cesar is the fourth of eight siblings. With a sixth grade education, Cesar has followed the virilocal tradition (Robichaux, 1998), building an L-shaped home with five rooms on the family plot for himself, and his wife and four children. The living room leads directly to the street and connects to the main bedroom where the five sleep. The main bedroom leads onto the shared patio and one crosses the patio to reach the two other rooms, one of which leads to the large kitchen.

Cesar's wife, Mariana, is the fifth of six siblings. The Oaxaca family's migratory experience began nine years ago when one of Mariana's sisters went to live in Las Vegas. This sister has been back only once since leaving. When she returned, her plan was to

stay, but after four months she returned to Las Vegas. Mariana's youngest brother then went to Las Vegas and stayed for a year and a half.

During these initial experiences with migration, Cesar and Mariana were experiencing hard times. Cesar met the challenges with flexibility, or, as Floyd Tenery (2005) describes it, "the strategic choices that the household makes in procuring its subsistence (p.114)." Cesar had worked as a night watchman and then in a furniture factory. Later, his brother started a dairy business and Cesar took care of the cows. When that business did not make a profit, his brother sold the cows, leaving Cesar without employment. Thus, hard times pushed Cesar to journey north to Las Vegas nearly five years ago, following his wife's youngest brother. Last summer, Cesar's youngest brother also journeyed to Las Vegas. Mariana says this brother has been very lucky because he found two jobs right away and is making good money. Cesar's experience was quite different, as recalled in the following section.

#### 3.4.2.2.2. The leave-taking

Mariana recalls that the decision to emigrate was sudden.

*Fue [tomada] muy rápida porque él tenía en planes de irse hace, de la vez que se fue, como dos años antes dijo que se iba a ir a Estados Unidos, nunca se fue, dijo que no y ya, hasta que de repente, no sé, la situación, los mismos problemas, dijo- me voy, yyy pues platicamos mucho y llegamos al acuerdo de que sí pero se iba a ir supuestamente por poco tiempo nada más yyy se está alargando más, alargando más, y este, a lo mejor son otros 2 a 3 años más todavía [was made very fast because he had had plans to go to the United States, two years earlier and then never went, he said no and that was that, until all of a sudden, I don't know, the situation, the same problems, he told me – I'm going, and well we talked a lot and we came to the agreement that yes, but he was going for supposedly a short time and it's been stretching out, stretching out, and it will probably be another 2 to 3 years yet].*

Mariana says she has not asked Cesar the details of the crossing, but she knows he called the people her sister had suggested, and he left from here on bus. She does not remember where he went to meet with this person and she doesn't know how he crossed. She does know that other family members have gone with a *pollero* who receives money once he has *entregada la mercancía* [handed over the merchandise]. Her sister paid *al chaz-chaz* [cash on delivery] for Cesar's safe arrival. She says if they pay beforehand, there is too great of a risk they would be left after just crossing the border in the middle of nowhere. It took Cesar three months to find a job in Las Vegas, and then about six months to pay back the money Mariana's sister had lent him. In the four and a half years since he left, he has returned once. "*Le toca venir pronto* [He is due for a visit soon]."

#### 3.4.2.2.3. Goals

Mariana said they did not have a set of concrete goals before Cesar's first leaving perhaps because they were skeptical he would even be able to cross the border. "*No sabíamos que iba a pasar y pues sí, de hecho, sí* [We didn't know if he would cross and well he did, actually, he did]." When I asked Mariana about goals since then, in general she spoke of the children's studies, their family's lifestyle, and finishing the house completely with "everything the family needs." She says those goals are still in place and they keep working towards them, but they get sidetracked because the children make them focus on other things.

*Pues de repente no lo hacemos, ooo no nos enfocamos a eso, o nos enfocamos en otra cosa y nos salimos del, del camino, entonces de repente salen cosas que no están previstas y hay que solucionarlas también, yyy pues, se cambia todo, o se tiene uno que esperar otro poco más (. . .) si pero este va tardar todavía yo creo otros dos años* [So, we end up not doing the things we have planned, or we stop focusing [on a goal] and we focus on another and we get off track and suddenly things which haven't been planned come up and we have to solve those things too and well, everything

changes, or we have to wait a little longer... yes, but it's going to be another two years, I think].

It seems she has discussed this with Cesar and they have agreed upon this point, that is, that it will be necessary for him to work for another two years in Las Vegas.

I also asked Mariana what she wanted for her children.

*Que salgan adelante como seres humanos, que sean buenos y que progresen. Que trabajen, esfuercen, y en el estudio. La educación es lo más importante. Una mamá quiere que sea por el lado bueno. Y que se une mucho la familia. También que pueden practicar una profesión que les guste. Entre mejor estén preparados, mejor* [That they succeed as human beings, that they are good and they progress. That they work, they try hard, and in their studies. Education is the most important of all. A mother wants it to be achieved with their cooperation, and that the family become really united. Also that they can practice a profession they like. The better prepared the better].

Like Licha, Mariana believes her children's studies will secure their future. In the next section, I discuss her and Cesar's experience with work.

### 3.4.2.3. Family Life

#### 3.4.2.3.1. Economy and Work Situation: *Empezar desde abajo*.

In Las Vegas, Mariana says, Cesar "*empezó desde abajo.... Progresó* [he started at the bottom.... He moved up]." Working at a fast food sandwich chain, washing dishes, and then waiting tables, he moved up to kitchen *manager*, and now he is store *manager*. As Mariana spoke to me about her husband's work experience, she could not find the words in Spanish to say what her husband did, but explained he had been promoted to *manager*, pronounced with a Mexican accent. Mariana understood this meant that Cesar was in charge of the locale and that he was very happy with this new position.

When I first met Mariana, she was also working a paid job. In apple harvest season of 2004, she took on a temporary seasonal production job at a local fruit-processing business. They asked her back to work in the spring and summer, training her to work in

other areas of the plant. She worked from April to early October 2005, when she quit due to schedule changes. She decided it would be too difficult to keep the family and home running smoothly with the new work schedule. “*Entonces, les di mis gracias* [So, I gave them my thanks (literally) / I quit (semantically)].” In retrospect, Mariana thinks they placed more confidence in her than she did in herself.

Mariana says Cesar wonders what is going on because they used to be able to live with one quantity of money, and now they are spending more. She explains to him that before the kids were little and they could buy them cheaper shoes, but as they grow, they also acquire *gustos* [specific tastes], and they notice differences between one pair of pants and another, and they want the one which costs more. It seems that Mariana regards this as a natural part of children growing up.

#### 3.4.2.3.2. Roles and Relationships

##### 3.4.2.3.2.1. *Realmente le cambió todo*

Mariana says that Cesar comes from a family that believes men do not do housework, but Mariana says she was not educated that way. She believes men should also learn these things. As a result, the organization of the housework is one aspect of family life that has changed considerably since Cesar’s emigration. Mariana spoke about how things were before Cesar’s leaving.

*Él era el que se iba a trabajar y uno aquí que la escuela, viendo la escuela, los niños, el quehacer de la casa, todo era aquí en la mañana; ahora no, porque como yo trabajo, él no está e de repente voy a la escuela muy de vez en cuando. Trabajo en la mañana; en la tarde tengo que venir a hacer las labores que supuestamente hacía yo en la mañana, ahorita en la tarde. Ooo por ejemplo los niños ya no salen tanto como antes porque antes con su papá salían a cada rato, si, a cada rato salía, se los llevaba al campo, a jugar fut, a jugar basket, a todos lados. Yyy ahora no porque salimos nada más cada fin de semana, salir no no a pasear sino aquí nada más a despejarnos un rato nada más pero sí ya han cambiado muchas cosas para*



*ellos y para mí y para Cesar igual, él está allá pero realmente le cambió todo.* [Cesar would be the one to go out to work and I would be here with the school, looking after school matters, the kids, the housework, everything would be taken care of in the morning; not now, because, since I work, he's not here, and I very rarely go to the schools. I work in the mornings, in the afternoon I have to come and do the housework I used to do in the mornings, at this time in the afternoons. Or, for example, the kids don't go out as often as before, because before, they would go out really often with their father, they would, really often, he would take them out to the field, to play soccer, to play basketball, all over. And now, no, because we only get out on the weekends, and not to live it up either, rather, just for a change of scenery or some fresh air for a while. So, yes, many things have changed for the kids and for me and for Cesar too. He's there, and that really changes everything].

After Cesar left, Mariana began dividing up chores for the children. Besides picking up their rooms and making their beds, she has them sweep, wash dishes, and wash socks. To lighten the atmosphere, she sometimes sings a song from Barney “*limpien, limpien. Ponga todo en su lugar...* [Clean up, clean up. Put everything in its place.]” If the children are doing homework and she is doing housework, she sometimes puts on music too. Her favorites seem to be the Doors and Queen. Another example of dividing up the chores is, since the kids like to eat *mole verde* [a green stew], she has one child wash the cilantro, another washes the meat, another peels the tomatoes, etc. Mariana reminds me that Cesar has also experienced changes because he lives with four men and they take turns with the different chores, but that he continues to believe that “*en su casa no debe ser así* [in his house it shouldn't be like that (that a man or boys should do housework)].” I have never heard the children grumble about responsibilities they have.

#### 3.4.2.3.2.2. *El héroe de los niños*



Figure 3.11 The Salazar Oaxaca family sends greetings to their father, Cesar.

Rarely have I seen or heard the children squabble. Rather, they share excitement when they have something new and look to each other to help solve problems. Mariana says that Cesar is “*el héroe de los niños* [the kids’ hero],” and for Roberta, “*Su papá es su adoración* [Her father is her adoration].” However, she says, Cesar communicates most with their oldest son. She says, she doesn’t know whether it is good or not, but Cesar tells Figo, “*Soy su papá y su amigo* [I am your father and your friend].” Cesar insists this is how he wants it.

The number of telephone calls per week between Cesar and the family varies, but Mariana says anything between two and five times a week. Roberta says she and her brothers talk to their father over the telephone and he asks them about their grades and “*luego, si sacamos malas, nos regaña* [later, if they are too low, he scolds us].”

According to Roberta, she is also learning some English from her father. “*El primer día que nos habló por teléfono nos dijo que había aprendido palabras en inglés y yo le dije ¿me las puedes enseñar? y así le fui preguntado.* [The first day he called by phone, he told us he had learned some words in English and I asked him, can you teach me them? And that’s how I started asking].” In Mexican public schools, English is not

taught until junior high, so Giovanni and Roberta's main contact with English has been through their father.

The youngest children often told me their father was going to be coming soon. Giovanni said his father had promised him a puppy; this was after their dog had been killed. Mariana told me Cesar tells the children those things but only *para darles ilusiones* [to occupy their minds with pretty ideas]. At one point however, even Mariana mentioned he might be coming. She said he wants her to go to Las Vegas with him, but that she really does not want to. She wants him to come back to Cholula and for them to be all together while the children are young. She says she will be willing to go with him to the States when the children are grown, but for now, she does not want to leave them.

#### 3.4.2.3.3. Education and personal interests

Cesar completed sixth grade at what was then the only primary school in the community. Mariana's family moved from the capital city to this community when she was in the sixth grade and so she finished the last half of sixth grade at the same local primary school as Cesar. She went on to complete secondary school at what was then the only secondary school in the community. Their two eldest sons, Figo and Oswaldo, now study at this same secondary school. They both studied primary at the Alfonso Cano Elementary, just a block from their house, where Roberta and Giovanni were studying at the time of this study.

Now that there is a choice of schools, Mariana says they decided on Alfonso Cano because it is the closest to their home, but also because they teach well. She then goes on to speak more frankly. Mariana believes that most any school teaches well. If the kids are intelligent, *van a brillar* [they'll shine] whatever school they attend. According to her,

a good education includes discipline, progress, teaching, learning, and constancy. She believes her children are doing average work.

At 13, Figo has already grown taller than his mother. He likes to read and write. He especially enjoys books on animals and fiction, but his favorite school subject is math because he likes numbers and problems and solving them. He says he sometimes makes mistakes in class, but sometimes, he is the best in the class.

Oswaldo, 12, does not have a favorite subject, and he reads and writes infrequently, according to him. His real enthusiasm is for soccer, which he loved to play at Alfonso Cano, and now at his secondary school. Oswaldo also loves watching professional matches on the television. His enthusiasm is contagious and his older and younger brothers go along with him. They know about the different teams and players, and that is how they chose their pseudonyms used in this study.

Roberta, 10 now, was in the fourth grade *Querida Abuelita* class at Alfonso Cano. Roberta loves to wear boots and skirts. She chose the pseudonyms for herself and for her mother from characters in a favorite afternoon television program. Like Figo, Roberta's favorite school subject is mathematics, and she thinks school is really fun. She tells me enthusiastically that, she has two friends who are also cousins who go to the same school. She likes to read because the stories are *bonitas, divertidas y tienen buenas imágenes* [pretty, fun, and they've got good pictures]. She also likes to write in order to improve her spelling and penmanship. She says she likes to study, but I noticed her attitude was less than enthusiastic the day she had to find roots for compound words.

Roberta's fourth-grade teacher, the same as Mary Carmen's and an ex-migrant himself, reported that Roberta was both academically and emotionally stable during all of

fourth grade. Since her father had been in the States for a few years, she had already grown accustomed to her father's absence. What may affect her most, in his opinion, is that her mother has to work outside the home. He suspects Roberta's father might not be able to send enough money to cover expenses here. He also mentions that Roberta's mother has to take on the role of both mother and father, covering each of her children's needs, and solving all the problems they might have during their growth and development. Roberta thinks her father takes a supportive role in her education by sending money to pay for the things they need at school.

Giovani, on the other hand, does not think school is very fun. Although spelling is his favorite class, he likes reading more than writing. He says the problem is that his teacher hardly ever lets them read; she just has them do writing. If he had to choose, he would choose to read books with pictures or drawings. He compares third grade unfavorably to second grade, when the teacher gave them time for reading and they were allowed to take storybooks home. He says there are books in his classroom, but they have not read them. Giovani has a good memory and can name the titles of books from second grade off the top of his head. He is able to repeat short stretches of speech he has heard others say, even from television. Mariana is concerned because she says Giovani used to enjoy school so much. She said he was doing addition and subtraction, and he was reading and writing in third grade of kindergarten.

During the family's free time, sometimes they ride their bikes, one of Giovani's favorite pastimes, to the city's sports field, and there, Mariana likes to run around the track as the kids ride their bikes and they like to play basketball on their patio where they have a hoop. At home, they like to watch movies and listen to music. Giovani's favorite

pastimes are to dance and sing. Figo proudly shows me their collection of mostly originally CD's. He says his father brought many of them from the U.S., all of them groups that sing in Spanish. They also take time to play together table games such as *Basta* and *Tourista* as well as made-up games that I explain in the next chapter.

I go into greater depth on education and homework in the Results. However, perhaps it is relevant to mention here how the kids responded to questions about their future aspirations. Giovanni said he wants to be a dentist or an electrician, *quien pone los focos* [one who changes light bulbs]. Roberta said she wants to be a teacher, and when I asked her for what grades, she finally decided for kindergarten. Mariana rolled her eyes when she heard that and I asked her why. She said with four kids of her own she couldn't imagine working everyday with a classroom full of kids. Oswaldo said he wants to be a soccer player or an "architect," because "*me ha gustado poner modelos de la estructura de los coches* [I like putting models of car structures]." Mariana and I tried to discern exactly what he meant, and I suggested he might want to be a design engineer and Mariana suggested an auto mechanic. Figo said he might like to be an architect.

#### 3.4.2.3.4. Extended family and community life

Although they share a patio with Cesar's parents and his sister, I was never introduced to any of Cesar's family. The children sometimes made reference to their father's side of the family. Roberta's best friends are her cousins. When their dog was killed, the children buried it with the help of their grandfather. When Mariana got home from work, they told her how it had happened and how they even said prayers for their pet at the burial site.

Mariana took out their collection of pictures that they keep in a cardboard box. Many of the photographs were taken during religious celebrations and related festivities. In one photograph, Giovanni is dressed in a suit. He was asked to be one of the *chambelanes* [escorts] for his three-year-old cousin for her birthday party. We also found some photographs of Figo y Oswaldo, alongside some religious images. It was December when Cesar's brother asked Mariana if she and Cesar would be *padrinos* [sponsors] for a *fiesta* in the *barrio*. Mariana spoke with Cesar about it and they decided to accept the *cargo*, the religious obligation. According to Mariana, Cesar's brother's request was the *gancho para que viniera* [the hook to get him to come back] and, she was happy to say, it worked. She did not tell me much about his return except that he was heavier than when he had left the first time. She added that he lost weight when he was back though because he got so sick. The only other comment she made in reference to his return was about an image on their *altar*. She said he had salvaged it from the garbage in Las Vegas and had brought it back for their *altar*.

The family spoke much more often of Mariana's side of the family. On one occasion, I met Mariana's sister and her husband. Mariana told me how surprised they were that she had a visitor (me) at home. Mariana said she does not have friends who visit and that the family does not visit much either. Mariana did say her sister and brother-in-law were very interested in the project on which I was working however, and supportive of Mariana and the kids cooperating in this literacy research project.

Mariana told me her parents both come from a neighboring state to the south, but they made their home for their family originally in the capital, where they lived until Mariana was about 12. She said her father was given an offer to buy a plot of land in this

community, but in another *barrio*. She said at that time, her father already worked here and he liked the area. At that time, it was a quiet place with a lot of fields to play soccer which her father used to enjoy, and so her parents took the offer and paid the land “*poco a poquito entre los dos* [little by little between the two of them].” Mariana said her father has always worked in food service, and he has been working for years as a waiter at a well-established catering business. She said her mother loves cooking and she will even cook for others, whether it is for five people or fifty. Many times that I went to see them, they were not home, and later they told me they had been with their maternal grandparents. During summer vacation, the three youngest children also took turns staying at their maternal grandparents’ home, helping out with chores.

On weekends, Mariana’s family sometimes goes to swimming pools at a nearby town where the weather is warmer. They either go by car or truck with their paternal grandfather, or by car with Mariana’s sister and her husband. Figo said his mother is starting to learn to drive. As Mariana mentioned, the weekend is nearly the only time they get out of the house – very different from when their father lived with them.

#### 3.4.2.3.5. Attitudes toward migration

In the family interview, Figo and Mariana brought up the conflicting about migration. In their opinion, the United States is strong economically and technologically and there is a lot of tourism. They said it is the number one consumer in the world, being the number one client of Mexico, Thailand, China and Japan. The more people who go to the United States, the fewer people there are working the fields and producing for Mexico. Rather, Mariana said, “*están colaborando a su crecimiento en otro lado* [they are collaborating in the growth of the other side].” Furthermore, they are leaving their



families behind. They agreed there is work both here in Mexico and in the United States. Mariana recognizes that there are good aspects to migration, “*pero están descuidando en casa o en el país, digamos, lo que nos ayudaría por lo menos a crecer un poco* [but they are neglecting their own home or country which needs a little help to grow].”

#### 3.4.2.4. Conclusion Salazar Oaxaca Family

Unlike the Tlatchui Tenahua family, the Salazar Oaxaca family has directly lived with migration for nearly five years. Before Cesar left, Mariana said, they had few furnishings in the house. Now, they have a three-piece living room set, a coffee table, a bookcase with books and a home entertainment center. They have a DVD player, two televisions and two stereo systems. Except for one stereo system, everything was bought here in Mexico. She said they also wear new shoes. “*Antes, aunque tenían hoyos, seguían usándolos*. [Before, even though they had holes, they kept wearing them].” These are all changes she attributes to the remittances her husband sends.

The family has adapted to Cesar’s living abroad. Mariana remembers that at first Roberta was sensitive and would begin crying anytime she even heard the word *papá*, and she also remembers the boys saying it on purpose to make her cry. Since then, the siblings have become very supportive of each other. Mariana has assumed the role of decision-maker, imposing changes resulting in adaptations in the family’s organization and daily functioning, and resulting in a harmonious working balance.

This concludes the description of the Salazar Oaxaca family, and leaves one family yet to introduce – the Nava Romero family. I follow the general organization which I used in presenting the Salazar Oaxaca family, beginning with an overall description,

following with the father's emigration, and concluding with a description of their life as they see it.

### 3.4.3. Nava Romero Family



*Figure 3.12.* The Nava Romero family.

#### 3.4.3.1. Overall description

The Nava Romero family lives near the southwestern edge of the town limits. Fidel Nava, the father, 26 years of age, has resided in the New Jersey area, and more recently in Canada since February 2004, leaving behind his wife, Monica, and their six children (seen in *Figure 3.12*) at their home on Monica's family's home plot. Araceli, the oldest of six, was just six years old when her father left. She is now in third grade at the Alfonso Cano Elementary School.

Monica has work aplenty caring for the children and fulfilling domestic obligations while directing the building of the addition on their home. Although she sometimes appears tired, she exudes enthusiasm and seems to love the close proximity of her family of origin. She depends on Araceli for help with the care of the younger children, and Araceli happily and lovingly cooperates. On two occasions when I stopped to schedule visits, the children answered the door and ran to call their mother. She came with her

hands full of tortilla dough. It seems she is the person in charge of making the tortillas for not only her family but also the extended family with whom they interact closely, a transnational family full of *deep* Mexican traditions.

#### 3.4.3.2. Fidel's migration

##### 3.4.3.2.1. The family background

Monica Romero was born and raised, and has made a home on her family's home place with Fidel Nava, who has his origins in a nearby *barrio*. Monica says it was her mother who inherited the family's home plot. Monica comes from a family of four brothers and four sisters, four of whom have made their homes on this same home plot. One of Monica's brothers, who is single, has resided in the New Jersey area for four years, and a brother-in-law, married to Monica's sister, Beatriz, went there approximately three years ago. It was Fidel's second time to make the journey north; the first time, he stayed only two months, returning because of a family emergency.

When I asked Monica about the reasons behind Fidel's migration, she explained plainly and simply, "*Ya había poco trabajo y teníamos que meter a los niños a la escuela y ya no nos alcanzaba el dinero* [there was little work available and we had to put the children into school and we did not have enough money anymore]." She made no mention as to the influence of the family members already in the U.S., but she is a woman who expresses herself simply and succinctly, and, with her load of responsibilities, I did not feel justified in probing further.

##### 3.4.3.2.2. The leave-taking

The opportunity did not arise to talk with Monica about Fidel's actual leaving, the preparation for it, the planning of it, or the payment for it. She only mentions that "*Ya no*

*teníamos dinero para salir adelante* [We didn't have any money anymore to get ahead with]." She did mention that their youngest child was born in November 2003 and that Fidel left just two months later, on February fifth, 2004.

I met Monica's sister, Beatriz, whose husband is in the New Jersey area, and she spoke about the danger of the journey with some sarcasm. "*Es bien bonito. Arriesgan su vida para pasar. Hay polleros abusados* [It's real nice. They risk their lives to go over. There are sly *polleros*]." Neither Monica nor Beatriz shared with me any details of the route or the means by which the men traveled.

#### 3.4.3.2.3. Goals

When I asked Monica about her and Fidel's goals, she said,

*Pues, hacer nuestra casa porque, de hecho, no teníamos donde estar (. . .) [tenemos] dos piezas pero todavía nos falta el baño, sacar drenaje (...) hacer (...) otra pieza porque, pues, dormimos todos y estamos apretados y no cabemos y eso es lo que nosotros queremos* [Well, to make our house because actually, we didn't have a place to be (...) We have two rooms but we still lack a bathroom, to install drainage (...) to build (...) another room because we all sleep and we are too bunched together and we don't fit and that is what we want.

In subsequent visits, I came to realize how much the house was on her mind, as she was on the verge of starting to build the addition to their house. I did not ask her to estimate how close she considered they were to reaching their goals; rather, I mainly concentrated on the here and now. It was during the first visit with the family, when filling out the Family Social History form that I learned more about their past. In the following sections, I present the story that they shared with me.

#### 3.4.3.3. Family Life

##### 3.4.3.3.1. Economy and work situation

Before migrating, Fidel worked for a gas distributing company in the community. Driving a truck, he sold 20-kilo cylinders of gas. Monica said his income was dependent on sales. He would earn anywhere between six hundred and nine hundred pesos (approximately \$60-90USD) per week. Going north, he first went to the New Jersey area where her brother and brother-in-law lived. Since then he moved on by himself. Now, he is working at a McDonald's, somewhere in Canada. She said that now he sends money every week, always to the same agency. On Mondays, she goes to collect the money. Monica said probably the biggest change for the family since Fidel's leaving is that "*ya tenemos un poco más para darles a nuestros hijos* [now we are able to give our children a little more than before]."

Monica's work is in the home and with her family. She administers the money Fidel sends carefully. There are no new furnishings in the home. They do have a stereo, as seen in *Figure 3.13*, and Araceli likes to put music on to listen to music, but they bought it about five years ago in the state capital. She is also frugal about using electricity. There are no fancy clothes in their wardrobe. Indeed, two weeks into the school year, the required sports uniforms were still pending.



*Figure 3.13.* Araceli and the stereo.

#### 3.4.3.3.2. Roles and Relationships

The first visit took place in Monica's mother's front room, the closest to the street. It is a large, sparsely furnished room with simple wooden chairs, a refrigerator, an *altar*, and two long benches pushed under a large wooden table, all of it lined up against the wall. For visiting, we sat on a few chairs in the middle of the large room. When Araceli arrived, she greeted me with a kiss. Then her two eldest brothers, Manuel and José Juan, already present, stood up, introduced themselves and shook hands with me. Various cousins and the youngest children also came to greet me – each one personally. Monica is proud of her family of origin, and the family she and Fidel have formed. She explained the layout of her family plot. Along the west side of the plot, after this first front room, is her sister's room, then the kitchen, then her mother's room, then a brother's room. Then there is a granary and last is their house. Along the other side of the plot are the well and the animals and their shelters. They have two cows, two calves, a sheep, some pigs, chickens, turkeys and dogs.

On the next visit, the children led me across the dirt yard, where the turkeys, chickens and dogs roam freely, and past the stables. Monica's mother was washing clothes at the well. Clean clothes hung drying on a line in front of the Nava Romero house. Several relatives from the extended family were outside and they greeted me as I headed toward the one-story house, last on the lot. Since Monica and Fidel's house is at the corner of the lot, their two long, large rooms are built perpendicular to each other. More recently, since my visits, they have built the main structure of the second story of the house. Monica had been buying the materials little by little and so they put up the structure in a few weeks, but they have yet to put drainage in.

The large main room is sparsely furnished; the floors are cement and the walls are finished white. There is a sofa on the south wall and a small round table in the corner, where the recently acquired telephone sits. Along the west wall, there is an armchair, a small wood chair and a china cabinet with a stereo. Along the north wall, there are two double beds. On the east wall is the doorway to the kitchen where you find a twin-size bunk bed set, a stove, refrigerator and table and chairs. Monica says her brother's wife and their two children are staying with her and that they are a bit crowded. This is new since our first meeting because at that time her only brother in the U.S. was single. This brother is in New Jersey, but since when or for how long, she did not say.

Monica said they cannot call Fidel because he does not have a telephone. Instead, he calls them from a public phone every week. Monica mentions taking advantage of the telephone promotion mentioned in the community description. This acquisition brought positive changes for this transnational family. Before the telephone was installed, Monica explained, Fidel would call once every three or four weeks, either at her sister's or her sister-in-law's cell phones. Since April 2005, he has been able to call directly to their house, and so she feels much more comfortable talking longer. When possible, the kids take turns talking with their father too. The day I interviewed Araceli was the day before her birthday, and so she was looking forward to a call from her father the next day. The children told me excitedly that their father says he is coming home soon. I later asked Monica about this and she said from the discussions she and Fidel have had, "*tardará otros dos años tal vez* [it will be another two years perhaps]." She explained "*nomás dice eso a los niños* [he just tells that to the kids]," which is similar to what Mariana told me about Cesar's talk with the children.

Monica said she does not send letters and that she does not have Fidel's address to be able to send him anything. She is not even sure exactly where he is. The extended family, however, sends packages to Monica's brother who has lived there for over three years. According to Beatriz, he is on the payroll at the *marqueta* in New York. When I asked her what the *marqueta* was, she was not sure if it was a market or a supermarket or a warehouse, but she said that he has to move a lot of Coke bottles.

Monica stresses that Fidel's not being here has changed her children's daily life. As noted in the opening quote of this study, he was the one who played with the children, taught them, and took them to the park. His absence seems to have affected them greatly. Indeed, it was going to be Araceli's birthday, and the fair was in town those days. I asked if they might be going to the fair to celebrate the birthday, but Monica said she would not be taking them to the fair; besides not having money to go (it was the beginning of the school year and the purchase of the obligatory sports uniforms was still pending), Monica explained she does not go to town with the kids because she simply cannot handle them all. She says, "*Se cansa uno y luego otro y no se puede* [One child gets tired and then another and I just can't do it]."

#### 3.4.3.3.3. Education and Personal Interests

Fidel finished primary school in the public school in the community and went on to secondary school in the neighboring town where he studied for two years. Monica studied first and second grade in a public school in a nearby town, then her parents sent her to study at the semi-private school, Centro Telpochcalli (mentioned earlier in this chapter in the description of the community and which has a sliding scale for tuition), for



two more years. Monica does not know why they made the change for her. She and Fidel, however, have consciously made the decisions for their children's schooling.

Fidel and Monica have chosen a nearby kindergarten for the younger children and Alfonso Cano Elementary for Araceli and her eldest brother, Manuel. Monica's nieces and nephews attend primary school in the neighboring town where Monica studied her first years of primary. In Monica's opinion, the teachers in the neighboring community school do not teach well, whereas the teachers at Alfonso Cano "*atienden a los estudiantes. No los deja ir par'abajo. Los saca adelante.* [They tend to the students. They do not let them slip (scholastically). They push them to succeed]." Furthermore, when parents pre-register the first grade children in February they choose which of the three available teachers they want their child to have. Monica chose Manuel's teacher because she believes that this teacher is more organized.

Monica is aware of the methods that the children are using to learn reading at school. She explains to me the *zapatero* [shoe bag] method. She explains they have rows of plastic pockets in which the letters are placed. Then, the teacher asks them to put together the different sounds – at first syllables, and then complete words, and the children take the corresponding letters out to form the syllables or words. She says this is quite different from the way she learned, which consisted of writing pages full of individual words or syllables.

Monica also feels indebted to Araceli's second grade teacher. She is grateful that Araceli's teacher knew how to help her. At one point, Araceli was in second place in her group and then, "*Bajé a tercer lugar, y luego no hubo lugares* [I went down to third place and then there were no more places]" Classrooms only give special recognition to the

students with the top three grades. Monica places the blame on the parents because “*a veces somos desobligados* [sometimes, we are irresponsible].”

Parents only have so many resources with which to help their children in their schoolwork. In this family, that changed after Fidel’s leaving. According to Monica, Fidel was the one who helped the children with homework. “*Sabía más que yo porque él estudió la secundaria y yo no* [He knew more than me because he studied secondary and I didn’t].” This is a source of frustration for Monica, as I explain in the next chapter.

Araceli enjoys studying at Alfonso Cano School “*porque tengo muchas amigas, porque está mi maestra que más quiero, porque aprendo, porque así puedo aprender y estudiar mucho, por eso* [Because I have lots of friends, the teacher I most love, because I learn, and because that’s how I can learn and study a lot, that’s why].”

Manuel was just starting first grade and he liked the idea of learning how to read and write, “*para que pueda yo escribir y para mandar cartas (...) a mi papá, [y] a mis tíos*. [So that I can write and send letters (...) to my father and uncles].” Although Monica does not write letters, perhaps his cousins do. They mentioned that Monica’s family sends packages to her brother. Perhaps they also include letters in the package. Since some cousins were staying with them, perhaps he had seen them write letters.

When I first met Manuel, he had just graduated from kindergarten. His mother coaxed him to tell me a little about it. He said they camped out at his school. He slept with his classmates and there were a few teachers there. They also had a ceremony and he said he cried when it was time to say goodbye to his teacher. Araceli and their cousins mentioned they also cried when they said goodbye to their teachers at the end of the school year. The children are expressively sentimental.

When I asked them about family activities, they mentioned activities exclusively in the home. They mentioned that their mom makes *chicharrines*, fried wheat chips, and they eat them. Monica also tries new recipes she and Araceli find in magazines. They do the housework all together; they also celebrate birthdays together with the whole family. Monica, Araceli, and Fidel too when he was there, also read storybooks to the children. One of Manuel's pastimes is to collect business cards and other cards of similar size.

While Monica sat to talk to me, she rarely sat alone. The youngest slept in her arms; another child, standing on the back of the chair, gave her hugs from behind; another crawled up on her lap. The smaller ones, especially the youngest sister, also look to Araceli for comfort and guidance. Araceli played with Laura on her lap or as they shared a chair. One afternoon, there were eleven children in the house playing. Another afternoon, a couple of the boys and their cousins had a radio transformer and they were connecting it to a battery, giving themselves, and anyone else who wanted them, electric shocks. Monica good-naturedly told me they had taken a radio apart. Later, a hen strut in, jumped up on a table, tipped over an incense burner, and Monica calmly asked one of the kids to guide the hen out. I found the kids' play entertaining and Monica's quiet, relaxed style of mothering very comforting.

As with the other two families, we can see in *Figure 3.14*, the Nava Romero family has a space dedicated to *los santos* [the saints], as the children call it. On another wall hung a Styrofoam and glitter decoration, shown in *Figure 3.15*, which read, Welcome to my baptism - a keepsake of the day the three oldest boys were baptized. They said it had been hung in the yard on a tube, which held up a canvas tarp for the festivities.



Figure 3.14. *Los santos* [The saints].



Figure 3.15. *Bienvenidos a mi bautizo* [Welcome to my baptism]

The family history involves two powerful experiences with illness. The first time Fidel went to the U.S., he returned after only two months because Manuel had become ill. A few years earlier, Monica and Fidel's firstborn died at the age of nine months from a stomach infection. The family believes there was medical negligence on the doctor's part. Infant mortality is still high in Mexico, and so, the family takes it seriously when children get sick. It is likely the first experience affected Fidel's decision to return from his first journey north.

#### 3.4.3.3.4. Extended family and community life

During the course of getting to know the Nava Romero family, they never spoke of Fidel's family. I was introduced, however, to Monica's parents and several nieces and nephews. Each time I was there, there were several people about the home plot. The youngest nieces and nephews mingle freely with each other, sharing toys. They celebrate baptisms and weddings together on the central patio. Araceli's cousins are preparing for first communion, and the three girls' eyes sparkle when they think about that forthcoming day, but Araceli will wait until her father returns for her own preparation. However, Monica takes prime responsibility in tending to her children's needs – washing, cooking, cleaning, attending school meetings and getting the children to Alfonso Cano for school, and the next two to the kindergarten an hour later, and then to pick them up, and on top of that, organizing the building of the second story, and making fresh tortillas. She and Araceli reserve Monday afternoons for collecting the remittances and stopping by the market.

#### 3.4.3.4. Conclusion Nava Romero Family

Monica is a careful administrator of the family's financial resources. With two children in primary school and two in pre-school, the family was still gathering the means to complete the set of school-required uniforms. It is a careful balance between interests – fulfilling school requirements and building the home they want for their family. Monica is accomplishing this. Monica finds it comforting to have the telephone at their home in order to receive calls from Fidel.

More questions remain, perhaps than are answered with this family. I lack information on Fidel, Fidel's family, and on the family's relationship with the community. Perhaps it is because I did not ask the right questions. Perhaps the children's young ages makes a difference. Nevertheless, as a point of comparison, both in terms of children's age and in Monica's educational level, the literacy results may prove to be interesting. Before turning to the analysis of the literacy practices in the homes, I present a summary of the three families' differences and similarities.

#### 3.4.4. Summary of Three Participating Families

These three families are part of new transnational migrant circuits. The three main receiving areas are Los Angeles, New York, and Las Vegas. In the Los Angeles area, we find the Tenahua men. Ernesto's uncle left approximately twenty years ago and now three of four brothers make a living near their uncle. In the New York area, we find Licha Tlatehui's brother and his wife and children, and four men from Monica Romero's family, although, Fidel has since moved to a new area. All of these men left within the past three years. Three of the Salazar and Oaxaca men have made Las Vegas their destination, meeting up with Mariana Oaxaca's sister who emigrated there nine years ago.

In the three cases, the migrants' initial choice of destination is where other family members live. Except for Fidel, the rest have stayed in close proximity to other family members in the area of residence. These data support Kochhar's (2005) findings that 80% of the migrants in the PHC survey had a relative other than a spouse or child in the US, and Levitt's (2001) affirmation that migration spreads through social networks. In all three cases, migration became a feasible choice for meeting the families' needs in part because of the resources offered by the extended families.

The organizing and financing of transportation and passage and the provision of food and shelter upon arrival certainly aided the migrants' decisions. Although I do not have the information about Fidel's journey, the other two men had considerable help from their family networks, not only in planning and carrying out the journey, but also in financing it. Ernesto received financing help both directly from his family and through connections in the community, as well as immediate help in finding lodging, clothing and food when he and his brother arrived at their destination. In Cesar's case, the choice of *pollero* and the payment for his services were arranged through family connections on the U. S. side of the border. These family and social networks are key to the pattern of migration (Kochhar, 2005).

Cesar emigrated longer ago, and he is the only one who emigrated without leaving a job. The fact that both Fidel and Ernesto had jobs, but that the income earned did not fulfill the basic needs of the family is a common phenomenon in Mexico (Kochhar, 2005) and one which leads to important questions on social and economic policy. Suro (2003) reported that the remittances serve to keep families from falling into poverty, and that

would seem the case for these families. Even though Fidel and Ernesto had jobs, their incomes were not enough to cover the needs of families of eight and five, respectively.

The goals of physical expansion of their homes and obtaining the essentials for the children to participate in school were common to the three families, but the timelines varied. The Nava Romero family began raising the addition twenty months after Fidel left. Cesar emigrated nearly five years ago, and, at the time of writing, the Salazar Oaxaca family had begun buying building materials. Indoor plumbing is another concern for the Nava Romero and the Tenahua Tlathui families.

Malkin (1998) mentions the acquiring of electro-domestic appliances for the homes as part of the material culture particular to transnational families, but only the Salazar Oaxaca family displays these, and for the most part, they have been acquired in Mexico. This family has also been part of the transnational migrant circuit longer than the other families. Contrary to what was found by Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) and Malkin (1998), the Tenahua Tlathui and the Nava Romero families do not move goods back and forth. The Salazar Oaxaca family sends packages but not consistently. In the three cases, it is the remittances that the families count on.

I see similarities between families in their preference for communicating by telephone, which allows information to move back and forth. This movement of information is discussed by Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) and Faulstich Orellana et al.'s (2001) however in these studies the information mainly moved through mail or delivery services. Furthermore, the frequency of calls made by the three migrants has increased since having telephones installed in their homes. Fidel calls the least often, calling once a week, while Ernesto and Cesar call up to five times a week.



These findings support statistics in the extraordinary number of calls made by migrants (Guarnizo, 2005). Only Licha and her children mentioned occasionally initiating calls to the migrant. The tendency for migrant-to-family calls is in part due to migrants not having a permanent telephone line, but the families expressed consensus that it was extremely expensive to call from Mexico to the U.S. The families told me the migrants bought telephone cards allowing for lengthy calls. Moreover, it appears the mothers utilize the telephone to nurture the father-child relationship, much like D'Aubeterre (2000) suggests when discussing women's creative and "subtle work oriented toward maintaining family solidarity and relations (p.82)."

Much of the couples' conversation over the telephone deals with decision-making. This has united Licha and Ernesto. Mariana and Cesar, however, have differing opinions on certain issues, especially those concerning gender and roles in the household. She worked outside the home, perhaps against Cesar's will. Well before his return to Mexico, she quit her job, perhaps in preparing for his arrival.

Religion played a significant role in relation to migration in the three families. With the Salazar Oaxaca family it was the main impetus for Cesar's first return visit. Both Belen's and Araceli's families have linked their first communions with their fathers' returns.

Licha and her children seem to be the most integrated with both sides of the family. The fact that both sides of the family are from the same *barrio* may account for this. Mariana keeps a respectful distance from her in-laws while allowing her children to foment the family's presence in the community. With Cesar's family living in the same *barrio*, the children have frequent contact with their cousins both at home and school.

Mariana's parents do not live far away and the family often spends time there. In the Nava Romero family, however, Fidel's family is from another *barrio* and the family did not speak about them. Daily interaction involves Monica's family.

In this chapter, I have situated the families socioculturally. I have described the community in which they live, their family histories, their customs, roles, interests, goals, and education. I have tried to relate how their experience with transnationalism has affected them in each of these areas. Understanding the families' social history allows us to situate their literacy practices in space and time. In the next chapter, I discuss the results of data collection concerning literacy practices of these three transnational families. I question the relationship between these literacy practices and the families' transnationalism. I question how migration affects literacy practices and how literacy practices affect migration at this time in these families in this community.