

Who Has Potatoes? Turning Points in Migratory Experience

Keith V. Bletzer

Arizona State University

Abstract / Resumen

Migratory farm labor like other forms of migrant work both in and outside agriculture impedes on the opportunity to make choices. The following essay explores particular phases in the life of one man (a single case study) and examines how he considers turning points in his life that led to a long period of substance use, both as an immigrant in the country and as a working man in his home country, followed by a cessation of use and the beginning stages of recovery.

Para el migrante, viajar en busca de trabajo es difícil, ya sea que trabaje en agricultura o en otras labores. Este ensayo examina ciertas etapas en la vida de un hombre (estudio de un solo caso) que examina los cambios que le han ocurrido durante un período en que él consumía grandes cantidades de alcohol en los estados y en su país, seguido por un período de sobriedad (no tomaba alcohol, no usaba drogas) en este país en que él comienza una etapa de rehabilitación.

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Conditions upon which migratory labor are based in the United States generate a life of transition that extends beyond that of other occupations and lifestyles. Migration by its very nature removes people from one place, compels them to seek work and/or residence in another, and may return them to the same place with new ways of looking at the world. Or it may push them not to return, once they experience another place or obtain something that they believe is better than a prior experience in work, residence and recreation.

Most single case studies on farm labor in the social science literature seek to present a view that is considered "typical." Instances of this approach are the unnamed labor camp in Illinois studied by Alicia Chavira-Prado (1992), the migrant family based in El Valle of South Texas accompanied by Isabel Valle (1994), a journalist, and the experience of Pedro, an older teen who came to California from a rural area of Guanajuato, Mexico, and worked in the Central Valley of California, as described by Juan Vincent Palerm (1992).

Works that cover multiple cases generally present extreme situations that may show an improvement or describe conditions that are sub-standard, such as discriminatory practices that lead to a poor working environment. Examples of this approach, for improvements in lifestyle, include strawberry growers who once were sharecroppers along the Central Coast of California (Wells, 1996), and, for the sub-standard, most of the 70 narratives presented by Rothenberg (1998), wherein farm labor hardships are presented first, before more upbeat narratives by children of migrant families in the final chapters. In this essay, I use the single case study approach to explore one man's experiences, which represent both typical and other than typical events in the life of a migrant who traveled more extensively than prior single case studies in the literature.

Having worked with migrant and seasonal farm workers for nearly 15 years, primarily in relation to risk behaviors, I recently collected life stories from farm workers in three states of the Southeast for a study of initiation into

drug and alcohol use. Although the main source of data was taped interviews, I incorporated techniques from my training in anthropology, wherein I spent time with those whom I interviewed. Worker-users in one state where I conducted fieldwork I came to know over time that I spent in a house rented by men in recovery, which I visited to collect life stories through the cooperation of a substance abuse program designed for farm workers. It is this data that I wish to explore in this essay, particularly my contact with one man over four interviews that became much like the ethnographic encounter that anthropologists cultivate (Marcus, 1998 [1997]). Life stories are a particularly good way to learn details of migrant life.

My focus is the dynamics of transition, as they appear in narrative, focusing on the case of one man's recovery from a long period of substance use. I collected nearly one-fourth of my life stories from men in a residential treatment program for those who are or were tied to farmwork. Bi-monthly visits permitted me to find recruits for new interviews and re-interview participants still in treatment, as well as those who "graduated." D.N. (fictitious initials) was among the first men whom I interviewed. He became a source of material on each visit through a combination of ethnographic encounters and audio-taped interviews. As Rosenwald (1992) reminds us: "When people tell life stories, they do so in accordance with models of intelligibility specific to the culture (p. 265) ... [T]he issue of human development is obscured if cultural forces are declared to be sovereign (p. 267)."

Introduction to D.N.

Je, quién tiene papas? ("Hey, who has potatoes?"), D.N. imitates the voice of a customer, as he explains his selling from a wheeled-platform in his hometown in a north-central province of Mexico. Unlike his co-workers and he, who line the sidewalk in a heavily walked avenue of the capital city, the customer who wants "potatoes" is mobile. He drives to the area to transact business where these men work from wheeled-platform stands (called *plataformas*) and he leaves, as he

arrived, less known than maids, nicknamed *gatas* ("cats"), who make daily purchases for employers in apartments along the adjacent streets, and less known than poor women who walk from nearby *colonias* ("neighborhoods") to make weekly purchases of vegetables and fruits, since bulk purchases are cost-reductive.

This narrative excerpt from which the opening quotation is taken occurs in the second of four interviews I completed with D.N. over a seven-month period.¹ I will return to this setting of "sidewalk selling" later in the essay.

Despite coming to the states at the age of 17 and spending most of his adult life in cities and rural areas of this country, D.N. identifies with the time that he spent as a fruit-vegetable vendor in Mexico. Owing to time in the states and no house of his own, he lives in his parents' home, when he returns. Unlike men and women from Mexico who come to the states to earn money, often with the goal of constructing a house in Mexico (Chavez, 1992; Davis, 1990; Rothenberg, 1998), and unlike D.N.'s hometown compatriots in a local branch of a national political party active in his hometown, he never sought title to land by "take-over," which entails replacement of farmlands with neighborhood housing and reimbursement of farmers by the municipal government for lands "taken" and "occupied." Like other urban areas in Mexico, the city is expanding to which he has returned four times since he first came to the states 18 years ago. D.N. talked of building a house in Mexico shortly after he left treatment, when he re-contacted his family after 11 years of no communication. The evening that I transported Celso and he to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in a nearby town, he sought out Celso's advice, since Celso, nine years older than D.N. and free of drinking and drugs for some time, was able over the years to purchase a house in his native state for his family. "In his mother's house" is how D.N. describes his residence in Mexico, since it is the house where she lived with her parents, grandparents and parents' siblings while growing up. Coming from an adjacent province, his father has lived all his adult life

uxorilocally² with his wife's family. D.N. recently came to the idea of "having a house." Forty-five days into treatment, he told me:

"I was living with my family at the time, since the idea I was going to build a house in Mexico never entered my mind [*nunca se me sembró en la mente que voy a hacer una casa en México*]. Though I used to accompany the town's "land petitioners," I myself never petitioned for land [*nunca pedí terreno, si los acompañaba*]."

D.N. recognizes that substance abuse thwarted any plans that he may have had for saving for himself or remitting money to his parents back home to Mexico. Later in the second interview, D.N. explained his drinking and drug use.

"In my mind I was carrying only thoughts of beer [*En mi mente yo traía pura cerveza*]. (pause) To think that I was going to eat, to think that I was going to work, it never entered my mind. So constant was the thought that it spilled out from my thoughts, (pause) and I had to bring along a bottle in my hand."

D.N. was twice interviewed during treatment for substance abuse (inhalants, alcohol, pills, marijuana, crack-cocaine). Thus, his narrative follows the process of recovery and provides an inside look at substance use by a man who worked inside and outside agriculture in the United States. Translocated by choice from Mexico to the states, before finding himself years later "ready for treatment," he presents a tale typical of farm workers in several respects (Chavez, 1992; Griffith & Kissam, 1995; Heppel & Amendola, 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994): variable rates of pay across employment (hourly wage, piece rate), short-term work and brief periods of no work (never collecting unemployment compensation), work outside agriculture (golf course, house construction, restaurant, among others), residential and recreational experience in towns and cities (for example, 8 months in Chicago, 6 months in a southern town of 1,219 persons,³ among others). Where his tale is

atypical is his engagement in illicit drug use (primarily use of marijuana). Seeking treatment for alcohol and drug addiction is uncommon among men and women who perform agricultural labor. The infrequency of treatment owes itself to a lack of appropriate services for men and women in farm labor rather than a lack of desire. For farm workers, D.N.'s choices typify common substances that farm workers may use (Weatherby et al., 1997) and/or initiate on both sides of the border.

New Developments

Mi mamá me manda foto de la hija a los cinco años ("My mom is sending me a picture of my daughter at age five"), D.N. tells me as we select coffee and pastries from a self-serve coffee shop one block from the rented house where several "graduates" of the treatment program are living. *Me dice que ahora tiene 16 años* ("She says she's now 16"); he elaborates on news he received from his family after 11 years of neither phone calls nor letters, news that also is new to me, since my last visit was three weeks earlier. *Boracho yo, ni sabía* ("Drunk I was [when I knew her], I didn't even know what happened"), he says with measured words, then continues with his earlier pacing: *Me dice que me quiere conocer* ("She says she wants to get to know me"). By this time, I recognized that he is sharing something integral to his sense of identity: he is demonstrating an interest not only in his daughter but also her mother, the one woman among several for whom he continues to feel affection (owing to the young age at which he left Mexico, all the women he has known lived in the states). He is enthused, yet cautious, as he explains that his mother will first send a photo of his daughter at age five, before sending one at age 16 (it is possible that his mother has no recent photo at age 16). Both the girl and her mother live in central Texas, and the link between mother-daughter, D.N.'s mother and D.N., is his aunt, also living in central Texas. D.N. first came to the states with an older brother, and the two of them spent two years working on a farm along the border in Texas. When the brother was injured (cow-kicked), D.N. went with him on

a bus to the border. Rather than return home with his brother, however, D.N. went to live with a maternal aunt and uncle in central Texas, where he shifted from farm labor to non-agricultural work. Working in a poultry plant, he met Guadalupe, the woman who gave birth to his daughter. At the time, she had friends talk to him of her interest in him.

Given his experience with women (Chicanas and Anglo) and the fact that three women followed him to Mexico on separate occasions when he returned home, I suspect his mother is equally cautious and seeks to emphasize the tie to his daughter through a reference to a childhood unknown to him, as her father (perhaps age five was a happy time for D.N. as a child). I consider a word of support is appropriate and I tell him: *Está haciéndolo con pasos despacios* ("She's taking it one step at a time"). When I start to pay for my coffee, he tells the cashier that he is paying as he adds two cheese rolls for me to carry out. Like José Limón (1994, p. 168-186) and several other ethnographers, I recognize that his gesture of largesse is important for him, and I slowly return the money to my pocket as we return to the rented house. Later that evening, after transporting D.N. and Celso to the A.A. meeting in a nearby town, I place the unspent money in the offering basket.

D.N.'s disclosure on news of his daughter is my entry point for analysis. Since the last interview with D.N. was more open-ended than the previous three, I allowed him to provide direction. He chose to discuss the women he had known in the states, and the pain he recognized that he inflicted. Into his narrative, he interwove reflections on alcohol and drugs. To review the interviews, I started in reverse order, since the news from central Texas through his mother brought an unexpected revelation to his recovery process, and allowed me to explore how he presented his feelings on gender relations in earlier interviews as well as his feelings for Guadalupe, their now-grown daughter, and the other women whom he has known in the states.

Four months after their daughter was born 16 years ago, Guadalupe left him for another man. Despite D.N.'s transgressions, which included his bouts of anger and lack of demonstrative interest in the baby,⁴ D.N. and Guadalupe remained fond of each other. During the second interview, D.N. described the relationship after they separated. For analysis, I begin with a general translation of his narrative; later I examine in more detail the narrative devices that he uses. In the excerpt below, D.N. is describing how Guadalupe took up with another man (double parenthesis indicates notes on speech and non-verbal behavior, and a question mark at the end of a sentence indicates a rise in inflection).

"So I continued, in the dance (*el baile*) ((he taps table)) and she, well, I would see the guy and her there. "Well," I said, "That's no way" (*Ni modo*). She loved him (*ella quiso*), right?"

Since D.N. omits an object to *quiso* ("loved"), past tense of the verb *querer*, the meaning is ambiguous and could also mean, "She loved me." He continues,

"And she would continue dancing, but this made me get drunker (*más borracho*). I'd go and take her to dance, and she would go out with me (*salía conmigo*). And the guy she would leave sitting (*lo dejaba sentado*) ((rise in tone)). If I wanted to take her some place, I would take her some place (*la quería llevar, yo me la llevara*). She'd return, two-three days later? And that's the way that I had her (*así la tuve yo?*) ((rise in tone, emphatic)). And she would come to get me (*ella me buscaba*), cause her brothers gave her money and she bought a nice car. She'd go and find me (*me buscaba*) where I was with my friends. Like she still really loved me (*sea que si me quería?*) ((rise in tone, more emphatic))."

To describe their relationship, D.N. uses the dance as a place where men and women "achieve artful control" over their bodies, which are prone to a dominance pervasive in

other sectors of their lives (Limón, 1994, p.141-167). Taking her out on the dance floor is a metaphor for her "going out" with him (*salia* has both meanings here). There is an expression of disbelief in his narrative where he describes Guadalupe's behavior and a lack of response from the "other youth." D.N. is cognizant of male protectiveness over women in Mexican culture. He indicates surprise at three points in the narrative, each indicated by a rising tone (emphatic in the last two). Starting with the young man "left sitting there by himself" at the dance (by implication, at home, when Guadalupe spent time with D.N. for two-three days), D.N. follows with two clauses that suggest that Guadalupe was more interested in him than the youth. That she accepted his advances (spending two-three days with him) is further illustrated by her "seeking him out." In this sense, "the dance" to which D.N. refers is a set of maneuvers off-the-dance-floor, in which the couple show a fondness for each other that cannot escape the watchful eyes of those around them. Whereas this behavior would be unacceptable, albeit tolerated, in Mexico (Gutmann, 1996, p. 111-145; Limón, 1998, p. 179-185), it is not unknown for women on this side of the border to "assert" themselves for issues that matter to them, including their interest in a particular man. Instead of interpreting this behavior as a breakdown of cultural *morés*, I suggest that women's assertiveness sometimes is necessary, given distractions that compete for men's attention on this side of the border. Thus, women are following a strategy of corrective action for a "sadness" that confronts men and women, as Latinos, and in this case, as Mexicanos, who find themselves in a world with distinct cultural expectations (Velez-Ibañez 1997:182-206; also Gonzalez 1994).

Later in the narrative, it becomes clear that her parents supported Guadalupe, and hence support my interpretation of her assertive behavior, however dissonant it may appear on the surface. At the same time, they encouraged D.N.'s responsibility to the daughter. At this point, he acknowledges a recurring theme in his life, his diversion into heavy drinking.

"She used to come to get me (*me buscaba*). I don't know why I did what I did. The beer, ((pause)) all that marijuana and all that. Did I ever take hold of them in a big way (*los agarré muy mucho-mucho-mucho*), right? I took hold of many resentments (*agarré muchos resentimientos*), she had left me-since she was going with another guy (*me había dejada-sea que se iba juntada con otro*)."

D.N. continues by illustrating a closeness he felt toward her family, and his feelings on the situation of Guadalupe and her new beau.

One day I arrived to visit her brothers, and her mother came out, the mother of her brothers (*salió su mamá, de ellos*). "My son (*Miño*), listen. You are the child's father. We will never deny that you see her. Come inside to see her (*pásele que la mire*). The other guy is there [in the house]-the one who stay-the one with whom my daughter got together (*allí está el otro muchacho que se quedó mi-se juntó mi hija con él*). But, no matter, come inside." "No, I may not be under control" (*No, no tenga cuidado*). I said, "No, señora, here I am okay." "Well, let me bring the child to you," and they graciously showed the child to me.

He recognizes a tension in the situation he created, notwithstanding the willingness of Guadalupe to start living with another man, a strategy on her part to make D.N. jealous. Interestingly, the mother catches herself in D.N.'s narrative, saying that this other man "stayed" with her daughter, implying that it was D.N. who left their daughter. He blames Guadalupe's breaking up for contributing to his drinking and use of marijuana. At this time, D.N. had tried all but one drug, crack-cocaine, which he would briefly use ten years later. Since drinking alcohol and marijuana smoking represent his repertoire of use at this point in time, he signals the fullness of his use with "and all that." Use of pills and inhalants were things he used when he was living in Mexico (more on these substances later). He uses the pretense of visiting her brothers to come to her house (her brothers he met after he met her). Under the watchful eye of her

mother, he is welcomed and asked to come inside to see the child. Another point of interest is that D.N. identifies her as the mother of the brothers, rather than the mother of Guadalupe or grandmother of his child. He thus erases the real reason he came to visit. Whether his statement that he might "lose it" with the other youth is real or postured is not known; D.N. never described in any of his four interviews significant participation as an aggressor in fights with men. For example, for incidents in which he was shot while living with his aunt and uncle, before meeting Guadalupe, and almost attacked by a gang in Chicago, he never sought retaliation. It is women toward whom he showed abusive behavior (but never to an extent where he was jailed or reported to the police). All incidents with women occurred after he left central Texas and Guadalupe.

D.N. expresses appreciation for an opportunity to see his daughter; the agency of Guadalupe's mother in arranging this is obscured by use of "they," as an expression of gratitude toward her family and an acknowledgment of the importance of family in Mexican culture.

He remembered the pain he felt during these final weeks in central Texas. A few lines after the above excerpt, he attributes his pain to actions of Guadalupe in taking another lover:

"We all have hearts ((forcefully)), that can be broken! Right? (*TODOS TENEMOS CORAZON. Verdad?*) I went thinking that, one day she might [experience this], also weighted with rage (*coraje*). Most likely, it seems, she many not suffer the pain she caused (*a la mejor, pos, no sufra el dolor que hizo*). After that, I left that place, Dallas. I left for good and never returned."

When I asked D.N. for clarification, if that was the last time, he tells me, "I've not gone back. I have a strong desire to return (*ganas de volver*), to go back there, and to the dance to see-I don't know, more than likely they're no longer there (*ir allí al baile a ver-no sé, a la mejor ya ni están allí*)."

There is a strong indication in this passage that for all the pain that D.N. felt after the relationship with Guadalupe, he retains a fondness for her. He wants to go back, and he becomes nostalgic in stating a desire to return to the dance, before he catches himself and recognizes the "dance" with Guadalupe has ended. Her attributes his pain to her taking up with another man, prefacing the passage with his recognition of vulnerability that suggests a continuing interest in Guadalupe.

Later during the second interview, D.N. acknowledges his womanizing at the same time that he characterizes such behavior as self-centered and, distancing himself from a sense of responsibility, a part of his youth:

"I thought the world was mine." I would take one woman (*ya agarraba una*), I would take another women (*agarraba otra*). Then, [there were] no more girlfriends (*no más novias*) to hug and kiss and dance and all that. I would have three, or four girlfriends ((rising tone)), wherever I was ((rising tone)). I used to say, "No, I'm too young to get married."

The tension between vulnerability and pain for Guadalupe, and justification for womanizing, are replaced with later statements that shift the allocation of responsibility. This time D.N. uses a rise in tone over disbelief of his behavior. After six months of recovery, D.N. 's perspective balances more equitably contributions of she and he to the dissolution of their relationship. He views the symmetrical aspect of pain to each of them: "I had to leave there, cause at that time, I did not want to hurt her more nor hurt myself more, better to not see her again (*no-no-no quería yo, sea, más lastimarla a ella ni yo mismo, mejor que, así, no mirarla más*)."

D.N. recognizes the pain experienced by he and Guadalupe, and he responds by leaving. Despite his departure, even before he received renewed communication from his mother on the daughter and Guadalupe in Texas that hinted at the possibility of a reconciliation, he recognized, through the medium of his

interview, that he still cared for Guadalupe. Drinking and womanizing were disruptive to the relationship. It is the final interview a few months after sobriety in which D.N. first acknowledges the potential for children to be affected by adult drinking and drug use. Until this time, he had acknowledged a lateral effect within his generation, most acutely felt by him in the loss of women whom he had known in the states. Previously, he had not expressed concern for the vertical effect of substance use generated between adults and children: "I thought I was never going to pay for what I made my parents suffer (*lo que hice sufrir a mis padres*), and now I have to pay with my own suffering (*tengo que pagar con el mio*)."

Turning Points

As indicated, D.N. acknowledged conflicts in relationships with women, and he named one woman per locale to highlight the tenor of his experience: Guadalupe in central Texas, Lucy in west Texas, Vanessa in east Texas, Susie in the Middle South, Luz María in the Southwest and Deborah in the Lower South [fictitious names]. One characteristic of his narrative style is inclusion of internal dialogue, which he foregrounds with *decir* ("say," "tell," "reply"). D.N. is not alone in the use of internal dialogue; there are several interviews with English-speakers and Spanish-speakers who strategically use dialogue to heighten the complicating actions or "plot" (Reissman 1993) in their narrative. Some farm workers shift pitch when (re)producing the speech of others. Others "mark" the onset of dialogue with *decir* (Spanish) or "say" (English).

What caught my attention in the internal dialogue with D.N.'s narratives was a shift in tense to mark onset. Although events he narrates, and the talk he recalls, took place in the past, D.N. uses present tense to mark occasions in which his behavior pulled him into trouble or he acted in less than an admirable fashion. More than this, these occasions represent a time to which D.N. cannot return. At the historic moment when they occurred, the person with whom he was speaking was referring to change in a situation

or relationship that could or would never be the same. These are turning points that Denzin (1989, p. 71-73) describes as "epiphanies," which are problematic and eruptive, but otherwise represent a crisis that is an important part of a person's life.

From central Texas, D.N. went to west Texas, where he became friends with the pastor of a small church. It was here that he lived with the preacher's family and participated in church activities, when he wasn't working. These were things that D.N. was able to do, willingly, admirably, and free of a need for pastoral chastisement, at least for a short time. He describes another turning point that he experienced while living with the preacher. For this excerpt I follow narrative techniques outlined by Riessman (1993, p. 34-40), who follows Labov & others. Following Riessman, regular breath pauses are indicated with a comma, longer pauses are indicated by (.), and a hyphen indicates interrupted speech. For this excerpt, I present D.N.'s speech stanza by stanza.

So [there was] this one occasion, I arrived (*yo llegué*), I bathed (*me bañé*). I noticed he was looking rather serious (.) to one side there. Then (.) he said to me, "Brother, I want to speak with you." Cause he called me that, Brother. We went to church [together]. I say to him (*le digo*), "Yes, what do you want, Brother?" (.) "Like, tell me, s-straight up, the truth. (.) Do you know a (.) girl [who is] such-and-such?" (.) And I told him (*le dije*), "Oh my! No, no." "Yes, you do know her." (.) "No." "Yes, do you recall that she works in the restaurant." (.) I told him (*le dije*), "Oh, yes, yes, yes, it's certain, yes I know her, but by name, (.) never, no-it's that I didn't remember, her name. K: /huh. G: /huh. [overlap due to suspense] But of course I know her-why, Bro'?" (.) K: /huh. G: /huh. [overlap due to suspense] "Know what, Brother? Well, you know I gave you my trust, I thought you would not go sinning (*pecando*) out there. (.) But I had a sinner here in my house." I tell him (*le digo*), "No, no, no." "Yes, (.) it seems that

you went and you misused a position of trust with that girl (*fué y se revolcó con esa muchacha*). And now she's pregnant, (.) ((softly)) and it's your child." "Brother, hey! How can you be sure?" He says (*dice*), "Yes, for sure." [D.N. uses "No" transitionally to link prior and impending statements] He says (*dice*), "That girl is my niece," (.) "Say what?" ("*Qué-qué?*") "Yes, that girl is my niece."

D.N. uses two narrative devices to highlight the impact of confrontation with the preacher. He indicates his duplicity by pausing in his responses to the preacher (rendered as "normative" pauses), and marks the sureness and authority of the preacher as an immediate response, without pause, that counters his two attempts of denial. Second, he uses past tense ("I arrived, I bathed," and "I saw him") to set the stage for the discussion that took place between the preacher and he, which he identifies by its true place as a part of the past (*me dijo* "he said to me"). He shifts to present tense (*le digo* "I say to him") to bring the listener closer to the dialogue, which occurred in a past time to which he has returned. At this point, he and the listener (and by now, the reader) "are there," if only through the use of language. He continues with present tense of the verb *decir* ("to tell") to indicate the preacher's talk, as the interaction proceeds, but alternates between present and past tense when producing his talk. I propose that shifts in tense, from present (normative tense, once the stage is set) to past, mark "turning points" for him in which he acted and/or spoke in good faith. Notwithstanding the predicament he created, these turning points should have been culturally correct behavior where he acknowledged transgressions. Continuation of the present tense (again, the normative tense within the internal dialogue) marks a turning point of another kind, one to which he cannot return and one which he cannot make different. This is the turning point of his effort to negate the main agenda of the preacher's statements at two points, first, denial that he knows the girl, and, second, denial that he sinned and broke the trust placed in him. Rather than alter the preacher's interpretation

of his inappropriate actions, D.N. validates his interpretation. Moreover, he inadvertently, or clumsily, depending on one's reading, permits a severance of their once-trusting relationship. Shortly after this incident, D.N. left this new town where he was working and residing.

Onset and Dissolution of Substance Use

There are other sections of his narrative where D.N. uses a shift in tenses to mark a turning point. There are two in particular that are related to the main point of this essay; this is a description of D.N.'s first use of substances and continuing use prior to the time he entered the residential treatment program. He equates both incidents with bringing death upon himself.

Well, there were two or three times when I was killing myself (*ya me anda matando*). To feel death right up close (*sentir la muerte cerquitas*) and all, like it has never touched me. (.) And when I came to this program, (.) I sent a request to the Lord ((draws out sound)) (.) that He remove me from drinking (*que me quitara de tomar*), (.) ((firmly)) that he take me from drinking was the one thing I most wanted! (.) To never drink no more (*no tomar na'*). Cause I couldn't stand it. Yes, that alcohol sure controlled me like a companion (*si me dominó así machin*). But, not drugs. Alcohol, not drugs, it was that little adorable beer (*esa cerveza sí*). That entangles (*esa sí amarrame*), that really raked me over (*si me arrastró*), raked me over but BAD! (*me arrastró pero FEO*) ((inhales)) Real bad for seventeen years. That's why I told Samuel, my nephew, he shouldn't drink so much. (.) He tells me, "No." He says, "I don't drink." He says, "only when, (.) when I get off from work. That's when we drink a six-pack (*un seis*) together. (.) It's me, and for sure, my dad and I, and there's Chico," he's my other nephew, "together we drink only one." He says, "Right now it's not as much."

D.N. pulls together several points in this excerpt, which he begins by a statement of

awareness of how close to death he has been. The most recent time was prior to his entry in the treatment program, where I first met him. He implicitly credits an answered prayer for how he made the program work for him, and he likens drinking to a close companion (*machin*) at the same time that he recognizes the devastation that he has experienced. He is thankful that his experience with substance use never entailed use of hard drugs⁵ other than alcohol, that "little adorable beer." His use of a diminutive (*-ita*) is common in Spanish to indicate something that engages one's attention, as well as one's affection.

D.N. ignores efforts family and friends made in the past to have him stop drinking, and he proceeds to describe his efforts to dissuade his nephew to quit drinking. His comment on alcohol's domination of his life provides an implicit suggestion that advice to his nephew will not be effective, at least not immediately. It is telling that he replicates a generalization common among abusers that their particular use is insufficient to warrant its definition as "abuse." Like confrontation with the preacher, D.N. uses the past tense to initiate internal dialogue with his nephew and he marks the immediacy of that dialogue with present tense. Where this dialogue differs is its one-sidedness; it shows only the nephew's responses, all of which are marked by present tense of "say" (*decir*). In this case, D.N. is alluding to the nephew's error in not heeding his advice, similar to D.N.'s growing awareness of his own errors. His own silence in the dialogue with his cousin fits with Greenspan's concept of "the traumatic silence of memory" (1992) for people who experience severe trauma (also Bar-On 1990). In the case of D.N., he is reflecting on a silence of 17 years in which he left unheeded the advice of many concerned people who sought to discourage him from alcohol consumption as well as other forms of substance use.

The first time D.N. encountered "death" was an experience with an illicit substance. The experience occurred in Mexico at age twelve, when he and some friends experimented with paint thinner.

"I once abused thinner, (.) one day. I was young. But you know that, that (.) I really gazed upon (.) death. (.) It seems that I, when my friend told me, "Take that bag for yourself and this bag for me." There were four of us; the room was like this. It didn't have furniture. (.) I started, to d-do th-the bag (*bolsa*). All of a sudden I'm looking at a coffin (*de repente yo miro un cajón de muerto*). (.) And the cadaver was I. I was in the box (*el cajón*), like this ((hands crossed on chest, body stiffens)). They were going to bury me in the cemetery, and they told me, "Are you aware that, uh, you died and if you continue this and another that we are going-you are going to die, ((rise in tone)) and I went, "NO!! I'm not dead!, I'm not." ((chuckles)) There I was shouting that I wasn't dead. And I left (*salí*). I was about twelve. I experienced a lot of dizziness (*duré mucho mareo*), and symptoms like one gets (.) when playing football or basketball. The thought came to me, but I mean real strong, that right there I was going to die. (.) And I went running home."

One of the few times that D.N. used the term "abuse" (*abusar*) is in introducing his experience with an inhalant, in this case paint thinner, which produced a reaction that he equates with death. Death carries a significant valence in Mexican culture, and D.N. is communicating the force of this experience with the singular mention of placement of his person in a coffin, which "they" were going to bury in the cemetery. His again uses past tense to set the stage for the listener: his friend "told" (*dijo*) him before they prepared the bags to inhale. Following this, he continues past tense to describe talk and actions within each component of the narrative. What is at variance with this narrative segment is use of present tense to describe his "gazing upon" (*miro*) death, the only time present tense is used as he describes its (hers? his?) warning to desist in using inhalants. These variants occur according to the same principle of a turning point that I proposed. He is communicating to the listener that what he saw had meaning for

him. D.N. is giving testimony to the aberrance of substance use; he suggests that its repetition led to inappropriate behavior that was counter-productive to everyday activities and destructive to social relationships.

Having come full circle in a long process of substance abuse, from a first encounter with "death" to a final encounter in a coma before treatment, D.N. drew upon a cultural idiom to explain a cessation of one form of life (*se murió* "you died") and his inscription into a way of life that encased him in substance use. Told that he "died" (past), he also was told that, if he continued, "you are going to die" (*se va a morir*). The Past and the Future were both contained in the message that he received through this experience. The recent experience of hospitalization prior to initiation of his treatment [not described here] was the culmination of seventeen years of use and inculcation of a way of life where securing and using substances became a driving force, a moment that is an ever-present residual from an earlier event from another time (Rosenwald 1992, p. 285-286), further transformed by his experience as a migrant laborer within and outside agriculture across several states.

Discussion and Conclusion

I return to the setting of street selling in D.N.'s hometown in Mexico. I set the stage by describing a customer who desires to purchase "potatoes," as he walks to the street vendors (*plataformistas*) and signals interest by asking them, "Hey, who has potatoes?" (*Quién tiene papas?*). *Papas* is the codeword for "pills" (also called *pastas*, shortened from *pastillas* "pills"), a contraband commodity in Mexico and this country. Despite the voracity and culture-encoded message when he first tried an inhalant, D.N. began use of pills as an older adolescent at the time that he was a vegetable-fruit seller. He began to sell pills to lessen the cost of purchasing pills for personal use; his regular earnings as a vendor he shared with his parents for household expenses. Since vendors cannot afford pills on their meager earnings, they developed networks for obtaining pills in quantity. Some were consumed and some were sold. D.N. contrasts the world of those who

arrive in motor vehicles to request the pills and those who walk (the maids and poor women) to purchase legitimate vegetables and fruits. He is making a subtle commentary on possession and use, distinguishing between use for illicit ends (pills) and use for legitimate ends (food). Participating in each as seller and consumer, D.N.'s tactics in his narrative provide a creative space outside the standard dichotomy of "rich" and "poor."

Papa has an alternative meaning. It may mean "sufficient to meet one's needs." *Tener la papa en la mano y no saber pelarla* ("to have a potato in one's hand and not know what to do with it") refers to someone who seeks or wants more than they need, that is, to have sufficient for one's needs but not recognize it, and/or uses things given in the course of daily life in ways that were unintended. This expression was in vogue among men in recovery with whom I spent time. The idiom of potatoes was thus a part of the cultural capital available for incorporation into D.N.'s life story. His long journey through substance use is a case of access and misapplication of "potatoes," as much as a form of resistance to the ways of a society wherein he worked, resided, sought recreation and lived a storied life that he is currently re-scripting and transforming in text and behavior. Seeds for change were sown more than once in D.N.'s life: formally through an acquaintance with the preacher, and informally by family and friends. He is fortunate that these seeds took sprout within his inner person, albeit after many years, that led him into, and through, a successful process of substance use treatment and recovery. The lesson of this story for those who provide services and counseling to farm workers or other populations of minimal resources is a gentle but firm persistence in educating and training. One never knows where or how the essence of one's teaching and instruction will take root and benefit the recipient.

Notes

1. D.N. completed two interviews in treatment (one during his first week, a second on his 45th day of treatment), and two in the community where he worked (third at six months of recovery, fourth just short of seven months).
2. *Uxorilocal* refers to residence on a wife's family's land, *virilocal* refers to residence on a husband's family's land. For D.N., "uxorilocal" is used to demonstrate respect for his father who devoted himself to raising a family without transgressing in ways that D.N. self-perceived for himself. D.N. once recalled his father's lack of funds to return to his home province when D.N.'s grandfather (father's father) died. One remittance, after D.N. renewed contact with his family, went to his father with the instruction that his father should visit his home province (earlier remittances went to his mother, both for household use and to bank for him on his behalf).
3. This was the census-estimated count of the population in 1990 (fewer people in the 1980s and 1970s).
4. D.N. never was told when Guadalupe was hospitalized to give birth. By coincidence, he went to the same hospital when he took a change of clothes for a buddy who had been shot and was ready for release. Like a scene from a movie, Guadalupe and her family were exiting the elevator: *Que venían saliendo con, (.) y yo no más me hice a un lado, (.) no me hablaron ni las hablé.* "They were exiting with, (.) I just stepped to one side, (.) they didn't speak to me, I didn't speak to them." One unfinished phrase in this short excerpt is instructive: *con [la niña]* "with [our newborn daughter]."
5. D.N. briefly used crack-cocaine outside the state of Texas. Owing to the nausea and vomiting he experienced when he smoked the crack that he was offered, he discontinued after one week of irregular use.

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Author Information

Keith V. Bletzer, PhD, MPH
Department of Anthropology
P.O. Box 87-2402
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85287-2402
E-Mail: Keith.bletzer@asu.edu