

Voices of Dixon: Amado Archuleta

From the book
Voices of Dixon:
Oral Histories from the Embudo Valley
Interviews and Editing by Harvey Frauenglass
(ISBN: 978-1-62050-226-6)
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Publisher: David Rigsby, P.O. Box 44, Embudo, NM 87531

Amado Archuleta

(1917-2009)

El Bosque (Dixon) farmer, with
his wife Tillie and son Rudy (Mayordomo of
Acequia del Bosque), and neighbor Robert Templeton
Interviewed April 22, 2003 in English & Spanish

On the Family Farm

Amado: (Translated by Rudy, with additions by Tillie to fill in the gaps.) I was born in Dixon in 1917. I am 86. I had seven brothers and sisters: Claudio, Eloisa, Estevan, Celestino, Nora, Carlota, Ursilla. I am second to the oldest. My father and mother were farmers. In those days there wasn't any outside work around here. They raised their children by farming. All of us were born and raised in the old house just down the drive. And I've lived here all my life.

I started working with my father when I was very small, maybe five or six years old. We didn't have a tractor. We had horses. We used horses to do the work. All day long we walked behind the plow. (Even after he owned a tractor, Amado continued plowing with his team well into the 1980s.) We grew corn and chile and tomatoes—

everything. And we had cows, sheep, chickens and pigs.

Tillie: We planted wheat, too.

Rudy: To make harina, to make the sweet panocha for Easter. We had some this year.

Tillie: I would mix the white flour with trigo for tortillas.

Amado: And we would trade with other farmers. We would go to Monte Vista, Colorado in a horse-drawn wagon. It took five days to get there. We had to take all of our food and water, and the whole family went. We slept in the wagon in bedrolls.

Tillie: We called them lache.

Rudy: I remember sleeping in a bedroll. They were big, not like the sleeping bags we have now.

Amado: We took up whatever vegetables we grew and corn and chile and we traded for potatoes and for beans. Whatever extra we had we would sell. Think of that--cinco dias! Now it takes a couple of hours by car. (Amado first went to Colorado with his father in 1923; Amado was five. After he married and started farming on his own, he went with Tillie and their children. But by then, in the Forties and Fifties, they had a truck and could drive up with the family.)

Tillie: We had ten children: six daughters and four sons (Rudy and Tillie, taking turns): Agripiana, Patricio, Adonais, Amalita, Orlinda, Rudolfo, Anita Luciana, Eleanor, Celso, Frances.

Rudy: I live over here by my mom and dad. My brother lives in that house. (Points out the window) Then Orlinda and Eleanor and Frances live here also. Maybe you know Pat? He lives in Embudo. And across the road from Pat my sister Pana is married to William Martinez.

You seem to have your whole family living around you.

Amado: Gracias a Dios!

Tillie: I was born in Dixon, by St. Anthony's Catholic Church, in 1922. My father was Filigonio Sanchez and my mother, Marina D. Sanchez. We had a garden for the family. My father was always working, construction. In later years he was working in Los Alamos,

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doing concrete finishing.

Schooling

Amado: I went to school here in Dixon, with las hermanas. Father Küppers was the priest then.

Rudy: I went to that school also. The nuns lived in the convent, which was in the building right next to where the senior citizens' center is now, in that compound behind the church. Across the road was the Presbyterian School in the Mission Building.

Amado: La escuela iglesia Presbiteriana y la escuela iglesia Católica.

Rudy: They remember both schools being there.

Farming In the Old Days

Amado: In the old days when we wanted to put water into a ditch, we had to go into the river and build diversion dams with rocks and trees and brush--whatever we could find. Trabajamos todo el día con pala (shovel). Now it's a lot simpler. Ahora, tiene presa hecha de cemento; buenas presas. All you have to do is lift up the gate. We still use shovels, but when there's a big hole, you can bring in a backhoe. And years ago we didn't think of sandbags to divert water. We used rocks and branches and whatever we could find.

Tillie: I used to walk in the water during the irrigating, to get the water to go down all the rows of corn and chile. We planted a lot so we could trade with the farmers in Colorado.

Rudy: And they used to plant in pieces of land all over Dixon. But my father sold all that land.

Amado: We planted acres and acres.

Rudy: And we used to work from dawn to dusk. We only took a few minutes to eat. We were hoeing all summer.

Amado: Mucho trabajo!

Tillie: All the time. And that's why I don't feel good now. Besides irrigating I had to wash the clothes by hand on a washboard

and then hang them out. I didn't have a washer or dryer. Working in the house and on the farm was too much.

Amado: And there wasn't always water. Sometimes we had to dig little ditches, little trenches to use what water there was. When the flow was too small, the water would just spread out and disappear in the regular ditch. There were a lot of small dams in the river when it was too low to run in the acequia. We dug ditches that were just one shovel wide so we wouldn't lose any water. And there was no fighting over the water; everybody would help out. People would help us water and then we would move the water to the next farm and make sure they got enough.

And helping each other--that's one of the big differences between then and now?

All: Yes!

Amado: Nobody was jealous of his neighbor; we all helped each other. Everybody was poor, and you didn't look to see who had what, whether one had more than the other. We helped each other all the time.

Amado (via Rudy): Once a year we had the fiesta of Santa Rosa.

Rudy: We still had it up to seven or eight years ago.

Amado: Todo la gente estaba contenta con lo tenía. No había ambición.

Rudy: Everybody was happy with what they had. No one looked to see if his neighbor had more than him.

Robert: No one had anything! (All laugh.)

But you all had everything—your land, your families, food, water, and crops to trade.

Amado: Muy bonito todo. Everyone used to help each other.

Rudy: When they went to work off the farm, they made a dollar a day.

Tillie: Sometime fifty cents. When I was twelve or thirteen. I worked for Mr. Duran, hoeing, picking chile. Sometimes I would make dinner and we would eat and then go back to work. And he might pay me in beans instead of money, or potatoes and I would

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take that back to my house.

Rudy: He would pay her with a bucket of beans so they could eat.

Tillie: I would do the laundry on the washboards for them, or paint the walls.

Rudy: For a dollar a day or a pail of beans or a little sack of potatoes or whatever.

Tillie: But with fifty cents or a dollar you could buy a lot.

Things Get Easier In the Thirties

Amado: When the W.P.A. came (in the Thirties) they started some road construction projects so the people could get work. That's when things started to change. They didn't pay much money, but the money started to circulate. Then you could make three or four or maybe even ten dollars a day. I worked in Pilar canyon putting rock for the road and at the Harding mine. There was work in the winter.

And that made a big difference in your lives?

Amado: (Laughs) Oh yah! Muy contente la gente. Before that I remember that we would make chile ristras and take them to Española and trade them for clothes. The outside jobs with the W.P.A. made a difference. Then when we could get a little money from working, we could buy some of the things we needed, like clothes. People were better off!

Tillie: When we got married in 1941, he owned a truck with his brother Claudio. Then we got a truck of our own, a Dodge.

Amado: I remember that Shafranka in Rinconada—he lived next to Sopyn—got the first truck in the valley in 1928. It was a Model T. That changed things. We could take it to Colorado to sell produce.

Plowing the Old Way

You got a truck and then a tractor, but you still plowed with a team. Why?

Rudy: The last time we plowed with the horses was in the 80s.

Amado: Horses do better work. With horses you could plow the whole field, right up to the edge. You couldn't do that with a tractor; you had to leave a space to turn around. The horses were well trained. For cultivating, I could get closer to the plants with the horses than with a tractor. And I could get into the corners.

Rudy: My father was used to horses. And that's what he liked, even though we had a tractor.

Amado: And the hoof print of the horse is much lighter in the ground than the wheels of the tractor. The dirt is softer because the horse doesn't push everything down the way the tractor does. You can work the soil better. Altogether the land was better with horses—softer to plant, softer to hoe, easier to irrigate.

We used to have a horse named Prince. I would get the plow and he would know just what he had to. He would get to the end of a row and wait and turn around. You would take your time and get the work done right. Now everybody is in a hurry. But the work is not as good as when you do it with a horse.

Rudy: And I helped, too, and so did my brothers and sisters.

And now the horses are gone?

Rudy and Amado: Yes.

Robert: There was still a horse here when I came.

Rudy: Those belong to my brother Adonais. He's the one who has horses.

Robert: Is he still using them for plowing?

Amado: No trabajando...

Rudy: Just for a saddle, for riding. And sometimes he doesn't do that anymore. He just has the horses.

WPA Ends, Los Alamos Begins

Amado and Rudy: Los Alamos Laboratory began hiring people from Dixon and the WPA closed down. Los Alamos made a big difference by giving people good paying jobs that lasted. Dixon people are still working there today and many are retired from there on good pensions. That was the biggest change for us.

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Tillie: Things are so much better for us now. We have running water. We have a washing machine. I just turn on the switch and put in the clothes, the water comes in and the machine washes them. That is so much easier for me. I used to come in from the farm at ten o'clock at night and start washing the diapers by hand. I used to hang seven or eight dozen diapers on the clothesline. Now I take the clothes out of the washing machine and put them into the dryer.

Rudy: And some people don't do *that*. They use disposable diapers. In the past there was nothing to throw away.

Things are certainly easier, but would you say people are happier?

Tillie: I guess they are...some...but. I think I was happier then because we had a lot of things to do and a lot of things to eat and to sell. It was nice in those times. We had cows to milk and I made cheese and I used to take that to the plaza to sell.

Rudy: She made white cheese.

Tillie: And we had pigs and plenty of chicken. I used to take my milk to sell at the small store on the plaza in Dixon, by the fire department. It was run by J.P. Lujan's dad. He's passed away now.

Rudy: You know J.P. Lujan from Embudo? His dad used to have a store at la Plaza. Onesimo Lujan.

Tillie: And we used to have chickens. I would order a hundred baby chicks.

Amado: Muchos pollos. She would kill the chickens and cook them for the mid-day meal.

Tillie: I used to work at Sunnybrook. We used to clean chickens over there.

Rudy: You know where that is? That's next to the bar that used to be called Sol y Loma, next door to your orchard. That was before Tony Baca bought the bar, long before it was called Quinto Sol.

Amado: Y una café; una cantina.

Tillie: They raised chickens there and I worked there cleaning them. Out in the back. I cleaned a lot of chickens. And it was so cold in winter! It was open and there was no heat. And from there they

used to deliver chickens somewhere. I don't know where they took them.

Rudy: I think they raised the chickens in those little cabins, those little buildings behind the bar. There's no other place because it's right against the mountain.

Tillie: And I still remember how cold it was! This was before I was married, in the 1930s. Then when I got married in 1941 I worked on our farm.

Where did you and Amado meet?

Tillie: At my dad's farm, by Arroyo de la Mina.

Rudy: Now they call it the first arroyo in Dixon. You know that house right against the mountain, just up the road and around the mountain from el Quinto Sol? That was my grandfather's house. And he owned a long piece of land up the arroyo and then across the road down to the river. That was before the road to Dixon was paved.

That was the house that Bob and Carolyn Grant lived in?

Tillie: Yes. Before that, my father sold it to someone, I think the name was Bailey. There was a big pond there. It was at the end of Acequia del Llano. And the water was always running in the arroyo from an ojito (a spring). I remember that.

The Future Of Farming In Dixon

Rudy: Some people farm still, but they don't do as much. Some people don't do any more farming.

Amado (via Rudy): Very few people are planting nowadays, not like years ago when they used to plant a lot.

Tillie: We used to sell a lot of chile right here at the house. We would take some to the farmers' market at Taos. We would plant corn and make chicos, posole, and harina de sala—white corn meal and blue corn meal. We had a big orchard with apples. We used to dry apples, dry apricots, pears. And before there was a farmers' market we used to go to San Luis and Questa and other places to sell.

Amado: We traded for potatoes.

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Getting Across the River

Rudy: Before the present bridge there was a wooden bridge across the Rio Embudo. Then there was a big flood and it washed out the bridge. Then they rebuilt it with cement.

Amado: When we were first married there was no bridge. We used to just cross the river in cars and trucks.

Tillie: Then there was a swinging bridge, a footbridge.

Amado: Un calabrote.

Tillie: It was dangerous when there came a lot of water. I remember walking across the swinging bridge when the water was high. That was scary.

Rudy: That was how we used to go to school in Dixon. And the path is still there, at the foot of our property. But that was only for walking.

Amado: On horseback you would just ford the river.

Rudy: Before they built the new concrete bridge, the bridge we have today, when the water was too high for the trucks, we used to take the old wagon road over the mesa all the way down to the highway at La Bolsa. The road came out where Casey Sanchez lives. Then you would come back across the main highway bridge and come back up on the other side to town. That was a long way. But that was good road then—the land was real flat. They used to race horses up there. They called it la Pareja. (They laugh)

Rudy: I used to walk across the swinging bridge to go to school in Dixon. First I went to the public school and then I went three years to the nuns, the Catholic school. Then I went to junior high and high school in Española. In the Dixon school they didn't have a cafeteria so we used to come home for lunch.

Amado (via Rudy): He used to come home in the middle of the day for lunch.

Rudy: We walked home for lunch sometimes with snow up to our waists.

Amado (via Rudy): In those years there was a lot of snow. When it snowed we would shovel a path for them with wooden shovels. We

didn't have any metal shovels.

Amado (via Tillie): The children from Rinconada had to walk the old road over the hills and then cross the river here to get to the school in Dixon.

Before Electricity and Running Water

Tillie: We used to haul water in buckets from the well for cooking and drinking and washing. I worked very hard and that's why I'm so thin now.

Amado: There was so much work then.

Rudy: Sometimes we still drink water from the well. It's good water.

Tillie: For washing I used to heat tubs of water outside on an open fire.

Rudy: And there were no freezers. It was so cold in the winter that we used to hang the meat on the porch; a pig or whatever we butchered, and it would freeze solid. To store vegetables we dug a pit, put them in, and then covered them with dirt.

Amado: Years ago, when I worked at the Harding mine, we used to bring down the metal by horse drawn wagon. In Apodaca, there was no bridge across the Río Embudo. We would drive the wagon across the river on the ice. They had tons of metal in the wagon and the ice would not break. That's how cold it was in those winters. Then the ore was brought to Embudo and put on the train, the Chile Line to La Jara and Alamosa in Colorado. From horse-cart to train. And nowadays we don't know what work is. We worked hard all day. Then, when we came inside at night, we lit kerosene lamps and candles; there was no electricity.

Tillie: And in the summer there were lucernas, fireflies.

Rudy: I remember there was a pond by the footbridge and there were turtles and frogs in it. At night you could hear the frogs croaking in the pond. That pond is gone now.

Amado and Tillie: In the old days we didn't have much, but people appreciated the little that they had. Now people are more

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ambitious.

Amado: La gente tienen dinero ahora, y quieren mas dinero.

Rudy: Even though they have money, they want more and more.

Amado: Before, what they had was good.

Rudy: For me it's a lot easier now than in the old times. Life then was hard! It's a lot better. Now I can get on the tractor and plow whenever I want to. When you had the horses, you were tied to the plow all day while the horse pulled.

Amado: We used to take "el caro de caballo" into the mountains to get firewood.

Rudy: They would go up to Taos Junction and then up onto Carson Mesa. It was hard work.

Amado: No chainsaws. La hacha.

Tillie: And when Amado wasn't here, was off working somewhere, I would get the wood with the boys.

Rudy: We would take a long saw. My brother would be on one end and I would be on the other end. That's how we got the logs I remember chopping wood every day, everyday. And I stack it in long rows. That's what I did every day. So we'd have wood to keep us warm in the winter. They still have the wood stove and they still burn wood in the winter.

Rudy: I remember when I was mayordomo at thirteen or fourteen, I used to have to go house to house to collect the mayordomia, my pay. If I remember, I used to make about fourteen dollars a month to take care of the acequia during the irrigation season. And I collected it a dollar per house, or maybe less. And if I didn't find the people, I would go back again.

Tillie: And when my son Adonais was mayordomo, I used to go with him every place to do work. I would help him out with the stones, pile them up in the presa, you know, to get the water.

Rudy: You see that stone I have over here by my butane tank? That rock you brought from the presa.

Tillie: I was walking in the water and I saw that stone. And I thought, why is it round? And I brought it here. I had it for a long

time.

Rudy: So I asked my mom, what are you going to do with that rock? Give it to me and I'll put it over there for pretty.

Tillie: And I told Rudy, that's where I want to be buried, under that stone.

Robert: That was a millstone, from el molino.

Rudy: And you want me to take that to your grave? (Laughs) How am I going to drag that to the cemetery?

Amado: Mucha historia aqui.

Robert: How long has that stone been here?

Tillie: I don't remember.

Robert: It was here when I came to el Bosque in 1979.

Tillie: You know, before this place was el Bosque, they used to call it los Angeles, right here. I don't know why, but it was los Angeles.

Amado: El Bosque, Embudo, Dixon, Cañoncito, Apodaca, diferente nombre para al mismo lugar.

The Church in Dixon

Amado: Father Küppers used to drive "un caro de caballos" to Peñasco for mass. He used to get very mad when people didn't go to mass.

Tillie: I remember his la Melva, and Regina, and another lady who lived with them, Louisa.

Robert: What was the relationship between Father Küppers and Melva?

Amado: Recuerdo que cuando él vino en lugar este, ya trujo la Melva con él.

Amado: Some people used to say she was his wife. Other people said she was his worker. (Laughter) He was Catholic, so he was married to the Church. Some people used to ask him if he was married. He said, no, he wasn't married. But they lived here in Dixon and they were always together. They were together all their lives.

Tillie: They're all buried together in the cemetery in Embudo. I

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never went to a Catholic school. I went to the Mission School. I was a Presbyterian. My family was Presbyterian. But when I got married, I went with him to the Catholic Church.

Rudy: So we're Catholics now.

Tillie: I go to church once a year, at Easter. A small piece of bread and a tiny glass of wine. And if you don't confess, you can't have communion. In the Presbyterian Church they used to teach us a lot of Bible verses. They had a contest to see who could memorize verses, in English, and my sister won. I know the names of all the books of the New Testament in English. Reverend Tomás Atencio was the minister. His wife was Bernadita. And I knew Lydia Córdova whose father also was a Presbyterian minister. She married Doc Zellers. They started the store in Dixon. I remember their sons George and Gene when they were young. Liseo Córdova was Lydia's dad. He was a minister and also a teacher.

The Little Acequias

Robert: Can you tell us some more about the little acequias you were talking about? There was one that started at the bottom of my property. What year was that last used?

Tillie: That was in 1949. I remember because my first-born died. He was working in the ditch with us, in the water. It was a dry year and we were trying to get the water in. He got sick. I think it was typhoid fever. And he passed away. That was the last time we used that ditch.

Robert: You used the little ditches just in dry years?

Tillie: Yes.

Rudy: You used the little ditch so you wouldn't waste the water filling up the big ditch.

Tillie: I remember in dry years we used to go down at four o'clock in the morning with a farol, a lantern, or a flashlight, and there would be just a little bit of water. We would make a small fire so we could warm up a little.

Rudy: That's what we did just this past year. Whoever had the

water at night. I remember when we used to do that years ago and there was a lot of skunks.

Tillie: And bears. You know the bears are all over now. We used to sleep outside on the patio.

Amado: Muy fresco. Muy agusto.

Rudy: We slept right here. Where the kitchen is, used to be a porch. It was nice and cool in the summertime.

Tillie: We would hear the frogs and early in the morning the birds.

Rudy: And the crickets. They made a lot of noise.

Tillie: In the fall, in the middle of the night, we used to tie chile into ristras. We had piles of chile. We would go to bed at eleven or twelve at night. And the next morning the kids would have to go to school, and I would have to do the washing. I even starched their clothes. And during the war everything was rationed and you had to use stamps to buy food and clothes.

Rudy: And now during this war one of my nephews is in the airborne in Iraq.

Note: Now we talk about family and neighbors, about how many of the people who are our neighbors are their relatives. We talk about our farm, which we came to in 1983.

Amado: How many years have you been at Father Küpper's place?

Harvey: Twenty years.

Amado: Veinte Años!

Harvey: Melva died in '83, so we didn't know Melva. We never met Melva. But Regina was there. We met Regina.

Amado: It's a big place, no? Lugar Grande!

Tillie: Father Küppers used to have lots of turkeys. And peacocks. And chickens.

Amado: Muchas manzanas.

Harvey: I make sweet apple cider. That's what I do.

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Note: Then Tillie takes out a picture of a soldier.

Tillie: This is my grandson. He is in Iraq. His wife, April, is from Texas. They have a son, Bryan. They live in Kentucky, where he was stationed.