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ABSTRACT

This document profiles the educational experience of 10 migrants who were faced with the decision of working or attending school. The problems they encountered were commonly shared by migrants: the difficulties associated with changing schools two or three times a year; having to work instead of going to school; or having to learn a new language. However, they all overcame tremendous odds to finish school or to achieve their lifelong goals. Each profile discusses their personal experience as a migrant, what they attribute their success to, and a message to migrant youth that stresses the importance of education and establishing personal goals. The profiles include a professional golfer; a professional football player; a radio announcer; a licensed practical nurse; migrant educators; a care provider; a priest; and a college instructor.  
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"I had always wanted to get my diploma . . ."

CAVIN PEETE

Golf pro Calvin Peete was 39 years old when he earned his GED! A former migrant farmworker, Calvin learned about the game of golf in Rochester, New York. Calvin spends some of his free time in schools talking to young people about the importance of education. In an article that appeared in the January 3, 1982 issue of the New York Times, Calvin tells his story about getting his GED.

"I had always wanted to get my diploma," he said. "And I wanted it for other reasons, too. I wanted to show my kids — and kids who I speak to in schools — that I was serious when I said that an education is important. I know a lot of athletes who made a lot of money, but they didn't know how to keep it. I think it was part of being uneducated, in knowing what to do with your money and who to trust it with."

"I remember sitting down in the classroom," Peete said before the test. "My hands were sweating and I felt more nervous than I did looking at a big putt on the 16th hole in the Milwaukee Open."

Peete also wanted a high school diploma because it is a requirement for the Ryder Cup team, the distinguished team of chosen professionals who annually represent the United States in competition against European professionals.

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# Migrant Portraits

# Migrant Choices



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## Migrant Portraits . . . Migrant Choices

The history of America is filled with stories about people who have overcome tremendous odds to become successful. *Migrant Portraits, Migrant Choices* tells the stories of very special Americans who keep the market shelves laden with the foods that adorn America's dinner tables. They traveled with their families from Florida to Maryland to New York, from Texas to Ohio to Michigan, from Mexico to California to Washington. All faced the problem of changing schools two or three times a year. Many had to work instead of going to school. Some were confronted with having to learn a new language.

Their stories are written for young people who face the same situation today. As you read about the men and women who were faced with the decision of working or going to school, you will find that each found a way to finish school or achieve their lifelong goals. Some stayed in school while other family members worked. Some dropped out but later found a way to go back to school — night school, GED classes, HEP (High School Equivalency Programs). Each used education to go on to become successful in his or her chosen endeavors.

*Migrant Portraits, Migrant Choices* is a small collection of success stories. As you read about their experiences, perhaps you will find a story similar to yours or one who solved a problem you are now facing. Maybe you will find someone with whom you can identify or a story that will make you say, "I can do that too!" Perhaps there is someone in your community or camp who has a similar story to tell about himself or herself. Go talk to that person and learn how you too can set your goals high and then exceed them!

Good Luck!

### For information about finishing school, call the dropout youth toll free hotline

If you are thinking about dropping out of school, think about what you will be able to do without a high school diploma ten years from now. That diploma will make a difference. If you have already dropped out, there are several ways to finish if you can't go back to "regular" school. Most public school systems and community colleges offer night classes to help you complete high school or study for the GED. Or you can take the GED at special testing centers. The migrant education program offers High School Equivalency Programs (HEP) in the United States and Puerto Rico. For more information about finishing school, call the dropout youth hotline toll free 1-800-245-5681. In New York call 1-800-245-5680.

*"Growing up as a migrant made me a more responsible person than I would have been if I had not been one."*

HENRY LAWRENCE



NAME:  
Henry Lawrence  
OCCUPATION:  
Professional Football Player  
HOME ADDRESS:  
Palmetto, Florida  
EDUCATION:  
High School  
B.S. Florida State University

### Migrant Experiences

Henry Lawrence considers himself a migrant by birth. "Farmwork was something I had to do growing up as a kid," says Henry. "Kids used to pick at me quite a bit because I was a migrant. They used to call me 'season tramp.' In the classroom I did just as well as they did. The only difference is I had to go out in the fields to work. Sometimes I came to school and my hands were dirty with tomato stains. As I got older, I started to realize that what we were doing was really honest and as a result I really lived a full, happy life. It was a life where I didn't have all those outfits to hang up and other things that most kids grew up with. It gave me an awareness of all kinds of people because of all the people in the camps and around me doing field work. Growing up as a migrant made me a more responsible person than I would have been if I had not been one."

Each year Henry's family followed the season from Florida up through the Carolina's, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware to pick melons, tomatoes and cucumbers, then on to New York to dig potatoes. His oldest brother, Smitty, still brings a crew up from Florida each year to Maryland and New York.

### To what or to whom do you attribute your success?

"The migrant life made me tough," says Henry. "I wasn't a quitter because my parents and the people around me were not quitters. We always competed to see who would pick the most cucumbers or tomatoes. I learned that anything I compete in I like to do well in." In school, Henry was a good student first, then a football player. "I couldn't have gotten where I am today without my family and some special teachers along the way. The Geneseo Migrant Center in New York motivated me too. I looked forward to going back there each summer."

### Message to Migrant Youth

Henry's message is "to have a dream and to figure out a way to make it come true. Quitters never win and winners never quit!"

### Migrant Experiences

Ruben Prieto was born in Mexico. His father would go to Baja, California to work one or two years at a time. His father would tell Ruben, "Mi hijo (my son), some day I will take you to the United States!" One day his father said he was going to live in the United States. Ruben's mother and little brother joined his father later, but Ruben and the rest of the family stayed behind in Mexico with his grandparents. When his father saved enough money, Ruben and his brothers and sisters joined the family in Los Angeles. The move was hard. He says, "We could not go to school because we did not have our shots. Then, my dad didn't have a job so my mother worked sewing clothes."

The family moved to Sunnyside, Washington, where an uncle lived. The family did fieldwork. Ruben attended school, but dropped out in the tenth grade. "I wanted a car so I went to work," he says. He went back to school the next year, but again quit because of economic conditions at home.

In 1979 he signed up for the Northwest Rural Opportunities (NRO) program. Across the hall was a radio station. The lady taking his application took him there and he became a trainee. He eventually became a DJ. However, he soon realized he wanted to make communication his career, and to do so he would need to go back to school. He entered a Migrant High School Equivalency Program (HEP) at Washington State and earned his GED in 1983.

### To what or to whom do you attribute your success?

Ruben says that his good friend Irma Jimenez encouraged him to continue learning and to strive for excellence in whatever he did. The Migrant HEP program provided him individualized attention and helped him realize his goals. Ruben sees "HEP as a chance of a lifetime because staff are professional and will let you know from the beginning that individuals succeed only if they try."

### Message to Migrant Youth

Ruben's message to youth who have dropped out of school is "Get back in school. Get an education, select a career, then spend your adult life enjoying the fruits of your success."



NAME:  
Ruben Prieto  
OCCUPATION:  
Radio Announcer  
HOME ADDRESS:  
Outlook, Washington  
EDUCATION:  
GED

*"Select a career, then spend your adult life enjoying the fruits of your success."*

RUBEN PRIETO

*"Go back to school any way you can . . . If you want an education bad enough, you are never too old."*

JOANNE STRAIT



NAME:  
Joanne Strait  
OCCUPATION:  
Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)  
HOME ADDRESS:  
East Bethany, New York  
EDUCATION:  
GED  
LPN

### Migrant Experiences

Joanne Strait calls herself a city girl who moved to the country. Her migrant experiences began after marriage to a man who had become weary of factory work and wanted to work on farms. For fifteen years this work took the family as far West as Minnesota and back to New York. According to Joanne, the years of moving from farm to farm presented many problems for the family. She often remarks, "I didn't enjoy it and the pay was often as low as \$30 a week in some areas. Also, we were often isolated from neighbors and transportation."

Her children's education suffered also. They attended more than ten schools in eleven years. Many schools weren't very receptive to migrants spending brief periods in their classrooms. Often the stay in a community would be three or four months. Joanne attributes these many changes in schools and teachers among the key reasons her two oldest children dropped out of school. She says, "It was hard for them — one year here, a few months there, and another year someplace else."

### To what or to whom do you attribute your success?

Joanne says she was encouraged by the migrant education staff to get her GED. She had always felt she couldn't get a GED because she was too old and money was a problem. According to Joanne, she will always remember the words of Margaret Riley, the director of the New York tutorial where she earned her GED, "Joanne, you can do it!" She heard it so often that she began to believe it, and since has become a licensed practical nurse. But wait, she is not finished yet. Joanne still has plans to become a registered nurse.

### Message to Migrant Youth

Joanne's advice is "don't drop out of school. You can't advance without a high school education. If you have dropped out, go back to school anyway you can — night school, weekend classes, whatever. If you want an education bad enough, you are never too old. Say to yourself, 'I can do it! I can do it! I can do it!'"



## Migrant Experiences

Frank and Nancy did not meet until their adult years, but their early childhood experiences were similar as both traveled with their families from crop to crop. Frank's family stopped following the crops when they moved from Texas to Michigan where his father found work in a factory. Frank enjoyed elementary school. However, in secondary school, things began to change: "I was placed in a cubby hole with others without regard to me as an individual." He quit school in the tenth grade at age 16 to join the Navy. While in the Navy, he took a good look at his young life and decided he needed further education. He studied hard while in the Navy and earned his GED.

Nancy was in the fields for seven years while her family moved between Texas and Michigan to work. Her family moved often and moving from place to place became disappointing for Nancy. She says, "I didn't like school. I was always behind. I never had time to enjoy school the way people around me did. I didn't like moving; it was hard to make friends and to feel like I belonged. I don't remember having any goals and having anyone coaching me for better things to come."

## To what or to whom do you attribute your success?

Both Frank and Nancy credit their success "to those people who believed in us, especially our parents." Frank says his father and brother Jesse taught him something about patience and perseverance. His mother was the one who showed him how to be proud of who he was as well as telling him how important education was. Nancy says her family "saw things in me I never saw in myself. My family never gave up on me, even when I made mistakes. They encouraged me to go to adult night school so I could get my diploma."



NAME:

Nancy Sanchez Soriano

OCCUPATION:

Migrant Education  
Instructional Specialist

HOME ADDRESS:

Harrington, Delaware

EDUCATION:

Evening High School  
B.A. Michigan State University

NAME:

Jose Francisco "Frank" Soriano

OCCUPATION:

Specialist, Migrant and  
Bilingual Education, Delaware  
Department of Education

HOME ADDRESS:

Harrington, Delaware

EDUCATION:

GED  
B.S. Michigan State University  
M.A. Michigan State University

## Message to Migrant Youth

Frank and Nancy Soriano have worked in migrant education programs in Michigan, Florida and Delaware. To their students they say, "Believe in yourself. If told you'll never amount to anything or you're not smart enough, fight back. Show the world you can. Never give up. It is hard, but when you believe in yourself, and care enough about yourself, others will also believe in you."

*"Believe in yourself. If told you'll never amount to anything or you're not smart enough, fight back."*

FRANK AND NANCY SORIANO

*Elia Luna of San Jose, California relates her story about setting goals and working hard to reach them. Her message might very well be "Aim for the moon, if you fall among the stars, you will still be at the top." Elia's story appeared in the November 1985 issue of the Western Stream Bulletin, of the Interstate Migrant Secondary Team Project.*

I am a daughter of a migrant family, who came to live in United States eight years ago. Both my parents have worked very hard during the past years to support our family. When we first came here, my parents would work in the fields while my five brothers and I attended school. Later we moved to San Jose, where they then started working in the cannery. They both worked temporarily in the cannery, sorting fruit.

Seeing my parents work this hard in whatever job they could find makes me now realize that indeed it is very important for all of us to have a good education.

When I first came here I was enrolled in the 4th grade. I remember very well my first years in school. Everything was very difficult for me because so many things were new to me. The most difficult thing was the English language. I especially had trouble with this because this stopped me from communicating with my other classmates. This bothered me so much that I was determined to learn it as soon as possible, for my own good. I received great help from my teachers during my first years.

Now that I have just graduated from Lincoln High School, my future plan is to attend college to continue with my education. I plan to attend college for four years and get a degree in Business Administration. I know that in order to reach my goal I will have to work hard and never give up with my objective.

*"How my migrant lifestyle will affect my future"*

ELIA LUNA

*"Fulfill your potential the best way you can!"*

LUCILLE LEATHERBURY



NAME:  
Lucille Leatherbury  
OCCUPATION:  
Care Provider  
HOME ADDRESS:  
Salisbury, Maryland  
EDUCATION:  
Ongoing

### **Migrant Experiences**

Lucille Leatherbury followed the crops from Florida to New York each year for thirty years. It was a very hard life. Because she had to work she went to school a total of only three days in her childhood! One of ten children, all had to work or they would not be able to live on the farm where her parents worked. She was paid as little as six cents for each potato sack of vegetables she picked! When Lucille got older she came to Maryland, met and married a man who was not a migrant. She saw what it was like to live in just one place and to have a stable life.

### **To what or to whom do you attribute your success?**

Lucille attributes her success to the many people in her life who believed in her in spite of her lack of formal education. She also credits her success to her belief in her own worth. All her life Lucille has wanted to be either a nurse or a teacher, but this has not been possible because of her lack of education. She decided to work towards her goal in the best way she could. She got licensed to be a care provider and now she takes care of an elderly man in her home, and also goes into homes of sick people to help them. She also fulfilled her life-long dream and bought her own home!

### **Message to Migrant Youth**

Lucille hopes that the young migrants of today will work hard to complete their education. She feels badly that she was unable to meet her goal of being a nurse, and says "you will need to take advantage of all the doors that are open to you these days. If you keep knocking on the door, somehow you figure out a way for it to open. Somebody may open it for you. But you've got to put out the effort yourself. You can't succeed unless you try. Sometimes we have to try and try again." Lucille's message: "Fulfill your potential the best way you can!"

### **Migrant Experiences**

As a boy, Patricio Flores de Fernandez traveled through Texas as a migrant farmworker. He and his family would start near Corpus Christi and move on to Houston. As crops were gathered, they moved through the San Angelo, Lubbock and Amarillo dioceses.

He dropped out of school although his parents encouraged him to complete his education. After three years he decided that unless he finished high school he would not get anywhere in life. He returned and finished high school. He now believes that the decision to return to school was the best decision he ever made. In the process of returning to school, he also decided to become a priest. After high school, he studied at a seminary for eight years. "I have been happy ever since," says the Most Reverend P. F. Flores.

### **To what or to whom do you attribute your success?**

"I have been given opportunities and support by so many people. I am what I am today because of my determination, the support of my family, and the opportunities given me along the way."

### **Message to Migrant Youth**

When asked what he would say to migrant youth, the Most Reverend P. F. Flores said: "Return to school before it is too late! Your only chance for success and survival is by getting an education, the best possible, and as soon as possible."



NAME:  
Archbishop Patricio Flores de Fernandez  
OCCUPATION:  
Archbishop of the San Antonio Diocese  
HOME ADDRESS:  
San Antonio, Texas  
EDUCATION:  
High School  
Seminary

*"Your only chance for success and survival is by getting an education . . ."*

THE MOST REVEREND PATRICK F. FLORES

*"Don't give up. Someplace, somewhere, sometime, things will go your way."*

DIANA MENDIETA



NAME:  
Diana Mendieta  
OCCUPATION:  
Migrant Teacher Aide  
HOME ADDRESS:  
Omega, Georgia  
EDUCATION:  
GED  
A. A. Abraham Balwin  
Agricultural College

### Migrant Experiences

When Diana was about six years old she and her family traveled from Oklahoma to Wyoming. For the next six or so years the family went from Oklahoma to Georgia to Michigan to Ohio or Indiana, then back to Oklahoma. After that they decided to settle in Georgia, but they still traveled to work. "I enjoyed being in the migrant stream because I was able to meet new people and see a lot of different places. The only thing I disliked was our hometown teachers' attitudes about us leaving and coming back year after year." Although they usually traveled to the same places every year, Diana went to many different schools before dropping out of the ninth grade. The fact that she got that far she attributes to the migrant education program. "If it hadn't been for the migrant education program, I might not have been able to go right on to school and not be discouraged by our moving so much. There were a lot of good people who cared when I went to school at all those different places."

### To what or to whom do you attribute your success?

Diana gives credit to several people for her success. First of all to her parents who, she says, "never gave up hope for me." She also praises "all the wonderful teachers who helped me in all my years of moving around from school to school." Special credit goes to the migrant education teacher who worked with Diana when she dropped out of school, and under whose supervision Diana works as a teacher aide today: Mrs. Joan Marshall "who talked me into going ahead and taking the GED and kept telling me I could do it."

### Message to Migrant Youth

"Don't give up. Someplace, somewhere, sometime, things will go your way. I think education is one of our (migrants') greater needs and our children need to be encouraged to stick with school."

### Migrant Experiences

Wavie Gibson was five years old when he made his first journey with his parents from Florida to the fields of New York. This migrant lifestyle later took him in and out of labor camps and fields along the Eastern Seaboard. As he became older, he joined his family in the fields since he was expected to contribute to the family's welfare. Because of the constant moving, Wavie did not begin school until he was nine years old and had a rough time in school at first. He says the migrant life and school were frustrating. Even so, through studying hard and with the help of many dedicated teachers he was able to graduate first in his class.

### To what or to whom do you attribute your success?

Any success Wavie now enjoys he attributes to a basic desire to improve the quality of his life. He didn't want to spend the rest of his life in the fields under the hot sun. He wanted a job that he would enjoy the rest of his life. He decided to become a teacher. He learned to speak Spanish from the Puerto Rican and Mexican crews and liked the idea of studying that language and eventually teaching it. He also credits his family's loving care and his teacher's dedication and attention to his special needs.

### Message to Migrant Youth

Wavie believes that the migrant education program represents an enormous commitment. He says the program "deals with the reality that the typical migrant student changes schools one to three times a year, and often must work alongside his parents, thus missing school." Even though the going gets rough on the road, Wavie encourages young migrants to stay in or return to school. He says, "take advantage of any and all education opportunities. There are Adult Basic Education classes that offer GED classes in every community across the nation. There is the Job Corps, also. The Job Corps is a live-in vocational educational program that betters your chances for a good job. You can learn a trade and also study for your high school equivalency diploma. Your local migrant education program can give you information about these and other programs. Plan and work with teachers and government officials who are convinced that migrants deserve 'a break.' Use the fruits of your education to advance in whatever walk of life you choose."



NAME:  
Wavie Gibson, Jr.  
OCCUPATION:  
College Instructor  
HOME ADDRESS:  
Mardela Springs, Maryland  
EDUCATION:  
High School  
B.A. Morgan State University  
M.A. Salisbury State College  
Ph.D. Candidate, Indiana  
University of Pennsylvania

*"Use the fruits of your education to advance in any walk of life you choose."*

WAVIE GIBSON, JR.