

10-28-1982

## Interview no. 653

Lucy Acosta

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Interview with Lucy Acosta by Mario T. García, 1982, "Interview no. 653," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact [lweber@utep.edu](mailto:lweber@utep.edu).

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Lucy Acosta  
INTERVIEWER: Mario T. Garcia  
PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: October 28, 1982  
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted  
TAPE NO.: 653  
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 653  
TRANSCRIBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE TRANSCRIBED: \_\_\_\_\_

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Local political activist.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Life history; LULAC activities in the 1950s; the Raymond Telles campaign for Mayor in El Paso; reactions to President Kennedy.

Length of Interview: 1 1/2 hours Length of Transcript: 60 pages

TAPE #1

G: Would you first, Mrs. Acosta, give some personal background information on you. Why don't you tell me a little bit in terms of your background, where you were born, where you were raised, a little bit about your education and so forth.

A: I'll be very glad to do that. I was born in Miami, Arizona and I was born in 1926. And in 1932 our entire family living in Miami, because of the Depression and the closing of all the copper mines, we of course had to move. All our entire family moved. My mother had already moved to El Paso and she had a house waiting for us when my brother and I... By the way, my father was killed in a copper mine in Miami when I was only about three years old, my brother was only a year and half. And my mother was a widow at, good grief, I guess at the age of 17, 18, 'cause she married real young, you know; I think she was 18, 19, something like that. And so consequently with the money from my father's accident we were able to survive the Depression, because they used to send my brother and I both a pension of fifty dollars. Would you believe that's what we used to sustain our whole entire family--my mother, my grandmother and my aunts and uncles and my brother and I. But that was a great fortune at that time, you know, we were able to pay rent and everything else with what we were given because of my father's death. And then of course my mother then brought us all to El Paso.

She worked I think for five, six dollars a week.

G: What year did you move to El Paso?

A: We moved to El Paso in 1932. Since I was born in '26, what was I, about five, six, something like that, approximately. I don't think I was quite six, because I didn't start school till January. I didn't start school right away, so I must've been /ābout six/.

G: So your mother worked as a maid in El Paso?

A: As a maid. She earned the whole big amount /ās/ a maid, cooker and everything else, here in El Paso.

G: In an Anglo home?

A: In a Jewish home, Anglo more or less.

G: She went and worked on the northside and then came back in the evening?

A: Right.

G: Where did you live at that time?

A: When we landed in El Paso, we lived in Sixth and El Paso. And I lived there up until the time that I married, which was in 1948, after my husband had returned from World War II. Of course, World War II was, as you're I'm sure familiar with, was...took a war to get a lot of us to really open our eyes and to really see how much we had been discriminated along all these many years. And all the things that we found out, like I tell you, I find out something new every day, and it's amazing, amazing, how we always took everything that was handed out to us, that we were always the...

G: It's a question of consciousness.

A: Yeah, right, right. We're very conscious of it now. And even though a lot of us do not carry that chip on our shoulder because we know better, but still we're familiar. Like I say, my God, it took a war to educate a lot of us and really, you know, let us open our eyes to how we were being treated and how much more we need to educate ourselves and promote ourselves to be able to survive.

G: What kind of home did you live in when you moved to El Paso?

A: In a tenement. We started out with a two-room house; well, apartment, if you want to call tenements /apartments/. A presidio is what we used to call them, you know, not a tenement or flats or not a fancy name like that, just a regular what they used to call a presidio at that time. And we had four-rooms and we all lived there. My mother, then, remarried about a couple of years after we had gotten here, and my stepfather was the one that raised us very well. As a matter of fact, my stepfather still lives with me. My mother passed away 10 years ago. And he was such a good man.

G: What did he do, what was his occupation?

A: He was a bricklayer. He was born here in El Paso. All his brothers and sisters were born here in El Paso. My mother was also born in El Paso, but they moved around to different mining towns. Like in Tyrone, New Mexico, one of my uncles was born, then two of my aunts were born here and my mother, and then another one here and there, you know. They moved around in mining towns 'cause my grandfather was in the

mining business, so consequently that's where my mother met my father. And she married in Miami, you know. But then she moved back to El Paso during the Depression that my father had died and we had to move out of Miami. There was nothing there for us, it was just such a small mining town. It was just completely dead like all the other mining towns during the Depression. So we lived in the Depression.

Most of my life, of course, like I said, we were a little better off than the next family that lived next door, I would say. I think all in all the tenement house that we moved in, Sixth and El Paso... And by the way that's torn down now because that's where the bridge is, the Santa Fe Bridge, coming. It was part of the Chamizal. Well, that particular piece of property was not because that's where the bridge just barely, you know...

G: But they had to knock it down.

A: Right, sure, sure, they knocked down all my hunting grounds, if that's what you want to call it. And they had to give it back to Mexico, which was the thing that they had to do, because actually it was Mexican territory.

G: What was your maiden name, by the way?

A: Grijalva. Grijalva, Lucy M. And you wonder why I have such a fancy name as Lucy, it's such a complicated story. But really my father, his mother's name was Luciana. And my mother hated that name. And actually my baptismal certificate and my birth certificates show Maria Angela Socorro Grijalva, would you believe?

But since my father just didn't like those names and my mother didn't like the other, so my father started calling me Lucy, and that's how I got Lucy. I need to have my name changed by my sons that are both attorneys, so that I can be legal now! At the time when I go register for medicare and so forth, I'm gonna have a heck of a time, I'll tell you. But anyway, this is how my name came about.

And of course, when we did land in El Paso, I had perhaps a little what I used to call my ace in the hole, because I already knew how to speak English because that's all we spoke in Arizona.

G: In your home you spoke English?

A: In my home. Well see, all my aunts and my uncles were going to school in Arizona. And when they were small, well, of course they spoke nothing but English. So consequently, I knew how to speak, you know, the language real well. My grandma didn't speak a word of English, so that meant I didn't know how to speak Spanish very well, but however, my grandma and I used to communicate very well.

So when I came to El Paso, when we landed in El Paso, much to my surprise I thought it was a hotel that we were gonna live in. And I kept asking my mother, "When are we gonna move to a house?" Because in Arizona we used to have a house. It wasn't anything to brag about, but it was a four-room house and it had a yard and everything else. And I just couldn't see myself fenced in. And to boot, we were

upstairs. It was a two story building, you know.

G: So you thought it was a hotel?

A: Yeah, I thought it was a hotel. See, I'd never been in a hotel, so that's what I thought. And then to my surprise in the morning when I get up, 'cause we got here real late at night, and in the morning that I started seeing all these...nothing but Mexican people there at the barrio, and the children couldn't speak a word of English, and we couldn't communicate.

G: Oh, so you couldn't speak Spanish and they couldn't speak English.

A: I couldn't speak Spanish and they couldn't speak English. But I'll tell you, I sure learned pretty quick. I tell you, in three weeks I was speaking like a native. Yes, because that meant that I couldn't talk or play with anybody. And to me that was, oh, that was the worst thing that could happen to me. I love to associate, and I love to play and I liked to... My brother was a little younger so of course he also got to...he could speak English but not much Spanish, but he learned

G: And with your mother you spoke English?

A: With my mother, yes. With my mother and my grandmother. My dad also. Even my stepdad, English, because my stepdad, you know, he can speak pretty good English right now. My mother used to murder the English language, but she could make herself understand. And my grandchildren now, every time they



think about her they say, "Gee, Mom, my grandma sure murders the English Language."

Like for instance she used to say, /if/ she was supposed to go somewhere, she'd come to me and she says, "I didn't went." And I said, "Mother, you don't say, 'I didn't went,' you say, 'I didn't go.'" And then she'd say, "Go, went, I didn't get there anyway." You know, this type. Because her education was up to third grade at Aoy School where I went to school, coincidently, because that was their barrio on Kansas, well, where Aoy School /is/ right now, there used to be some houses there. They threw them down now and they've got the fancy elderly complexes and a lot of fancy things that they didn't have in south El Paso at that time.

G: So you went to Aoy for elementary school?

A: Yes, I went up to the eighth grade. And then from Aoy I went up to Bowie, starting in the ninth grade, and on to graduate from Bowie.

G: How was going to school at Aoy in the '30s?

A: Well, let me tell you, for instance Aoy was the largest... this is information that I gathered later, by ear. At that time Aoy School was the largest grammar school of totally a hundred percent Mexican-American, as of course was Bowie High School.

G: But your teachers were Anglo teachers?

A: All of my teachers, every teacher that I had was an Anglo teacher.

G: What kind of education did you get there? What kind of classes did they want you to take?

A: Well, I can tell you that as far as our being able to read and write and so forth, excellent. I even think much better than what they're getting today. Because we were, you know, any of us that really wanted to buckle down and really learn, we would learn, because their classes were excellent. Of course, there's so much modernization nowadays and so much, now, rights that supposedly the students have in contrast to what we had. I mean, at that time when I went to grammar school, if we did something wrong, of course we were always hit with the ruler, or if the boys misbehaved they'd take them to the principal's office and whack 'em. You can't do that anymore. You know, that student is capable of just knocking your block off, especially if he's grown, you know, and of course the teachers can't take that kind of privilege or right and so forth.

I don't know whether that was good or bad or indifferent, but I remember that...and this I keep in the back of my mind, because I never had to take it because of the fact that... I remember one time we were having some type of a spelling contest. And I remember very vividly, because if they missed a word, they would get a ruler in the hand. And this is the way that they would...I have a ruler here. They wouldn't hit you like this, you know, they'd hit you like this. And it was hard. And it might've been a hard way for you to learn and maybe that'll make you study the next day, so that you

wouldn't miss so many words, you know. It never happened to me, you know, but it was tough to see some of those kids when they were hit, now that you think about it.

You know what else was very embarrassing when we were in school was the fact that, like I say it was during the Depression, everybody was so poor, and a lot of these people there at the barrio were being helped by what they called...what was it, WPA at the time? Yeah, WPA. And a lot of the younger boys were in the CC Camp. What is it?

G: Civilian Conservation Corps.

A: Yeah, right. I remember one of my uncles went into that to earn some type of money, 'cause here they were young fellows and there was nothing to eat, nothing to do, or whatever the case may be. But what was very degrading was not the fact that all the children did not have any clothing, and at the end of the month, or once a month, trucks would come by and they would all get the same color dress, the same threads, the same everything, you know, and they would distribute the food to all the people that didn't have food. We, like I say, were very fortunate because we had that steady pension and my mother had that steady job of a whole five dollars a week. So we were a little better than the next... And even we didn't have at that time a figurehead of the household other than Grandma--you know, she used to be the whole thing--we still got along real well, and she would share with the other people during the month. If they didn't have anything to eat, she would

share with them. And then when they got their items, their beans and sugar and flour and so forth, of course they would share that with her or whatever the case may be. And like I said, some of these children used to get the same clothing. And so consequently, can you imagine, we're all vain; I mean, we've got feelings. So you could see the little girls going to school with the same dress, so that means that they didn't have... Of course everybody was in the same boat so it didn't matter.

But what I was gonna say was so degrading in school, and I think about it and it just kills me. Some of these children, of course their parents, their mothers or whatever, whether it'd be because they didn't have any soap or didn't... Well, so you know the time, the hygiene and so forth, was not as good as it could've been and of course they would have the health people or the nurse or whoever it was at school, used to check the kids for lice and so forth in their hair. And if they found that you hadn't washed your hair, or that they found that you were infested with all of this they would either just shear all your head off, or put petroleum in your hair to kill all that, and then put a rag. I mean, can you imagine how embarrassing? It never happened to me, never happened to me, because my grandma and my mother, my aunts, were all so clean and everything, but it could've happened because the kid next door would have it. And I remember that I used to help them, and I used to...los espulgaba.

I don't know how to say it in English. How do you say espulgar in English? It's hard, ¿verdad? Yo me ponía a espulgar a todo mundo, y me decía mi abuelita, "Se te van a pegar." "No, abuelita, yo me cuido muy bien, no se me pegan." You know, but just so that this wouldn't happen to that child. And that recollection, I'll never forget. Because I would see these kids with a rag around their head, because they had shaved all their heads or because they put petroleum on their hair. You know? And that was so degrading, that was so degrading.

G: Did you have to take vocational education?

A: No. See, when I started high school, that's when the war started.

G: What years were you at Bowie?

A: I started in Bowie in January of 1940. So the war started in '41, so the following year when I was a sophomore, that's when the war started. So that's when everybody, at the moment they were eighteen, and off they went. And of course a lot of young men just dropped out of school, and a lot of them had already dropped out in grammar school.

I'll give you great example, because of the times, you know. My brother-in-law, who's about four years older than I was, was in the same grade that I was at Aoy School--I'm talking grammar--because I had been promoted into a higher grade because of my capability, I already knew the language when I went to school, so naturally I was far ahead of some of the kids. So I got double promoted from the third grade.

In other words, I didn't have a third grade, I went from second grade to fourth grade. So I was up a grade. And so consequently he was in the same class that I was.

That's my brother-in-law, my husband's brother. And he had to drop out of school in the fourth grade to be able to help out with his parents, who were much older. I mean, they were very old for them to be so young. My father-in-law was very...gosh, he died in his seventies. And my mother-in-law was not that old, but anyway she died six months after he died. So they both died within the same year, which was a very hard blow for both my husband and my brother-in-law.

Anyway, my brother-in-law had to drop out, and many of these students never completed not even grammar school at that time. You know, they would drop out in the third, fourth, fifth, sixth grade for whatever reasons, and that was their education right there.

G: You were one of the few that actually went through all the way and got into high school.

A: Yes, and my husband with me. Because my husband had his brother to put him through. And even though my husband had to work and get up at the wee hours of the morning to work in a bakery or a restaurant or whatever you call it, do the menial, you know...well, what we're used to doing.

G: So it was the kids who actually had a little better financial family background that actually went on to high school.

A: Right.

G: Did you work when you were in high school yourself?

A: Never worked, never worked, because, like I said, I had a little more than the next kid because my aunt started working at the time, and she also brought me up, along with my grandmother. And my aunt went through high school because she was more asserative than perhaps my other aunt that didn't even finish grade school. Of course my uncle went to school, to Bowie, but he never finished, he just went and joined the navy. My aunt, the one that still lives and was the one that raised me, she was the one that did go all through high school, finished her high school career, and was able to get an office job and learn by experience what she knows now. And her influence, you know, of course... And with me there was never any doubt. I mean, school was my life to me.

G: You were a good student?

A: Oh, I was an excellent student. I used to cry when I was sick and I couldn't go to school. In reverse to my kid, the one that is really intelligent, that he was so bored in school that on Sundays he would act...we used to call it the Academy Award night on Sunday nights 'cause he'd start coughing, and, "Oh, I'm sick, and I don't wanna go to school Monday." I was a complete reverse. And I was a complete reverse from my brother. My brother hated to go to school, I mean actually hated to go to school. But I was on the contrary. Well, that's where I had all my friends and I would

get to play and I would get to do this and talk and so forth. So I loved, I really really loved school.

G: You enjoyed going to Bowie?

A: Oh, that was the most beautiful days of my life. Tremendously.

G: Were you active as a student officer, in organizations and things like that?

A: Oh, absolutely. I was active. I was president of what they called at the time Girl Reserves. I was in the gymnastics group. And I was in the Pan American Club and the Student Council and so forth. Oh, and I was a very good ping-pong player--as a matter of fact, I was school champion--and I was a very good tennis player also. I didn't keep on with tennis because of the time after graduation, well, you know, we didn't have the teaching, coaching, that perhaps El Paso High and Austin High had. If I'd have had a good instructor from the beginning from my freshman year, or had gone into P.E. at the time instead of taking R.O.T.C. like I did, I could've done real well. Because I competed, I remember competing against...you know, at El Paso High when we competed, we competed against the tops. And I remember very vividly that this instructor...I tell you, the match that I played when I was eliminated, I played with Sylvia, I remember her name was Sylvia Lerner. And she and Margret Varner, who later became world tennis...

G: Yeah, I remember that.



A: OK. That was in my era, that was in my time, and that's who I played against at El Paso High. But the instructor there was so impressed /by/ the way I played and the hard time that I gave. You know, we were neck and neck and I beat her two games, and finally she did win the match. But Sylvia was one of the top contenders, not only statewide, but nationwide. And Margret Varner was too. So this is the type of caliber of people that they had. But if I had had the instructor and I had more time at Bowie, I probably would've been a very good tennis player. 'Cause I'm a very dedicated person. When I want to do something and like to do something, I really put up all my...

G: So you think you didn't have the right coaching there. At this time were you still living in the same tenement?

A: Yes. I lived in the same tenement through high school until I married. I lived with my grandmother. And my mother moved to California, and my stepfather. And the first summer that they had moved there, they had wanted...I don't remember what year, I think it was in 1936, '37 more or less. Because work was so hard to get here, you know, at the time. And my dad, my stepdad, I call him Dad anyway, he was able to get a job in California. So they sent for us, but I just could not...I went to school there in California at junior high one year. But I just could not...

G: Where in California?

A: In Glendale. It was in Los Angeles, suburb of /Los Angeles/.

G: But you wanted to come back?

A: I stood one semester up there, I just could not... I wanted to come back to Aoy and graduate from Aoy. My brother did stay, though. So that meant that we were separated. My grandma and my aunt brought me up, my mother and my dad and my brother stayed in California. Of course I was up there the moment grammar school was over--I mean, summers--I was on my way. And I'd spend the whole summer in California and I'd come back just for school. So I commuted, you know.

G: During this time that you were at Bowie, this is the '40s and there was the Pachucos, what did you think of yourself in terms of your identity? Was that an issue to you?

A: No, no.

G: Did you see yourself as a Mexican or an American?

A: Well, see, that was not the issue at the time when we were going to high school. The issue was at the time the Pachuco came around, was when we were perhaps juniors and seniors in High School, that they were a different kind of breed. And I think it was mostly, it was not what they did, but the way they dressed. It was only the dress, and we would just identify it with the California Pachuco. That's what we would identify it with. There was not that many drugs like there is now. With what money, you know? And yes we were poor, but we were decent. And our parents brought us up, an entirely different group of parents, that brought us up in a very, very strict manner.

Let me tell you how strict it was. If there was a dance at night at Bowie, like my Junior Prom and Senior Prom, my date could not go for me at the house, and we'd come along and so forth. My aunt or my grandma would be my chaperone. And I mean, I wasn't the only one. All of the girls were always chaperoned.

G: They went to dance with you and your date?

A: You bet. I could care less; as long as I danced I could care less what, you know. And we had to walk all the way. There was no such thing as a taxi. We'd walk in our formals and so forth, you know, walk all the way. On the way back I was so tired, I walked barefooted all the way back from Bowie High School all the way to Sixth and El Paso.

Lunch time we used to go back and forth and eat lunch at home and run all the way to school. When we got a little wealthier--my aunt, when she started working--they used to give me a whole dime and that used to buy me my whole meal, including the dessert. Can you imagine?

G: When you graduated were you in the top ten of your class?

A: Yes I was. As a matter of fact, I was in the top ten and /also what/ I would call the top two. I think that I ended about, in a class of 86--in that time that was a large class--I ended about fourth, fourth from the top.

G: And after you graduated from Bowie, what did you do?

A: I took some business courses. I went into International

Business College and I took some business courses and I immediately started working. Remember, the war was already going on. The moment the boys were graduating, they were taking them like...you know.

And this one very interesting thing that I do want to mention. I don't know if you're aware of it, but at that time, of course you know they had the Selective Service Board. I found out later that in the Selective Service Board there was not a single Hispanic, OK, so they used to fill the quotas with all the mexicanos that were not going on to college. Who was going to college? And this happened also during the Korean War, I'm not blinding myself to that, that it was at World War II that really... All this time we didn't have a single Hispanic in the Selective Service Board, so all the quotas were being filled with all the Hispanics. You wonder sometimes and you say, "Well, we're real proud of the fact that the Hispanics or the Mexican-Americans have more Congressional Medal or Honor winners." Well, why not? We were filling, you know, we were there all the time. Sure, with the blacks and ourselves, and we were the ones that was making up the army, you know. Well, the blacks weren't segregated until Truman segregated them, you know. What was it '48, or somewhere along the line.

See, I went through two wars. I went through the World War II, and my husband went to World War II and he was

in the service. Fortunately on his way to Japan the War ended when he was in the high seas and he was brought off the boat in Hawaii. So he spent his overseas stint in Hawaii. But then when he came out of the War, World War II, when his time was up, he stayed in the Reserve to keep his rank 'cause he was a Sergeant Major, so he stayed in to keep his rank. and be able to get his education, everything going. Who knew that three years later, four later, or five years, that the Korean War was going to come along. And boy, I'll tell you, he was the first one out. So he had to go through the Korean War too. And again, the Selective Service Board of El Paso, all the Anglos, so they would fill the quotas. The moment the quotas came by, there go all the Chicanos. And of course all the Anglos, the majority were going into college, they were exempt.

G: What was the first job you got out here?

A: Right after I graduated from high school, I started going to business college, you know, taking my courses, and I got a job at El Paso Welding Supply. My aunt used to work there. She was going to California so they needed a girl to take care of the office. And taking a lot of business courses at Bowie, shorthand and all this kind of business-related subjects, I was fairly good. Well, you know, I was pretty good for a sixteen-year-old, 'cause that's when I finished high school, because I had to attend a summer

session. So we were pretty young. That double promotion helped a lot, and then we attended a summer session during the War. In other words, we didn't stop so that the boys could complete their education. The moment they completed their senior year, they're gone. So I finished school in three and a half years instead of /four/. My husband finished it in three years because he was a little behind than I was because of my double promotion. So he finished it in three years because he had two summer sessions.

G: So you were doing clerical work?

A: I was doing clerical work at this El Paso Welding. When my aunt came back from California, then I went back to school. She took her job back, and then I went to business college, started taking courses. And then I got a job as a secretary at Patterson's Sales. As a matter of fact he still lives, and we're very close friends. And I started working for him.

G: What kind of a company was that?

A: He was a sales representative, and I used to take care of all his correspondence. He used to be gone for a month or two at a time, so I used to take care of his correspondence and so forth. Coincidentally, when I was working with Mr. Patterson, we would hire what they call V.O.E. now at the schools, where the high school students work part-time. So we hired a couple of persons to work there and I would supervise their /work/.

And of course by then I was earning what I called a fabulous sum of fifty dollars a week, you know.

G: Still living at home?

A: Still living at home, still not married, still living on South El Paso. Consequently we'd commute to our aunt's house, who was living in the Alamito Projects. And they had a running water inside the house. And I'd go over there every day and take a bath so I wouldn't have to carry the tub inside our apartment house, our complex, and have to share community bathroom with everybody.

G: Did you commute to work?

A: Well, no. I lived in South El Paso and Sixth, and Mr. Patterson used to first have his offices /where/ the American Furniture is now, so it was walking distance. And if I got lazy or I saw a street car coming, I'd put my six cents in and ride into town.

/PAUSE/

G: We were talking about your first job.

A: Oh, my first job as a secretary and what had transpired since then.

G: How long were you at that job?

A: I was there at that job about six years. Well, while I was working there is when I got married, you know, in 1948. As a matter of fact, last October the 9th we had our 34th Wedding Anniversary. Still the same husband, the same kids, same everything (Chuckles).

G: Where did you go and live after you got married?

A: We had a real nice apartment, what is really now the Chamizal there, the Mexican end of the Chamizal, on Tenth Street. My husband also is a person that was raised in the barrio. As a matter of fact we knew each other before we even started school. Well, I had already started school, like I say. I was with my brother-in-law, he was the one that was in my class 'cause I was a little ahead of the rest. And my husband, we got to know each other, like I said, since we were children and he also went to Aoy and Bowie High School, went through because of the fact that his brother saw to it that Alejandro got the education that he didn't. So Alejandro got the education, but Jose didn't get the education 'cause he was too busy working. And besides he got married and had a family to support and also had his brother to live with him because they had no parents.

So Alejandro lived with them while he was going to Bowie. And of course my husband worked all the way through school. He couldn't participate in athletics and so forth and go to all the tea dances that I used to go and have all fun that I used to have, because he had to go home and work. But nevertheless, he was very, very popular in school. As a matter of fact, he was I think president of his class since he started, Freshman, and including his Senior year, he was president of his Senior Class. And he was very



active at the time in school.

G: When he came back from the Service, what did he work at?

A: When he came back from the Service he started working for a firm... He went in as a buck private, in the army, all right? A buck private. And he, if I'm not mistaken, was one of the youngest Sergeant Majors in the army. In a year and a half he went from buck private to Sergeant Major when he was released from the army, in a year and a half's time. He had some clerical experience at school, through his training at school, because he got drafted right after, you know, right after he finished school. He used to work at the Pullman Company, taking out the dirty linen from the...while he was in his senior year, and even when he graduated he still continued that. He graduated from Bowie I think in May of '44, and in May of '45 he was gone. He was one of the younger ones, so the moment he...so they took him.

G: So when he came back he did clerical work?

A: He did. He got a job with Ecklin, Irvin and Crowell. It was an insurance company. Not as a clerical job, you know, because at that time still, you know, los prejuicios todavía existían. So anyway he got a job with Ecklin, Irvin and Crowell, and he was their errand boy or whatever you want to call it, runner, whatever it is, and used to help in the mail room and so forth, this type of work.

When the IBM computers started into being introduced into the nation, Ecklin, Irvin was one of the insurance companies that was going to have a computer system. And Alex saw the opportunity and he applied. And believe it or not, they gave him the opportunity. And at that time it was not a matter of going to school and learning, it was a matter that IBM did not sell their computers, that they merely rented the computers. And that's how come they got into that litigation that they were, how did they call it? They were monopolizing?

G: Right.

A: Right, OK. So IBM, they sent him through the insurance company where he worked, they sent him to IBM school and of course he learned how to run the computers and everything else.

G: This is the late '40s, early '50s?

A: Late '40s. It was a matter of fact just before we got married. It was in 1940...oh, I would say it was about '46 - '47, thereabouts.

G: So after you got married he continued that job?

A: Yes, yes, till he got drafted. Not drafted, I mean...

G: He went to the Korean War?

A: Right. That's when he was recalled again, he was recalled because he stayed in the Reserve, you know. In the meantime he was going to school at night, getting further training, further education.

G: Did you yourself continue to work after you were married?

A: Yes. I've worked all my life, all my life I've worked.

G: So what was your second job? You said you spent six years at Patterson.

A: Six years at Patterson's Sales. Then I went back to the job that I had first originally, at El Paso Welding Supply. And I started out as an assistant bookkeeper and assistant office manager. And I worked there for sixteen years.

G: So you worked until the 1960s?

A: Yes, in '65, if I'm not mistaken.

G: At this time you were already having a family?

A: I already had Alex and I already had Danny. As a matter of fact, Alex was born in 1951. When Alex was born we lived, like I said, in that apartment that we had rented when we got married. It was a real nice apartment.

G: What street was that?

A: It was on Tenth and Stanton Street, South Stanton. That's where the Mexican side is right now, you know. And it was just a real nice place. And it was an apartment house, but it had it's own bathroom and it's own...not like the presidio that we used to have to share with fifty other people or whatever. And everybody knew when everybody was going to take their bath because of carrying the water and the buckets back to the house, and then having to warm up the water so that you could take a bath.

G: How long did you live at that apartment?

A: Well, we lived there from 1948 until we purchased our house. When Alex came back from Korea, we had saved a little money and he was able to get a house under the G.I. Bill. We purchased our house in 1952.

G: Where is that?

A: In, I live on Leeds Street. It's a block from Radford school for Girls.

G: You've been there ever since?

A: Ever since. Haven't moved. We've added on to the house, we've done quite a bit of things to it, and it's very liveable. I'll tell you, right now it's worth right now about five times as much. It's in the central area, great huge lot, and my dad has done miracles with it. We've got a large house that we have totally paid and I'm not about to go and move and get another mortgage, that's for sure. We're doing very well.

G: We've carried your own personal background right to the point where I want to now deal with the question of politics of the city and Raymond Telles.

A: All right.

G: Let me first ask you, up to this time--we're now talking about the middle 1950's--from high school to the '50s where did you become involved civically, and I guess to some extent politically?

A: All right. In 1957, I have some friends and a relative

of my husband's that were in the LULAC organization. And these friends invited me one time to start a new ladies' council in El Paso. There was one ladies' council that had been in existence since 1934. And in 1957, they invited me to attend one of the sessions and perhaps we could start organizing a new council. My children were of course young. My youngest, Danny, was only about two years, but I like to be involved so I said, "Well, it wouldn't hurt." And of course at that time we had been friends with the Telleses. Mrs. Telles, Richard's wife, was a personal friend of mine since we were young. And that's how my association with Raymond Telles came about. Richard's wife, Lily, like I said, was one of my bridesmaids, and we started out being friends. And then she subsequently married Richard, and has been his wife since, his second wife; because Richard that is now running for office is not Mrs. Telles's son, he's her stepson.

G: So you had known Raymond back then?

A: Right. I knew Raymond before he was elected County Clerk. When Raymond was elected County Clerk, he motivated a lot of the Hispanics because there was not that many Hispanics in public office. So of course at that time, when he ran for County Clerk was probably about '54, '55, thereabouts.

G: Well, he was first elected in '48, County Clerk,

and he was subsequently reelected.

A: Ok. 1948 there were not too many, like I said, too many Hispanics in public office; as a matter of fact, none that I think of. I remember even Mr. Patterson telling me, Mr. Patterson my first real boss, or the first boss that I worked /with/ he said... Well, first of all my boss was born in Durango, and so he used to associate very closely, he could speak Spanish better than I could and understand it better than I could, so we communicated very well. So he knew Raymond and he said, "You know that boy," he used to call him a boy at that time, "that boy is going to win, we're going to help him win. He's a good person," and so forth. So he was the one that got me real enthused about...

G: Did you work on that '48 Campaign, were you involved in it?

A: No, not as County Clerk. No, Mrs. Telles wasn't married then to Richard yet, OK? Because I married before she did.

G: But you did know Raymond?

A: Oh, yes. We all knew...as a matter of fact my dad knew Mr. Telles' dad before, and he was the one that used to tell me, "Raymond's dad is a good friend of mine and I've known them for quite a while," and so forth. And of course reading the newspaper, and knowing that Raymond... But I was never involved politically at that time.

G: During the time that he was County Clerk up till 1957, did you interact with him personally?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely, because see we were thrown together because Mrs. Telles then married Richard, which is Raymond's younger brother. He's the youngest one, because Ignacio is the oldest, and then Raymond, and then Richard. Richard is the youngest, there's three of them. And so we used to meet at Mrs. Telles' house because she and I were very good friends, and then also somos compadres. I baptized their youngest son, Richard's and Lily's youngest son. So I used to see Raymond at the little parties and we used to talk.

And at that time there was other persons that were very much politically...very staunch Democrats. I'll tell you one that we loved dearly, she used to be in LULAC, and it was a Mrs. Mata. I forgot what her first name was, but we always used to call her Mrs. Mata.

G: Is she deceased now?

A: She's deceased now, and she was a very close friend of Raymond's. And she helped him in that campaign. I'll tell you, she really really did.

G: This '57 Campaign?

A: In the '57 and in the, when he was County Clerk. There were many people like her, the older generation, that I would say, because she was much older. She could've been my grandma. You know, he brought out the pride in

the mexicano, because of the type of person that Raymond--we're talking, Raymond, OK?--brought out the pride that the mexicano has in knowing that one of their own has done so great and has been able to hold office, or that could be elected. And this motivation prompted a lot of people to go out and buy poll taxes, something which everybody just...you know, who had a dollar seventy-five? Nobody wanted to pay it, you know. We used to go out and register people and sell poll taxes, and they used to give us a quarter for every poll tax so that we could keep our LULAC fund going.

G: This is during the '57 Campaign?

A: '57 Campaign.

G: Let's get back to where you're beginning to be involved with LULAC.

A: OK. It was in '57. We started that '57, at the year when Raymond was elected, if I'm not mistaken. And like I said, I'm associated with him; he knows who I am, I know who he is. His brother's my compadre, and consequently also his brother is the president of one of the LULAC councils and then I become involved in the other LULAC council.

G: You were involved in the ladies' council.

A: I was involved in the ladies' council. Richard was involved in Council Number 8.

G: The ladies' council was number 6?



A: Number 9, that was Number 9. Ours was 335. See, I didn't join the group that existed. We formed a new council, we were chartered in 1958.

G: These were younger women like yourself at that time?

A: Yeah, right. These three ladies right here, that's myself, Mrs. Perez and Mrs. Ramirez, are still charter members of that particular council, that still are in existence and we're still very much active.

G: That was Council Number...?

A: 3-3-5.

G: And so the group of younger Mexican-American women organized Council 335?

A: Right, exactly.

G: And this was early '57?

A: It was in early '57. We finally, after a bitter battle, because the other ladies wanted us to join them--instead of having two LULAC councils, have one.

G: That was Council 9.

A: Council 9. And as a matter of fact, Council 9 was the first ladies' council in the state of Texas, as a matter of fact in the nation. That's how come their number's so low, Number 9, see. But they were, not meaning no disrespect, but their ideas...it was impossible.

G: \_\_\_\_\_ with the older generation.

A: Impossible, sure. I was barely twenty-nine, thirty years at that time. Mrs. Perez was only eighteen years old.

Mrs. Ramirez probably was in her early twenties or thereabouts, and it was impossible for us to join a group of ladies that still had the first president of their council since 1934. My God, in '34, I hadn't even started grammar school, you know? So this was the difference.

G: So the three of you basically organized it?

A: Well, Mrs. Ramirez and I started, and a lot of other groups, but we were the ones that have remained still in the council. In 25 years that the council has been in existence, the three of us have still remained in the council, some have gone by the wayside.

G: How many women were in the council?

A: We started out at that time with about thirty some-odd women involved, and our council more less has maintained the average of, with associate members, between fifty and a hundred, thereabouts, our council. Other councils have existed. There's at the present time seven councils with different men and women and so forth.

G: So this is the time then between you and the Telles Campaign?

A: Right. O.K., the Telles Campaign.

G: Tell me about that association.

A: The association of course started that we went out... and this is the whole Mexican population of El Paso.

G: But you were working through LULAC?

A: We were working through LULAC, too, to sell all these

poll taxes so that people can go out and vote. But he used to...he inspired the Hispanic in El Paso, the Mexican-American I would say, the Mexicans mostly--the Mexican-American that could vote, naturally. He inspired them to whereby they wanted to invest a dollar seventy-five in a poll tax so they could go vote for Raymond Telles. And no other candidate...

G: So you had no problems convincing them?

A: No problem whatsoever. I'll tell you, people...

G: You went to the barrio?

A: The barrio, or we would sit out at Sears and people would come by. And we'd have different locations.

G: Sears at Five Points?

A: Sears at Five Points, or different locations all over town, to go out and sell the poll tax, otherwise they couldn't vote.

G: This would be like on weekends?

A: Weekends, right; or people that didn't work during the day or whatever the case. Like we had a lot of volunteers, you know, that would go and give their time. Like Mrs. Ramirez, for instance, doesn't work, she's always been able to afford to stay home and her husband does real well. So she was able to volunteer and go out and write poll taxes. And we'd do it on Saturdays or whenever we could. But see, this is the inspiration that this person... But see, that was even

prior to my LULAC days, now. The other LULAC people were doing it. I was doing it because I was barely starting LULAC, but I was still not very much in the political scene. I was there because Raymond Telles inspired all these people to the extent that, let me tell you that people that had never, ever, ever voted--Mexican people I'm talking about--or ever, ever, taken...well, they couldn't vote because they never had a poll tax, would go out and buy a poll tax. But he knew Raymond Telles was going to run. Raymond Telles was a mexicano, and wouldn't it be wonderful if Raymond Telles, if we would have the first Mexican-American Mayor, the city of El Paso?

G: What were some of the other locations that registered voters?

A: Oh, all over in the [city]. And you know, we'd go out in all the stores, the main stores, we'd have a location.

G: Could you name some of them? You mean like in the downtown area?

A: Downtown area, we would go into the downtown area. And we would even, of course at the County Courthouse we would even have sometimes a little desk there in the County Courthouse to help the... J.C. Penney's were very cooperative also, and a lot of the stores that would give us an opportunity to go sell poll taxes.

G: Popular and White House?

A: Popular and White House, all the big downtown stores were very cooperative.

G: These were LULAC tables?

A: Yes, yes.

G: What about going into the southside itself?

A: Oh, well see, the people in the southside would come and register at the Courthouse just to go vote. When you find a person from the southside that has never voted going into the big, enormous to them, City-County Building to register to vote--my God, that's an accomplishment in itself. I mean, not register, but buy the poll tax.

G: They were coming on their own?

A: Oh, on their own, on their own, you know. And it came from within. No one had to go and obligate them and no one had to tell them. That was a mexicano running and it was Raymond Telles. And they wanted Raymond Telles to win so, I mean, they had to. So that's what I mean. When they really have someone that will inspire, they'll go out and do it.

G: Who was basically spreading the word, especially in the barrio?

A: Well, probably the newspaper. I'll tell you who helped Raymond a lot. That was Ed Pulley, who was the editor of the El Paso Herald-Post. And the other one that helped him a lot was Ralph Seitsinger, you know, helped

him one heck of a lot. There was quite a number of Anglo people that were very much involved.

Without the Anglo vote, let's not kid ourselves, Raymond would not have gotten elected. But he was such a good public servant. He was basically a great, intelligent person, that he did have quite a bit of support from the /Anglos/. And I think his opponent was a very tough opponent, /Tom/ Rogers.

G: Did you ever go personally into the southside to register voters?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, always, always.

G: Door-to-door?

A: Door-to-door, door-to-door.

G: What about the use of any churches or stores in the southside?

A: Absolutely--churches, stores.

G: What churches? Sacred Heart, Saint Ignatius?

A: Sacred Heart, Saint Ignatius. You know, we'd stand outside and have our little table and so forth and register people, and tell them about all this.

G: Any particular stores that you remember? Where you set up tables?

A: The southside, there were so many stores, you know, several stores in the southside, near around the Bowie area particularly. Well, all the schools at that time, you know, the Aoy area and so forth. So we were all over.

G: But these were mostly a lot of the women that were doing this?

A: A lot of the women; no, and a lot of men too. Remember they have the men's council. They would really go all out, and I'm telling you, with such enthusiasm.

G: ¿Pero las mujeres también ayudaban?

A: Oh, absolutely. Oh sí, muchísimo, muchísimo. Quite a number of us would go out and volunteer, especially on a Saturday when we didn't have to work, because most of us had to work, you know. So like I said, it was inspiration, motivation. We were motivated, you know. We had someone of our...you know, one of us, one of us.

G: Could I mention some of names of women that I've been told were involved. Lucy House.

A: Yes, Mrs. House.

G: Was she a Mexican?

A: Oh, yes. Her husband is a Mexican also, Charles House. Mrs. House was the wife of Joe Ray, the attorney.

G: At that time?

A: At that time,

G: Is she still married?

A: No, she is married to Charles House, who also went to Bowie. He's a mexicano. He just carried the Anglo name, but he's a mexicano himself.

G: Pero ella ya esta muerta, ¿no?

A: No, no.

G: Oh, she's still alive?

A: Yes, she's still alive.

G: And she was involved in your LULAC council?

A: No, Number 9. Mrs. Santos next door here, Molly Santos, she's in Council Number 9.

G: How about a Mrs. Aranda?

A: Her first name I think is Cruz. Yes Mrs. Aranda. I still think she works at City Hall. If that's the same Aranda, I think she still works at City Hall.

G: How about a Mrs. Pimentel?

A: I've heard the name but I'm not familiar with her.

G: And Señora Albert Armendariz?

A: Oh, yes, definitely. Mrs. Armendariz was also president of Council Number 9.

G: She was in Council 9.

A: Yeah, she was one of their presidents.

G: Can you think of any other names of women?

A: Well, of women that were highly involved in politics, that were non-LULACers, like I told you, Mrs. Mata. I can't think of her first name.

G: She's no longer alive is she?

A: No, she's not alive.

G: What about some other women?

A: Well, I can tell you a lot of the ones that helped in the campaign de Richard, but I can't think of that many in the Raymond Telles Campaign, but Mrs. Mata.

G: You mentioned something of when you registered and you got



the dollar seventy-five, something about a quarter.

A: Yes. The County would allow us a quarter to sell the poll tax, so of course the more the poll taxes we sold... And even in later years, you know, not just during the Raymond Telles or after, in later years up until the poll tax was abolished, they would let civic organizations, non-profit civic organizations, sell poll taxes, and we would get a quarter off of every poll tax we sold. So we made a little money to augment our educational fund, our scholarship fund, 'cause that's where all our money went.

G: Now the election of '57 was characterized by a kind of undertone because Telles was a Mexican-American. Can you tell me any examples or incidents of things that you heard about the kind of anti-Mexican or even anti-Catholic undertone campaign going on in that election? Were you aware of this kind of thing?

A: No. I'll be very frank with you, I wasn't very aware. I'm sure that the Catholic religion were absolutely a hundred percent at the time for Telles. I don't know whether there had been any other mayors that had been Catholic. I'm sure there had been, you know, in El Paso, and there has been since. Mayor Westfall was a Catholic for sure.

G: What about the anti-Mexican sentiment?

A: No. I tell you, I know that of course the endorsement of the newspaper, that that endorsement that Pulley gave

to Telles, was certainly something that was unprecedented, you know. Of course the Times naturally endorsed Rogers. That I remember very vividly. There was no way that the Times was going to endorse Raymond Telles, even if they may have liked him, because he was an excellent County Clerk. Well, he was a County Clerk, it was all right. But good grief, Mayor of /the/ City of El Paso, who could think of a Mexican being the Mayor of the city of El Paso. But as sarcastic as I would like to be, that's about as sarcastic as I can get.

But anyway, I'm sure that I can tell you positive that Raymond had a lot of help from the money people that had some... You know, I think he had worked his campaign properly, and I think all the aldermen that ran with him, since he ran on a ticket--you know, at that time they were still running in ticket, not in district--all the rest of the aldermen were all Anglos. See, he was the top man, but all the rest, like Ralph Seitsinger, and I think Ted Bender was on his /ticket/.

G: Oh, yes, Ted Bender, and Jack White.

A: And Jack. And who's the other guy?

G: It was Ernie Cragin.

A: Yeah, Ernie Cragin. So those four people I'm sure helped quite a bit. But they believed in him, they really believed in him, and there was a lot of other people that had means that believed in him. Otherwise,

he'd have never been able to carry out the campaign, let's not fool ourselves. But see, it was that inspiration, though.

G: Can you tell me what you did on election day to help get out the vote?

A: Oh, God yes. I'll tell you. I recollect that we celebrated in Mrs. Telles' house, and we worked like crazy. I remember working the precincts. I think that's about the only time that I have ever, if you want to call walking the precincts.

G: What precincts?

A: We used to live in, well, always lived up here. We vote now in Radford School for Girls, but at that time we voted at, it was a garage, would you believe? It was a garage-type thing around Trowbridge and Radford Street. It was just a garage, somebody's house that would open the garage to vote in--you know, this type of thing. And I remember going over there to vote and then trying to pass out literature, whatever the case may be, and helping out.

G: In the precincts around the area that you lived?

A: In the precincts around the area, which were highly Anglo at the time. I mean, strictly Anglo.

G: What was the reaction to your work?

A: I can tell you that we worked it so well, and he was so well known, that we really, really, truly did not get very much...they were receptive to us, you know, they really were receptive. And the campaign was so

clean, and it was nothing other than perhaps just one person running against the other. It really wasn't what you would call a mud slinging, because Raymond will not stoop to that kind of campaign.

G: Did you ever attend any of the rallies that were Telles fund raisers?

A: No, I don't think I did at the time. You know, I don't recollect at the time that I did. I must've, I know I must have, because I know that he was a tremendous speaker, he was extremely knowledgeable, and I know that the debates that they had with Rogers, that Raymond always came up on top. I can tell you that for experience, that he was really very well versed, he was educated enough to, capable enough of taking just about anyone, you know.

G: Did the other women in the LULAC council work the precincts also?

A: Oh, yes, yes. I mean Council Number 9 was in existence. We were barely getting our charter, OK? We were not a chartered council, but I as an individual did go out and help out as much as we could, we really did. And we just did.

G: Passing out leaflets and things like that?

A: Leaflets, and just...

G: Were these both in English and Spanish?

A: No, strictly in English.

## TAPE #2

G: Can you tell me what the election of Raymond Telles meant for the Mexican-American community?

A: Well, it meant of course, "We finally made it." We finally got a mayor elected, a mexicano mayor elected, mayor of a major city in the United States, you know. At that time we were thinking, "My God, wouldn't it be great to have a Mexican Governor." That's how far back we were thinking, you know. We thought that he would be so well known and would do such a great job, which he did, you know. And of course, we were so sad... elated for him at the time that he was appointed Ambassador by Kennedy, but yet we knew that we were going to lose him. And we were losing our prized possession that we had worked so hard to...you know. And it was just a great loss on our part when he was given the ambassadorship. And of course, it was wise of him to accept it. But we were so elated, we finally had gotten one of our own and we said, "This is just the beginning. From here on we can do whatever we want, and elect whoever we feel is the best qualified, and we can elect more Hispanics," and so forth and so forth. And of course that didn't happen, it didn't materialize.

G: You went to the Telles home that night after the election?

A: I went to Richard Telles' house, yeah. They were celebrating all over and they had a celebration...God, they

were having so many celebrations all over. I re-collect they had their headquarters at... Where the heck was their headquarters?

G: I think it was downtown.

A: Yeah, it was downtown somewhere, and I recollect that very, so vividly. And I was just very, so relieved and so happy when the... Of course at the time, I don't recollect how the absentee vote came in. But I recollect that I think that Raymond won it, you know. And if he didn't win it, I'm thinking that he lost it by just a few votes. But when all the returns started coming in and particularly the hundred percent Chicano barrio, you know. I mean if Rogers got one vote out of three, four, five hundred...and it still happens, you see it, you see it when you see the precincts, you know. So, of course we were just so, so elated. It was just a jubilant, we were all so jubilant that it was just unbelievable. I think it took us probably a month to finally, you know, settle down.

So of course when he started, he'd been Mayor, and we started getting to know each other, well, getting to know duties. Then in the meantime, our council had been chartered--this was six, seven months later. And consequently, I was involved in the organization and I think very much involved. And I was appointed, through I'm sure the suggestion of his brother Richard, to serve on this committee to select our recreation site for the

Parks and Recreation on this side, to where the boys could have a place to play and so forth. We had The El Paso Boys' Club on Florence, but they needed another boys' club, but they wanted it out here on this other area. So that's the first committee that I got appointed to, by him, and he appointed several key people, among them Dr. Francisco Licon and myself, and I think there was three or four more of us, I don't recall.

G: To what particular committee?

A: That committee to select a site for a building of a boys' club in the area...what do you call this area out here?

G: East El Paso.

A: Well, Border area. We finally selected the Delta area, and the Delta Parks and Recreation was built there, and also the boys' club was subsequently built there.

G: This was done under the Telles Administration?

A: Yes, it was done under the Telles Administration. And that was our first job. That was my first committee. And from there on, after Raymond left...how many years did he serve, I forgot?

G: Until '61, four years.

A: Was he re-elected?

G: He was re-elected without opposition in '59.

A: Then when he left, then Ralph Seitsinger took over, right? He was the Mayor pro tem.

G: He was elected himself in '61.

A: Right, right OK. So then Ralph appointed me to another committee. And while Ralph was in office, then I was selected the LULAC Woman of the Year in '62, districtwise, statewide, and subsequently nationwide. So I served under Ralph's Administration. Then after Ralph came, I think, who was it, was it Judson Williams?

G: Judson Williams.

A: OK, under Judson Williams I think I served in two, three committees.

G: Can you tell me what you think were the specific concrete accomplishments of the Telles Administration when Telles was Mayor? You've mentioned for example the boys' club. What other things like parks or whatever?

A: The boys's club, Parks and Recreation.

G: Especially in terms of the Mexican population, what do you think Telles did specifically that benefitted the Mexican population, in a concrete sense?

A: Well, aside from the inspiration and construction and so forth, and also getting the Hispanic involved into committees, and to serve in boards with the City of El Paso, whereby before the only name that you would ever hear would be Ernie Ponce. Ernie Ponce, he was an alderman. I think he was an alderman under...

G: He was actually Italian.



A: Well, not really but...

G: OK, he perceived himself as Italian.

A: I even heard that one time they said, "You know Mrs. Pons?" And I said, "Mrs. Pons? No, I don't. "Yeah, you know Mary Pons." I said, "You mean Mary Ponce." "Well, she said Pons." And I said, "Well I don't care what she said, but her name is Mary Ponce." So, we'd go into that conversation. But she's a beautiful lady and so forth, but they are... well...

G: So he appointed various Mexicans to boards?

A: So he appointed and got us interested, you know, in government...in the government, in participating, in getting ourselves involved, getting ourselves committed. And this is where it all started for many of us. I don't specifically...I would be lying if I could tell you that I would remember everything that happened. I don't.

G: Do you remember anything specific like parks and things in the southside that were done during that time?

A: No, other than the Delta, I can't for the life of me. I wish I could, but I can't. It's probably a matter record that he did, you know. I'm sure that he did, many, many things that perhaps are to his...that he contributed to the City of El Paso, other than being the first Mexican-American Mayor. He must've come to the attention of being as popular as he was here during the Kennedy Administration, and he must've been very well liked because he was nominated

and very much backed by the people of El Paso, the Democrats themselves, to whereby he was elected, you know, they couldn't have had a better choice. And I understand from what I hear, not just from what I hear, what I've read in the newspapers, that he was just an excellent Ambassador to Costa Rica because they really, really liked him quite a bit, because of course, he spoke their language.

G: Speaking about Kennedy, were you and the others who were involved in the '57 campaign, also brought into the Viva Kennedy Movement here in 1960?

A: Oh, yes, yes.

G: Can you tell me a little about that?

A: Again, you know, with the same inspiration because Kennedy of course was just such a...it was all that charisma that he had. To make a long story short, when Kennedy was campaigning and he was coming to El Paso that one night, and speak at the airport, here at the El Paso Airport, we were having a LULAC function that night. I don't recollect what council was having it, but most of the ladies that were there, said, "Well, I don't care about the function, and when he comes, at the hour that he comes, we're taking off," we were all going. And we did. I think most of us just took off; we were coming back to the LULAC function, but most of us took off.

At that time, when we got there to the...it was just jam packed. I mean, thousands of people, But fortunately since I happened to know a lot of people at that time, Mauro Rosas was the state representative, and he was inside the rope. And I remember very distinctly that Mrs. Conrad Ramirez, Cora Ramirez and I, I don't know how we wiggled our way in through where the ropes were. But we were still very far away from the platform and we couldn't even get through with such a mob. And I saw Mauro. Mauro graduated with me from Bowie High School, and I yelled at him, and I said, "Mauro, Mauro come here." And I said, "Is there any way you can get us over there up to the platform?" 'Cause you had to be a V.I.P to be able to get right smack to where the platform was. He said, "Sure come on." And he told the policeman, "I know these women, I'll be responsible for them." So he got us under the ropes and I was standing right smack there where the platform was. When he came to... and the plane flew in, and with him of course was Lyndon Johnson, the mighty Sam Rayburn, and of course the President. And Jackie wasn't with him, but his sisters were. Two of his sisters were there with him. Of course we were all just simply fascinated by the man. Of course he had that charisma that he would just...all you had to do was look at him and you were sold, you know.

G: Was that what particularly attracted you, the charisma?

A: Aside from that of course, that he would be, if he was elected, the first Catholic. To us that meant a lot. To us that are Catholics, it means a lot. I don't know why it should, but it does. It's just like they ask me, "Well, why do you Hispanics think that you're so privileged, what makes you think you're so privileged, why can't you just live alone and quit bringing up the discrimination and all this kind of stuff?" I says, "I don't know." I say, "It's because perhaps we've always been under the thumb of somebody and we're trying to have our own identity. It's not that we want to be superior, but we want to have a little parity, which is something we haven't had." And that's the argument I always bring /out/.

But anyway, I don't know what inspired us other than... Me personally, of course, his youth for one. He identified with us, you know; his youth; his religion; he was just trained so well to be president that I think that perhaps we just fell for all the publicity, us being so far away from Washington. Everything that that represented was what we liked.

G: Was there a particular personal contact between the Kennedy Campaign people and groups like LULAC?

A: There was later on. As a matter of fact the sad experience was, and I'll relate this to you, the day before he died, was he was given honorary membership in LULAC at Houston, Texas. And I was supposed to be over there.

But because I couldn't leave the office and I couldn't afford to travel at that time, I was not at that function. But LULAC honored him the night before he was killed. He was in Houston that night because it wasn't in Dallas, and then the following morning that's when he flew into Dallas and that's when he was killed. And we hold a copy of the certificate that we presented to him and honored him, made him an honorary LULAC member, him and Jackie Kennedy. Isn't that a coincidence? But it happened. That's the night. And our national president at that time, and Mrs. Paul Ando, were the ones that made the presentation. Paul Ando was our national President, I was National Director of Youth. That was the year that I was elected also as Woman of the Year, or the year after, whatever.

G: Were you a member of the Viva Kennedy Club here locally?

A: No. No, I wasn't. I didn't go out and campaign as much as I would've liked because I didn't have the opportunity. But I certainly was helping as much as I could.

G: People were registering for this?

A: Oh, yeah. You know, I'm trying to recollect, it's been such a long time ago, and I'm trying to remember all the Buttons and I'm trying to remember everything. I'm positive that I was, but of course, LULAC at the time not being political, not being able to endorse, we would do it in an individual basis. You know, we

would keep away from the organization because we have a few republicans and so forth in the organization.

G: But you did register a lot of voters?

A: Oh, God, yes.

G: It was very similar to the '57 /Campaign/.

A: Oh, yes, yes, very similar to /that/, because he just inspired all of us. And I remember that we waited, you know, I remember that I didn't sleep all that night because the voting was so close, and we were watching t.v. We stayed up until finally, finally, all of the states came in and for sure he was elected because, I think the margin of his election was only a few...

G: Oh, it was terribly close.

A: Oh, God, it was terribly close. It was just so close that it was just pitiful.

G: Let me ask you about the 1970 Campaign, when Raymond Telles came back and he challenged Richard White for the Congressional seat. Tell me about that campaign and what your position was, and some of the earlier supporters of Telles, because as you well know, the results were rather disastrous.

A: Very disastrous. First, what they were claiming, of course, was the fact that Raymond Telles no longer belonged to the people of El Paso, that he was in Washington and had been over there, he no longer was associated with

El Paso. And I think a lot of people were just very hurt that he left, he took off and left us, you know. Like if we were his little chickens and he took off and he left us. And when he tried to come back and run against the seat that was held by a very conservative Democrat, and a Democrat that a lot of people like, and particularly a lot of Hispanic liked, all right? And of course the staff that White had was certainly Hispanic and happened to be LULAC members and happened to one of my closest friends at the present time. But at that time when he did come, the Hispanic vote was totally divided--totally, totally, totally, divided.

G: You were one of the Telles supporters, I assume?

A: You better believe it, sure I was.

G: But many previous supporters were no longer?

A: No longer there. Queta Fierro was a worker, worked for Congressman White.

G: Why the change, why couldn't they accept Telles in '70 as they accepted him in '57?

A: Because they were still hurt...the fact that he left and didn't stay here.

G: I see, so there was a lot of people who actually resented him leaving.

A: Resented him leaving us. They resented his leaving El Paso because they had thoughts of grandeur that he was gonna be our next Governor, that he was gonna be

staying here in the state of Texas. He was gonna be the greatest Mayor El Paso ever had. And he never finished his second term. They resented that something terrible.

G: You said Richard White was a conservative Democrat. You didn't think that he was that effective in terms of helping the Mexican-American population?

A: I'm sure he was. I'm sure he was. He's always been very responsive, very receptive to the Mexican-American population.

G: But I remember reading the Telles literature in the '70 campaign that pointed out that White had voted against a lot of social legislation, including the Civil Rights Act?

A: He's probably right, they're probably right. But see, a lot of the people didn't know about it, you know, they weren't acquainted with it. I know it and you knew it, but they didn't, you know. And Richard White was so well liked by the Anglo population. And even though, you know, he perhaps at one time when he was a junior Congressman or when he started his first year, he was not as effective as he later was in his other years. He's never been a person to say... I don't know how many bills he went and put through or what he did, but he also didn't make any waves, OK?

G: He was basically a conservative?

A: A very conservative person, and a lot of people like him.



G: Including a lot of Mexican-Americans.

A: Oh, a tremendous amount of Mexican-Americans. The LULAC organization was totally divided, totally divided--one side for White and one side for Telles, where before, it was all Telles.

G: Did you think yourselves that Telles ran an effective campaign in 1970?

A: No, I don't think he did, and he didn't have the support, naturally, of the people that had supported him in the mayoral campaign. He didn't have the money backing that he had then. Richard White had all that money. He had all the big business and everything else. I think Raymond Telles' hands were very much tied, the fact that he had been gone away from the city for so long, was not as familiar as he was. He had been gone quite a number of years, you know.

G: I heard that his ears really wasn't in the campaign.

A: Evidently it wasn't. I think that perhaps he probably was more effective up in Washington and perhaps maybe being an ambassador and being up in the Washington scene, of course that's probably why he thought that he would make a good Congressman. And he probably would've made an excellent Congressman. I have no qualms that he would've been very, very effective; very, very effective. I think maybe perhaps that why he wasn't effective again was the mere fact, like I said, that we don't forget, and a lot of

Hispanics don't forget the fact that he went off and left us.

G: This is 1970, and even here in El Paso there was the beginnings of a very intense youth rebellion among young Chicanos. I undertand that they did not receive him very well.

A: No, no they didn't. And neither did they receive White very well either.

G: So that youth backing that was back there in '57, like yourself, was not here in 1970.

A: Was not there, not all of it. A lot of us still was. Like I said, we were totally divided. And when we're totally divided, like in any other campaign, we're going to be defeated because the Anglo vote is gonna come out and they're gonna pick who they feel is their good representative, you know.

G: One last question. Tell me how important Richard Telles has been to Raymond Telles' career, going back to 1957. What was Richard's role in that 1957 Campaign?

A: Well, he did a tremendous amount of work for Raymond. He totally believes in his brother, and he really, really helped. Now you're saying Richard's effectiveness towards Raymond?

G: For example in the '57 Campaign, how important was Richard Telles?

A: Very important, very important. Now Raymond and Richard are totally two different persons. Richard is a gutter fighter and he'll go out into the barrio. Ese se revuelve con todo mundo. So does Raymond, OK? But Raymond is a much...I'm not saying Richard is not a nicer person, but Raymond, they're different personalities, you know. And Richard will tell it like it is, without any polish or anything.

G: What was Richard's role in the '57 Campaign?

A: Well, he helped him, I know, quite a bit. I think he was already County Commisioner, wasn't he?

G: No, not yet.

A: Not yet, not yet. Well, he had a lot of help. He organized a lot of people to help Raymond, a lot of people, you know.

G: Basically in the southside?

A: Basically in the southside, because see they had their offices, their father had left them... /PAUSE/ I know Richard organized quite a few persons. I mean he was the organizer, he was the mover. He's a mover, he's a doer, he's a hard worker. And he knows the people in the barrio and he can make those people work and make them believe that this is what they want.

G: I've heard it said that Richard Telles basically had a political machine in the southside.

A: He did, he did. It only failed him when he went up

against Judge Moore. I think the best thing he could've done was stay as County Judge. And he'd still be the County Judge. And Solis and the other guy that's running right now would not be, because Richard would've beaten them, you know. He didn't do it this last time because he made a mistake in running against Moore. But he would use to take good care of his constituents and his county, and he used to do a good job at Commisioners Court. And he really took care of his constituents, I can tell you that.

G: This political machine basically started in 1957, that campaign.

A: Yes, and he of course used it very effectively in subsequent campaigns for himself. He had the women volunteers, the women /doing/ this or that.

G: Women from the southside?

A: Southside, Border; I mean, all his district.

G: He had a business in the southside, didn't he?

A: They've always had a business. Yeah, he had a vending machine business, and the three of them, the three brothers, they have not been the totally poor people that were in the barrio because their father had quite a bit of property.

G: He had his own transfer company.

A: He had his own transfer company. And not only that, he had quite a bit of property. And then when he died,

he of course passed it on to his three sons, to where they were not left destitute. Let's face it, they own quite a bit of property. Richard right now has quite a bit of property, and so does Raymond because they've had a little more than perhaps I and many other people have had. But that machine was used at that time, and Richard kept it intact and used it, like I said, subsequently to get himself elected, and he did. And there wouldn't have been anybody to beat him unless he retired, because he'd have been there still, like Rogelio Sanchez has been all along.

G: Do you have any documentation or photographs around the 1957 campaign?

A: No. No, I think my documentation that we have (and we have turned it over to the LULAC Archives) would've been around in the '60s, in the '58s or '60s. Nothing that I can think of in the '57s, 'cause I didn't start gathering documentation at that time. I wish I had. The only one that might've had, you know, who's been very active and that might have some type of documentation and he's a rat pack like I am, that means of course that I gather just about everything. Like look at all the stuff that I've got right there that I haven't...I've got a couple of certificates plus papers on the re-districting that I have and so forth.

Mr. E.B. Leon might have.

G: Oh, yes, I've met him.

A: Have you met him?

G: Yes, and he does have material.

A: Oh, he does, he does. And he was very actively involved in the campaign because he helped Richard and he helped Raymond. He holds Raymond in very high esteem. You know Raymond's back in town.

G: Oh, yes, I've had two interviews with him.

A: Have you had some interviews with him?

G: And we're going to have several more.

A: Yes, yes, he's back in town.

G: I would love to interview these two women, Mrs. Perez and Mrs. Ramirez, 'cause they were involved in setting up the LULAC council which also helped voter registration.

A: They were not involved in 1957. They came on board in early '58. Now wait a minute, you know who would be a tremendous person for you to talk to and he was involved? Mrs. Perez's husband, Alfonso.

G: Alfonso Perez.

A: Yeah, right.

G: You don't have their number by the way?

A: Oh, sure, I know it by heart. They're my compadres.