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Interview no. 91.2

Mrs. Richard Falcón

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Richard Falcón
INTERVIEWER: _____
PROJECT: Press Conference
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 2, 1972
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 91B
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 91B
TRANSCRIBER: Lourdes Tinajero
DATE TRANSCRIBED: August 14, 1973

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Widow of Richard Falcón.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Press conference regarding the circumstances of Falcón's death.

30 minutes (3 3/4 tape speed); 13 pages.

[Tape of Press Conference with persons involved in the investigation of the death of Richard Falcon on September 2, 1972.]

M: I guess we're ready to start. We've got Mrs. Richard Falcón to my left; Ben Rodríguez, who is accompanying her; Rodolfo "Corky" González, from La Raza Unida de Colorado; and Florencio Granado que es una camarada de Sr. Falcón que estuvo con él cuando pasó esta cosa. I'm Francisco Martínez and I'm an attorney. I'm one of the team that has been investigating the matter. At this time we have conducted a preliminary examination and we have several matters that we would like to relate to the public at this time. I believe everyone has focused upon this event at Orogrande. As far as our investigation shows, it's a small town. When the incident happened, the authorities failed to act or cooperate in any manner with our people. The facts as we understand them are that a caravan of a couple of cars from Colorado were coming to the convention. One of the cars was over-heating so they slowed down to let the other car be here on time for the planning session. Now, the car in which Mr. Falcón was riding was driven by Mr. Granado. There were five other occupants in the car. When they arrived at the Chevron station which belonged to Perry Brunson, they drove in to cool the radiator off. They filled the radiator

and they started to put water around it to cool it down somewhat, as it was very hot. The owner, Mr. Brunson, got very angry at this and supposedly there were words between several of the occupants, or at least one of the occupants, of the car and Mr. Brunson. Now, this matter continued. There are no witnesses that we can tie down to having seen Mr. Falcón do anything to Mr. Brunson. We have made contact with several of the state's witnesses in this matter. We do know that there was a struggle; we do know there were four shots from a .38 chief special belonging to Mr. Brunson. Two shots hit Mr. Falcón. There was an autopsy report that has not been released yet. We hope to get that. Mr. Falcón was shot more or less at 4:15 p.m. on the 30th of August. At 4:17, the state police did receive a report that there was a shooting at that station. The officer that arrived immediately was Officer Cunningham who lives in Orogrande. At 4:17 the sheriff in Alamogordo, Nuevo Mexico received a call that there was also an incident. He did not arrive until approximately five minutes before 5:00 on the same evening, 45 minutes later. Officer Cunningham arrived at 4:20. There was no physician who was ever called; there was no attempt to give Mr. Falcón any medical treatment whatsoever. We feel that there was ample time to summon a physician or someone to administer first aid. Apparently, there was no one who attempted in any manner whatsoever from the authorities to administer first aid. One of our own people did attempt to revive Mr. Falcón. When the police did arrive, Mr. Falcón lay

there approximately another hour before he was put in an ambulance and taken back to Alamogordo. Mr. Falcón leaves for Colorado today. The fact I think we've got to emphasize in this matter is the failure of the authorities to cooperate or at least to deal with them. We have already gone into the matter that they had no medical attention given to Mr. Falcón. I think that yesterday we experienced what Mr. Falcón was fighting: the racism that exists in this country. We went down to Alamogordo, spent most of the day there, trying to obtain information. When we first got there, I think we caught them off-guard, and we were getting a bit of information. By the end of the day, no one was available to talk with us; no one knew anything; the doors were slammed in our faces. The district attorney's office has filed a general manslaughter charge. He filed this general manslaughter charge about an hour and a half after he learned about the incident. He merely filed it on his own without investigating it. That, we contend, is very poor procedure for a district attorney to follow. At 6:30, Mr. Brunson appeared in front of the judge. Judge Nader, who lives in Orogrande, of course disqualified himself. Robert Bradley was the magistrate who permitted Mr. Brunson to be released on a personal recognizance bond. As we understand it, when Mr. Brunson was brought into the courtroom, neither Mr. Brunson nor anyone else, no one, advocated why Mr. Brunson should be released on personal recognizance with the exception of one person. The person who advocated that Mr. Brunson be released on a personal recognizance

bond was the judge, Judge Robert Bradley. We feel it's improper for a man in a judicial position to get up there and say, "This man is a good person, he's a businessman," etc., and be permitted a PRB when he killed a person. We attempted to talk with Dr. Lavar who is the county coroner for Otero County in Alamogordo. Dr. Lavar slammed the door in our faces, told us to get out of his office. He gave us about a minute of his time, for which he wanted us to apologize to him for. Dr. O'Brien, who conducted the autopsy, was unavailable to be interviewed, although we do know he was around. Another matter that I think should be brought to the attention of in terms of poor procedure is the fact that an autopsy was performed after there had been arterial embalming, after the tissues had been preserved. With this type of procedure it is virtually impossible for us to obtain an independent, pathological report. We cannot find anyone who would take it. The results that you will get are very poor. We think that again it is improper procedure. I think that the key issue that we should center on, that has been brought to our attention, is the fact that the American Independent Party is involved. At the filling station, there is a petition that the American Independent Party be placed on the official ballot with full rights for the people that advocate the American Independent Party. We know that the presidential candidate for the American Independent Party is a well-known racist, a right-wind extremist, who has close contacts with people throughout this country, and we know in southern Nuevo Mexico. Another

fact that should be emphasized is that when this petition was read, there were names on that petition. Several of the names include a Charlotte Cunningham, reportedly the wife of the investigating officer (Cunningham). Mr. and Mrs. Brunson, who operate the filling station at which Mr. Falcón was killed, was murdered, were also people who signed that petition. I feel that that is a very important matter. It's interesting to note and I think we should also encourage people to follow the example set by several people who have called us, who personally contacted us because they have something for us. They know about the reputation, they know about the character of Mr. Brunson. This type of person we encourage to come forward. I believe Mrs. Falcón is seriously grieved in this matter and she would like to present a brief statement.

F: First of all, I would like to say that my husband wanted this Raza Unida convention to be a success. He lived and he died for La Raza Unida. He worked for La Raza Unida in northern Colorado and we had our office in Ft. Lupton, Colorado. Two years ago, he ran under La Raza Unida for sheriff of Well County. This year he was running for state representative of Colorado. I know that he would want us to go on and run somebody from Ft. Lupton for that office. I'm sure that we will get somebody to run from Ft. Lupton for the position that he was running for. I would like to say that since I've been here on Wednesday, and from what I've been able to see, I know in my heart and in my soul that my husband was murdered. The town of Orogrande and

Alamogordo helped Mr. Brunson in every way they could with the murder, because no attempt of any sort of help was given to my husband. No attempt was made to save his life. Patrolman Cunningham, who was first called to the scene, offered no help; no doctor was called; no ambulance was called. So I think that he, too, along with Mr. Brunson, is just as responsible for the death of my husband. The officials of Alamogordo were very discourteous. They were very insensitive and unfeeling. When I arrived Wednesday afternoon, I went directly to Alamogordo. Up to this day, I have received no official word from the county coroner or the state patrol of New Mexico on the exact incident, or anything that led up to my husband's death. On Wednesday, I went to talk to the state patrol. They were very discourteous. They did not want to talk to me at all. I finally had to go up to the deputy sheriff, Earl Brunson, and tell him who I was and what I was there for. He still turned his back on me and would not look at me; he would not talk to me. I finally had to talk to another officer there at Alamogordo at the state police office. Yesterday, as you heard, we went to Alamogordo and we talked to the district attorney and we talked to the county coroner, who is William Lavar. The district attorney, I think, is a very racist man. He implied that I should not ask him any questions about the incident because I did not know the law of the state of New Mexico. I did not have any right to question him about my husband because I did not know the law! That's what he told me yesterday. Mr. Lavar, who is the county coroner, is nothing but

a racist old man. I went to his office yesterday and he slammed the door in my face. He did not talk to me, he would not answer any questions that we had. I think one of the reasons the district attorney didn't want me asking any questions about the incident was because he knew Mr. Brunson. He often visited Mr. Brunson's station when he was coming to El Paso or when he was leaving Alamogordo. He knew who Mr. Brunson was. He told us that yesterday. I would like to also say that I would like to ask Mr. Brunson and the community of Orogrande and the community of Alamogordo, "How do I tell my two-year-old son that my husband was murdered?" He was murdered in Alamogordo over water, and no help was given to him. I would like to ask them, "Why was he murdered by this racist man, Mr. Brunson, who belongs to the American Independent Party?" How do I explain this to my son? That's all I have to say.

M: I beleive that Mr. Corky González has a comment.

G: First of all, I'd like to say that I don't think anybody can express more fully than the way Mrs. Falcón put it that Ricardo Falcón was murdered. The discourtesies that she suffered as a woman and wife, and the insults that the attorneys that went down with her suffered at the hands of the people of Orogrande and Alamogordo are just one more sign of those racist areas that we're struggling against. First of all, at this time in our own state, Ricardo Falcón is being murdered once more in the press and by the news media. They are trying to relate him to being a militant, an agitator, a La Raza Unida candidate, a La Raza Unida organizer. We'd like to put

some of those facts straight. When Ricardo Falcón first got to Colorado University, there were 37 Chicano students in that university. This September there will be 1000 Chicano students instead of 37. This is through the efforts of such young men as himself, who offered leadership there. In Ft. Lupton, another racist community where the Chicano population is 22%, Ricardo Falcón was definitely a leader there, not only in the state of Colorado but in that area. The biggest charges of racism in the educational system have been filed through the Civil Rights Commission because of his efforts of stimulating the community to take part in reorganizing the inequities in the school system, and among other things, such as attacking the police brutality in that city. It's kind of ironic that Ricardo would end at the end of the same kind of brutality, since he was struggling against that, to protect the young kids, the young people, the young men and women of that community, and the older people, especially those who could only speak in Spanish, the migrant laborer who came in there. He was taking part in the housing struggle for migrants, along with his co-worker, Jose Calderón. He was involved in the same area if you know that part of the state. I think some of these things should be printed and some of these things should be known. In my estimation, he was someone who has tried to develop and tried to create and inspire young people to go back to the community and to give that leadership if necessary to help our people. Ricardo Falcón (not because he's gone; because if he was here today I would make the same statement) is one of the leaders in the Chicano movement because he gave of himself at

all times. He's been jailed. He's been beaten. He's been fired from jobs. But he never gave up the struggle. He's been jailed, not for criminal activities, but for activities based on the human rights of people. So every jailing that he has gone through has been one of honor, not one of dishonor; and not based on crime, but based on justice. We feel that when a district attorney takes the position that he will ask a grand jury not to press charges in Alamo-gordo, we're not going back to 1920 or the Deep South or what the Texas Rangers did in Texas to our people (such as castration and hanging and lynching in this state); we still live with it. If it happened to one person, it happened to all of us. This is the problem in educating not only the masses of our people, but the masses of white America. When we went to the U.S. Attorney General, he said it was a dark day in the pages of the history of white America. That's not as true as it should be. It is a dark day in the pages of the history of the Chicano movement. We lost a man. Brunson walked out on his own personal recognizance. No Chicano in this state, or any state in the Southwest, or any barrio in this country, would have walked out on personal recognizance without a bond between \$100,000 and \$500,000 on charges of first degree murder. No Chicano, no Black, no member of a minority group in this country would have been given the grace that Perry Brunson was given. Perry Brunson reminds us once more of the racist society that we have to deal with. This is why La Raza Unida exists, because we can no longer depend on any other party or any other people to take care of our problems. This is why

we have to organize ourselves: to protect ourselves, to defend ourselves, to educate ourselves, to take care of ourselves. It's a much different aspect, the philosophy of La Raza Unida, than that of the American Independent Party, who go off shooting ghosts in the dark and go looking for Communists under the covers. Anybody of a different shade, a different name, or different culture is immediately branded an agitator. I just want to say that we're carrying the struggle on, because Ricardo Falcón developed to that level of top leadership, through a lot of struggles within himself, within the community, going to the same route that all of us have gone to. We understand the insensitivity of man for man. We see it in the bombs of Vietnam and we see it in the bullets of Orogrande. Chicanos won't forget. I feel that he's only given us more strength to continue. there will be more young men following in his footsteps, who will be looking towards developing their own people with their own defenses, because it won't be forthcoming from this society. We have no peers on the jury and we don't control the system. I can only say that today my speech will be dedicated to Ricardo Falcón, the many Ricardo Falcóns, that were never mentioned or named, who died in barrio streets, or suffered and died in prison. For all of those Ricardo Falcóns, thank you.

?: Well, at this time Lt. Governor Modregón from New Mexico and the federal investigation of the murder, also a battery of attorneys, are meeting today and will be assisting Mr. Martínez, who will be the coordinator at this time. Tony Martínez, district attorney of Las Vegas, has offered

his assistance. Daniel Sosa from Las Cruces has offered his assistance. There will be many such men in legal capacities who will be helping. We intend to have the U.S. Civil Rights Commission investigate it, for what that's worth, for the future. We also have the Justice Department looking into the usage of justice in Orogrande and Alamogordo. There will be nothing covered up in this town as it's been covered up in the past years. We've received many calls from people who have been abused. Orogrande is known as a non-Chicano area; it's tabu for Chicanos. Being from Colorado, Ricardo and Florencio didn't know that. But I think their political status shows their type of mentality. There is nothing that we will not try to expose on this, to bring real justice, although Ricardo Falcón's life can never be brought back. One of the other areas is that there will be civil suits filed against Chevron Oil Company and Perry Brunson. We hope that possibly one of the actions of our newly-formed Congreso at the end of this conference will be to endorse a total boycott of Chevron until this matter is settled. I feel that possibly we can take a very hard effect on them. We've done it in other areas; the boycott has been effective. Other than losing their blood, the capitalist society of this country fears more to lose their money than even their life. With that, I'd say that we are working in all areas. We're not holding up anything. There are memorial funds that are being started in Colorado. There are people getting together; there are people from across this nation

who have offered their help. With that, I'd like to have Raul Ruiz, a candidate of La Raza Unida in California, read you some telegrams.

R: The national convention has received many letters and calls of grief and concern over the death of Ricardo Falcon. In one of our first positions, we declared that the death was a cold-blooded murder. The national convention has done that. These are telegrams we have received. I'll just read them to you.

"Hermanos,

We have just received the tragic news of our hermano, Ricardo. It is these kinds of events that provoke our further determination in pursuing nuestra causa. With this in mind, we, the Trabajadores, pledge, whatever assistance is possible to you in the course you choose to rectify this tragic injustice."

Carlos Tafoya

Chairman of Trabajadores

This comes from Pueblo, Colorado.

"I have today requested a formal investigation by the New Mexico Attorney General's Office, and sent a similar telegram to U.S. Attorney General Richard Kleindeinst adding my support of a federal investigation by Lt. Governor Robert Mondragon of New Mexico. I am shocked at the killing of young Ricardo Falcon. I assure you of my efforts to see that justice is done in this act of insanity. I am contacting the U.S. Attorney General to

see that immediate action be taken to initiate investigative proceedings."

George McGovern

U.S. Senator

"I share Senator McGovern's shock at the shooting last night of Ricardo Falcón and also his appeal to the Attorney General's office for an immediate investigation. My staff has talked with the Attorney General's office to express my concern."

Sargent Shriver

We feel that many of these letters of grief and concern will come to naught. This is not the first time that a Chicano has been murdered; it will not be the last. Hopefully, the press will begin to play it up, because this is all we really have. The callous murder of our people must end. Hopefully with this coming out in the news, people will become aware of what kind of society they live in. Thank you.