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Interview no. 414.1

Rudolfo Candelaria

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Rodolfo Candelaria (1904-)
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 5, 1976
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: 414 A
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DATE TRANSCRIBED: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in El Paso, Texas in 1904.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biographical information; growing up in Second Ward; school; Mexicans in government jobs and politics; the Mexican Revolution; Prohibition; jobs held; ASARCO; the Depression.

Length of Interview: 1 hour Length of Transcript: 29 pages

M: First, Mr. Candelaria, can you tell me when and where you were born?

C: I was born here in El Paso, the 13th day of February, 1904, at 907 S. Stanton.

M: That's in South El Paso.

C: That's right. We all used to call it el segundo barrio, Second Ward.

M: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents, their background?

C: Well, my father was born in Ysleta, Texas. My mother was born in La Mesilla, New Mexico; Old Mesilla. And they were married in Ysleta, Texas. When I grew up and knew my dad, he was working with the Police Department. The Police Department was then on Overland Street and Stanton. It was joined by the Fire Department. The Fire Department was right on the corner of South Stanton; next was the Police Department, a two-story building. On the lower floor was his office and Chief of Police--I don't recall his name--and on the second floor was a court, the Corporation Court. And then there was an alley, and then there was a Chinese laundry. My school days were at St. Mary's. It used to be on Myrtle and Ange Street. There I went for six grades, as far as all the grammar school I had. Then I started working. I used to work for Ramon Telles. I was trying to make myself an automobile mechanic. I worked there for a while, and then when one day he sent me to a machine shop to have a block rebored, fit rings and grind the bearings, I said, "Uh, uh. My job is not going to be a mechanic, I'm going to be a machinist." So I shifted. I started working in shops. The first shop I worked in was El Paso Foundry. But before that I went to El Paso High School; I took manual training. My teacher was Mr. Sacks in the machine shop. I took Machine Shop Practice, ROTC, and the Math that we needed in Machine Shop. Then I also served with

the Texas National Guard, 36th Division, E Company, 131st Infantry. I was their Supply Sergeant. And since I knew a little about mechanics, I was taking care of the rifles, repairing. All that repair was just to replace parts; [I] didn't have to make them. And then I come back to old El Paso. Down on South Stanton we had Ramon Gomez, who was the father of Modesto Gomez, who's still living.

M: Modesto Gomez, yes. I interviewed him.

C: He told you more than I can, because he is older than I. He knew me since I was a kid. He taught me how to drive a car, he had a Ford Model T. And he was working for the International Cigar Company. He taught me how to drive a Studebaker and a Ford. And I used to go around with him on sales. That was before what I said before. Then Kid Payo and Jim Payo, they're uncles of Saul Paredes. Do you know him?

M: I don't know him personally, I know of him.

C: He can tell you more; he was my next door neighbor.

M: Is he about your age?

C: No, he is older. Saul Paredes is around 75, more or less.

M: I'm curious to know what you remember about growing up in South El Paso.

C: Well, at that time South El Paso was nothing but a little town; we had everything close by. _____ Bakery was owned by the Paredes family. Across the street was a butcher shop, owned by a fellow named Chema, that was his nickname. He passed away. We had everything around here. Another place that we used to get together was The Quien Sabe. That was owned by an Italian, it was on 4th and South Stanton. And then there was the First Baptist Church on 5th and Stanton, another Protestant church, Methodist, on 4th and Stanton. Then [there were] grocery stores on both sides of

the street, selling fruits, vegetables, and groceries. Then the railroad used to come on Texas Street, and the streetcar used to run from El Paso to Juarez in a circle. Then the Second Ward Streetcar used to come to Seventh Street, go around, come to town and back. The Juarez [Streetcar] used to come from North Stanton and pass to Juarez.

M: Do you remember a lot of people from Juarez who used to go through Stanton Street on their way back? There's always been a lot of traffic on Stanton Street.

C: Oh, yes, but I was just a kid.

M: But do you recall a lot of traffic, people going by there?

C: Oh, yes, plenty of heavy traffic, sure, with the streetcars. And at that time we still had horses and buggies, one or two automobiles. There weren't many cars at that time. This place where I live now was nothing but mountains. My dad and I used to go shoot rabbits right here at this place. The Police Firing Range used to be on Hawthorne and Schuster, a big stone wall. I think that's still there, if I'm not mistaken, on Hawthorne Street over there. There was no College of Mines then, nothing; that came years later. No high school, that came after the First World War when that school was built. I think it was [the old Morehead] School on Arizona and Kansas.

M: What did you do as a kid in your neighborhood?

C: Played with the kids.

M: What kind of games did you play?

C: Escondidas, hide and go seek; and sometimes Indians and Cowboys--you know, kids' games. We used to have a gang of our own. Among our members was Saul Paredes, Ernesto Herrera and Tito Paredes. I don't remember them

other fellas. We used to fight with stones against each other. At that time there were no buildings around there. The canal had no fence. Some of the kids fell off of them once; that kept me out. I still like to go back to the old days. There was no traffic. Well, to my way of thinking, it was better.

M: Do you remember a lot of those tenements that they have in South El Paso?

C: Yeah, but I don't remember the names of the owners. There used to be a tenement right across the street from us on South Stanton, it still is; and then another one farther down. When the United States had this cambio de territorio back to Mexico, those houses were torn down, tenements. And there were a lot of them on Seventh, East, West, they're all torn down.

M: How did Mexican people live there? Was it crowded?

C: No, it wasn't crowded. It was crowded over here towards the Union Depot on Chihuahua Street and Durango, and those places. But over there we weren't. We had law and order.

M: You say you ran around with a little gang.

C: Oh, just kids around the neighborhood, yeah.

M: Was it more of a friendly gang rather than some of these gangs that we have now?

C: Oh, no, it wasn't like that. My father and their parents wouldn't allow us. My father had been a police officer. He was in charge of everything there, and some of the cops that were around there. No, nothing of that sort in those days. It was law and order with the kids. In those times, kids worked. Now kids don't have a damn thing to do but raise hell. You can see that yourself. We didn't have none of those [gangs]. For instance, I had to come home from school and chop wood, help my mother clean the stove,

get the ashes out and get ready for supper. I had to run errands. Of course, everything was close together. If I played, I'd play after doing my homework. Sometimes too late to go. A kid used to work in those days.

M: What school did you go to?

C: St. Mary's.

M: That was a Catholic School.

C: That's right, on Myrtle and Ange Street.

M: Was it mostly Mexican kids in that school?

C: No, Americans. They wouldn't even let us speak Spanish. We were there to learn English, and English was the language spoken. Well, among ourselves, kids would get together [and speak Spanish]. There was Eddie Swyer, and there was my cousins, Pablo Garcia, Arturo Maese, another fella named Rudy (but I don't remember his last name, and a Syrian named Joe (I don't remember his last name either). He used to live on San Francisco and Leon Street. His father used to have a grocery store. Then later when the Chinese quit the laundry, _____, which afterwards it moved to Second and Utah, which is now Mesa. They changed the name. It was Utah, and then Broadway, then San Jacinto, and now it's Mesa.

M: As I remember, that was the Red Light District.

C: That's right.

M: What do you remember about that?

C: I didn't go.

M: Did you ever go by there?

C: No through the street, no.

M: Did you know what was there?

C: Oh, yes, I knew what was there, through the older kids. But at that time,

no kid would go around that neighborhood. Oh, no. They had law and order with the kids then.

M: Mr. Candelaria, what experiences or incidents stand out in your mind from your grammar school days, that you remember the most?

C: Well, in grammar school, I used to learn my English; then we had Arithmetic, Spelling, Handwriting (what we used to call Penmanship). We used to go to grammar school till we got to the sixth. That school was run by Sister Zalbareto, and the pastor was Father Roy, a Frenchman. I don't remember his first name, his last name was Roy. Our first Bishop was Bishop Schuller. I think he took care of the school for a time, too; I'm not sure about that. But he was our first Bishop.

M: Did they treat the Mexican kids good there?

C: Sure! There were only a few, the ones I named, my sisters and my cousins.

M: Where was the school located?

C: At Myrtle and Ange, right on the corner of Myrtle and Ange; and between St. Vrain and Ange, and then on the rear by Magoffin.

M: That wasn't the Mexican neighborhood, then?

C: No, no.

M: It was away from the Mexican neighborhood. Did you have a long ways to walk?

C: From Seventh over there. I used to walk to school, then come for lunch, and walk back. I used to take my sisters.

M: Was that unusual? Most of the kids in your neighborhood must have gone to the public school.

C: Oh, yeah. I was the only one in that neighborhood that went to that school. Later on, the family Herrera sent one or two of their girls there, and also Avocato, an Italian. I think he sent one or two of his daughters there

to school, too. They used to walk there with my sisters and myself.

M: Was the education you received at the Catholic school better than at a public school?

C: Sure it was. That's where you learned how to obey your parents. Nowadays they don't. Yes, sir, we were brought up straight Catholics; and [they taught] obedience to your parents, allegiance to your country. We used to raise the American flag every morning, raise it up and salute. And then I remember one time a sergeant at Fort Bliss gave us military training. We had an Army uniform, and we used to drill with our rifle. I had a 22 rifle, we all had 22's. So we had our drill on the school grounds.

M: Did you get along well with the Anglo kids?

C: Sure. Oh, once in a while, for instance, they'd call you a "Mexican." That's natural.

M: They called you "dirty Mexican?"

C: Oh, something of that sort.

M: And you got into fights with them?

C: Oh, sure.

M: Did that happen a lot?

C: No. We had the best fighters, even though they outnumbered us. I learned my punches from Kid Payo. He passed away about two, three years ago. He was Saul Paredes's uncle. And then years later I wrestled professionally when they started wrestling here in El Paso. I did weightlifting, fencing, archery, shooting. Now I go shooting with my firearms, pistol, 22, 100 millimeter, 45, rifles, 222, 3006. I shoot once in a while.

M: You're quite a sportsman.

C: Just trying to keep fit; I'm not a spring chicken anymore, but...

M: After grammar school where did you continue school?

C: I didn't continue. I started working, 'cause my father pulled me out of the grammar school, 'cause he was a sick man with asthma. So I had to work for a while. And then when he got better I went to El Paso High and took Manual Training, Machine Shop Practice, and Drafting, 'cause a machinist has to learn how to read blueprints to make things; for instance, make a valve and make the pistons, make rings for the motor, turn crankshafts, make gears, pinions. You have to know how to draw them; that is, mechanical drawing. And then they handed you a print to make [things, and you have to] know what you're doing. And the mathematics you knew there, for a machinist was very simple--decimals.

M: How long were you out of school?

C: A little while.

M: And you were working at that time?

C: Oh, yeah, I had to.

M: What did you do?

C: Well, I used to work as a delivery boy. I had an uncle who was a butcher, he got me a job at the old City Market, the one that was on San Antonio, the City Market.

M: You must have been about 12 years old?

C: Something like that, 13.

M: Was that unusual to be out of school and working, or did a lot of other kids do it, too?

C: No, we all had to. Since I left school I had to do it. For instance, my cousins, they used to work after school and Saturdays and half-day Sundays. I started working at Ramon Duran's automobile shop learning automobile work, mechanics. At that time was the Ford Model T, and then came the

Studebaker, Grayhan Page, which later became the Chevrolet and things of that sort. Then I had a little training about Cadillacs, big cars, afterwards. I left all that to be a machinist. I liked it better.

M: Tell me a little bit about your father's work.

C: Well, he was clerk of the Corporation Court when he was working with the Police Department, then at one time he worked in the office of the Fire Department. See, in politics, if you worked for the wrong fellow, you lost your job. So when Tom Lea ran for mayor of El Paso, he voted against him, because he was with Kelly. And Tom Lea was judge of the Corporation Court. But Tom Lea didn't last but one term [as mayor] 'cause he didn't like the Mexican people. He wouldn't even clean South El Paso at all. So everybody looked to my father as one of the leaders of South El Paso, and he got a lot of petitions, signatures, and finally they cleaned South Stanton Street and all the Second Ward around there, 'cause it was a mess. Then my father came back to work with the city when Charles Davis was elected mayor, and he worked under R. E. Thomason also, when he was mayor. And then he worked as a deputy sheriff under Orndorf, I think it was, and [another] fellow. He served with two sheriffs, Sid Orndorf and the other one. He died with asthma.

M: Were there many Mexicans working in city government like your father?

C: Oh, yeah, there were a few.

M: What kinds of jobs did they have?

C: They had office work, some of them were sheriffs, some of them were policemen, out on the beat on the street.

M: Were any Mexicans in politics?

C: Oh, yeah, sure! There was Domingo Montoya, Escajeda, Alderete, there was a

while family from down the valley. There was my uncle down in Ysleta, Frank.

M: Did they hold office?

C: Well, I think the Escajedas did, and they ran for some kind of clerk, county clerks, I think. I'm not very sure if both of them did or not. The one who could give you more information on that is Modesto Gomez. He was older and I was just a kid when all that took place. Modesto, he was not in politics as a whole, but he liked to mix once in a while. They even tried to make him mayor. That was after he came back from the Service. He was in the Service during the First World War.

M: Was there a lot of politics in the Mexican community?

C: Oh, yeah, There was The Mutualista, it used to be on Fifth and South Stanton, Circulo de Amigos, it used to be on Seventh and South Stanton. Those were all for one, for the same thing, contra el americano.

M: Contra el americano?

C: Si, cuando no nos trataban bien. For instance, when they didn't care about them, see?

M: When you say, "cundo no nos trataban bien," what do you mean?

C: I mean, for instance, when Lea was mayor, he didn't want to clean South El Paso.

M: Was South El Paso very dirty?

C: No, not very, but when it rains, Seventh Street used to get full of water, just like a river there, Seventh and Stanton; and also Seventh East and West, but mostly East. On South Stanton and Seventh, we used to have water that deep when I was a kid. We used to play there, swimming in there.

(Chuckles)

- M: Swimming in the muddy water.
- C: Yeah, just like kids play here now.
- M: And the city didn't want to do anything to clean it up?
- C: No, not until the people there got together and started complaining, getting their rights, and then they fixed it up.
- M: Did Tom Lea make any negative statements about the Mexican people?
- C: I don't remember. My father kept a paper where Tom Lea made some of those remarks against the Mexican government. After he passed away I tried to find it, but I guess he gave it away.
- M: Well, let's see, then you went to El Paso High School?
- C: That's right. I got my diploma in Manual Training and Machinist.
- M: What year was that, when you went there?
- C: I don't remember exactly, I would say around '21, '22. I think it was '21 and '22.
- M: Were there a lot of Mexican students there?
- C: Oh, yeah, many. Dr. de la Torre, the dentista, he was there with me in Manual Training, Machine Shop.
- M: Is he here now?
- C: Oh, sure! He's a dentist here, Abelino de la Torre. He lives here some place on North Stanton. His family still owns De la Torre and Sons Wholesale and Retail groceries, on South Stanton. And the others I was going to mention, they passed away, I don't remember their last names. There are very few of us left.
- M: Did you mix with the Anglo kids at El Paso High?
- C: Sure, sure I did.
- M: Did you get along with them?

C: I got along. Whenever they tried to pick on a Mexican fellow that didn't know how to fight (since at that time I started wrestling), I'd say, "Leave that guy alone." "What do you care?" I said, "Come on. I'll take care of you." I was wrestling professional. A big guy like you was no fight for me.

M: No problem, huh?

C: Look, I'm 72.

M: You're still in pretty good shape. Solid.

C: Yeah. A fellow like you was no problem for me. If you'd pick on a guy and he didn't know how to fight, that's one thing I never did like, to see a fellow get whipped when he didn't know how to defend himself. I'd say, "Leave that fellow alone." "Why?" "Get the hell outa here." If he didn't, well, I said, "Come on." The same way, if you'd see a girl on the street, you know how some guys are. I'd tell them, "You leave that lady alone." "What's it to you?" "I'll show you what it is to me." I'd tell her, "You just keep on going, I'll take care of it." That's the way I've been all my life; same way in the shops.

M: Where did you get that fighting spirit?

C: It's just born. My father was a good slugger, too. I saw him get some of the guys. Since he was an officer and some of the fellas started getting in street fights, he just started arresting them. And if some of them jumped on him, why... Besides, I learned my punches from Payo. And then I took up wrestling when I saw my first wrestling match at Liberty Hall. That was _____ Jordan and I don't remember who else. But I took my lessons in wrestling from Marty _____. I wrestled for a few years, then my dad made me stop, he says, "That's enough." 'Cause I was going

too fast. He says, "That won't do you no good. You better stick to [being a] machinist." So I did.

M: Mr. Candelaria, in those days did many Mexican kids go to college?

C: College? Yeah. The college was then the Texas School of Mines. My cousins graduated from there, Arturo Maese and Bob Maese, and I forget the rest of them. I knew a lot of them, because they were older than I, like my oldest cousin. There were several Mexican boys there; plenty. At that time I believe there were more Mexican students than Americans, I think. Of course, there were lots of Americans, too.

M: What do you remember about the Revolution?

C: Oh, the Revolution, Pancho Villa, yeah! The one that can give you good stories is my wife; she went through hell over there in Durango, where she grew up. I remember, oh, I was just a kid, I used to read in the paper about it. I remember when Villa or Madero, when they first took Juarez, the American Army was all over the river. That was the Texas National Guard from the east. Where Bowie School was then, it used to be called Camp Cotton; that's where the Army was stationed. Those fellows were guarding the border, all along here in El Paso to the Smelter. Here by the Smelter, you know the railroad tracks at the top? Well, they had machine guns there on the trains. My dad used to take us to see the soldiers there, patrolling the river. It was an Army town; we had Fort Bliss, too. At that time it was the cavalry and field artillery.

M: What else do you remember seeing?

C: Well, just the Army. And then during Prohibition time, I used to see smugglers running in their cars, either in automobiles or whatever they could, and I saw some shooting between the smugglers and the officers.

I saw some smugglers get killed in the street, or an officer get wounded or an officer get killed.

M: You actually saw people get shot on the street?

C: Sure, sure! And my mother used to say, "Come in, come in! Don't get hurt!" Getting us out of the way! Yeah, they used to go in daytime and nighttime. In Prohibition time, when the United States was dry, everybody was smuggling goods from across the river.

M: By that time, you were in your 20s?

C: I was around 18 or 19.

M: Prohibition started here in El Paso in 1918 and it ended in 1933.

C: I was 18 or 19, something like that, when I saw that.

M: Did you go over to Juarez yourself, to go to a bar down there, drink a beer?

C: No, I didn't do that. My father had a saloon before Prohibition, and I was raised on wine and beer. My father used to give us wine all the time. When you'd get up in the morning, you had a little glass of wine. And at noon we'd come home for lunch from school, and I had a glass of beer or two, and go back to school. One day when I was in grammar school at St. Mary's, the nun smelled my breath, and she says, "Where've you been?" I says, "Home." "What have you been drinking?" I says, "Beer." She says, "Where?" I said, "Home." She wouldn't believe me. She says, "You go home and give this note to your dad." "Okay." I got home my father was working. He was then with the Police Department. My mother said, "What's that?" "The Sister gave me that." "Fine." It was in an envelope, I didn't know what it said, So she handed it to my dad. My dad starts laughing, he says, "Tomorrow we'll go to school." So we went to school and he explained to the nun that I drank beer all the time, and I still do.

M: That was the custom.

C: Sure.

M: So it was no big deal for you to go to Juarez.

C: No, I didn't care for drinking.

M: Could you still do it during Prohibition? How did your father get the beer?

C: No, no, he quit. They had no beer during Prohibition.

M: You quit drinking?

C: Yeah.

M: Didn't you go to Juarez sometimes?

C: My father used to take us, because Mr. Luis Webber had a bar and a poolhouse on Fifth and South Stanton called La Mutualista. So when Prohibition came, he moved to Juarez. So he invited us to go Sundays there with his family and eat there at his restaurant and drink beer. But for myself, for liquor, no.

M: You weren't hooked on it.

C: No, I don't care for it. I never smoked; drinking, just like I said, just with my meals.

M: Did you visit Juarez, and look at all the places that they had over there, during Prohibition?

C: Well, I visited Juarez, but not during Prohibition.

M: You didn't go over there too often?

C: With my parents. I had cousins there at that time that I used to go see, once in a great while. They are now here in the States. Some of them passed away. One of them has a gas station here on Texas and Willow Street, a Texaco. I used to go see his mother, but he was born afterwards. He's only 50 years old now.

- M: I've heard and I've read that during Prohibition, there was a big problem with the bridge. Some people wanted to close the bridge early and there were constant fights here.
- C: They did have that, I remember that. First they used to keep it open till midnight, 12:00, and then they closed it at 9:00. I remember that, yes.
- M: And a lot of people got caught over there, and had to spend the night in Juarez.
- C: Yes, they had to spend the night at Juarez. I remember that, you're right.
- M: That never happened to you?
- C: No, no! I didn't have no business over there. My father used to keep us here.
- M: Your father was strict with you. Did you start working after you graduated from El Paso High School?
- C: Yeah. I started working at El Paso Foundry. I worked there one year till [it went] broke, and then I went to Southern Pacific, where I finished my apprenticeship, and worked there 12 years, six months. And then from there I quit on account of my health. I was with the graveyard shift. I used to go in at 5 o'clock and work till midnight, sometimes stay all night till the next shift came in to finish the work. That ran me down, so I quit. Then I went to work for J.E. Morgan and Sons, when they _____ Fort Bliss. He gave me the job as lumberyard foreman, checking up the lumber going in and coming out. Then when the war broke out, I went to work for the Ordinance as a machinist. Then I went to work for Fort Bliss. When I was at the Ordinance at Fort Bliss they sent me to Fort _____, Oklahoma, had me [going] back and forth. And then for some reason I gave that job up and went to Biggs Field. I worked as a machinist also, I was foreman there.

From there I went to the Smelter, and worked as a machinist with AS and R until I retired. I worked 23 years at the Smelter.

M: 23 years at the Smelter. When did you retire?

C: Oh, seven years ago. I was an all-around machinist. To be a machinist in El Paso, you had to work in any machine they give you, not only one machine. That's why they'd been having trouble. At that time there used to be some machinists from the East who said they were machinists. The kind of machinists they were were one-machine men, and that machine had to be adjusted by somebody else. We didn't have that machine here. They used to give you blueprints to make [something]. You had to cut a gear, use the middle machine; you got a board, use the lace; you want to lay it out, go to the table there and lay out your work. That's where the mechanical drawing comes in.

M: Did you ever have any problems getting a job here in El Paso?

C: No. Well, I did sometimes, yes; when there were no vacancies, things of that sort.

M: In the jobs that you had, were you ever paid less than Anglo workers?

C: No, all the same.

M: Did you know Mexicans who were paid less than Anglo workers?

C: No.

M: Everybody got paid the same.

C: We all got paid the same.

M: Did you know of any discrimination against Mexicans in employment?

C: Oh, yes, but not from the big boss; it was among the workers. Some of those Mexican guys were darn good machinists, better than the Yankees there, damn good. Especially, I learned a lot from a German. We used to

call him Fritz. That guy was tops. I was one of his favorites when I set up my apprenticeship. He was a sick man, so I used to help him with everything I could. That's why he took an interest in me. There was a little discrimination, but not from the big company, just from the workers themselves. They were jealous of [the Mexican workers] because they knew better. We had a Mexican fellow that was in Villa's army, his name was Sandoval. That fellow would work on the lace and on the floor. By "on the floor" I mean where they take the locomotive apart. This happened at Southern Pacific. [When] the wheels of the locomotives are balanced, they put them on the bench, and they swing. Those guys would put a gauge [on it] to gauge [the weight]. This fellow didn't. He just picked them up, started swinging [them], and would say, "Take 10 pounds off," or "Add 20", or whatever was needed, and everything was perfect. He used to have a padding shop here on Alameda and Copia. That guy was tops in mechanics, as well as machine shop [and] repairing.

M: You never were aware of cases where Mexicans were denied employment, because they were Mexicans?

C: No. If you was a machinist, you got a job.

M: What about in other jobs?

C: Well, I never did try others, I don't know about others. I only worked in the shops all my life. All my life I've been a machinist.

M: Did you ever hear of discrimination toward Mexicans?

C: Oh, yes, I heard; yes.

M: In housing?

C: No, not at that time, no. Housing, hoy en dia. Everybody used to live in South El Paso and East El Paso, the Mexican people; no problem.

M: Was there a dividing line between the Mexican and the Anglo communities?

C: Well, could have been, but I never did pay any attention to it, because there were some Mexicans on this side of the tracks, too. That's what we used to call it at that time, "the tracks."

M: Were the tracks the dividing line, more or less?

C: Yeah, but I knew a lot of Mexicans who used to live on this side, too. For instance, during the Revolution in Mexico, Sunset Heights was built by the Mexican people that came from Mexico. They're the ones that built Sunset Heights, they're the ones that built the Holy Family Church and the school, the people that lived there. For instance, the family Samaniego who were doctors, and others, they're the ones that built Sunset Heights. They was people that had money from Mexico, and came to live here. Some of them went back, others died here.

M: There was an incident here in 1916, when Pancho Villa's troops killed some engineers in Santa Isabel.

C: I heard about it.

M: Some of them were from El Paso, and their bodies were sent over here; and people here in El Paso were very upset. I've read in the newspapers of those days that a mob of a thousand Anglos wanted to clean out the Mexican colony and send the Mexicans back across the river.

C: No.

M: You don't remember any of that?

C: Nothing happened of that sort here. How could they do that? We were all American citizens born and raised here. There were very few Mexicans that came during the Revolution that came to live here. For instance, the ones I said before that built Sunset Heights, scattered here and there.

Those that had money had the best homes here, even on this side of the tracks. Those that didn't [have money] lived where I used to live, on South El Paso, South Stanton, Kansas, Ochoa, Virginia Street, towards the East and towards the West. South El Paso Street at that time was a very busy street in business. They had grocery stores, meat markets, moving pictures, one-picture houses and vaudvilles. For instance, the moving pictures were El Hidalgo, at South El Paso and Fourth; farther down was the Eden, then farther down the Eureka and then the Rex, the Alcazar; and then the Alhambra was built by a Mexican from Chihuahua. You had very beautiful vaudvilles. Before you got to that was the Grecian Theatre, and then across the street was the Lyric, vaudville; and then next one was the Bijou and then was the Unique, and then the Wigwam.

M: There were plenty.

C: For 5 cents us kids would go in and then when I got a little older it was 10 cents. They used to have streetcars all over El Paso, no buses then. You took the streetcar to go here and go there. Or if you had a horse and buggy, you got in your horse and buggy; or if you liked to ride a horse, [you rode a horse]. If you had a Ford, that was the main car at that time, the T Model Ford. And then later of course, the people that had money had big cars--the Page, Studebaker, Cadillacs, big cars.

M: When you were a young man, what did you do on a Saturday night to have a good time?

C: Well, my sisters liked to go dancing, I'd take my sisters. Or my father would make us a dance at the house and invite our friends. They wouldn't let us go around. We weren't that kind.

M: Real strict, huh?

- C: For instance, my sister used to belong to a club of young ladies, I can mention some of those girls who are now Ph.D.s, school teachers: Virginia Gomez (who is now Mrs. Baños), her sister Delfina, her other sister Maria, and then another sister that passed away, Blanca Gomez de Hill; they came from Mexico, that family. They're all school teachers here; tops, too. And then other, I don't remember their names. Those girls were friends of ours, and my father used to make a party at home or they organized a club and they rented the Sheldon Hotel, had a nice big dancing hall.
- M: They had parties there?
- C: Yeah. Running around? Not for us. Others, yes. I remember the Bluebird, it used to be on Texas and Stanton at the corner, that was public; I never did go there. No, my dad was too strict, he knew every damn place. If I did something, he knew it. [With him] working for the Police Department, all the cops knew me. (Chuckles)
- M: You had to be pretty straight, huh?
- C: I had to!
- M: What about the Depression, Mr. Candelaria? What do you remember about that?
- C: Oh, I was married then. It was pretty rough, you bet you it was. My wife was working as a nurse, and the reason I couldn't get a job was 'cause only one in a family was allowed to work. I was working for the railroad at that time, see, and we were laid off. Of course, when the Depression came we used to work two or three days a week, and gradually they kept cutting the days until finally they closed up. And my wife started working as a nurse in the old Providence Hospital. It used to be on Upson and Santa Fe, right on the corner.
- M: How long were you out of work?

- C: Well, quite a while; I don't remember exactly.
- M: What did you do when you didn't have work?
- C: Well, I took care of the kids while [my wife] worked; she was working nights. Or if I could, [I'd] land a job helping a fellow fix a car, or whatever he had to do. For instance, if a water line broke, I'd help him out. He didn't have a job either, [so] we helped each other. If they'd give you 50 cents, it was a hell of a lot of money then. That was the Depression. Now they have handouts. That's the worst thing they have done, instead of putting a fellow to work. People don't want to work now. In those days, that was the time they built the Scenic Drive. It was very narrow, just for a horse. Now they widened and fixed it from one end to the other.
- M: I understand that a lot of people went to Juarez during those years because food was cheaper there.
- C: Oh, yeah. I was one of them. For a dollar, I used to get a lot of food, for one buck.
- M: What things did you buy over there?
- C: Oh, whatever you needed: tortillas, queso, huevos, lechugas, tomatoes, chile, whatever you'd eat. Sometimes meat.
- M: Did they ever give you problems on the bridge, bringing it back?
- C: No.
- M: I understand that some of the merchants over here didn't like that.
- C: Oh, of course they didn't like it! They were too damn high for us! So if you need something and you have a family, what the hell you going to do? You look to feed them some way. Between whatever pay she was getting, two or three dollars, and whatever I made, if I found something to do, we got groceries in Juarez, sure! Sure, you had to , you couldn't afford to

buy it here. It was a lot cheaper in Juarez.

M: Where did you live during those years?

C: I was living on 625 Upson during the Depression. The house still stands, a two-story building.

M: When did you go back to work?

C: When the Depression was over, I went back to the railroad.

M: Do you know about when? In the late '30s?

C: Something like that; yeah, the late '30s, because [the Depression] started here in the early '30s, late '20s. I went back to the railroad.

M: Then World War II came along. Did that have any effect on your family?

C: I was 1-A when I was working for the railroad.

M: When did you go into the Service?

C: I didn't go into the regular Service, I volunteered into the National Guard before the war came.

M: In between the First World War and the Second World War?

C: That's right. There was Saul Paredes and I, Madrid, Delgado. Delgado's still here, but I don't know his adress. Madrid is not here anymore. Roberto Delgado was Platoon Sergeant, and I was Supply Sergeant. Saul Paredes was First Sergeant. Captain Hughes is now dead. I forget the names of the other fellows. I joined the National Guard to learn military training, 'cause I always liked it. And then when the war came in, we were old, because we were over 35, and we were married and had small children. So those were out, and I was one of them.

M: Did El Paso change a lot as a result of World War II?

C: Oh, yeah.

M: A lot of soldiers here?

- C: Oooh, yeah, crowded! Plenty of 'em. Just like in the First World War, we did too, we had a lot of soldiers [then]. Modesto Gomez was in the Service. He was in 350th Ammunition Training, he was a sergeant. Cleofas Calleros was with that. He now passed away.
- M: I interviewed him, too.
- C: Cleofas Calleros, I knew him. And his brother, Ismael, and I were in the National Guard together. Then I met his brother when I joined the Knights of Columbus.
- M: How did you like working for ASARCO, the Smelter?
- C: No trouble.
- M: A lot of Mexicans working there?
- C: Oh, yes! 99%. [Maybe] not that much, but there were more Mexicans there [than Americans]. The only Americans there [were the foremen]. Now they have Mexican foremen, but at first they didn't.
- M: They didn't have Mexican foremen?
- C: No.
- M: Why not?
- C: Well, they didn't qualify. They tried to make me a foreman, but I turned it down.
- M: Why?
- C: I didn't like it. You had to go day and night; hell, no! When something goes wrong, they call the foreman, then the foreman calls the machinist. I says, "Oh, no. I'll stay as a machinist." They didn't call me but one or twice, otherwise I'd have to go [more often]. And besides, I'd have to stay to finish a job overtime. Oh, no. But now they have Mexican foremen. I'll tell you what happened once. After the Second World War, they couldn't

get no machinists, because these machinists that used to come and work at the Smelter, like I said, before, they were one-machine men. You'd put them on something else and they didn't know nothing about it. The superintendent (I don't remember his name, he passed away), him and I used to get along fine. So one day he says, "Rudy, what am I going to do? I need a machinist and I can't find him." I says, "That's simple." He says, "What?" "Well, these Mexican boys that've served their country, they're entitled to have better jobs. Let's get going." "Who's going to train them?" "I do. You just tell the foreman to leave me alone. If he wants the job done, I'll do it; [but does he] want the job first or do you want me to teach those boys?" "Go ahead." Before that time, ASARCO had a school for machine shop, as apprentice, but that time they didn't have it. So I began to teach them. Some of them are still there, some of them are now foremans. I go there and they call me, "Maestro." You go there and ask them for Rudy Candelaria, they'll say, "El Maestro." They don't call me Rudy Candelaria.

M: You trained a lot of them.

C: Yeah, I'd teach them how to run their machines, sharpen their tools. Some of them are still there, some are foremans. I broke them in.

M: Were you happy at ASARCO all those years?

C: Sure!

M: I'm curious about the wages that they paid there in comparison to what they would pay you if you were working someplace else, in other parts of the United States.

C: Well, let me tell you, the nation is divided. Some places in the East pay more than in the South, East, or West. But here when I went to the

Smelter, I think we were getting a dollar an hour when I started, see. Well, we didn't have good working conditions, we had wood floors. I had quit the SP, that was after the First World War, and so I came over to ASARCO, and saw the conditions there. And some of the boys wanted to get transferred, but they wouldn't do it because they were Mexican. So one day I got together some of the best heads in the machine shop and the boiler shop, and I told them, "Let's organize a union." "Oh, no! We'll get fired!" I said, "Like hell we will. We're going to organize a union." So I got with some of the boys there, and after work we started talking. Gradually, we used to have meetings across the street from the Smelter. We started talking, and we got a union. We had our first strike. Working conditions began to change, they gave us a raise. There was discrimination, yes, but that began to stop. Then we had another big strike, and then another, and then another. Now you go there and see. Some of the old timers are still here. Nacho Aguirre lives someplace around here, I don't know his address. Juan Marquez, he's out of town now.

M: When did you organize this union?

C: It wasn't me only, it was several of us. I just brought the idea to one of them and then we all started working together. Let's see, I don't remember the year, no me acuerdo.

M: In the '40s?

C: Yes.

M: After the war. You say there was discrimination. What kind of discrimination?

C: For instance, one day the foreman said, "Hey, you!" I didn't pay no attention, I didn't know who in the hell he was talking to. He came to me and says, "Hey, you." I said, "Listen, my name ain't 'Hey, you,' my name

is Candelaria. Understand? If you need me you call me Candelaria, not, 'Hey, you.'" So that was the end of him. And some other guys, they tried to do the same way, and I told them, "Uh, uh. That's not my name." And I told the other fellow, "No se dejen." And they started doing that and we started getting the union. And no more, "Hey, you," [no more] yelling. I says, "Toma, the same to you!" (Laughter) So that was it.

M: Did you have any trouble organizing the union?

C: No.

M: Did management give you trouble?

C: How could they if we didn't have our meetings on their grounds? Everything was after working hours. We didn't start raising hell [until] we got organized. They tried to scare me. My foreman came and told me, "You're going to get fired." I says, "Go ahead. Give me my time. For what reason are you going to fire me?"

M: Did anybody get fired?

C: No, hell, no! They couldn't! How could they? To get fired you had to spoil the job, or if the foreman told you [to do something] and you didn't do it. But one day the foreman gave me a job and at the same time [he gave] the same job to his son. My job came perfect, I put it to work. His job didn't fit. So then they came back and threw it there and told [the foreman] that the job was no good, but they didn't say whose [it was]. So he came over to me and he says, "You're fired." I says, "Why?" "The job ain't worth a damn." I says, "Prove it." Then his son heard and says, "Dad this is his job. That's mine." He just put his head down and walked off. We fired some of those foremans after we got organized. We didn't fire the machine shop foreman, though.

- M: The Anglo foremen?
- C: Sure! Eran puros americanos. Ahora si hay mexicanos.
- M: Do you think in those days they purposely had Anglo foremen and purposely didn't have Mexican foremen?
- C: That's right. They just didn't care for you, they just thought you couldn't do it. No, everything has changed. But once you got organized, they couldn't do a damn thing and they couldn't fire you. They had to have a reason. If you fired a worker, you had to go to the union, and go to your superintendent [and tell them] why you fired him. That's how we fired some foremans, and called them boys that was fired back. And the foreman, out. Once we got organized, there was no more, "Hey, you," no more. They called you by your name. My nickname was Rudy, for Rodolfo.
- M: Do you think the Mexican community has improved a great deal over the years?
- C: Sure! A lot. We got machinists, we got electricians, we got pipefitters, we have painters, we have carpenters; everything. At first the big jobs was for the Anglos. Now you go to the Smelter and you find, let's see, I think there are only two Americans. One of them is a scab, he was a scab in the last strike we had.
- M: Is it all union now?
- C: Sure! CIO. Congress of Industrial Organizations.
- M: You were saying that the United States is divided into zones?
- C: That is, in pay. In California they get more salary than we do. In other states too. The salary here at the Smelter, I don't know exactly how much it is now, but still in other states it's higher than here.
- M: Do you think this is the lowest of anywhere in the United States?

- C: Well, I don't know; it could be, it could not. But that time, we were the lowest until we got organized; from one dollar to two, three dollars. When I was retired, I was getting \$3.66 an hour. Now they're getting, I think, six, seven dollars an hour, with the cost of living. But other states get more than El Paso does. I understand that East Texas pays more than here. Now the railroads here are gone. We used to have the SP, the Santa Fe, Texas and Pacific; no more. All we have now is the cement plant, the ASARCO, and Phelps dodge. Ya no hay ferrocarriles.
- M: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about? I seem to have exhausted my questions.
- C: Well, that's about all I remember.
- M: This is the end of the interview with Mr. Candelaria. On the reverse side is an interview with Mrs. Candelaria.