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Interview no. 752

Alicia Chacon

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE:	<u>Alicia Chacón (1938-)</u>
INTERVIEWER:	<u>Carmen Montes</u>
PROJECT:	<u>Class Project</u>
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	<u>November 26, 1984</u>
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Longtime resident of Ysleta, Member of El Paso City Council.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Childhood experiences in Canutillo and Ysleta; adolescent years; the social segregation of Anglos and Mexican-Americans at Ysleta High School in the 1950s; why she did not attend college; her employment history; family life and traditions; changes in Ysleta during the past forty years; community involvement; reflections on her public service.

Length of Interview: 1 hour Length of Transcript 30 pages

ALICIA CHACON
by Carmen Montes
November 26, 1984

M: Can I call you Alicia?

Ch: Please do.

M: Alicia, when and where were you born?

Ch: I was born on November the 11th. in 1938 at home in Canutillo.

M: Texas?

Ch: Texas.

M: And what is the ethnic background of your parents?

Ch: Both of my parents are Mexican-American. My father is half Jewish.
His mother was a Mexican-American. His father was a German-Jewish
gentleman.

M: Where were they born?

Ch: His mother...my father's mother was born...

M: Your parents.

Ch: My parents?

M: [Yes.]

Ch: My father in Las Cruces, my mother in Ciudad Guerrero, Chihuahua.

M: What was the background of your grandparents?

Ch: My father's parents, his mother was from Las Cruces and his father was
from New York. My mother's parents were both from the state of Chihuahua.
My grandmother, I think, from Guerrero and my grandfather from a small
town called Satebo(?) But both in the state of Chihuahua.

M: Born in Chihuahua, is that right?

Ch: [Yes.]

M: Do you remember your grandparents?

Ch: No, I never met any grandparents. And it is very unusual because my
parents are both only children.

M: Do you know what the occupation of your grandparents was?

Ch: Yes, I do. On my mother's side, my mother's mother was always a home-maker, and always stayed with her daughter. Her husband, Carlos Almeida was a general in the Pancho Villa army during the Revolution. He joined the Revolution very early, at the very beginning of the Revolution in 1910, and in 1914 was killed in an ambush in Tomaqui(?), Nahuara(?), Chihuahua. And at that time my mother was a year old and right after my grandmother was notified of my grandfather's death she decided to leave Chihuahua. At that time she feared some retribution, you know, that occurred during the Revolution in México, and she feared for her safety and for my mother's safety. And so she came first to Juárez and then crossed to El Paso and then, wanting to be more isolated inside, then she moved to Canutillo. And she had a small house built in Canutillo, where she and my mother lived.

M: And how about your father's parents?

Ch: My father's mother was from a long, probably a third or fourth, generation family in the small town of Doña Ana, New Mexico, and she had lived there all of her life. We don't have too much background on my grandfather other than we knew he had come to hasta Las Cruces area when he was a young man from New York and married my grandmother. But we did not have, you know, very much information on him.

M: What about your parents, what was their occupation?

Ch: My mother was always a homemaker. She never worked outside the home. She was very devoted to her children. In fact she was a very strong mother figure, you know. I think people talk about Jewish mothers having a strong influence in the home, and I think that my mother very much, you know, and I think that Mexican-American mothers, Mexican mothers have that same type of influence. Como quien digo, she made all of the decisions really. She'd say:

--Well, ask your dad.

But she had already made the decision. My dad worked in a number of capacities, 'cause he is a very strong and a very independent person. He worked for the county mostly, in fact, that is how we happened to go to the Lower Valley. When he worked with the El Paso County as the shop foreman, he was a mechanic, he had been a mechanic since he was a very young man. And when World War II came he had been the foreman in Canutillo, that is where he had grown up and that's where we lived, and when he went overseas during World War II, when he came back three years later there was no job for him in Canutillo and they offered him a _____ position in charge of the warehouse in Ysleta. And so that's when we moved to Ysleta.

M: Okay, how many siblings do you have?

Ch: We were seven children. Right now two have passed away; we have right now five of us that...

M: And how do you fit in it?

Ch: I was third.

M: Third. Where did you spend your earlier years?

Ch: Earlier, like from what age? From six on I lived in Ysleta.

M: And before that...

Ch: Before that I lived in Canutillo, /yes/. In fact in Canutillo we went to the Catholic church there and I was baptized there (my parents were married in Canutillo) I was baptized in Canutillo, I made my First Communion in Canutillo, and I started school in Canutillo. I went the first year to school in Canutillo. When my father came, that is when back from the war, and we lived alone for three years while my dad was in the Service. And Canutillo was a very small town and, you know, very relaxing, very safe. I think you always felt very comfortable.

M: Okay. Were there religious differences in your family?

Ch: No, all of us are Catholic.

M: Always Catholic.

Ch: Always Catholic. We knew that my grandfather had been Jewish, but he passed away I think my mother says like when I was like three months or something like that, so I never knew him. But we always knew that he had been, you know, that he was Jewish.

M: What do you remember most about your childhood?

Ch: I think the fact that I always grew up in very small towns. I think back to the freedom and safety that you felt and that you could walk the whole town, you know, during the day and be gone. I remember the summers that in the morning, you know, groups of us would just, you know, kind of meet somewhere and just walk around and kind of go out into, at that time, open fields, there were open cotton fields. It was, both areas were very rural, 'cause in Ysleta it was a rural area too. It was, you know, not in the city and it was very relaxed, and I think that things were very easy-going for us and, I guess, we did all the things that other children do. We were a very close family and still are, and I think maybe it was because we didn't have a lot of cousins or a lot of other family. All we usually had was the immediate family.

M: Describe your school experiences.

Ch: Well, most of my school was at Ysleta, at Ysleta Elementary and at Ysleta High School. At Ysleta Elementary it was mostly pleasant, though there were..., in fact I think that I remember particularly, I remember some of the good teachers and maybe the bad teachers. But I remember very vividly all of my teachers. The first teacher that I had was Miss Kathy, and she was a very sweet and very, very nice lady. In the second grade I had a teacher that did not like Mexican-Americans. Her name was

Mrs. Roberts. She was an older lady; she was very grouchy. And on a number of occasions she was very harsh and particularly with the Mexican-American children.

M: Was it an outward...

Ch: It was very obvious that she didn't like us. And she would make remarks and I think that that's the first time that I really felt uncomfortable and, I guess, kind of sad you know, I think that I felt more sad than anything, but she would make me feel sad because she would jerk around some of the kids. It was very harsh and kind of ugly. And she was not tolerant if you made mistakes. And she made a lot of remarks because you were brown. I think particularly she had a real hang up about you being brown. I remember one time, she had a real thing for cleanliness and for health and, she said that she wanted to have a class doctor and a class nurse, and she was going to have an election. And the job was going to be that you checked everybody's hands in the morning and you checked their hands and knees in the afternoon. 'Cause it was very important that your hands be clean. And up to kind of that time I had always thought that I wanted to be a nurse. And others of my friends knew that I wanted to be a nurse. And so when, you know, they talked about nominating, well they nominated me. I remember the boy that was elected the doctor was a young boy called John Fitch. And I remember when she went to check, you know, if you could run I guess or if you could be participating, she checked your hands, and she said:

--Oh, your hands are so brown I can't even tell if they're clean.

She would make very ugly remarks to you, you know, and make you feel bad. But anyway they did elect me and I even have a picture, you know, that I'm dressed like a nurse and I'm standing next to the doctor, you know, John

Fitch. Also, at that time Ysleta was very much a mixed community and kind of middle-class. There were some, you know, there were some very poor people, but not to the degree that there are now. And there were probably in our classes half Anglo and half Mexican-Americans. And at the grade school level we interacted and interplayed, you know, very well. I remember having some good friends that were Anglo in grade school. And all through grade school it was very good and we were very good friends. We would visit each other's homes and they would have like, you know, birthday parties and all and it wasn't unusual that, you know, that they would invite, and so that there was good comingling of Mexican-Americans and Anglos. When we went to high school it was entirely different because the high school was predominantly Anglo at that time.

M: Why was that? Was there a higher rate of drop-outs for Mexicans?

Ch: Well, I guess that, but also the community that was feeding into Ysleta High School at that time was, you know, just the population was greater at the time I was in high school. So that most of the people, the majority were Anglos. Also, at the high school level there was not the interplay and the social or any type of relationships really. It was almost as if at Ysleta High School--I was there for '54 to '57--it was almost as if there were two campuses. The campus for the Anglo community and they kind of did all of the school things; they were the cheerleaders, they were in the contests, they were in the plays, they were in all of the organized activities. And the mexicanos we kind of had our own culture, and our own things that we did, and our own activities, and very little interplay into the mainstream of high school life, very little participation. In fact I remember that there was two drive-ins that were right across the street from each other. One was the Lucky Boy and it was across from Ysleta High School, across the highway. On the other one there was another place

called the Wigwam and it was on the other side and all the Chicano kids hung out at the Wigwam and all the Anglo kids hung out at the Lucky. So it was very, you know, I think that high school... high school to me was a lot of fun, but I didn't participate in any of the traditional things that high school kids do because we just didn't do that. Most of our social activities and our social development came from our involvement with the church. In fact I guess almost all of the activities for the Ysleta area were surrounded with social activities at the church. When I was a teenager we had a club that was a very, very popular club at Mt. Carmen Church. It was called the Old Mission Youth Group and we called it the Old Myo(?). And all of us were going to be Old Myo(?) (chuckles) And it was every week. We would meet every Tuesday night, you know, whether it was school or not. So our activities were centered around that, you know, going to the Old Myo. We had, I remember we had a drive to collect funds for the Hungarians, when the Hungarian revolt, when Hungary was first taken over by Russia. And our group collected quite a large sum of money. And we would have picnics sponsored by the church, and we had, you know, all the social events. We would have some dances, we had some queen contests...can't remember what the queen really was about, but I think it was in the Spring. We always had a contest where there was a queen elected by the club and all. Somewhat, you know, similar in activities to what the maybe the Anglo socials were doing in the high school, but we did it through the church. Our socialization was through the church.

M: Now, what type of games did you play like when you were in grade school?

Ch: Well, I think we played probably all the games that everybody else played. We played colores, and we played encantado.

M: What are they?

- Ch: Colores is that you assign everybody a color and then someone comes and knocks on the door and you say ¿Quién es? And you [answer] La vieja Ines. ¿Qué quiere? Un color, [no] un listón. ¿De qué color? And then they start saying the colors, and if they guess your color then you have to run to a certain area. And that person will run after you and if they caught you, then you were "it".
- M: That's colores, what is the other?
- Ch: The other one was encantado and that one, one person would be "it". You would have two teams and you would have bases. The idea was to run from base to base and not get caught. If they caught you and touched you, te quedabas encantado. And so you were frozen and you had to stay there until somebody from your team could come and touch you.
- M: It's like freeze tag.
- Ch: I guess so, yeah. We call it encantado.
- M: How were you disciplined in school?
- Ch: I don't remember that I was disciplined a lot; I guess that I wasn't too bad. (chuckles)
- M: Well, for example just a child misbehaved in school, would they sit them in a corner?
- Ch: Miss Roberts was the only one that I remember was real bad and she would jerk them, and she would shake them a lot. She never did me, but I was terrified of her. And she was in the second grade, she would shake them. There was another lady, I guess when I was in the seventh grade, Miss Harrison would get very angry too and she would shake the kids a lot. Really ugly. I was in her home room.
- M: What type of discipline did you see at home?
- Ch: Mostly you had to go to your room, you know, or just stay, you know, in a certain room. We lived in a very small house. We only had three rooms and we had, you know, the kitchen, the bedroom where all the children

slept and then kind of, my mother had another room where it was divided and they had their bed and then they had a drape, and then they had like a little sitting area. And mostly you would just, you know, you were kind of like grounded, you know. She would say:

--Don't go outside.

M: How far did you go in school?

Ch: Through high school; I graduated from high school.

M: What do you remember most about your teenage years?

Ch: I had very happy teenage years. And I think it was, you know, because I was very involved in the church club. It gave you a good feeling to belong to the church club.

M: Okay. At what age did you date?

Ch: My mother didn't allow us to date and in fact, you know, what we we used to do is we would go in groups all through high school. None of my friends dated either. So it didn't feel, you know, like a big deal. The Anglo girls would date, but, you know, and they would go to things, but in our groups no one, none of my friends dated all through high school. We would go to social things either sponsored by the church club or occasionally like to the football games and all as a group of girls. And sometimes we would stop, you know, to have a coke or something, there would be a group of guys and we would talk. And mostly, you know, nobody had cars and so we would all walk home together, large groups of us would walk home together. So there wasn't a lot of pressure to team-up or pair-up and there was a lot of group things. And I think that we felt comfortable with that from the relationship with Father Martín at the church.

M: What fads were popular when you were a teenager?

Ch: Cherry cokes and cherry limes, everybody wanted a cherry lime when we went somewhere. (chuckles) That was the thing to ask for, was your cherry

time. We used to wear crinolina, really full ones. I remember I used to sew, I always sewed a lot, and I used to buy the regular net of petticoats and I would add more layers of net at the bottom, you know, I was practically my mother used to say, like a gallina.

M: Would you wear this everyday?

Ch: Oh, yes! Everybody wore crinolinas with very full skirts. And felt skirts so you wore the big petticoats under the circular felt skirts, and then the sweaters. And we used to wear the saddle oxfords and with real thick socks on top. In fact, they used to sell, it was like I guess now it would be the tube socks, except that we used to have like a little sponge, like a donut that we would buy and we would put it over our ankle and then roll the sock into it. So it would make like about that thick on your ankle. (chuckles) You're laughing.

M: (Chuckles)

Ch: That was just it, you know, and you would get that and put it in to make it that much thicker. So you'd have like a roll, and it would be like this much on your ankle. And everybody had that, the sponges on the, wrapped up in the socks.

M: How did you get along with your family?

Ch: I guess very well. My oldest brother was my best friend I guess, you know. I cared for him a lot. And then I always felt very motherly toward the younger ones and took a lot of responsibility for them. When I was I guess fourteen my oldest sister Bertha was very ill and she contracted tuberculosis. And she had to go to--at that time they used to have to go a rest home--and she was assigned to a rest home for six months, and so my father would take my mother every day to the rest home to be with Bertha. And I would stay at home in charge of all the kids during all the summer. I remember it was a whole summer for sure that I stayed. And like I was in charge

of the three younger ones.

M: Is there a big gap between you and the three younger ones?

Ch: Yes. I'm seven years older. All of us are very far apart, by the way. My mother had children forever. My oldest brother is six years older than Bertha, and then Bertha is two years older than I am. She and I are the closest of all of us. And then I'm seven years older than the next one, and then he was about four years older than the next one, and then she was about four years older than the next one. Those two have passed away; the two after me have passed away, at adults, but they passed away. And then I was eighteen when the youngest one was born.

M: When did you leave home?

Ch: When I married; when I was twenty.

M: When did you meet your spouse?

Ch: Right after high school I got a job and that was one thing, you know, I think some people ask you:

--Why didn't you go to college?

And no one in our group even talked about going to college. It wasn't something that anyone even thought about, you know. We all, you know, I remember us talking about, well, what are we going to do and we were all talking about, you know, what type of jobs and where we might look for a job. I always enjoyed working. I worked part-time all the time I was in high school at W. T. Grants, after school and on Saturday and Sunday. On holidays and weekends they would always hire me. And almost all of my friends also worked during, you know, the summers and so forth, mostly at dime stores and those type of things. So all of us were just looking forward to work. And I think all of us kind of felt, well, that we needed to help home. So that going to college was not something that we even thought about.

M: You met your husband at Grants?

Ch: No. I worked one year at the El Paso Humane Society and he was working there as an officer. And I worked during the office for a year then I went to work at the Credit Bureau, 'cause Bertha, my sister, was working at the Credit Bureau and it was a better job, so I went to work at the Credit Bureau.

M: So after you met him, how long was it before you got married?

Ch: About two years.

M: Did you have a big wedding?

Ch: Well, I guess fairly big, you know, it was a church wedding. I didn't like a lot of attendants. My mother wanted a big wedding. Joe had been married before even though he had not been married by the church. We did not particularly feel that we could afford a big wedding, but my mother wanted a big wedding. And we wanted to please her. So we had a whole day thing, 'cause my mother invited a lot of her friends from Canutillo and my mass was real early in the morning--I was married in mass at 8 o'clock in the morning--and my mother...everybody came from Canutillo the night before and spent the night there at the house, and so there was a mob of people already at the house and then they had breakfast, and then they had lunch, and then they had...then we had like a reception. The only thing I didn't have was a dance.

M: Were dances not real big then?

Ch: Some people had them, but it wasn't really a big deal. I thought that my wedding was a very nice wedding. My sister was one of my bridesmaid and my brother and then two of my friends were damas.

M: What is your spouse's family background?

Ch: His parents had been migrant workers and had traveled, you know, all the time with, they had three sons, and so they had a very unstable--for my

homelife had been very stable always and very secure in a small town-- they always traveled with the crops to all kinds of places. They would go to California and stay a while, they would go back East, and then go wherever the betabel is, which I think is in Minnesota. So they spent most of their time, you know, he had a very unstable childhood.

M: What brought him to El Paso?

Ch: They finally settled in Fabens at, you know, lots of the migrant people finally after they got older they settled in Fabens. And that's where they settled. They stayed in Fabens.

M: What was your livelihood? How were you supporting each other through those early years?

Ch: When we first married?

M: [Yes.]

Ch: Well, I worked at the Credit Bureau for two years, three years after we were married and he joined the Police Department right after we were married. In fact, the other day we were looking at, and there was a write-up in the paper and it said, you know, twenty-five years, I think twenty-five years ago they were offering the exam and it said how many people they were going to take. And the starting salary was \$350, and that was the class he went to, that he joined.

M: Okay. What was your favorite job?

Ch: My favorite job?

M: [Yes.]

Ch: I, you know, I've liked all of my jobs and I've learned from all of my jobs. I really have enjoyed working. And I think maybe since I didn't go to college that at the jobs I have learned so much and I've had very, very good bosses. I have felt very fortunate. After I left the Credit Bureau--the Credit Bureau was more of a mundane job because it was just,

you know, it was checking credit records and all that all day long you would do very routine. But after that my daddy had a very good friend-- Woodrow Bean that was the county judge--and my dad was always interested in politics and liked politics--so my dad knew Woodrow. And Woodrow and Jerry Callison told him that there was a job as the person in charge of booking at the Coliseum, and would one of the girls be interested. Bertha said she didn't want to go, because my older sister she said she liked it at the Bureau. And I said:

--I want to go.

And so I went and applied and was hired. And I worked at the Coliseum for five years. And the last year I was running the Coliseum. It was a political job, but they abolished the job of director to fire the man that was running it, because the commissioner's court changed, and then I think the press got kind of hot and so they didn't want to appoint anybody, so they just appointed me interim director and let me run it, you know, for about a year.

M: What was your least favorite job?

Ch: I never had a least favorite job. There at the Coliseum it was political, but I enjoyed what I was doing. I loved it immensely. After that when there was the politics at the court got very hot and there was a county judge that did not like me. There was a new change and there was a county judge and he didn't particularly care for me. But the county auditor liked me quite a bit and the judge was putting a lot of pressure on me, and so I told the auditor that I thought I was going to have to quit. And he said:

--Why don't you go ahead and resign that position and I'll find you another job in the county.

And I said:

--Okay.

And so he found me another job. It was in the library in Fabens, as the library assistant. And so I worked at the library for two years, and I really liked it as a library assistant, and I learned all the library system really well. I learned how to access the books and, you know, how to...

M: You've had a wide range of jobs.

Ch: I worked with a very, very good librarian. The bosses that I've had have been excellent teachers. 'Cause at the Coliseum I learned all about show business, and setting up shows, and taking down shows, and booking, and managing, and at the library I learned, you know, I could go and run a library right now. And I learned, you know, to do the budgets at the Coliseum for the county, so I learned, you know, the government budget. After that Mike Sullivan was the chief deputy and since I had been in the county I had known him, and he was elected sheriff for '65 and he asked me if I wanted to come and be his assistant. You know, 'cause I lived in town, so I wouldn't have to drive so far to Fabens, 'cause I lived in Ysleta. And I told him yeah, and he offered me a real good salary, and it was kind of an administrative assistant job, not just clerical, but also kind of helping him with other types of things. So I went and learned the sheriff's department. I enjoyed it. I was in charge of the civil division. I enjoyed that one quite a bit; I enjoyed the, maybe this is the least favorite thing that ever happened to me 'cause I left there. There was a lot of cruelty on the part of the deputy and some of the jailers to the prisoners. And a number of times I complained to the sheriff that, you know, that they were so cruel and that they were really, you know, bad, and that I felt that he needed to do something. And he wasn't a bad person, but I think he just felt that it was a part of the system, and he didn't try to stop it. And there was one incident that a man

was brought in that had been handcuffed and beaten by a deputy with a blackjack and the man had perdió el ojo de tanto que le había pegado el deputy. And I was very upset, and I told the sheriff that I was very upset with that, and that I felt that he really needed to discipline the deputy. In fact, I felt that he needed to fire him. And he didn't want to because the man was an old, old time Anglo from the Lower Valley that was tied in to a lot of the old ranch families--Carl _____-- I'll never forget his name. And he wouldn't do anything, you know, he said he couldn't take any action, and that anyway that this guy, you know, he was going to arrange for the insurance to pay him some money. I said:

--Well, it's not enough.

You know, for that. So I told him I was going to have to leave, that I couldn't stay, that I felt real uncomfortable, that I liked everybody else, and that I liked, you know, the department, but that I couldn't stay because I felt like staying was condoning the cruelties and the brutality that was going on. And so he was upset that I was leaving, and I guess maybe he thought I was going to say something to somebody. But it really wasn't my intention. So I left and then I didn't work for about six months. And then another political friend offered me a job at the hospital--R.E. Thomason--at the R. E. Thomason they were just kind of beginning. They had, you know, they had the new hospital, they had the reserve fund. They had a lot of money because in the 60s was when the hospital was first set up and the building was brand new. And so they were setting up the department. Anyway they asked me if I wanted to come and do community relations for the hospital. And so I went into that, and I set up like a newsletter for the employees--that they had not had--and I worked real closely with a lady that was in charge

of in-service. And we coordinated, you know, seminars and workshops. Mine more geared toward bringing in other community and hers, you know, toward the employees. And so I did that for about two years, from '68 I think to '70. And then a good friend of ours was George McAlmon ran for democratic chairman. And George wanted to really make the party more viable and particularly he was interested in promoting more mexicanos to run for offices. And he wanted to maintain a full-time office where they had never maintained an office. And so he asked me if I would come and do that for him. And it was kind of convenient for me because he said that I could have like 5 hours a day and that way I could be home, you know, 'cause my kids were starting to grow. I had the children real rapidly right after I married and so they had been little, but, you know, they were growing and they were I guess six, seven, they were already in school and were, you know, more active. And so that was a real good thing for me, see, 'cause I would come after they were in school and I would be home before they were home. And I had to do a lot of telephoning and stuff, but I would do it from the house. It facilitated my having some free time for them and at the same time having a salary to supplement Joe's salary. 'Cause the Police Department has never been enough to support people! (Chuckles) And so that's how I think I got more political because then, you know, Mr. McAlmon was very interested in helping. And Mr. McAlmon helped me considerably in understanding political philosophies because I've always loved to read and he would give me a lot of material to read. And that helped me, you know, tremendously I think in understanding I guess, you know. He would give me whole series of books to read, you know.

M: So from that point on you've been more concentrated in a political job?

Ch: [Yes.]

M: Describe your typical day.

Ch: Right now?

M: [Yes.]

Ch: I'm an early riser, so I get up very early, usually about 5:30, 6:00 o'clock in the morning. I like to watch the news early, then I get ready. And then I go to the Tapatia, and I stay at the Tapatia 'til about 10:00, except on Tuesdays, which is the counseling. But all the other days I stay at the Tapatia 'til about 10:00. Then I come over here; I usually have meetings every day, either with individual constituents or with groups and I meet with the department heads that I need, you know, on follow-ups that they've called at home or that I talked to on weekends. Then I usually will have lunch here in town with, most of the time it's a business lunch of some type, you know, if someone wants to talk to me about a particular issue or something that is going on. And then I'll work all afternoon, usually 'til about 5:00, sometimes 'til 6:00 on answering phone calls, 'cause I'm always behind on phone calls because the meetings take so much time, so I'm usually behind on phone calls. I'll try to get into answering some of the mail in the afternoon. After Cindy leaves then it gets more quiet; it's easier to concentrate on mail. And by then it's kind of late to answer phone calls, so I will, you know, prepare responses for my mail. And then I go home, you know, and usually Joe's home by then also, 'cause he works at the Tapatia in the afternoon. And probably about 3 times a week at night I will go back out to some type of meeting.

M: Did you ever belong to a union?

Ch: Yes, I was the president of the County Employee Union.

M: Did you have good experiences there?

Ch: Yes. I belonged to the AFSCME--American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees--all the years I was employed by the county, even

when I was a clerk. And in 1968 I was the president of the County Employee Union. I feel that unions are very helpful and help many individuals with their problems. That's kind of what I did, that particular union being that it involves county and is the same as the city, they are not permitted to negotiate with a governing body. But we were able to, not directly but indirectly I think, have a good effect on the commissioner's court and influence them.

M: How many children did you have, and what are their names?

Ch: I had three children; my son Carlos David is 24, my daughter Corinne is 23, and my son Samuel René is 22. And then I had a child that was stillborn.

M: What types of family traditions did you pass on to your children?

Ch: I think that, you know, that one of the things that my family passed on to me was the social conscience and social awareness and of being aware of how life is affecting everyone, not only yourselves. My father was particularly a very generous person, a very giving person, and always devotes himself still at his old age to helping people. And so I think, you know, that that's something that I have most admired about my parents, and that I try to teach my kids, to care not only about each other, but about the community they live in and what was happening. I think other than that, you know, all the traditional things that you like hope that they pick up and that is, you know, the coming together. Like I said our family was particularly close, our brothers and sisters and we still get together always for Easter, for the Fourth of July, for Thanksgiving, for Christmas Eve, for Christmas Day, for New Year's Day, you know, all of us get together. And, you know, I think I emphasize too to my kids, you know, the importance of family.

[PAUSE]

Ch: I think I've tried to tell the kids, you know, that family is very important, and that it is probably the strongest support system you could have.

M: What are your goals for your children?

Ch: I think that just, you know, I haven't had, you know, like monetary goals for them. I have hoped that they would want, you know, to have more education than they have, but they decided they did not want to. Chuck said he did not want to go to college and he went to the Air Force. He did not want to go to college. He particularly did not like and was not suited for the academic world and the structure of school, even though he is a very intelligent person and has a lot of common sense, no le gusta estudiar, no le gustan los libros, aunque sí le gusta leer. Corinne loved school and she was a straight A student and was in all the honor societies all the time, and then she went four years to St. Mary's and a couple of summers to St. Mary's, but was so unsure of what she wanted to do. In fact, she went to St. Mary's 'cause she thought she wanted to be a lawyer and then the last year decided not to finish. I think it was in January that she came home for Christmas and she told me she didn't want to go back to school, that she had talked to some people about working and she stayed in San Antonio. And she didn't want to go to school and I told her: --My God, you've gone so many years and you're supposed to be getting a degree, you ought to get one, if nothing else just so you can put it on your resume. Because you may feel that you know as much as you're going to learn, that there's not that much that they can teach you anymore, but if you don't have the degree there's always kind of a stigma because the society is geared toward education and toward people having a degree. But she said that she didn't feel that she needed it. I still hope that

some time she'll go back and get it. My youngest son went to St. Mary's for two years and he loved the school, but he did not like being in San Antonio and away from El Paso. When he came back he did not like UTEP. He came back and said:

--Well, let me go to UTEP and see if I like it, or see how I do here. And he did not do well academically and he did not like it. So he dropped out and he works at the Tapatia. He went to college two years; he completed two years. So I don't think they have those types of goals. I think that I want them to be fulfilled as people, you know, rather than financially, and that I've taught them and tried to influence them in seeking ways in which they feel satisfied and fulfilled and happy with themselves, rather than just a looking at financial satisfaction, which I think society is very much in gear to. And I don't think that that's always, necessarily leads to happiness.

M: Would these goals be the same for your grandchildren?

Ch: Yes. I have a grandson.

M: Did you share your household responsibilities with your husband?

Ch: We always did. Eventhough, you know, some people think well, you know, that maybe that I'm older and that I didn't, but both of us I think realized, you know, that we both needed to work. So from the very beginning, when we first had the first child we would alternate who would get up with him at night. He was a very demanding one; every four hours he would wake up. And since I had to work I didn't breast-feed, so you have to get up to warm the bottle and do all that. And so we would take turns during the night. 'Cause we both had to get up the next day to go to work. And also with like laundry and cleaning on weekends we would share that too. The only thing Joe doesn't know how to do is iron.

M: (Chuckles)

Ch: And now you don't have to do that, so it's good. But he would help me

with the washing and he would help me with all the, you know.

M: How about your children, did they help you out?

Ch: Oh, yes. Everyone had duties always. And we would share the house cleaning on weekends.

M: Have you ever hired household help?

Ch: I did at different times, yes.

M: It did not work out?

Ch: Sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't. I enjoyed it when I had it, but I think, you know, that we've always enjoyed, you know, the privacy and having a stranger at the house it didn't, you know, make us as comfortable. And so we didn't particularly enjoy it. The kids never liked having someone at the house.

M: Let's see how I should put this. Have you ever belonged to any political or community organization?

Ch: I've belonged to probably everything and, you know, I always belonged to the democratic party organization since my dad was very active. Later I became very involved with PTA, and I did a lot of PTA work all the years that the kids were in school. And I was president of the grade school PTA when they were there for about three years. The community had changed all and it was still in English and I changed it to a bilingual program, and brought back a lot of parents that, you know, or brought in a lot of parents that didn't feel that it was relevant to them because all the meetings were still being conducted in English. So I did a lot of PTA work. When Joe was in the Department I was a charter member of the group that chartered a group called Police Wives Association, which was a support group for police wives. Because I don't think that many people realize, you know, what serious impact police life has on a home, and if you share it with someone that it's very good, or share or can compare notes with others. It's a real good support system, and that was one of the reasons

that we organized the Police Wives Association. And I was very active with them for a number of years, and was a charter member and one of their chairs; was active with the union, have always supported the unions; have always been active in my church, in the church activities, in the parish council, eventhough I'm not very active in the parish council now. I've never belonged to social groups.

M: Why?

Ch: I find them kind of irrelevant and meaningless. I do not particularly enjoy just social things, and I guess that maybe I'm too harsh with them. I find them trivial.

M: You need something with a purpose.

Ch: Yes.

M: Did you ever serve in the Military?

Ch: No.

M: Okay. What memories do you have of life under wartime conditions? Yours would be World War II.

Ch: Yes, World War II. I had my own ration book; I still have it. During World War II you were assigned ration books for almost every item: for shoes, for sugar. And they assigned them even to the children of a family. You would go to the War Office and they would assign you your book, and then when you went to buy a pair of shoes you had to have a coupon. If you didn't have a coupon you didn't buy shoes. A lot of the food items were rationed also. I remember very much the rationing, eventhough my mother had, you know, four children and so we'd have the coupons for all of us. Sometimes you would run short of your coupons. And some of them were very strict. Like I remember you couldn't hardly ever buy meat. Meat was, you know, just out. But it was a pleasant thing for us to, I guess eventhough we worried that my father was gone

and he would write to us and we worry about him being gone and the letters that he would write about, you know, things that were happening in Europe. But we were very close to my mother, and I guess the only thing that was more of an impact was that we were alone just with her. But she used to read to us at every night. Nos leía las novenas, pero nos leyó también todas las historias clásicas mexicanas. Ella lee muy bonito en español. Particularly, hay una novena que se llama Genoveba de Avante. It's kind of a classic, I guess like comparable to the classics here, [like] Treasure Island or any of those that are children's classics. And I always remember la historia de Genoveba de Avante.

M: Was it like a folklore in Mexico?

Ch: It's a novel. At that time it was a very popular, and I think it is one of the classic novels in Spanish.

M: How long have you lived in this community?

Ch: My whole life.

M: Do you have any hobbies?

Ch: I paint.

M: What has been your most memorable vacation?

Ch: I haven't had very many vacations, but we went to Puerto Rico, but it was on business for the National Democratic Committee. We went for a week and Joe went with me. And I think that that's probably the one that I've enjoyed the most. We had some business sessions to do, but then we, you know, in the evenings we could do what we wanted to.

M: Have you had to travel very much?

Ch: I traveled a great deal when I was with the Carter administration, with the SBA(?)

M: Did you enjoy that?

Ch: I do not enjoy traveling. I enjoyed the job, but I didn't enjoy traveling.

M: What is your favorite TV show?

Ch: I don't watch too much TV, and so what I try to do is--usually it's late in the evening when I watch--try to find old movies. I love old movies. And so I seek out old movies from the '40s, either in Spanish or in English. Anoche vi una de Pedro Infante cuando estaba el Pedro Infante todavía niño. (Chuckles)

M: Have you ever experienced a natural disaster?

Ch: No. I guess the closest that I came was when I was sixteen. An oil rig overturned in Ysleta, in the downtown street. And the whole, two city blocks of Ysleta caught on fire at 11:00 o'clock at night. And we only lived about three blocks, about two blocks from Alameda, and it was on Alameda. And I remember the volunteer fire department would run out in the city, the volunteer fire department coming to the doors. It was about 11:00 o'clock at night, telling you that you had to evacuate because they were afraid that the fire was traveling on the electrical wires, and it was windy, and they knew that they did not have the facilities to contain the fire. And when you would go out and you would see it, the flames were higher than, you know, well like about three-stories high. And so it was super scary, and, you know, it looked like the whole Ysleta was burning.

M: What changes in ethnic relations have you witnessed in your community?

Ch: Okay. When I was growing up, like I said, Ysleta was, and I guess even through 1970, Ysleta was still a middle-class community. And it was probably a very mixed community--probably about half and half--there was not Black, you know, ever maybe more than a couple of Black families in Ysleta, but there was a lot of Anglo families. And over the past twenty years there was a mass exodus of the Anglo community as more poor people,

poor Mexican-Americans came in, particularly with the public housing. The Anglos left Ysleta so that now there's, you know, probably just a handful. And that's the immediate, you know, my, what I consider my community. So it changed dramatically from a middle-class community to a high-poverty area, and from a ethnically-balanced community to a predominantly Mexican-American. And more particularly from what had been the semi-rural or rural to a strictly urban area, and then additionally from what had been long-time residents, Mexican-Americans, but that were seven and so generations in the area to now there are mostly, many people that are not even citizens.

M: What about the social attitudes?

Ch: I guess that that has relaxed a lot. I have always been socially a very conservative person, but I think that when the church, the Catholic church relaxed some of its regulations and wasn't quite as rigid, that society in the general, people are more accepting and more relaxed. Not as strict moral codes I guess as when I was growing up. A lot more things are acceptable now then were then.

M: Do you think there was more of a crossover between things that were accepted within the Mexican-American community and the Anglo community or have you seen more of an interaction now?

Ch: No, I see less interaction in my immediate area. I think that ten years ago I had more Anglo friends than I do today. In fact, I kind of feel that the circle has narrowed, you know, in that I have very few Anglo friends.

M: What do you think is your most shining achievement?

Ch: (Chuckles) I really don't know. I've had, you know, a good number of first things that I've done. Ten years ago I was the first woman ever elected to serve in public office in El Paso. And I felt that was

a break, but, and then when president Carter named me to the SBA(?), I was the first woman to serve as regional director at that agency. It was a national agency. They had never had a woman and they had never had a mexicana, you know. So I had two firsts there and I felt that that was significant. I would, you know, find it very hard because I guess that just, you know, the fact that people have accepted me as a leader, you know, I consider that very much significant--an accomplishment.

M: In your opinion, what invention in your life has been the most significant?

Ch: I guess probably the airplane 'cause it's made all the distances and it's made the world so much smaller. And, you know, I know that before even ten years ago there wasn't the extensive air travel and the cheap air travel so that people could facilitate, you know, so much with such ease travel distance, you know, and that you could go and be, you know, like go to Washington today and be back tomorrow, you know, tonight. That has made communication very significant. Additionally, you know, the fast and the convenience of air travel made it possible for me to take the job in Dallas. I commuted to Dallas; I did not move to Dallas. I commuted on a weekend-basis. I would come back to El Paso every Friday night and I would go back to Dallas on Sunday.

M: What are your hopes for the future?

Ch: Oh, my hopes for the future are the same ones that I had twenty years ago and, you know, sometimes I think that it's, you've been there and it's running the same thing again. My hopes are, you know, are for justice and equality for everybody. And we just don't seem to get there.

M: Who was the most influential person in your life?

Ch: Both of my parents.

M: If you were sixteen again, how would you relive your life?

Ch: I might consider going to college. Other than that, you know, I can't think of anything that I would do differently.

M: Okay, thank you very much.

Ch: We didn't touch on my parents and I kind of wanted to tell you, you know, of my parents generosity and their sharing. And I think that that has been very important to me that they've always shared so much to the point that they've shared their home with people. And maybe for them it came from the fact that both of them lost their parents when they were relatively young and that they didn't have brothers and sisters. But my father had a knack for finding people that were homeless and bringing them home, and that they stayed with us even though, you know, we didn't live all that extravagantly but, you know, but there was always room to feed additional people that he would bring home. He had one gentleman--named Bill, un americano--that stayed with us about five years in Canutillo and then he went on. And then there was another man--that was named Felipe Valverde--that my dad met him and the man didn't have a home, didn't have any family, he had come to the United States, he had run away when he was a young boy and so he had just been kind of wondering around, and my dad brought him home to dinner and he stayed forty years.

M: Forty years!

Ch: Lived with us for forty years. Le decíamos Tío; el Tío Felipe. We had a lot of experiences with Tío Felipe, 'cause they just became like extended family with us. And then there was another man that had been a friend of my grandmother's, on my mother's side, named Ladislado Salcido, and he emigrated to the United States and he didn't have a family, and he came to live with us. And he lived with us I think about twenty-five years. All of them, you know, lived to be older people and then they died in my parents' care, or under my parent's care. Yo tenía una madrina muy viejita; no sé por qué me consiguió

tan viejita. But when her husband died she had a son, but he was in California and she didn't want to go. So, se recogió con mi mamá y vivió con nosotros hasta que ella se murió. And later my sister's mother-in-law had always lived with a son that was married and then she had kind of a falling out with her daughter-in-law and so she didn't have a place, and so my mother invited her to live with her. And she lived with my mother 'til she passed away. So my parents have been, you know, always very, very generous and very helpful and sharing. I've always looked and admired them. Because I think when you are willing to share your home you're willing to share anything. You're very giving and I look and examine myself and, you know, I think that I have tried to be generous, but I think it would be very difficult for me to share my home. And yet I look at them, you know, that they didn't have, you know, a big home. They didn't have a lot, but what they had they were so willing to share it.

M: You had two very good teachers in your life.

Ch: Both of them. 'Cause, you know, my mother would never be upset that my dad brought someone or if some other relative of my mother offered the house to someone, he would never be upset either.

M: It was just accepted.

Ch: Just like very natural. And for us it was also, and they were helpful. Ladislado almost, you know, somehow we kind of had them like built in baby-sitters too because there was always adults, you know, if mother and dad weren't there, there would be adults there. Tío Felipe was there, Ladislado was there--all those years. And so I think that maybe that they kind of gave us some of the love maybe that grandparents give other children because they were older. And maybe to my mother and dad some of the companionship that they had not had from brothers and sisters.

M: Well, I thank you very much.

Ch: Well, I've enjoyed it.

M: This was very informative and enjoyable.

Ch: Well, thank you. I enjoyed it too.

(END OF INTERVIEW)