

11-18-1977

## Interview no. 308

Estella Duran Vega

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Estella Duran Vega (1914- )  
INTERVIEWER: Alfredo Antonio Vega  
PROJECT: History 3309  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 18, 1977  
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TAPE NO.: 308  
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TRANSCRIBER: Alfredo Antonio Vega  
DATE TRANSCRIBED: November 22, 1977

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Lifelong resident of El Paso; registered nurse

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; both parents of miner backgrounds; educational background; dating patterns among peers; employed as seamstress during WWII, farm worker, registered nurse; impact of Spanish flu, Prohibition, the Depression, peso devaluation; political awareness; opinion of Chicano Movement; views on the illegal alien, the Ku Klux Klan.

1 1/4 hours, 27 pages

This is an interview with Estella Durán Vega. The interviewer is Alfredo Vega and today's date is November 18, 1977.

AV: Mrs. Vega, could you give us a little bit of your background? What is the date of your birth?

EV: I was born November 13, 1914, in El Paso.

AV: Could you give us a little bit of your parents' background?

EV: My parents came from Arizona. On my mother's side, my grandfather worked the mines, and also my mother's father worked the mines in Miami, Arizona.

AV: Did your grandfather hold any kind of position there?

EV: My grandfather was a foreman of a crew of miners.

AV: So when your parents moved down here, what did your mother and father do?

EV: My father went to work for the railroad and he worked there for 30 years until he retired.

AV: Didn't you tell me that he was a sheriff's deputy?

EV: Yes, when he was a young man before he started at the railroad. He was a special policeman and his area was to take care of law and order on Alameda and Copia Street where there were a lot of bars and a lot of fights and drunks. And there were times when even his own family, his relatives were drunk, and he would take them to jail, regardless.

AV: Did he ever get injured?

EV: Oh, yes! There was one time when he went to take in a drunkard, and this drunkard happened to have a knife in his hand and he slashed my father in the stomach, and he made a deep wound all across his stomach.

AV: And your mother, what was she doing all this time?

EV: My mother was a housewife. She stayed at home taking care of the kids.

AV: Your mother liked to visit a lot of neighbors. Didn't she read cards or things like that?

EV: Yes, she did that as a pastime. She was very friendly and neighbors would come to her and ask her to read the cards for them, and they had a lot of fun just telling different kinds of stories. Of course, they weren't true, you know.

AV: They didn't take it seriously?

EV: No, it was just in fun.

AV: What part of town did you grow up in?

EV: I grew up in east El Paso, the part that is now called Chamizal. It was on the border between Juárez and El Paso; the Río Grande River was close by. There was a canal running along side. There were a few houses in between the Río Grande and the canal.

AV: What street was this on?

EV: San Antonio Street, 2100 block. That was on Willow and San Antonio.

AV: Could you tell me about any interesting events that happened during your childhood?

EV: Yes, I remember going to my aunt's house on Sunday mornings. Kids around the neighborhood would gather at her house since she was the only one who could afford the Sunday Times and she would read the funnies to us, and that was a big attraction at her house on Sunday mornings. And the kids in the neighborhood would gather at her house and then afterwards we would play games in the back yard.

AV: Any other interesting events? Didn't you live with your grandmother?

EV: We were all living together--my grandmother, my mother, and my father. I was about two years old when my baby brother was born and my grandmother moved away, taking my baby brother with her, because my father had given him to her to replace him. In those days, when a son married, the first boy born to the couple was given to the grandmother. And so, when my grandmother moved away with my baby brother, I was very sad and so I just wouldn't eat. And so after a couple of months I was feeling sick and so my father decided to send me to my grandmother's to live with her. And so I was happy again. I was just homesick for

her. She had raised me from the time I was born and so I wanted to be back with her and my baby brother. And so once they saw that I was happy, they left me with her. That's how I grew up with my grandmother until age ten when my father again came and took me back home, telling me that they needed me to help with the kids. By that time I already had four more brothers and sisters and so I had to help with the housework and the kids. Also, I went to Alta Vista School there, which at that time was an all Anglo neighborhood.

AV: Where did your grandmother live?

EV: My grandmother lived in east El Paso, right on the border. When she moved away from my parents, she moved just about five or six blocks on the same street. We still lived on the same street.

AV: Did she live in a house, or apartments?

EV: No, it was apartments. She built apartments. But during the time that I was living with my grandmother, my parents moved from that area to the north on Tularosa Street, which was close to Alta Vista School. That's how come I had to transfer from Beall to Alta Vista.

AV: Your grandmother owned the apartments?

EV: Yes.

AV: How many tenants did she have?

EV: She had ten apartments. She lived in one and rented nine apartments.

AV: They were mostly Mexican, right?

EV: All Mexican.

AV: You told me once that she didn't trust banks?

EV: Right! That was during the...when the Depression started when all the banks closed up. She had put her money in the bank and she lost it, and so she never trusted banks again. She used to wear a money belt and that's where she carried her money. And she would tell me that if anything happened to her, an accident in the street or anywhere, to go for that money belt before I did

anything else, because she was afraid it would get stolen.

AV: Let's go to your education. Where did you attend school?

EV: I attended school when I was living with my grandmother. I went to Beall School.

AV: What year was this?

EV: I started when I was eight years old. 1922, I guess. I was eight years old before I started school because at that time there was no law that a child had to start school at six. So when I was six, my grandmother used to send me to a neighbor about a couple of blocks away from the house and she would teach children in the neighborhood to read and write in Spanish. She would also teach the little girls how to embroider and that was it. By the time I was eight I went to Beall School and I already knew how to read and write. So when I graduated from the second grade, I was double-promoted to the fourth grade, and that's when I transferred to Alta Vista.

AV: Is that when your parents took you back to their house?

EV: Yes, that's when they took me back to the house on Tularosa and I started going to Alta Vista.

AV: And after Alta Vista, where did you go?

EV: I went to Austin Junior High, which at that time was on Grant and Piedras. That is Houston School now.

AV: How long did you go there?

EV: For two years. I only had two years of high school and then my parents took me out. They wanted me to go to this Mexican school called Palmore College, or something like that. He was a Mexican professor from México and he used to charge tuition. But he had students from México, boarding students, and I learned Spanish. That was about all I learned there.

AV: After Palmore, where did you go? What school?

EV: From Palmore School, I went to Vocational School, which at that time was a school where high school dropouts would go to learn a trade or...

AV: What was the name of the school?

EV: Just El Paso Vocational School.

AV: El Paso Tech?

EV: No, it wasn't Tech. It was El Paso Vocational School. There was no Tech then. Later it was changed to Tech on Arizona Street.

AV: Where was this school?

EV: Vocational? It was on Oregon and Río Grande, I think,

AV: Did you get your GED afterwards?

EV: I didn't get my GED until I was going to start my nurse's training, and that's when I was told that I had to be a high school graduate or pass the GED. That's when I took the GED and passed it and that's how I started my nurse's training. But this was after I was already married.

AV: What school did you go to for your nurse's training?

EV: I took nurse's aid training at Hotel Dieu for about five weeks, worked a year as a nurse's aid, then I quit to go into LVN training at Thomason. For a whole year I trained, then I worked as an LVN for six years before I started training for RN at El Paso Community College.

AV: What year was this?

EV: I started in 1971, and finished in 1975. I had to take courses before I actually got into the training, and so that's why it took longer; but I have my degree now.

AV: Were there any social activities in school?

EV: Not as a young adult--there were hardly any social activities. We were not allowed to go out. Our parents were kind of strict with us and so we stayed pretty close to home in those days. Sometimes we would go to parties around the neighborhood, birthday parties.

AV: Were there any cultural activities at school?

EV: No, no, because that was something that just wasn't around in our time.

AV: When you started Elementary School, what was the ratio of Mexican-Americans to Anglo?

EV: When I started Elementary, that was in Beall and there were all Mexicans in Beall School. Later when I went to Alta Vista School, that was an all Anglo school and I was the only Mexican in my class, a class of 30. That was in the fourth grade. And even when I finished in the sixth grade there were about three or four in the class--hardly any Mexicans at all.

AV: There weren't even any Blacks at Beall?

EV: No, oh, no! Blacks at that time had to go to Douglas School, which was across the canal from where I lived. But even if they lived far away, they still had to come to Douglas. I mean, I was about two blocks, a block and a half, from Douglas, but I wasn't allowed to go to Douglas. I had to go five or six blocks to Beall School from where I lived because that was the school for us Mexicans. Blacks were segregated at that time. They couldn't even get on the street car. They had a sign that they were supposed to go to the back. Even in restaurants they had signs, "No coloreds allowed." The movies, they couldn't even go to a movie. And this was as late as the fifties, in the 1950's, when they weren't allowed to go to movies.

AV: At the time you were going to Beall School, did you notice a lot of discrimination from the Mexican-American against the Black?

EV: No, because Blacks lived in our neighborhood and some of them were pretty good neighbors, and we liked them. They were peaceful. They were very religious, some of them. They used to sing on Sunday; you know, play the piano, and sing on Sunday afternoons.

AV: Were there any interesting events or incidents that stand out in elementary school?

EV: Well, not that I can remember. Nothing, because all we did was just go to school, that was it. The only thing, if we were late, we were punished. The bell would ring and we had to start running or else; if we got there late, the teacher would get a ruler and hold our hand and just whack it as hard as she could, and it stung like fire.

AV: Were there any Mexican-American teachers in Beall?

EV: No! Uh-uh. All the teachers were Anglo. No Mexican teachers at all. They were all women teachers.

AV: How about in high school? Were there any interesting events?

EV: No. The only thing I can remember that was interesting was they elected a queen for the football team and stuff like that, but as Mexicans we just held back and we didn't participate in any of those events. To this day, we never attended games or things of that sort.

AV: How about at the El Paso Community College?

EV: Oh! That was something different. There was more activity; you felt more free to come and go and do things, speak out.

AV: What were the dating patterns among your peers? Did your friends use to date a lot?

EV: Well, not openly. We wouldn't date openly. Most of our dating was done by letter writing and by notes, stuff like that, because, like I said, our parents were strict. They wouldn't allow us to go on dates. So we grew up just being very close. We had to be in the house by dark and no going out at night.

AV: How did you spend a typical Saturday?

EV: Well, as a young adult, I had to do the housecleaning on Saturday--do the house chores. That was about it.

AV: You didn't go visit your friends or anything?

EV: No. No, that was on Sunday. My girlfriends would come over on Sunday and visit for a while, or I was allowed to go, but it had to be in the afternoon early and I had to be home early.

AV: What else would you do on a Sunday?

EV: On a Sunday, we would probably go to Washington Park, which was about ten or fifteen blocks away. We would walk all along the edge of the canal and just walk around the park. Sometimes we would go skating. They used to have skating there a long time ago at Washington Park.

AV: So that was part of your social activities? Skating and what else?

EV: Sometimes we would go to the zoo and watch the animals. Just walk around the park. Way back, years ago, they used to have a pond of water and they used to have boats, and we would rent those boats, you know, behind the swimming pool. They don't have a swimming pool there anymore but they used to have a pond of water there, and they would rent boats and we would paddle the boats. That was fun.

AV: Did you belong to any clubs or any kind of church group?

EV: Yeah, we belonged to a church organization called the Daughters of Mary. That was when I was a teenager. But that was a church organization; we didn't have any social clubs. Not being allowed to go to meetings at night, you know, that did it.

AV: You said that you once went to a bazaar, with music and all; and since your dating patterns were usually done on the sly isn't that where you could all meet together?

EV: Yeah, boys and girls from the neighborhood. They would hold bazaars at the church and they would have music and games and food, and that's where everybody met. But the parents also attended and they would more or less be chaperoning so that if anybody got out of line and was seen walking around with a boy, her

parents would know because somebody would always tell. The churches would hold bazaars and the musicians used to play. They used to have a stand right in the middle of the area and they would play music, the mariachi music, and young boys who had their girlfriends there would dedicate songs to them. And since they were not allowed to be together, the girls would walk in a circle around that stand where the music was playing and the boys would stand on the outside of the circle, and more or less, when the girls passed by, they would probably give them a gardenia or they would dedicate songs to them, you know. The mariachis would play tunes dedicated to a particular girl; you know, a particular boy would dedicate a song to a girl that he liked.

AV: The girls would go around in a circle?

EV: Yeah, two or three girls would walk arm in arm around the stand, and there was a long procession of girls walking around the stand; it was crowded. There were a lot of girls from all around the neighborhood, around the Church at Guardian Angel. And then the boys would stand on the outside of that line and just watch the girls as they walked by, and laugh, and smile, and whatever.

AV: And to their favorite one they would give a gardenia?

EV: They would give a gardenia, and some of them would even dedicate songs. They would pay the musicians to play a tune for that particular girl, and they would announce it on the microphone, "Dedicated to so and so."

AV: What else was there?

EV: Well, sometimes in the auditorium, in the school, they would have plays. Certain organizations from the church would have plays, and a lot of people from the neighborhood would go to those plays and enjoy them very much because they would have dance numbers and song members. The part that was not very interesting was when somebody came out and started reciting a poem about some

patriotic thing, it was kind of dull. But then a dance number would come out, a song, and then that would be very interesting.

AV: Did you have any recreational activities?

EV: No, there were no recreational activities, no games. I don't think we even had bingo at that time.

AV: Did you go to the movies?

EV: No, not really. If we went to the movies, it was on a Sunday afternoon; but very rarely because, you know, who had money to go to the movies?

AV: Could you tell me about the jobs you have had?

EV: The jobs that I've had... Well, when I was a young teenager, I would work babysitting for Anglo people, taking care of the babies and I would get paid about two dollars a week, working five days of the week. So, that was the extent of our jobs, because we couldn't get jobs in offices or...you know, that was discrimination. Hijo, I don't know if I...when I was about 17 years old I was asked to go to this job. A friend of mine recommended me to this family; it was a mother who had a young boy. He was one and half years old and I took care of him for two years. As he grew up, I would occasionally see him and today this young boy is Doctor Nickey. I hope it doesn't...well, I just hope it doesn't get out. He doesn't know that I took care of him when he was a baby. He is a very good doctor now, a pediatrician here in El Paso.

AV: Is that his name, Dr. Nickey?

EV: Dr. Lawrence Nickey.

AV: What other jobs did you hold down?

EV: Well, as I grew older, when I was about 22-23, I went to work in a pants factory earning \$6 a week, graduating to \$15 a week by the time I had been there 7 years. And then, from there, I went to work at the Popular in the

office. By that time WWII had come and there was a demand for people to work. And so I went to work at the Popular for \$15 a week, and I stayed there for one year, then I went to Fort Bliss. I got a very good job there working in the Medical Supply Office.

AV: That was at Beaumont?

EV: At Beaumont, Beaumont Hospital. And then I worked there for about two or three years until I got married and then I quit, stayed home, raised a family.

AV: What kind of job did you have during World War II, besides working at Beaumont?

EV: That was the only job that I held during WWII, at Beaumont, because I quit in 1946, and WWII ended in 1945. But after working at the pants factory, I quit, and then went to work at Fort Bliss as a seamstress, and that was during the war and there was a lot of work. A lot of it was just heavy work. I only stayed there about six months because the work was too heavy.

AV: Was there a quota that you had to meet?

EV: Not there. The quota that I had to meet was at the pants factory. We had to make a quota of 100,000 pants a day, and so it kept you pretty busy. So if we didn't make the quota, we were out of a job because the boss demanded that we make that quota or else we were fired. But a lot of us just had to work fast, from the time we went in to the time we quit, no rest.

AV: But at Fort Bliss you had no quotas, you worked at your own speed?

EV: We worked at our own speed and there was no quota. We didn't have to hurry. But the work was heavy because some of the sewing that we had to do was on tents and they were heavy. And so, after a while, we quit.

AV: You worked as a farm worker, right?

EV: Yes. That was in 1964 when work was very scarce here in El Paso. By that time all of the kids were in their teenage years and times were hard, so I decided that we would have to do something in the summertime when school was

out to help with expenses. So we planned to go to the fields in California and do some picking out there. So when June came around we loaded the car with all our goods, equipment, and we took off to California. The only thing is, we decided that your father should stay at home and take care of the house while we were gone. So we started our trip in the direction of California and we were going to see what we could do in the farms as far as picking. So we traveled to California and went past Bakersfield and we kept looking for signs that would tell us that workers were needed in the agriculture. And so when we got to San José we went to this address that we had written down from one of those signs on the highway. And when we got there it was about 4 o'clock and I was a little worried because we had to find a place to stay that night. The man there at the office tried to find a farmer that would take us in. And he called one up and while he was talking on the telephone I saw him looking towards us, me and my four teenagers and I heard him say something that sounded like, "Yeah, they look pretty clean." I guess he was just sizing us up to see what kind of people we were, and so I was a little self-conscious, wondering what kind of farmer was going to hire us. When we got to the farm, it turned out to be a Japanese farmer that needed people to pick his berries, and so he let us stay there. He gave up a room where we could stay there and he told us that we could have kitchen facilities, but that we would have to be up and working by 7:00 in the morning.

AV: Could you describe your living conditions there?

EV: Yes, it was a two-story building. It was made out of wood; it was like a shed. It wasn't very nice but at least there were a lot of Army cots there where we could sleep. But I more or less had to clean them up before I could use them because I was afraid; I didn't know who had used them before.

They looked kind of dirty. When I went to fix supper, I had to scrub, wash everything there. The stove was messy, the table was dirty. I had my own pots and pans, so I used mine. But he gave us kitchen facilities which were downstairs, and so by 6:00 we had to get up and eat breakfast and then be out in the fields.

AV: Were there any other people living there?

EV: Yeah, there was just one other guy from Mexico. He was a wetback. He was staying downstairs and he was working there at the time that we got there. He got to be very friendly with us. He was a nice guy.

AV: Where were the toilet facilities?

EV: The toilet facilities were separate. They were kind of in a shed and there was no door, no privacy. It was kind of embarrassing to go in there because everything was open, and so we more or less had to stand outside and see that nobody else came in while we were taking a shower.

AV: It was apart from the barracks?

EV: Apart from the two-story building, shed.

AV: How many hours did you work during the day?

EV: We had to work from 7:00 in the morning until 5:00. And we were paid by what we picked, not by the hour. So sometimes, if the berries were good, we would pick about \$20 a day; otherwise it would be \$10, \$12 a day. We would pick the berries and put them in a can that we had to tie around our waist. We had to tie two cans to our waist. When those two cans were full, we had to walk to a little cart where the mother of the Japanese man, the owner, would weigh the berries and pay us according to what we made.

AV: How long did you stay there?

EV: We stayed there about three weeks. After that, the work started petering out; there were hardly any berries to pick. And so my oldest son got tired

of being there, of picking, so we decided to move out. After we moved out, we were looking for an apartment or a house to rent, but nobody would rent to us because there were five of us, and so we had to go to a motel where they let us stay.

AV: Back at that farm, did you work on Sundays, too?

EV: Yes, oh, yes. We had to work every day. I remember the first Sunday I told the boss that we would be going to church and we would be gone. He said "Oh, no. You have to work Sunday, too. You start at 7:00 like any other day." So we had to go to six o'clock mass in order to come back and eat breakfast and then go pick again. So working seven days a week kind of got to us, and so after three weeks we decided to just move out and go find work on our own.

AV: What other job did you get?

EV: We moved out and we found a place in a motel, an apartment in a motel. We moved out at around noon and by two o'clock I took my oldest son to an employment office where he applied for a job. And he was lucky, he got a job right away. He was sent to a service station to pump gas. And I thought the boss was just going to interview him about the job, but we waited for him and when he came out he already had a uniform on; he was starting work right away.

AV: Was this in San José?

EV: This was in San José, yeah.

AV: And what about the rest of you?

EV: The rest of us went back to the apartment and then the next morning, after I took my oldest son to the service station, we went again back to the office, the agriculture office; and from there they sent us to another farm where we could go. I think we went to a place where they were picking onions and that's what we did for a while--pick onions--until those gave out. And then

after that we went to another farm and picked stringbeans. And after that we went to a place where they were...not picking the apricots, but we had to cut them open and lay them on boards because they were going to be dried up, and we worked there for a while.

AV: So, all in all, how much time did you spend out there in California?

EV: We stayed out there two months, just working different places. And when we came back we had I guess about two hundred dollars that we had made after paying all expenses--rent, food, and everything.

AV: Did anything happen on the way back?

EV: On the way back, we were coming back to Los Angeles because we wanted to visit my sister there. My oldest son, seventeen, was driving the car. It was the peak hour of traffic on the freeway. And this car was getting on to the freeway, and my son, in order to avoid hitting that old man, he swerved into the left lane and hit a brand new car on the side. And he did some pretty bad damage to the car. And so the driver told us to get off the freeway, pointing a finger for us to get off the freeway. We did and we talked to him and we told him that we had just come back from picking and that we didn't have much but that we would pay for the damage to his car. So he gave us the name of his insurance company in San Fernando, and the next day we went to the office and we arranged to make payments for the damage. They let us go. They didn't press any charges or anything. And so, I promised them that within a month I would pay them the...I think they asked for a hundred dollars damages, because I told them that as soon as I got back home I would pay them. After a month's time I sent back a check for the amount and they wrote me a very nice letter thanking me. Well, a year passed after that incident and then I got a letter from that man that we had had the accident with and he had sent back the check for a hundred dollars, which was the total of the damages that we had done, and he said that he was able to

arrange with his insurance company to pay him and that he was sending back our money, and he was very thankful.

AV: This was an Anglo man?

EV: Yeah, he was an Anglo man. He was a businessman. He was some officer in a bank, but he was a very nice man. He thanked us and he told us that we needn't worry any more about the accident.

AV: So when you came back home, did your husband finally have a job?

EV: No, my husband was still out of a job and it was very depressing to come back and find the situation that was still...you know, no hope! Here you all were going to start school again and we were paying tuition at that time because you were going to Cathedral. We had to pay tuition there; we had to pay tuition for the younger ones at Guardian Angel. So I decided that I was going to do something, not just stay at home. So I went to the employment office and told the man there who was interviewing me, I said, "Look, I have to work. Either you find a job for me or give some type of training, or something." Usually I was kind of quiet and didn't speak up, but this time I was desperate. So I told him that I needed some type of training, that I could work at. I was already old and I couldn't do heavy work, because he told me that all they had was motel work, cleaning up rooms and mopping, and heavy work. So I asked him if there was any type of training that I could get into. He said, "Well, we have the nurse's aide training here. If you want it, we'll give it to you, but you have to pass a test." So that was when they told me that they would give the test on Thursdays, for me to come back and take the test. So I came back, took the test, and passed it. And when I was waiting there to be called to tell me the results of the test,

they called me and then they said, "You made a very good grade on that test. Would you like to try to take the LVN test and see if you'll pass it? It'll be better for you." So I said, "Sure." So that was another day that I had to come back for the other test, and I also passed it. But I went ahead and took the nurse's aid training and when I finished it, I started working at Hotel Dieu. That's where I took the training. And so after a year of working as a nurse's aid, I quit to take the LVN for which I had already taken the test. But then when I registered for the LVN training, they told me I had to have a high school education or pass the GED test. So I went to take the GED and passed it, and then I started my LVN training--a whole year of training. Then I worked as an LVN for about six years in different hospitals and finally I decided and wanted to go on to the RN training. By that time, Community College had started here in El Paso, 1971, and I first started taking courses at Community College and then in 1972 I started the RN training and I finished it in 1975.

AV: How old were you when you got your RN degree?

EV: I was sixty. I started when I was fifty-seven.

AV: Let's go back in time. You were about four years old when there was an outbreak of the Spanish flu. Do you remember anything about it?

EV: The Spanish flu. Well, I was four years old so naturally I don't remember anything except what was told by my parents as I grew up. I think my father had it and he was very sick with it for a long time. I think he nearly went out of his mind. He was sort of like in a coma, he was so sick. I think it was around 1917 that that happened. It was a terrible thing. It was all over the States. A lot of people died from it.

AV: How about prohibition? What impact did prohibition have on your life and your family?

EV: In Prohibition days, it just meant that no liquor could be sold here in the

States and so there was a lot of smuggling done from Juárez into El Paso. And also at that time a lot of people would make their own beer in their homes. But if they were caught by the officers, immediately that beer was taken out in big boxes and tubs and broken outside. We could see the officers throwing them on to a pile of rocks and breaking them. And that beer would be flowing out into the street like a river.

AV: Did your parents make it?

EV: Yes. We used to help as kids. We used to help put the stopper on the... We used to have a kind of machine with a handle on it and we would put the bottle under it and put the little cap and help stop it. I don't know if we did such a good job because sometimes those bottles would start popping and breaking and we would have beer all over the floor.

AV: What else can you tell me about Prohibition?

EV: Well, like I said, there was a lot of smuggling and during the night we could hear the smugglers. When it was dark, just before dawn, around five o'clock in the morning, we could hear them running past our doors. You know, doors were right on the edge of the river. And we could hear them running with that can on their backs and we could hear the swish of the liquid, the alcohol, whatever it was that they had on. It was those ten gallon square cans they used to have a long time ago. Just before the guys would cross the river with their liquor, they had staked out a lookout that would give them a signal. This guy would make kind of a whistle and, well, it sounded real long. Three times he would do it, you know, and so after a while we would hear the guy running with the can on his back. And if he was lucky, he wasn't caught; but sometimes they would get caught. And there were times when they would jump over our fence and run through our back yard. Or sometimes the officers would come knocking on our doors and ask if we had seen anybody. Of course,

we would deny it; we hadn't seen anybody. So, that was the exciting thing about it. There was one time when we had a sheriff; he was Mr. Chris P. Fox, and he was a sheriff way back then in those days, in Prohibition days. We had some distant relatives who used to smuggle liquor and they used to store it in their house. And so one time the sheriff was tipped off that this family was going to bring in some liquor. And so they decided to hide behind the house in the alley where there was a chicken coop. So they hid in the chicken coop to watch the house. This was about midnight when they heard the smugglers coming in with their liquor. And so just as they started to crawl out of the chicken coop, one of the officers knocked down a pole where the chickens were roosting, and so that started a big fuss with the chickens, you know, so there they were sprawling all over the ground, trying to get up and run. By that time the smugglers took off. When they heard the racket, the chickens, they took off.

AV: That was Chris P. Fox?

EV: That was the story that Mr. Chris P. Fox told over the radio. He used to have a talk in the morning, Mr. El Paso. That's what he's called.

AV: And you knew who they were talking about?

EV: I knew at the time that he was telling the story over the radio who it was because those people were our distant relatives, you know; we knew that they were smugglers; we knew that they sold liquor.

AV: But there must have been other smugglers. Couldn't Mr. Fox have been at some other house?

EV: No, because it gave the address of the...the area, we knew where they lived. We used to visit them. And we knew what they were doing, smuggling liquor.

AV: Could you tell me something about the Depression era, how you went through it?

EV: Yes. During the Depression, those were very sad days because a lot of people

lost their money, lost their jobs. Many were hungry and those were very bad days. I can't even describe...people were so poor, they just didn't have any food to eat. In fact, we had a cousin of my father's who was left a widow at the time and she had to work to support her kids. She didn't have anything to eat and here she was working. She was working and she contracted TB. At that time a lot of people had TB in those times in El Paso. And so she died from lack of food. We tried to help them as much as we could but they were bad times for everybody.

AV: Where were you staying at this time?

EV: I was with my grandmother at that time.

AV: What would your grandmother do?

EV: My grandmother would help them out with food. Sometimes, if the tenants couldn't pay her the rent, she'd just let them live there until they could pay.

AV: Is that how your grandmother went through the Depression, by holding down those tenants, tenaments, or did she hold down a job?

EV: No, my grandmother never worked. She just stayed at home. But see, she would put her money in the bank at that time, and when the Depression came, that was when the banks went broke and she lost her money, so she never trusted the banks anymore. She would just keep her money at home. She was very "saving." She wouldn't spend any money.

AV: In WWII, what were you doing when you heard the news about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

EV: Oh, the 7th of December. That was a terrible day. There was this lady that was visiting us from the neighborhood when the news came over the radio and she heard it. Her husband was in the service. He was a soldier at Fort Bliss. Immediately she started crying and screaming about the war because that was what the radio was saying, that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. And so

I walked her back to her house (she was so nervous and sad that I walked her back); it was about five blocks from us, and I could see a lot of people walking the streets. At those times, if there were any news, they let out a newspaper. We used to call it "Extras." And the kids would be running up and down the streets, "Extra, Extra," you know, with the newspaper. People were buying up the extras, you know, reading the news about the war. It was a very sad day.

AV: Did all your brothers go to war?

EV: Yes. All my brothers went to war. Four of them that were old enough to go went. The youngest one wasn't old enough. And one of them had to go to Guam and he was killed there by the Japanese. He was just twenty years old.

AV: What does the Chicano Movement mean to you?

EV: The Chicano Movement, well, it doesn't mean anything special because in my time "Chicano" meant the same as "Mejicano;" it was just a race. Mejicano. Chicano. It doesn't have the same significance that it's given now. People are more conscious now of our race and, in our time, we dared not say...well, we were ashamed to say we were Mexican. Some Mexicans would say that they were Spanish. They wouldn't say Mexican.

AV: Why do you think they would do that?

EV: Because they would be looked down upon. People who were Mexican would be looked down upon, as not being good enough. So we were self-conscious. We always stayed in the background. We never went to places where we knew that we wouldn't be welcomed.

AV: So, do you believe that the Chicano Movement was good for the Mexican people?

EV: I think it is in a way. The only thing that is not good is these displays of anger and all these marches and stuff that they do now when they get upset and angry.

AV: Are you referring to the Brown Berets?

EV: I am referring to Mexican people. I don't know...is it Brown Berets?

AV: Well, like the young radicals. Is that who you are talking about?

EV: Yeah, radicals. Yes.

AV: But don't you believe it has brought some change in the way the Chicano is treated now?

EV: Yes, but there's still more that needs to be done because I think we are still being discriminated against.

AV: But you don't think it should be done through violence, right?

EV: Not through violence; no, never. I don't believe in violence.

AV: What kind of impact did the peso devaluation have? There were several devaluations. One in the 30's, one in '48, '54, and the latest one in '76.

EV: Well, that has helped the...us because that means we can buy cheaper goods over there in Juárez. It has not helped the people in México and I believe that's one of the reasons why we are having so many of them coming over to look for work here.

AV: When was the first time that you voted?

EV: I voted...when I grew up and could afford to pay the fee. See, we used to have to pay a \$1.75 in order to be able to vote.

AV: Just the women had to pay?

EV: Everybody. Everybody. But since Mexican people didn't have any jobs, Mexican people couldn't vote because they couldn't afford the fee that was charged.

AV: What year was this?

EV: I don't remember the year. But I do remember that there was a time when women were not allowed to vote, so we didn't vote. But then afterwards, they allowed women to vote, and so those who could afford to pay the \$1.75 could vote. But

a lot of Mexican people were poor, couldn't afford it, and so they didn't vote. Now it's free so we can vote, so there's more turnout of Mexican people.

AV: What is the level of your political awareness?

EV: I am very much aware of the importance of voting and I never miss a chance to vote for whatever issue comes up in our government.

AV: How do you vote?

EV: I am a Democrat but I can go the other way if...I have to weigh one candidate over another and make my choice.

AV: Have you ever been involved in community organizations?

EV: Yes, I am involved with the church organization. I belong to the Legion of Mary. We visit hospitals, nursing homes, the aged, those who live alone.

AV: How about in the community?

EV: In the community?

AV: Like the one that is to keep El Paso clean or...

EV: No, none of that. None of that. I just don't have the time.

AV: These are general questions now. When was the first time you heard the word "Chicano"?

EV: When I was young. We used to hear the word Chicano, but it referred to a person of the Mexican race.

AV: How old were you?

EV: Oh, I must have been around ten or twelve.

AV: And was the word Chicano used as a derogatory term?

EV: No, no it wasn't. It was said among Mexican people and we could use it as referring to Mexican people, not in a derogatory manner, because, you know, we were Mexicans.

AV: What is your opinion about the use of the word now?

EV: Well, my opinion about the use of the word now, Chicano, it's more like we're proud of being a Mexican. It still doesn't mean anything derogatory. Now we can more or less not be ashamed to say...we can be more open about what we are and not be ashamed of it like it was in the old days.

AV: Since the beginning of the Chicano Movement, do you believe that they have done any good in making people aware of the problems of the Chicano for, say, education?

EV: Yes, I think so, especially with young people. I think they are more aggressive in the way that they express their needs. And I think that we are being heard--more about what we need as far as education and rights.

AV: Do you think they have brought out anything as far as culture is concerned?

EV: Well, yes, I think there is more being taught about what the Mexican culture is now, whereas before there wasn't anything being done about it. But now it's coming out and I think it's good that everyone is aware of what the Mexican culture is.

AV: How about in society, in general? Do you think it has brought out most of the problems, then?

EV: Society in general. Well, there's still some areas where discrimination is still being practiced, and so we need to keep on working so that society will recognize us for what we are. We are just trying to get...like President Carter says, he's for human rights, and so Mexicans are human and there's no reason why we shouldn't have any rights.

AV: Say a Brown Beret came up to your door and was soliciting members to help them in their cause, would you join?

EV: What cause would that be?

AV: Cause for the Chicano; for the betterment of the Chicano.

EV: Yes, I would help in whatever way I could.

AV: A Brown Beret?

EV: I don't know what a Brown Beret stands for, but I don't believe in....

AV: They are supposedly radicals.

EV: Well, I don't believe in that, in being a radical. I believe in a peaceful way of accomplishing goals.

AV: Let's get into the problem of the illegal aliens. What is your opinion of the illegal aliens?

EV: Well, illegal aliens are first of all human beings, and I feel that what they are trying to do is find a better way of life. Sure, they might be doing something illegal, but at the same time I think that they should be treated in a fair way and not be abused.

AV: How do you feel about President Carter's plan for amnesty of the illegal aliens?

EV: I suppose that would be something that would have to be worked out by the government because they have to find a way to make arrangements for these people but at the same time to be at peace with México. I think the idea is to have something that will be better for both nations, whatever plan they can come up with.

AV: Have you ever employed an illegal alien?

EV: Yes. I never ask a person who comes looking for work whether he is alien or whatever. I just hire him and he works for me.

AV: Can you more or less tell that he is a wetback?

EV: No, not unless he tells me.

AV: You can't tell the difference?

EV: No. If he tells me that he is an American citizen, that he lives here in El Paso, I just take his word for it. I'm not going to question him.

AV: What kind of jobs have you given them?

EV: They clean up the yard, cut the grass, weeds; paint, paint the fence. So whatever kind of work I have that's hard for me to do, I let them do it. I feel like I'm helping them out and they're helping me.

AV: What do you think about the Ku Klux Klan patrolling the border?

EV: From what I have heard about the Ku Klux Klan those people employ methods that are not legal. They can be kind of rough in their way and so I don't think I would approve of them patrolling the area. I don't like to see people hurt, especially a wetback who is just trying to find a better way of life.

AV: Would you compare the KKK to the Brown Berets?

EV: No. No, because the KKK is not the Brown Berets. Their tactics you mean?

AV: Their tactics, their methods of...

EV: Well, if the Browns use those tactics then I'm against it because the Ku Klux Klan from way back years ago, they were very mean. They would torture people.

AV: Do you believe that Chicano groups should use countermeasures against the policy of the KKK?

EV: No. No, I don't. Brutality you mean?

AV: Use some kind of countermeasures against the KKK.

EV: Oh, against the KKK.

AV: Well, I just said Chicano groups in general. But if you want, say the Brown Berets to use countermeasures against the KKK for patrolling the border.

EV: Well, I believe that if a person is being attacked, he should defend himself.

AV: Well, the KKK is there just to apprehend the illegal alien, but anybody that looks like an illegal alien, they'll stop, and ask for identification or whatever. So do you believe that Chicano groups, say for instance, the Brown Berets should be there and use countermeasures against the KKK for this policy of theirs?

EV: Not if it is a peaceful policy, I don't think so. I don't think they should use countermeasures.

AV: Say you were walking on the levee and the KKK stopped you. Wouldn't you be peeved at that?

EV: Not if I didn't have anything to hide. I mean, I'm an American. Are you talking about illegal aliens being on the levee and being...?

AV: I'm talking about you, an American citizen, were stopped for no reason at all but that you were Chicano, you were brown; they stopped you to check your identification to see if you were an illegal alien...

EV: I have been stopped. I have been stopped by the Immigration to be checked.

AV: I'm talking about the KKK, if they stopped you. How would you feel? Would you cooperate?

EV: I don't think the KKK has authority to stop me so I would resent it. I don't think I would like it and I would tell them so. I mean, the only ones who we are responsible to is the immigration officer and he has to identify himself. But if the KKK identifies himself as KKK, I mean, that don't...

EV: So, would you believe it would be all right then for Chicano groups to use countermeasures against this?

EV: Yes! Yes, we have to defend our rights.

AV: How far would you say that a Chicano group should go to defend their rights?

EV: Within legal limits. Not use violence.

AV: No bearing of arms?

EV: No bearing of arms! No violence. Uh-uh. That's not the way.

AV: And so we end this interview with a note of non-violence.

EV: Right! Viva Chicano power!