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Interview no. 312

Pete Leyva

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Pete Leyva (1894-1982)
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 22, 1976
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: 312
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DATE TRANSCRIBED: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in Presidio, Texas in 1894; spent his early years in Marfa and El Paso; held several jobs, including playing semi-pro baseball; publicity man for southwest area racetracks.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biographical data; education; early job experiences; travelling on freight trains; experiences during World War I; the Mexican Revolution and his experiences as an interpreter for Pancho Villa; playing semi-pro baseball; experiences working in gambling house in Tijuana; discrimination.

2 hours; 53 pages.

/ This is an oral history interview with Mr. Pete Leyva of 3816 Oxford St., El Paso, Texas. Interviewing is Oscar Martínez, July 22, 1976. /

M: Mr. Leyva, would you tell me when and where you were born?

L: Presidio, Texas. That's down in the Big Bend country.

M: What year?

L: I've got it right here handy. I always keep it handy 'cause a lot of people ask me, "How old are you?"

M: Your certificate here says January 26, 1894.

L: Right. That's when I was born.

M: Did you grow up in Presidio?

L: I was about five years old when we left there, went to Marfa, Texas. My father used to drive the stage from Marfa to Presidio--Shafter, really. The stage used to go from Marfa to Shafter and Presidio. My father used to pick up the gold bars about that big, and quicksilver in bottles of steel that high, at Presidio. Sometimes when he didn't have any passengers he had to have somebody to open the gates for the stage, so he used to take me to open the gates. And we'd have a Ranger on top, two Rangers in the front, and two Rangers in the back, 'cause we was loaded with gold or quicksilver when we didn't have any passengers. And my father used to break in horses at the same time on the stage, wild horses and mules. It would run from Shafter to a little place there they call Ruidoso, eat dinner there, and then come into Marfa. We used to leave Presidio about 7 o'clock in the morning and get in Marfa in time to put the gold on the trucks for the train to pick it up in Marfa, Texas. It would take at least six hours from Shafter to Marfa.

M: Where was the gold coming from?

- L: Shafter; and quicksilver, lots of it.
- M: Mines around that area?
- L: Well, there was then. A lot of people used to go there and pick up a little at the time. Yeah, we'd pick it up right there. And they come in steel bottles about that big. I was too small, but I could take both hands and pick 'em up. I couldn't pick up the gold bars 'cause they were too heavy; a little bigger than a brick, gold bars. So my father done that for several years and after that they fixed the highway for people to go back and forth and they took the stage off. The men that owned the stage was big store men in Marfa, Texas, named Murphy and Walker. In other words, my father worked for them, for Murphy and Walker. He took passengers to Presidio back to Marfa and sometimes to Ft. Davis, Texas.
- M: And you would go along for the ride?
- L: Sometimes. If my father had people that could get off and open the gates for him, I couldn't go, because I went to school then. I had to go to school.
- M: But you still remember riding on that stagecoach.
- L: Oh, yes! I knew a lot of bandits and all that stuff down there.
- M: Do you remember any interesting experiences? You mentioned bandits.
- L: Well, at that time, between Terlingua and Marfa, the only time that I know... Of course, I didn't see them, but my father said that there were some fellows, cowboys, tried to hijack the stage; but he had two guards on top of the stage and two in front of the stage--cowboys, you know, marshals--and two in back. So they wouldn't dare attack. So my father was pretty lucky. He never was hijacked.
- M: He was never attacked.

L: No.

M: What was the most interesting experience that you had going with him on the stagecoach?

L: Let's see. In Terlingua they claimed that there were Indians, which there were Indians there, see? So every time we went through there, I always wanted to see the Indians, 'cause I was a kid, you know. But we never did see any. But there were some there in the hills, in the mountains there. So I didn't get to see any of 'em. I always wanted to, because I was going to school and I was going to give my teacher a story on that, and I couldn't 'cause I didn't see 'em.

M: You say you went to school in Presidio?

L: Well, I was too small to go there. I only went there one year, and then the rest of the time in Marfa.

M: What stands out in your mind of those early school experiences, elementary school?

L: You mean from the school, or in my comings and goings?

M: Well, your school years; first in school and then growing up in your neighborhood.

L: I can't remember our teacher's name, but (her family) was very well known people in Marfa, Gillettes. They were cattle people, they had a lot of cattle; Gillettes. She was our teacher when I first started to go to School--in other words, I'd be absent--then I'd come back and tell her about me going with my father, so I was excused.

M: You got a big break.

L: Yeah! You see, that way I didn't have to go to school.

M: Didn't you like school?

- L: Yeah, because, see, ever since I was a little boy I always wanted to be an athlete of some kind. At that time we only had baseball and football, handball, tennis, and stuff like that. But I always wanted to be a boy, a man, you know; so I took up baseball. I played a little football, too, even here at the school. Me and Chris Fox made the first touch downs in the old time's game.
- M: Were there a lot of Mexican Americans in the school that you went to?
- L: Yes, we was about half and half; I'm talking about Marfa now.
- M: How did you get along with Anglos?
- L: Well, we managed because I was kind of a favorite among the kids and some of the girls, because I was kind of a half-athlete, you know, and I used to wear fancy pants up to here. Well, I was just a big boy, that's all; I used to get around.
- M: How did you get along with the teachers?
- L: Very nice, because I was always obedient with my teachers, I was always willing to do something. Like say on Christmas, I'd go out and get holly, mistletoe or something. I'd climb the tree. I used to be good at that, too.
- M: Were the teachers good to Mexican Americans?
- L: Well, in a way. Just like now, they had their favorites; and I was one of their favorites.
- M: What about other Mexican kids? Did they get along okay?
- L: Well, I'd say they did. But at first they were a little backward about things, the Mexican kids, you know. They didn't give them much attention, I guess. But for some reason I was one of the guys that could get along pretty good with everybody, so I got along pretty good with all of them.

M: What about high school?

L: I didn't go to high school there. I just started one year here in high school.

M: Here in El Paso?

L: Yeah, but I (also) went to (elementary) schools here. At that time, Aoy School was López's School when I went. I started there; that was in 1905 or '06. Then it changed to Aoy. Then I changed from Aoy to Alamo, then to San Jacinto, and then to high school. The high school was right there on Arizona Street then, where the (School of Nursing) is now. I played football there, and baseball.

M: At what age did you leave Presidio?

L: I was about six, seven years old; between six and seven.

M: So then you came to El Paso. Why did your family come to El Paso?

L: Because after they took the stage away... My father was a man that could handle horses. He used to raise horses of all kinds, and mules. At that time, when the Army had mules for the ammunition, the little mules, my father used to raise them and sell them to the government. See, we had a ranch down there. And then we come here. So my father got word from a friend of his to come, because they were hiring good teamsters to come to work for the city at that time. When my father first got with the city, they used to have those wagons that opened on the bottom; they used to go to the mountain to get the rock when they started paving the streets in El Paso, in 1905, '06, somewhere in there. My father done that.

M: When you came here, where did you live?

L: On the El Paso Street, South El Paso, in a little dingy hotel, till we got straightened out.

M: Do you remember your first impressions of El Paso?

L: Well, yes, because it was something new. Then, on the other hand, they had fire engines; and every time they had a fire, their fire engines would go down the street and make a lot of noise, smoke. And I used to run out there and see what was going on; I liked that. Then they had parades, carnivals; and down in Marfa, we didn't have them. In other words, more entertainments, 'cause Marfa is only a small place.

M: How long did you live in that hotel on South El Paso Street?

L: We didn't stay there but about six or seven months, till we got a house down on Fourth and Stanton.

M: How long did you live there?

L: We lived there about three years, because there was a colored school for colored people; Douglas School, all colored people. We lived right next door to them.

M: Where was that located?

L: Stanton and Fourth.

M: And Douglas School was there?

L: There's an alley, then next to the alley was Douglas something now.

M: Where did you go to school?

L: I started going to "Escuela López," which is now Aoy School.

M: What do you remember about your experiences in that school?

L: We had some good teachers. I was lucky to get along with teachers. I was always doing something for them, and I got along with the teachers all the time. I was a good boy in school, even if I say so myself.

M: Did you have Anglo teachers?

L: All Americans, nice teachers. I can tell you the first teacher that I met

--was Mrs. Gallagher; she was the principal at Aoy School. And at Alamo we had Miss Higgings. She lives right here on Arizona Street. Sometimes I call her, she's still living.

M: How old is she?

L: Oh, I don't know exactly. But we used to get a kick out of a teacher that used to live at what we call old Fort Bliss. Instead of coming in a car, in those days she use to come in a buggy with a horse. She was teaching fourth grade and I was there, so at about 1 o'clock I'd go out and give the horse some water. She used to park the buggy right in front of school there in a vacant lot; there was a tree. And I used to go over and give him alfalfa and water. Then I could have a little fun for an hour or two. See, I was by myself, I could go out, get away from classes.

M: Were you always trying to get away from classes?

L: No; well, in a way, yes. When it was a little hard, I would; like say, Arithmetic. Of course, I liked Geography, but I was a little slow in Arithmetic.

M: When was the first time you went to Juárez?

L: In 1907. There used to be some boys that come to school from Juárez at that time.

M: To your school?

L: No, they used to come to St. Mary's School, down on Oregon Street. It was a Catholic School. Big businessmen today that I know are still living; García and several others.

M: What do you remember about Juárez from those early days?

L: Well, at that time, I tell you, I was always butting into someting. I got acquainted with some of the people over there. And you see, at that

time my father wasn't making much money, because there was four of us kids. So I always tried to make a little money on the side, so I'd go over and sell banderillas at the bullfights.

M: On the other side?

L: Yeah! We'd sell them for two bits; we used to get them a dime a piece, and we'd sell them for 35 ¢. Now you can't buy them for a dollar and a half.

M: Did you make out pretty good?

L: Oh, yes! I used to bring my mother 40 ¢, 75 ¢, 80 ¢, sometimes \$1.00.

M: Did a lot of American tourists go down there then?

L: Well, at that time, yes, there were a lot of Americans. You could walk across there for 2 ¢ then. In later years the streetcar used to drive around and come back--open air streetcar.

M: Did you have jobs in El Paso when you were a kid?

L: I'll tell you how it was. I'd call it a job, 'cause I was always trying to make some money to take home. So the first time I went to selling newspapers for The El Paso News, Warner's Drug Store used to be right in front of the Post Office, and I used to sell The El Paso News. A boy told me, "Why don't you go over there and sell papers?" So I went over there, and, by golly, I sold five or six papers the first day; that was 30 cents. I went home with it and gave it to my mom. But after that I got smart, bigger, and I sold The Times in the morning, I'd finish at about 8 o'clock or 8:30, and run to school. Then after that we'd come back and sell The Herald, El Paso Herald. So when I got big, when I was selling papers, I got to working as a stuffer, stuffing the papers. But after that I worked on the press; I wanted to be a pressman, but I didn't

finish. I could have finished, but the war come on and then I had to go.

M: How long were you a newsboy?

L: About three years. Because I used to work for The El Paso Times, I used to know the man that used to own the old Fort Bliss; they got a restaurant there now. He gave me a job one day, 'cause he saw me on the street selling The El Paso Herald Post, and he says, "You come down and sell The Times." I went down there and I used to sell five, 10, 20 papers a day. I got to sell 20 papers a day before school time.

M: What time did you get up in the morning?

L: About 6, sometimes before, when we had to stuff the comics on Sunday. I could sell one paper just as regular as you're sitting there at the Zeigler Hotel; an old man. Oh, he was mean! He wouldn't let newspaper boys go in there, he used to run them all out. But he took a liking to me and I used to sell him the first paper every morning.

M: What do you remember most about those years as a newsboy? Do you recall any interesting stories?

L: Yes. At The Times, we used to stuff the comics for Sunday, and then on Saturdays, we used to stuff papers for The Herald. They used to give us 10 papers to stuff with the comics, so that would be 50 ¢. And then we used to get a dollar and a half to stuff the other papers. So that was \$2.00 right there; that was a lot of money. I used to run home and give it to Mama.

M: How long did you have to work to get those \$2.00?

L: Well, the press used to start at 5 o'clock in the morning. We'd be through about 6 or 6:30; then go out in the street another hour or hour and a half; and then run home and go to school. That's what I had to do. But the fun-

niest part of it was this: At that time, of course, my people were poor and I had old shoes on, and sometimes it'd snow and be cold. So I was coming down the street one day and I saw tennis shoes for .55¢. So I made up my mind on Sunday to sell that many papers to buy those pair of shoes; and I bought them. 'Cause I used to like to play ball.

M: You made enough money to buy your own tennis shoes.

L: Yeah, yeah!

M: Did they have kids from Juárez crossing over to sell the newspapers in those days?

L: I don't remember; there were some from California. We used to have newsboys that travelled from town to town; like, say, California, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. So it got so that we used to have to fight to sell papers. So there was a nigger boy came from Los Angeles, and he was tough. He came down here and he said he was going to whip every newsboy on the paper; so I told him I'd take him on. I knocked him down. From then on, every time I'd go to California, he'd tell me, "Come on, you help me sell papers." He was a big guy there; they had some kind of newsboys' union, and he was head of the union. I wished I had that card, union card; he give it to me, 'cause I was tough, see? He used to tell them guys, "This guy whipped me in El Paso." (Chuckles).

M: Did you get into a lot of fights?

L: No, just with outsiders. Guys come from Chicago and different places-- newsboys, tramps. You know, they'd come into town and sell enough papers to eat on, and then get going. So they're the ones that we had to put up with. We used to help them.

M: You helped them out?

- L: Oh, sure! 'Cause I'd think... "Well, sometime I'll go to California or some place and they'll help me." And when I went to California, another fellow that came here, he was at the head of the Circulation Department. So I went there to see him, and then he put me to work. I was selling papers there on Fifth and Broadway. I'd sell 20, 30 papers a day.
- M: How old were you when you went to California?
- L: About nine years old, maybe.
- M: How did you get to California?
- L: On freight trains.
- M: You took the freight trains?
- L: Sure!
- M: At that age? So young?
- L: Yeah, there was three of us: Charlie White, myself, and another boy; I can't remember his name. We used to hop on them trains, 'cause the trains use to run by the Herald Post there. We used to hop them freights and go. I was about 10 years old, I guess.
- M: Did your parents let you go?
- L: They wouldn't know! I'd go four, five days; come back. Maybe a week.
- M: Where did they think you were? Didn't your parents worry about you?
- L: Oh, yes! When I come home the first time, my father gave me a beating. After that, I cut it out. But I had about six, seven dollars in my pocket, so I gave it to my mother. I made that in California. I was always saving my money and giving it to my mother.
- M: That must have been a big adventure, going off to California in a freight train.
- L: Well, according to the Newsboys' Union, newsboys had to be some kind of

tramp, to go back and forth. "I'll go to California, stay a week, sell newspapers, and come back," the old saying was. You know, a kid would do anything.

M: Did you do that during the summer when school was out?

L: Oh, yes!

M: You didn't do that when school was in session?

L: No, 'cause, see, in the winter we used to get up early, no matter what kind of weather it was; because in El Paso it used to snow that high sometimes! But I'd get out, 'cause I was big enough, and sell papers; go into hotels and restaurants and sell them. There were two good customers I had: Old man Schwartz of The Popular, he'd come down Mesa and I'd sell him a paper; and this big jewelry man, too, used to come down the street and he used to buy a paper. So that was 10¢ right there. So we'd go and eat a waffle-- 15¢--and then we'd go ahead and keep the rest of it. We used to eat a waffle for 15¢, and coffee.

M: Do you remember any interesting adventures as you went to California on the freight train? Meet any tramps or get into any fights?

L: Yes! It's a long story, too. At that time there was a man they used to call the King of the Hobos. I don't remember his name, but we heard a lot about him. We used to go down here, hop them freights and see them bums and talk to them; and they told us, "When you get in Lordsburg, if you look that way or this way, there'll be hobos cooking in an old can. So if you happen to get there at night, you can see the fire a little ways away. But you got to go get wood and go out and ask for this and that; and you'll get enough food to put in this can and eat it." That's what we used to do, or else go to houses and ask for a bite. So one guy, an old timer from Cleveland, Ohio,

says, "I'll tell you boys, when you get into California, meet the milkman. He come there early, 4 or 5 in the morning, to leave the milk in front of the restaurants. So when he goes over there, take a couple of quarts of milk." That's the way we'd eat, 'cause when the bakery man come in, we'd steal doughnuts, half a dozen or so. That was our food for the day.

M: So you'd get doughnuts and milk, huh?

L: Yeah! This old timer used to tell us how to do it.

M: When did you start high school?

L: In 1912, around in there; I really don't remember. But it was on Arizona Street. I only went there one year, that's all.

M: Just one year? To El Paso High School?

L: Yeah!

M: Then you dropped out?

L: Yes, because I went to work. I was big enough to go to work.

M: What kind of job did you get?

L: After I got through selling papers, the pressman for The Herald Post, Schroeder his name was, he said he'd give me a job, so I stayed with him. He said, "I want you to be a pressman." The press was a Goss press, and I knew all the parts, because if anything went wrong with it, Schroeder would say, "Kid, you'd better look and see how the comics came out." So I'd check it, see, the ink and everything. I was getting to be pretty good at it, 'cause I like it. But the ink got the best of me.

M: What happened?

L: Well, I got sick. I went to the doctor and he told me, "You're allergic to it."

M: So you had to give it up.

- L: Yeah. Then my eyes were bad then.
- M: What else did you do then?
- L: Let's see, delivering papers. I had a route up on Sunset Heights, clear down to Old Fort Bliss. I was making pretty good.
- M: That's while you were in high school?
- L: I was going to school then.
- M: When you quit school, what did you do?
- L: Go ahead and sell the afternoon papers, the evening papers.
- M: Did you have any other jobs while you were a young man?
- L: No, because I wasn't old enough. When I was in the fourth or fifth grade, they wanted somebody more experienced, who could read and write and so forth. I was too young.
- M: After your job selling newspapers, what else did you do?
- L: I'd go home, I guess, and stay in at night, because at that time, if you'd go out at night they used to have a curfew--9 o'clock. So I'd be sure to be home at 9 o'clock.
- M: You mean, they'd pick you up after 9 o'clock?
- L: Yeah! They'd keep you overnight and send you home.
- M: How old did you have to be in order to stay out?
- L: I think it was 15.
- M: Why did you quit school?
- L: Why? I'll tell you what: My father couldn't get a job, and my brothers couldn't get a job, so I had to do something. So the best I could do that I know of was either to sell newspapers or shoe shine. I was good at that, too--shoe shine--with a box that big with all the stuff, on Sunday morning.

M: Why couldn't your father get a job?

L: Because he was new here and he didn't know anybody, so us kids had to work here and there.

M: What other jobs did you have besides selling newspapers and shining shoes?

L: It's a long story. I was big enough to save enough money to buy a bicycle. A fella by the name of Newman used to have a bicycle shop, and I used to sell papers around his place. So one time I told him, "I want a bicycle." He says, "The only way you can get one is to get enough money to give me the down payment, get \$3.00 or \$4.00, then you can give me 50¢ or a dollar a week, and you can buy one." And he let me have one. So I got smart and I went to work as a messenger boy. And I was a pretty good messenger, I knew the town well. At that time, the saloons used to close at 9:30, if you remember, way back, and that district was wide open all right. So we'd get a lot of messenger calls to go to the different places. And I used to work as a messenger after school, so I could pay for my bicycle, too, see? I used to work as a messenger in the afternoon. I'd go there after school til about 11:00 at night. But after I got bigger, then I got to work anytime, all night, til 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. All them places were open, the district. We used to take messages all over town, because the only messengers they had was a postal telegraph. They only had two or three.

M: How long did you have that job?

L: I'd say three years. I've got a picture right there as a messenger boy.

M: Mr. Leyva, after you left that job as a message boy, you went to World War I?

L: Yes.

M: Could you tell me about your experiences in that war?

- L: Yes. I can show you the pictures if you've got time, because I happened to be on the ship that took President Wilson across to sign the peace; our ship. In other words, it's a convoy; the place was right in the middle of the George Washington, and we was the number one ship with him to go across, and to see that he got to the point where he was going to sign the peace. I've got pictures of it.
- M: So you were in the Navy?
- L: Oh, yeah!
- M: Did you volunteer?
- L: I volunteered. I was just big enough and old enough to go. I went over there and says, "I want to go, and I'm going to war," 'cause I liked it; I wanted to go some place.
- M: Where did you get your training?
- L: At _____, in San Francisco.
- M: Were there a lot of Mexican boys who went off to war?
- L: No, there wasn't very many, because when I was at _____, I didn't see over five,; then when I went to _____ island to meet our ship, there wasn't very many. Of course, they had me coming and going, because I used to play ball with the ballclub. I mingled a lot with the officers and ballplayers from the big leagues who joined the Navy, and I got acquainted; so they had me coming and going. And we chose the first destroyer made at _____ Island, No. 88--I got good pictures of it. And they took us on there because they'd choose ballplayers to go, so we could play ball anyplace we wanted to. I /also/ got pictures where you can see President Wilson walking up the steps to sign the peace; and we were there. In other words, we took him there. Sailors and soldiers guarded him. We

got a big kick out of it.

M: It must have been quite an experience.

L: The people in France, they were very nice to us, very nice, 'cause we could spend a lot of money.

M: Sounds like you had a good time in the Navy.

L: Oh, yeah! I loved it. If I had a chance, I'd go now; yeah.

M: How long were you in?

L: Close to three years, til the war was over. And then coming back, we brought the soldiers back, convoyed 'em back.

M: You brought them back from Europe?

L: Yes.

M: So you were on one of these transport ships?

L: No, a destroyer, fighter. They run just like cars, 15, 20, 30 mph. Now they make 50, 60 mph. We had some good men on it, because we fired the guns, and we had some good gunners. And a bridge closed in on me and cut this finger here. For some reason the bridge closed in on me, and I was firing. We got word that there were some submarines ahead of us, so they gave us the distance and the point so we could shoot.

M: After you got out of the Navy, you came back to El Paso?

L: Yes.

M: What did you do then?

L: Worked for the city.

M: Doing what?

L: First, I started driving a truck for the city waterworks. I worked for the city quite a long time, driving a truck. A fellow by the name of Serna, a big hero in the war, him and I looked for a job, and we got that job.

We went over together and came back together.

M: Did you have any trouble getting a job?

L: No, because I knew the Mayor. He was a big hero in the war. I saw him on the street one day and he says, "Pete, what are you doing?" I says, "Nothin'." He says, "Come on, I'll give you a job. I'm the Mayor of the city."

M: How did you know him?

L: Because when we came back, there was a lot of doings about soldiers from overseas; I met him. He was a lieutenant, he was in the Army. And he told me to go to work. At that time he lived up in Kern Place.

M: Did a lot of Mexicans work for the city?

L: Not many, no. In other words, when we came back, we got preference in all the jobs. Of course, some of the boys couldn't work; wounded, sick, from the swamps over there. So they couldn't work. But me and the other fellow, we stuck together and we got the job.

M: What other jobs did you have after you left that one?

L: I went to work for the Sheriff's Department.

M: Doing what?

L: Deputy Sheriff.

M: How did you get that job?

L: Because I know the Sheriff; he used to be a motorcycle cop. He met me on the street one day and he says, "Pete, are you out of a job?" I says, "Yeah." He said, "Well, I'll give you a job." So he gave me a job. I was there about five, six years.

M: What interesting experiences did you have as a deputy Sheriff?

L: Lots of experiences. Gambling, in the first place. See, he knew that I

knew El Paso pretty well, when I was a young boy and he could tell me to go to a certain place and I could find the place. They were gambling, dope fiends and what have you. So I stayed there, then I got tired of it and I quit. I didn't like the job because I had to arrest you if you were my friend. So I didn't like the job.

M: Do you remember any specific incidents that stand out?

L: Yes. At that time, there was a lot of gambling in El Paso in Chinatown, and I knew it, I knew all of them; and I knew the man that used to run them. So there was nothing else to do but get a couple of deputies and go down there and raid the joints.

M: What years are we talking about?

L: '26, '27, around in there.

M: That was during Prohibition.

L: Yeah!

M: Did you raid places that sold booze? Or did they make booze?

L: Well, at that time there was a lot of home brew made, and of course we didn't care about home brew. We used to leave all that stuff to the government men; that was their job.

M: So you didn't bother with that stuff?

L: No. Oh, we could catch a lot of it, but we didn't want to. We used to go to the bootlegger and get home brew; they'd give us two or three quarts of it. They give it to us.

M: You got stuff from bootleggers?

M: Sure! At that time Jimmy Hill was the Chief Deputy Marshall. After I got through as a jailer, he gave me a job emptying whiskey in the sink, from bootlegging, you know. I had to dump it out. I'd take a bottle or two home,

good stuff. Oh, I had some awful jobs.

M: Did you make trips to Juárez frequently?

L: When I was a little boy, yes; but not now.

M: Well, during Prohibition, did you go over there for a good time?

L: Once in a while we used to go to the bullfights.

M: How about to bars and casinos, those places?

L: No. When I got to be big enough, I went to work in a gambling house over there, 'cause I could deal. I could deal there at the Tivoli; I done that for several years. Went to Nevada to work up there. I went to Tijuana to work there for this guy here that I'm working for now, Alessio. He's got the racetracks. We used to have the gambling down there; I worked there. I can deal dice, and I can deal anything in gambling.

M: When did you do all this, this gambling?

L: I done that for about six, seven years.

M: How old were you?

L: Well, when I came back from Europe.

M: Right after?

L: Yeah!

M: What interesting experiences do you remember from that?

L: Very good ones. Of course, it comes up here lately about Pancho Villa in them days. See, we was working at the Tivoli at that time. And my father and grandfather joined the Revolution, Pancho Villa's Revolution. My father was a major and my grandfather was General Sánchez during the Revolution. So I was old enough to travel, and me and my mother went to see my father and my grandfather in Torreón. And we ran out of money to buy groceries. Pancho Villa had his own private car, he had all kinds of money

all over. So my mother says, "Go down and tell your father to give us some money to buy some groceries." So I went over and I started walking next to this car to see my father. And so the guard stopped me, he says. "Where are you going?" I said, "I want to see my dad." And the guard that was there knew me and my father; he was in my father's troops. So he told me to wait, and he called him. Then I went in there to ask him. First Pancho said, "Who is that boy?" Pancho was sitting there talking to all those generals and newspapermen. So my father said, "He's my son. I want to give him some money to go and get some groceries." Pancho says, "Let the kid take some money out of that." So I just took a bunch of money and I took off.

M: Do you remember how much money you took?

L: No, because I was in a hurry getting home so I could give it all to my mother.

M: How did your father join up with Villa's troops?

L: On account of my grandfather. See, my father run the stage through Presidio, and it was right across the river from where my mother and my grandfather lived. But my father lived on this side of the river, and he had a ranch. So when the Revolution started, my grandfather had his own troops in Ojinaga, and my father, naturally, joined him.

M: Was your father born across the border?

L: No, he was born on this side.

M: So he was an American citizen helping Pancho Villa over there.

L: That's right. It was on account of my grandfather. In other words, my father married my mother from the Mexican side. Just like here, men say, "I'll go to Juárez, get a girl, come here and get married."

- M: Were there a lot of people like your father who had been born over here that joined up with Pancho Villa's troops?
- L: Oh, yes; oh, sure! I tell you why... I don't know whether you read in the paper or not, not long ago, I was interpreter for Pancho Villa. I was a little boy!
- M: You were an interpreter?
- L: Yeah! See, my father and my grandfather, they were pretty close to Pancho, and of course, I used to come and see my grandfather and my father. So there was an American fella that had a lot of cattle. His name was Benton, and he had a lot of cattle. This fella was in there arguing with Pancho Villa because Pancho Villa's men were taking the cattle to eat. So Pancho and the rest of the guys, Mexicans, couldn't understand what this gringo was saying. So my daddy says, "Well, let's get my boy." That was me; I was waiting for him outside. He said, "What's this gringo want?" Then I asked Benton, "What is it you want to tell Pancho?" "Well," he says, "I'm missing a lot of cattle and I want him to pay me for that cattle." So I told Pancho, so Pancho was kind of thinking a little bit what to do about it; and he said, "Well, you tell that gringowe'll pay him later." That's what he said. But Benton stayed there arguing. So he told him, he said, "Get out or we'll take you out." So Benton went out. Pancho Villa had this fellow, "The Killer" they used to call him; Fierro. He was a mean son of a bitch. A big Mexican like that. All he knew was to kill people.
- M: Did you ever see him shoot anybody?
- L: No. I'll tell you what, talking about that. A lot of people don't believe this, but I was there one day when I heard some shooting in back. They killed the paymaster of the post office or the bank, 'cause he wouldn't cut

loose.

M: Where? On the other side?

L: In Juárez. They took him in the backyard and shot him.

M: And you were there?

L: Yeah, but I didn't see it; I heard the shots. They told me about it afterwards.

M: This was Pancho Villa's people?

L: Yeah, the last time he took Juárez.

M: Tell me about other experiences that you had as an interpreter of Pancho Villa.

L: I knew his brother well. At that time when they took Juárez, Pancho Villa's brother come over on this side and put a lot of money in the bank, and I showed him where. And he wanted me to bring the money. I said, "No, you get somebody else to do it, 'cause I don't want to get shot." You see, somebody's liable to kill you for it. So I was his brother's interpreter. Pancho Villa's brother was a little guy like that; he didn't know how to read or write. Oh, I went through a lot with Pancho Villa.

M: What year was that?

L: 1913.

M: Were there other times when you interpreted for Pancho Villa directly?

L: No, not exactly, because my father told me to get away from there, he didn't want me to get in trouble. 'Cause I was for both sides, Americans and Mexicans, see? But this fellow Fierro, I was afraid of him. He'd kill you in a minute just over nothing. He used to love to kill people. Big son of a bitch like that, ugly looking; couldn't read or write, but he could ride a horse and shoot.

- M: Did you see any of the action that took place in 1911 when they took over Juárez the first time, Madero and Pancho Villa?
- L: Yes. I was a little boy, too. When they gathered here in front of the Smelter, in that canyon there, I was there when the Indians from Sonora joined Pancho, and the Americans joined him there. In other words, Francisco Madero made them join him when they first started the war. And I saw the Indian from Sonora; I know his name well--Mansuo. Big Indian, good looking guy, mean son of a gun. He had Indian troops from Sonora; he's the first one who joined, then General Angeles. Of course, he was a military man; he had college education, a very smart man. He was a chief artillery man, he could handle any kind of gun, cannons or anything. He's the one that made the approach attack to Juárez, you know, like a blueprint. He'd say, "Your troops go this way and this way." He was the one, a very smart man. I was a little boy; I used to watch him over there, 'cause my brother joined at that time.
- M: He joined them?
- L: Yeah. I used to take him lunch from here, take a bunch of bread, sandwiches, and stuff like that; I was just a kid. /I'd/ cross the river right there at the Smelter, you could walk across. One time, they began to holler, "The troops are coming!" Along the river, alongside them hills there, there was a detachment of soldiers. So General Alejandro _____ got his troops right away and followed them in front by the customhouse, as you come across the little hills, there; he run them back. Of course, I was on the other end, I could hear.
- M: I understand a lot of people would climb on top of the roof to see the fighting.
- L: No, they'd go alongside of the river and watch the fight! I tell you what:

--when they had their real battle, the people would go as far as the Stanton Street Bridge, along the river there, clear over to the Smelter, watching them fight.

M: Just stand and watch them?

L: Yeah, like a damn fool!

M: I understand a lot of people got hurt.

L: Sure! They killed a little boy standing right close to me. He got hit and started crying, and I knew goddamn well he got hit! Deader than hell, a little boy about six, seven years old, standing there watching them. And them goddamn people wouldn't get out of the way! Finally the soldiers from Fort Bliss went down there and sent all the people back downtown. Then they got to shooting, the American soldiers.

M: The American soldiers started shooting over there?

L: Yeah! They didn't have orders to, but they'd shoot. 'Cause I knew Jimmy Gary, he was the captain of some kind of brigade from Fort Bliss. They went out to guard the river and they started shooting; and then they started shooting cannons. They even had a big cannon right there on the railroad car, shooting to Juárez. I've got pictures of the racetrack and all over that stuff. While I was in New York I went to go see a fellow, 'cause he told me to go see him, to make a book about Pancho Villa's life. You know what he wanted me to do? To give him all the stuff, and he says, "I'll give you 10% or 20%." And I says, "Like hell you will. You ain't gonna give me nothin!" I ain't gonna take it." I couldn't write them books for him. And after that, when Pancho Villa made money of his own--it was worth, oh, nothing, almost--I had a lot of that because the paymaster on my father's side, after they got through, they quit fighting and everything,

he gave me a bunch of it; oh, hell, a box full of it!

M: You still have it?

L: I don't think so. Did you ever see it? Pancho Villa's money?

M: I don't think I've seen it.

L: You can buy them at any curio store. I had a lot of that. Milibiques they used to call them.

M: Why did they call them that?

L: Because the money wasn't worth much. Yeah, I had a lot of it! So I went to California on a vacation, and I took a bunch of the stuff. I went down on the beach and I met a fellow and he says, "Hey, Pete!," this and that. "Have you got any of Pancho Villa's money?" I said, "Yeah, I got a bunch of it." So I gave him, oh, hell, a bunch of it! He went down to the beach and sold it to them guys down there for 25¢ a piece. He made money and I got nothing. (Chuckles).

M: He didn't give you a cut?

L: No. I didn't care, 'cause I had a lot of it. I don't know what the hell I done with it, but I had a bunch of it; I gave it away. I had some awful experiences. Now, at the racetrack, they all want to know how old I am, and they want to know if I knew so-and-so, horsemen and people like that. Because when Pancho took Juárez, they destroyed the racetrack in Juárez, one of the most beautiful tracks in the world made out of cement. So the troops from over here shot the hell out of it. Pancho took all them racehorses. I still got a picture of the horse that they gave me for bringing some horses across. I had a racehorse, they gave me a racehorse.

M: Why did they give you a racehorse?

L: Because I brought some horses from Juárez over here. I crossed them right

there at the river.

M: When they were shooting up the racetrack?

L: No, after they took the town.

M: Are you talking about the attack in 1919?

L: Yeah!

M: Right after the attack you went over there to rescue the horses?

L: No, I went over to see my father. At that time, I used to sell papers to a man that owned the racetrack, when I was a little boy. So, I found out that they were going to take the town, and I told Mr...

M: Was he an American?

L: Yeah!

N: He owned the racetrack?

L: Yeah! It's a big syndicate. And I told him, I said, "They're going to take the town at midnight."

M: So you knew the owner of the racetrack in Juárez, you sold papers to him.

L: At that time they didn't have what they have today, overnights, like we have here at Ruidoso. So he had to buy 20 papers to present the lineups for the day, horses and races. In other words, you get the overnights and then you study them, then go to the track, you buy a program and pick out these horses and play them. So I used to sell him 20 papers. So the fellows that used to sell tickets at the window were mostly Americans. At that time, Americans could work over there.

M: The people who sold the tickets were Americans?

L: Sure!

M: They were not Mexicans?

L: Some of them. But they got scared, and they wouldn't go to work, see, be-

cause they were going to take the town at any time. But when I was working for this man, he says to me, he says, "Come here, boy; get up on this window. I want you to sell tickets here." (I still got tickets from that racetrack over there). And we were gonna race that day, when they started this goddamn Revolution! The streetcar used to run over there, too, the trolley; so all the gringos left. A few of us stayed because I knew that I wouldn't get hurt, because all I had to do was to hide behind them cement walls, and my father's troops and Pancho's troops wouldn't hurt me because some of them knew me, that I knew. So I got to selling tickets. So before that, the day before, I told all the horsemen, I says, "They're gonna attack." "Aw, you're full of shit." I said, "All right! You better get your horses and get your ass across the river." They said, "Nah." "All right!" About 12:30 or 1 o'clock, the fighting started. "Hey, Pete, take my horses!" "You take them, not me! I'm not gonna get out there and get shot." So finally a good friend of mine had three horses. He says, "Pete, I'll give you a horse if you take my horses across." So I got there by the Stanton Street Bridge. You know where Peyton Packing Company is on the river there? They crossed a lot of booze and stuff there. I said, "Now, you get your horses and lead them off; I'll wait here." So they took them across and they gave me one--I still got the picture of the horse--and the rest of them just scattered. So we stayed over there. Finally I had to come across; they got to fightin' pretty hard. Because the Americans were shooting over there with guns, so I had to get out of the way.

M: Were you there when all these shells were coming in from this side of the border?

L: No, before that; because I knew about it.

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- M: You knew that it was coming. Was the fight going on around you at the race-track then?
- L: Well, the fighting started in the lower valley in Juárez alongside the river, so I had plenty of time and room on this side to get across.
- M: Where was the racetrack located?
- L: When you go across on the way to Chihuahua, you make a turn to come to Zaragoza, it was right along in there.
- M: Well, pretty close to where it is now.
- L: Yeah!
- M: So you were there when the fighting started?
- L: I left before.
- M: You left before the fighting got to there.
- L: Yeah!
- M: But the fighting was already going on in the lower valley.
- L: Well, they were getting ready to, because they give orders, "At a certain time, we're going to attack." That way you don't make mistakes, because if you go ahead, you don't know who in the hell you're going to fight. But if you do what they call "the hour," they go all together. Pancho was very smart. Of course, he had scouts to find out where most of the soldiers were, the federal soldiers.
- M: Was your father with Pancho then?
- L: Yes!
- M: He was attacking right along with them. How about your brothers?
- L: One of them was there. He got shot in the leg.
- M: Did you get a chance to talk to your father or your brother?
- L: Before and after.

- M: Both times.
- L: Yeah!
- M: What did they say about the whole thing?
- L: Well, my father wouldn't talk much because he had some ugly things to say, and he didn't say them. I can't remember the name of the brigade, but my father was in that group. They had brigades like the Brigade de Zaragoza, etc.
- M: Did you get a chance to see Pancho Villa?
- L: Sure! I knew him well, I talked to him.
- M: In 1919?
- L: After they took the town.
- M: Where did you see him?
- L: In Juárez at his office, at Harry Mitchell's home. That's where I went down there to see my father about some money, this, that, and the other.
- M: After the racetrack was attacked?
- L: After all this shooting and everything was through, Pancho had an office there.
- M: I thought they drove Pancho Villa away from the town and he never came back.
- L: The hell they did! Hell no, he was there for a month. They organized here and attacked Torreón, and then from there to México.
- M: When they shot up the racetrack in 1919, that was the last time that Pancho Villa attacked Juárez. After that he still stayed here a month?
- L: No, no. He stayed here I'd say about two, three weeks, 'til he got organized to go to Torreón. He used trains, automobiles, airplanes and everything to send the troops to Torreón to organize to attack México City.

M: But he was just about through then.

L: On the border. He wanted to take the border so he could get ammunition, horses, food and everything. He was smart; damn right he was smart. Well, he had some good advisors. Another thing that happened there during the time is, you've heard a lot and read a lot about these guys that they call Soldiers of Fortune. There was three of them, Americans, come down to talk to Pancho, and I interpreted for him. /One was/ Sam Drebben; he was a Jew. He said he was in that Foreign Legion. He was the one, Sam Drebben was the first one. And then the other one was an El Paso boy, born here, and he joined Pancho Villa because he could talk good English; he was an American, half American, half Mexican. His name was Albert Harrel. He joined Pancho to be a Soldier of Fortune. So another fellow come down to see Pancho--he was in the Service in Fort Bliss, he was in charge of Battery B at Fort Bliss--to join Pancho and bring his whole battery to fight with Pancho Villa. I was an interpreter for that.

M: Did they join up?

L: They claim that some of them did, but the rest of them didn't get across; but some of them did. And he brought the battery across. A lot of people didn't know that. He done that at midnight, a whole battery from Fort Bliss to go across the river, with horses--at that time they used horses--and took them across the river. He didn't get there till the last part of the fighting, so he went as far as Torreón. After that I don't know what happened, 'cause I went with the troops that far, with my father and mother; 'cause Pancho furnished a long train of about 15 cars for the families of all the officials--you know, captains, generals, and what have you. So me and my mother went down there to see my father and my (grandfather).

M: In one of those cars furnished by Pancho Villa?

L: Yeah, a special train; flags all over the goddamn thing. I remember that when I was a kid, watching them flags fly. And then we came back, and after that my father got tired and come back. So the Revolution was over, Pancho took over. We went as far as Torreón with the troops. But a lot of things happened in Juárez that a lot of people didn't know. Now, of course, some of them fellas, you know them people in México, in Juárez and different places, they think pretty good, some of them. They think ahead of how they're gonna figure you out of some money. So they joined Pancho and they told him, "We're gonna furnish a lot of money for your ammunition," and this and that. So I knew this guy; Pancho gave him a lot of money--I think it was \$100,000--to buy ammunition, and that son of a bitch took off. And I knew him. So the last time I saw him, I was swimming in Los Angeles at the beach, and I saw him at a very big hotel.

M: Did you talk to him?

L: We said, "Hi," that's all. It was all over, you know. Yeah, he was a thief. If Pancho had a got him, he would a hung him, 'cause you couldn't steal nothin' from that guy. He had lots of eyes, you know, Pancho. His brother was Hipólito, a little fella like that, couldn't read or write. I had to go along with him sometimes to the bank. One time I started to tell him, "Look, you're young, I'm young. Why don't you put away some of that money, leave it here with me." I started to tell him that, but I was afraid.

M: You didn't do it.

L: No. 'Cause I could see all that money coming over here to the bank.

M: How much was it?

L: Oh, it must have been millions, I guess; you know, them Mexican gold pieces,

50's, sack after sack.

M: Whick bank?

L: They had a bank of their own here, the Mexican something bank. I'll show you what's there now, it's a Jewish store. You know where that Wigwam Theatre is, on San Antonio Street? They call it something else now.

M: The State?

L: I don't know the name of it now. They alley is here, but right on the corner there was the bank.

M: Near the American Furniture Company?

L: No, the American Furniture is on this side.

M: But in front of it?

L: You know where that theatre is right there, as the streetcar comes around the corner there, in that old building? Next to that is a hotel upstairs, and then that Jewish store selling shirts and stuff. The bank was there.

M: And it was a Mexican bank?

L: Pancho's bank. He had his own men here with money.

M: What was the neme of the bank, do you remember?

L: It had a Mexican name, but I don't remember.

M: They set up their own bank, huh?

L: They had their own money there. 'Cause I knew the guy that run it, Carlos _____; that was the secretary for Pancho. And Pancho's brother used to come there with the money and we used to come there with him; deposit the money, gold pieces and hundred dollar bills in stacks that high, wrapped with a shoelace or string or something.

M: That must have been exciting.

L: I was a boy, I didn't know. I said, "What the hell, it's money," and that's

it. But now, it'd a been different. I'd a took one of them stacks!

(Laughter) I've been pretty lucky , because I've handled a lot of money and I've worked and I've been with a lot of high class people; 'cause after I got to playing ball I met a lot of big people. I just had enough education to get along with people like that--you know, rich people, millionaires and what have you. I don't know, they take to me; I don't know why, they just take to me. Like this fellow I work with, Rosa. You know him? He runs all these racetracks. Of course, they're the Mafia.

M: He's a member of the Mafia?

L: Yeah! They got three tracks: Juárez, Ruidoso, and Sunland Park. See, I handle the publicity. We go to Albuquerque, too. See, I'm the publicity man.

M: So you've been in sports a long time then?

L: Right.

M: When did you start playing ball?

L: When I came back from overseas.

M: Did you play amateur teams?

L: We played the Copper League, City League, Army League.

M: When did you start working for this man that you're working for now?

L: About five years ago, four or five years ago.

M: And you handle the publicity for the racetracks?

L: For all of them.

M: What do you do?

L: In other words, I go in and put a card or tickets or publicity sheets for the racetrack in all the motels. I go as far as Las Cruces, and as far as Alamogordo. I don't go to Juárez. And then during the race I work; I

work in the clubhouse.

M: What do you do in the clubhouse?

L: Well, we take care of the reserve sections. But I didn't work this week, 'cause I got a lot of work I have to do over here. 'Cause we're almost through; see, we'll be through there in no time. So we're getting this place ready. We'll be in Albuquerque for three weeks, and then back here.

M: And you're going to go up there too?

L: Oh, yeah! I'm going to Albuquerque. I like it there. I have a lot of fun, make a little money.

M: You mentioned a little while ago that you also worked in Tijuana.

L: Oh, yeah; before this. That's where I met Alessio, the owner. I worked in the gambling house at the club down below the street, the main drag. They used to call it the Country Club or something like that. Then you go around the hill and go to the racetrack. I worked there too.

L: How long were you there?

M: The first time I went there, I was there about six months, got sick and came home. Then the next time I didn't stay very long. They closed up the place.

L: When did you first go there?

M: 19... what? I was out of a job. And I had trouble with the immigration over there. They wouldn't let me in 'cause I was an American and I couldn't work. But I had a cousin in that little place across from Yuma. I don't remember the name of the place. Joe was my cousin, and the President of Mexico was a good friend of Joe's. So Joe told the President about me. So he called the immigration in Tijuana and told them to leave me alone, that I could do anything I wanted to down there. And I was an American citizen.

And the man, an American fella on the bridge, he used to play ball with us here. So I'd leave all my American papers with him, and then go to work over there.

M: When was the first time that you did that over there?

L: 1935, '36, something like that.

M: In the '30's?

L: My boy, my first boy, he was born at about that time. I'm poor on keeping dates.

M: It's sometime in the '30s?

L: 1930 to '35, along in there. That's when they had the gambling in Tijuana all over the place.

M: Was Tijuana a wide open place in those days?

L: Wide open; whores on the street and everything. Big gambling and all that stuff. I'll tell you what, I made a hit with the boss there because I could talk English and I could work the Gold Room. The Gold Room is about as big as this room here, nothing but gold pieces to play with, instead of chips. The movie stars would stay there all night, playing. We used to fight for that job because we could make some money. Everytime they'd win \$200, \$300, \$500, they'd take one and put it in your pocket. Hell, at the end of the night you had two, three hundred dollars-- \$20 gold pieces. Instead of chips they'd give you that. We used to fight for that job.

M: What movie stars did you see coming in there?

L: I'll tell you, there was a blond-headed woman. Yeah, I knew them well, I don't remember their names now. That was before the talkies come on.

M: Before the talkies, huh?

L: Yeah!

M: That must have been in the '20s then.

L: Oh, yeah! Tom Mix was born right there at Fort Bliss, I knew him well. And my father and my brother went to work for him, taking care of his horses.

M: Your father took care of Tom Mix's horses?

L: Yeah! See, my father was a rancher. So when we went to California, my brother went to work at the movies, and him and Tom Mix knew each other. 'Cause he was born right here at the end of the bridge, there at Old Fort Bliss. And he says, "I'm from El Paso." So they got together, he was looking for somebody to take care of his horses. So my brother says, "My dad used to do that for Pancho Villa." So he took him on. My father worked for him 'til he died.

M: How long was that?

L: Three years. He had some beautiful horses. You know, he used to ride horses in the movies. Yeah, I knew Tom well. Talked good Spanish; in fact, he talked it better than I do. He was raised right there. He'd hold a good conversation with you. He was always saying, "Quihúbole; hi!" Well, I've been around a little bit and met a lot of people.

M: Did you like Tijuana?

L: I didn't like it. Of course, we used to drive back and forth to San Diego. We stayed in San Diego; we had a car and we'd go back and forth. But sometimes on Saturday nights we'd work all night and stay there, and Sunday leave at 12:00. And the man at the bridge used to play ball with me, so I could go back and forth anytime.

M: You mean, if you didn't know him, you couldn't go back and forth?

L: Well, I'd a had a hard time getting there. Because the American immigration

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and the Mexican immigration, they were tough, both of them, in Tijuana. A lot of people would go there, just like Juárez; a lot of cars.

M: Yeah, but if you were a U.S. citizen you had no problem.

L: If you're an American you got to get a permit to work. Oh, they'll let you by sometimes. They don't care, they want the money. But there was a lot of money there at one time, a lot of it.

M: But you say you didn't like Tijuana?

L: No, I didn't like it very well. Oh, I stayed there a few days in an apartment, and goddamn it, there was a lot of drunks and thieves and what have you there, so we moved to San Diego. We used to go back and forth.

M: Did you like working there, though?

L: Yeah, because we was getting good money. We'd get \$20 a shift, plus what you'd make; you'd be good for \$50 or \$100 a day.

M: How many days a week did you work?

L: Well, I worked Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays--three days; and then I helped the slot machine man. He'd give me \$10 to go eat, and he give me \$20 a day. We'd take all the money we wanted to out of the machines down at Rosarito. You know all them slot machines there on the beach? We used to go there and just take the money out. So I made pretty good. I had a lot of good friends there. One day I was in Las Vegas, first time. And you know, Las Vegas is a great place, big, lots of money and everything. So before crossing the line there in California, a man from Juárez, he wanted to give me a job. I said, "No, I want to go to Las Vegas." He says, "Well, when you come back, come on by. You need money?" I said, "No, I got enough." So I go to Las Vegas. Who's running the place there, The Thunderbird, but a fellow by the name of George Sattelow. He's a gangster who worked for Hughes,

running this place. They have policemen on the doors, big guns and everything. And the guy on the door, I knew him from El Paso. So me and my wife started walking in, and he says, "Wait a minute. Who are you?" I said, "You know me." He says, "You can't go in here." I said, "I want to gamble. Does George Sattelow run this place?" "Yes." I found out he was running it, so he went down to talk to George in the office. So he told this guy, he says, "Let Pete and his wife come in." He married a Mexican girl here in Juárez. He's still living over there. So he wanted me to go to work. I didn't even say, "Hello, how are you?" or nothing. He says, "Come on, you got to go to work." I says, "No, George. I want to look around and have fun." He said, "All right." So he told me, he says, "Go to the cashier if you need any money and just sign the ticket. Get what you want." And he put me to work on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, \$150, and all the money I wanted to spend. I knew George well. He belonged to the Purple Gang in Detroit. They were gangsters. He used to tell me, "Don't tell anybody." But what the hell did they care? But I knew people like that; and I don't know how, but they'd take to me. Same way this Alessio, this guy that runs the racetracks here, I knew him before he got rich, before he got the racetrack. He used to have newspaper stands in Tijuana, he was selling papers. And then he got the concession and then he went up. Now he's a big millionaire.

M: Did you ever see any gangster fights?

L: No, no! No, I'd stay away from them, because they'd point them out to me. In other words, they were watching us. They got a lot of eyes; any move you make, they can tell you how many cigarettes you smoke, what time you come in, what time you went out, who you talk to. I know all that. They

got eyes.

M: They've got you covered.

L: Yeah! I didn't mind because I didn't give a damn. I wasn't doing nothing wrong. Yeah, I've been lucky that way for some reason. Because I used to work in Juárez at the gambling house for a long time. So George was the manager there at one time, at the gambling house. So when he went over to Las Vegas he took over The Thunderbird. You ever been to Las Vegas?

M: Yeah!

L: Beautiful place. Oh, yeah, the shows are great. It costs you so much, but they give you your drinks. Who was that girl singer who used to get drunk and sing? Judy Garland. I knew her well.

M: I guess you met a lot of famous people that way.

L: Oh, yeah! In Tijuana, mostly movie stars. They knew me by my first name. "Hello, Pete." But you knew who they were.

M: Tell me a little bit about your baseball career.

L: Well, in the Service we had a lot of big league ball players. You know, they were drafted to go to the Army and the Navy. So when I joined the Navy they sent me to _____ in San Francisco. And they'd make companies out of so many people as they would come in. So I was in Company A. And the old man that run it, he was an old time captain of the Navy. _____ is a big place where we used to play ball and march and all this, maneuvers and everything. So he used to sit up there and watch us during the parades and what have you. And then on Sundays we'd play a game in the morning and a game in the afternoon. So during all that time all these big league ball players, minor league ball players, were drafted, so we'd make a team out of them. So they saw me training. At nights or afternoons after 4

o'clock we'd go out there and play among ourselves. So my commander used to watch us, so he recommended me to Jimmy Hicks. He was a captain in the Navy and the captain of the ball team. So he spotted me and he transferred me from A Company to another company of nothing but big league ball players. And I was the only amateur. That's how come I got started. I used to pitch for them.

M: You pitched?

L: Yeah!

M: You must have picked up some good experience there.

L: Oh, plenty! A good catcher, Hainesworth his name was, he says, "Goddamn it, where d'you come from?" I said, "Texas." He said, "Goddamn, there are a lot of Texas boys that come in here that are good ball players." I said, "Well, it's hot there and you ain't got nothing to do but play ball." So he says, "You're on the team, now." So we'd muster in the morning, eat breakfast, and then go to roll call. Then all the ball players would get on the boat and go to different places to play ball: Oakland, Berkeley; sometimes we'd go to Sacramento. We'd go play. Yeah, I knew a lot of the ball players. Here's a funny thing. Now, of course, when we came back from France they had the Navy/Army game at the pologrounds in New York. They had 5 million people there--soldiers, sailors, marines and everything. I got on the team, they chose me to play on that team, All-Star team. I knew I wasn't going to get to play 'cause all them big league ball players were going to play and I was only a small league player. So they chose me for the pitching staff. There was nine of us. So they pitched Carl Mays and different guys. Finally one of the boys got hurt and I had to pinch hit for him. And that pologround was full clear up to the top,

just like a bullring. One guy was sitting up on top of the roof when I went to bat. You know what he said? "Enchiladas!" How in the hell, out of a million people, some guy knew me; he knew that I was from here. "Enchiladas" he called me. So I took my cap off and fooled around, and I was laughing. So Greer says to me, "What's the matter?" I said, "Nothing. That guy made a remark and I'm laughing. Wait till I get through and I'll go ahead and bat." So I stalled around in the dirt and this and that and other. And everybody was hollering like hell when I took off. So I went to bat, and he struck me out. I couldn't, 'cause I was laughing.

M: Why did he call you "Enchiladas?"

L: 'Cause I was a Mexican, the only Mexican out of a jillion people, a player. Can you beat that? One guy knew me; he must have been from here or down on the border. When they named my name as a pinch hitter on the loud speaker, "Leyva," he must have thought, "Oh, he's a Mexican." So this guy must have been from this part of the country--Texas, you know, or someplace-- and he yelled, "Enchiladas." I didn't know what to do. (Chuckles).

M: Was he an Anglo?

L: I don't know. He was up on top of the roof there, among jillions of people. I got a kick out of that. And the boys were just kidding me, all of the ball players.

M: What did they tell you?

L: They just wanted to know why he called me "Enchilada." Because we eat enchiladas in my country; Spanish food, see?

M: Did they have any Mexican jokes in those days?

L: No, we didn't use many at that time; that I can remember, no. Because baseball is different and everything is in English. Oh, once in a while...

There was a fellow by the name of Rose, he was from San Antone or someplace, a pitcher. A nice looking fellow, good pitcher, nice looking guy, beautiful; he was a good looking man by the name of Rose. And he was the only one could talk Spanish, a few words--"Cómo estás?" and stuff like that. Him and I used to buddy up on a count of we could talk. And so when we come to New York or France or anyplace, we'd go together. There was another fellow that could talk Spanish, from Arizona, and of course, he could talk it and understand it. Douglas, Arizona is just across the line, you know, from Sonora. He was from there. They were the only ones. So when we got over to France, once in a while you'd see one who'd talk to you, look at you up and down and say, "Where are you from?" "El Paso." "Oh, I'm from down there in the valley, San Antone," or someplace there. That's the only time we ever met like that.

M: Did they treat you good?

L: Oh, yes! I was a petty officer then; they had to.

M: You were a petty officer?

L: Yeah!

M: Have you ever experienced discrimination because you were a Mexican?

L: No, I've been pretty lucky for some reason. I'll tell you why, because I could talk good English. I can get along with anybody. Well, them Dagos in New York used to think I was a Dago, and I used to get along with them pretty well, most of them.

M: So you've never had any problems?

L: No, no! Not even here or anyplace I went. There's only one time they started to, but they didn't know for sure. When I came back from the war, they sent for me to pitch up in New Mexico someplace, Alamogordo

or someplace, I don't remember. They told me to leave on a train here that night to get there at midnight and sleep til 9 o'clock. And they wouldn't let me come out with the rest of the team until game time, because they were betting a lot of money. And another time out here in the oil field in Odessa, they used to have a lot of oil at that time. Guess how much they give me to pitch a ball game?--\$1500. But they didn't know I was coming, and they had an amateur team; I was already a pro. I beat the hell out of them kids, beat them 15 to nothing. All them guys from the oil fields, "Here, Pete! Here!" I bet I made \$1200, \$1400, and expenses.

M: You made out pretty good!

L: Yeah! So in Alamogordo they called me the same way; they told me to stay in that night till the next morning. I had to warm up in the alley so they couldn't see me till game time.

M: What was your regular job in those days?

L: When I was playing ball?

M: Yeah.

L: I was working for the city here.

M: Driving that truck?

L: And playing semi-pro ball.

M: Well, let's see. You drove a truck for the city, you were a Deputy Sheriff. What else did you do?

L: Before that I was a messenger boy.

M: Yeah. But after you were a Deputy Sheriff, what did you do?

L: See, I worked for the city first, then the Sheriff.

M: After leaving the Sheriff's job, what did you do?

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- L: I wasn't doing nothing. I (think) I went to work for the racetrack.
- M: When did you start working for the racetrack?
- L: When it first opened up.
- M: What were you doing in the '30s?
- L: That's when I came back from the war. Working in Juárez at the gambling house.
- M: How long did you work there?
- L: At different times. Because, see, when they changed the governors in Chihuahua, they changed the concessions; so sometimes I didn't work until they found out that I could work, (because) I was an American. So it varied.
- M: Were you there when Cárdenas closed down the gambling places?
- L: Yeah, I was working there.
- M: Did you lose your job?
- L: Well, they told me that they were going to close it up. Quevedo come up and told me, he says, "Pete, they're going to do away with gambling, so you'll be out of a job." At that time, he was the Mayor of the city, one of the Quevedos. Do you know him?
- M: I don't know him, but I've heard of the Quevedos.
- L: José. He used to live across, over here on this side.
- M: He lived over here?
- L: Yeah, he was married to an American girl.
- M: And he was the Mayor over there?
- L: Yeah!
- M: Did he live over here when he was the Mayor?
- L: Well, he was _____ with this girl. You know how the Mexicans are.

- M: Oh, I see!
- L: Yeah; oh, I know all about that in Juárez.
- M: So, do you remember if a lot of people lost their jobs when they closed up all these places?
- L: Sure! But here is the way it was: When they changed the concessions, they had a man by the name of Tuchet; he was a Frenchman that had the concession. And then some political guy from Chihuahua would take it away from him, so we'd be out of a job maybe a month or two. Then it'd be open again, it'd change hands. Then when Pancho got it, it was a different story.
- M: So it just depended on politics.
- L: Yeah!
- M: What did you do in the '40s?
- L: I think I was playing professional ball. I was up in Nebraska playing ball for a little while during the season. I used to go like that, lose a job, and come back to El Paso. But this has been my home all my life.
- M: And then in the '50s, what were you doing? Remember when Raymond Telles was elected mayor?
- L: Oh, that was after. I was working here when he was going to college. His father used to have a taxi stand, and he used to come through there to go to school. Sometimes they used to drive him up to the school. Yeah, they used to carry him up the hill when he was late, you know. His father had a taxi cab stand. He used to come by there and we used to sit there and talk all the time. I was working for the city then. Name anybody in town since 1910, anybody, I didn't care who.
- M: You knew most of them. What were you doing at that time that he became Mayor?

L: I was spending my money when we got our bonus during the war.

M: What job did you have then?

L: What the hell was I doing then?

M: Racetrack?

L: No, that was after. I don't remember. I think I was driving the truck for the city.

M: You've had many jobs.

L: Oh, yeah! I've had a lot of jobs. Veterans could get these jobs because there was no work, see? So I was driving the truck for this company down here that had the pavement, the Texas _____; I was driving the truck. They put us veterans to work cutting trees down the valley, old trees that had been there for years and years. And then they began to pave the road. In other words, the road was about that wide, I guess, but they expanded it. So they put all of those veterans to work. So they had to cut those old trees in the way to make room for the highway. So they made room for the veterans to work. I was driving a truck.

M: When you were working over there in Juárez in those gambling places, and over there in Tijuana, were most of those places owned by Americans or were they owned by Mexicans?

L: That's a good question. The first one that I went to work with was a Frenchman, Tuchet was his name. Then after that, a Spaniard. Then after him was some politician from Chihuahua. That was the last job we had; that is, over there.

M: What about the bars and restaurants?

L: I knew all about them. Severo González, the Big Kid, and all that. Do you remember that time when you had to have \$2 bills to go to Juárez?

- M: No, when was that? You had to have \$2 bills to go to Juárez?
- L: Yeah, to go to Juárez. They made a rule, everybody had to buy \$2 bills to go over there.
- M: What for?
- L: To spend. They wouldn't let you take gold or anything like that. I don't know why; I never did find out why they did that.
- M: When did that happen?
- L: About '67 or '68, along in there.
- M: In the '60s. But those bars and restaurants along the strips in Juárez and in Tijuana, would you say that most of them were owned by Americans?
- L: I don't know, because I wasn't a drinker; I wasn't a guy that would go in a bar and sit there and drink. In other words, it didn't faze me to find out nothing about it 'cause I'm not a bar drinker; I never was. Lots of fellas, the first thing when they'd get off work, they'd hit the bars, and I didn't. I always kept clean, kept in shape.
- M: You mentioned you knew Raymond Telles.
- L: Oh, well, as a kid.
- M: Have you always voted?
- L: Sure! I helped him in his first campaign. Sure! 'Cause I knew his father. And he was only a kid; a good little kid, too.
- M: You know, he's the only Mexican who's been elected Mayor in El Paso.
- L: I don't know. I heard one time that when Magoffin was Mayor, that's in 1904, '05, that he was half Mexican.
- M: Yeah, that's true. His mother was Mexican.
- L: Because I went to school with Mary and Jean, the two girls. In fact, I used to go with Mary in San Jacinto School. See, have you ever seen that home of

his?

M: The Magoffin home?

L: Yeah, They used to have a lot of trees, pears that big; and we used to go out there and pick a bunch of them and eat them. Nice big pears like that. I come pert' near marrying that girl. She went to college, after that I lost track. I was living right there close to her on San Antonio Street.

M: I was wondering what your ideas are on Mexicans not getting elected to public office here.

L: At that time, there was a clique; Montoya was one of the leaders. I knew most of the Mexicans that were politicians trying to get in, but they never could get in, because they couldn't get enough votes. In other words, we had more wetbacks here than we had citizens, that's why. Because they didn't give a damn about elections; all they wanted was to work. If we'd a had a _____, we could've got Mexicans in there. Because this fellow from Ysleta tried to run for Mayor, he couldn't get to first base.

M: Not enough votes.

L: No. After he found out he couldn't get nobody to work for him or to vote for him, he quit. He was an Indian from Ysleta. They was going to run him for mayor, but he couldn't get to first base, couldn't get no backing or nothing.

M: Do you think Anglos here in El Paso have discriminated against Mexicans?

L: At one time I heard that, but I used to fight myself to get by.

M: You had to fight yourself to get by, to get a job?

L: Yeah!

M: Was there discrimination in El Paso?

L: Yeah! Our zone was from San Antonio to the river, and this way to Washing-

ton Park, but not across the tracks, which is now where the trains go underground.

M: Was that the divinding line?

L: Almost, yeah! And I had a hell of a time one time, 'cause I wanted to live on that side. If the rent was \$35 they would charge you \$75. So I couldn't afford it; I wasn't making enough money.

M: When was that?

L: 1909, '10, '11, '12, along in there.

M: You wanted to live north of the tracks?

L: Yeah! There was a few houses there. Up on the hill, which is now Kern Place, it used to be nothing but Mexicans up on the hill. La Mesa they used to call it. But half of them are Mexicans up there now. Tony Lama's wife, the boys, all of them. Of course, they're not considered Mexicans; son italianos.

M: Did you ever see people discriminated against?

L: Well, let's see. They used to do it on jobs, like say, the railroads, shops, the depot, the post office. Some other places, too.

M: What did they do?

L: They wouldn't hire you.

M: Did you ever try to get a job there?

L: No, I was too young at that time.

M: Did you know people who tried to get a job who didn't get hired because they were Mexican?

L: My father was.

M: He was turned down?

L: Yeah, but my father was a good horseman, so he always had a good job. He knew about horses, he was a rancher.

M: Mr. Leyva, did you hear the word "chicano" when you were young?

L: No.

M: When was the first time that you heard that word?

L: It was after we lived here. I'd say about 1915, '20, along in there. But that's caló.

M: Barrio language.

L: Yeah!

M: What did it mean to you at that time?

L: Well, it means that I wasn't well educated, I didn't have enough school. I was always wondering what the hell it was and I never could figure it out. After I got to mingling with American boys when I went to San Jacinto and high school, I mingled with American boys and some would say, "No, we don't want him," that was me, because I could play football, baseball. And I didn't play basketball because I wasn't fast enough with my legs. But once in a while some of them boys used to say, "No, we want Pete to play." But they kind a put you to one side. But I fought my way through, and I made it. I used to fight good. One boy called me, "Goddamn Mexican son of a bitch." I got mad and I hit him with something, I don't know what it was; a stick or something. I knocked him on the head. That's the only time. But after that, after I got talking good English and everything, I could get along good. I don't give a damn who it is, lawyers or anybody. In other words, I had self education, I didn't have college. I could read and write, figure, stuff like that. And I can argue with any gringo, I don't care what he says. First thing I say, "Look, you're American, you think I'm Mexican. I'm not. My father was a full-blooded Indian, just as good American as you." And I get them off my back. That's the way I'd fight. (I got a good picture of

my father. Just a big Indian.) I used to fight them off that way, when I got big enough.

M: You've had an interesting life.

L: Ever since I was 12 years old, I made a living for my people, too.

M: You've been through a lot.

L: You bet. I learned a lot. And this world is a big world, too. I'll tell you another incident. Now, this is funny, and it's pretty good, 'cause I always tell it. At the time I was a messenger boy, they had a lot of Chinamens in El Paso. All Oregon Street was Chinamens. They had restaurants and chopsuey joints. There was a joint there on Second Street, which is now a gasoline station; a noodle joint. We used to go there and eat at night when I was a messenger boy. And then the district was wide open and they'd sell beer after 9:30. See, they closed the saloons at 9:30, so we'd go back behind the bars and get beer and sell it to the whores; at a dollar a bottle, too. We used to make 50¢ on the bottle.

M: They paid a dollar a bottle?

L: Sure! So when I joined the Navy, we'd go to Hong Kong. So these millionaires' sons, two of them on my ship, we had just come out of training and we had all that pay. We go to China, we go on a big drink with these Chinese girls and everything; we got in jail! So, them guys kept saying, "Don't you talk to that Chinaman," and this and that. And I say, "I will." I told him, the guard, "Hey, take me to the bank. I got a money order here. I want to cash it and pay you and get out." "Oh, no, no, no!" "I'm going to give you some money." "All right." He took me to the bank, one of the biggest banks in China. Who was there, that was President of the bank, but this Chinamen, joint guy. And he says when he saw me, "Pete! Pete! El Pa-

so!" I said, "Yeah, Pete, messenger boy." He says, "Mess-en-cha boy." He says, "What's the matter, what's the matter?" I said, "They got me in jail. I want to cash this check." Sure! You don't cash it. How much do you want?" He talked to the Chinaman, "How many boys?" "Three, \$25 a piece." He gave him the money right there and said, "Let the boys go out." And he give me some money to have a good time. Can you imagine, out of a trillion people in China, one guy would know me? Ain't that funny? So them guys says, "How in the hell do you know him?" I said, "Well, he's from El Paso, he's got a restaurant there, and I used to eat there." He made a lot of money here during that time, when the district was open. Big restaurants, big restaurants here in El Paso; Chinese, you know, great big ones. Same way with _____. One of my boys was going to marry one of his daughters, so he sent his daughters to China and they wouldn't let them come back no more. So when we went to China, I went to looking for his girl and I couldn't find her. Oh, hell, it was too big! Too many people! You'd see hundreds of people on the sidewalk. You had to fight your way through in China. So Carl, he was a millionaire's son from Sacramento, said, "How in the hell did you get us out?" I said, "Look, I still got my check. They let me out." "How did you do it?" I said, "Well, I knew the guy at the bank." "Oh!" Out of a jillion Chinamen, and he had to be the banker. Gee, can you imagine that? I've been through a lot.

M: That's really interesting. Well, I'm out of tape here. I want to thank you very much for this interview. It was very interesting, and it was a pleasure. Thank you very much, Mr. Leyva.

L: Okay.