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Interview no. 320

Herminia M. Chavez

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Herminia M. Chávez (1943-)
INTERVIEWER: Esperanza M. Marruffo
PROJECT: Chicano History 3309 Class Project
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 19, 1977
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Mrs. Herminia M. Chávez is a native El Pasoan and has lived in El Paso all her life, except for one year (which she spent in California), and is a community leader. She is a fourth generation El Pasoan on one side of her family. During all her school years up to high school she achieved the highest grades in her classes. At present she is working toward a Bachelor's degree in Education.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; educational experiences; childhood and teenage years; work experiences; discrimination; thoughts on the Chicano Movement.

1 hour, 10 minutes; 22 pages (In English and Spanish)

(Today is November 19, 1977. I am Esperanza Marruffo and I am interviewing Mrs. Herminia M. Chávez of 5732 Prince Edwards, El Paso, Texas.)

M: Mrs. Chávez, where were you born and when?

CH: I was born in El Paso in 1943 in the Upper Valley.

M: Who were your parents?

CH: My mother was Rosa Navarrete Mata and my father was Bernabé Mata.

M: Where was your father from?

CH: My father was born here in El Paso, and I think his parents were from El Paso, too.

M: And your mother?

CH: Well, my mother was brought here from México as a baby; she was born in 1910 but I believe by 1911 she was brought over to the U.S. and lived in Kansas, and then they moved back to El Paso in a few years.

M: Do you know if they belonged to any organizations?

CH: I think, I believe, when they first got married they belonged to a social organization of Mexican Americans called the Pro Raza Society. They had some name for it in Spanish. It was only a social organization for the continuity of their Mexican cultural background.

M: Do you know what some of the activities they did were?

CH: Well, they held like dramas or plays within the group. They held social activities like dances. Everything was for the continuity of the Mexican American culture and the music was Spanish-Mexican and they spoke Spanish; and I imagine they discussed Mexican-American issues at their gatherings. I believe this was in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

M: Do you know who your grandparents were?

CH: Well, I remember my father telling us a few stories about my grandparents. My grandfather's name was Luis Mata. He had a farm, or maybe more, in the Upper Valley in Canutillo. He was considered a rich man by the standards of way back in El Paso then.

M: Was he from El Paso too?

CH: I believe he was a native El Pasoan.

M: And that's from your father's side of the family?

CH: That's my father's side of the family. I believe my grandmother died when she was quite young.

M: Was she an El Pasoan or was she from somewhere else?

CH: I really don't know, but I think she was an El Pasoan too. They belonged to the few Mexican families that were scattered in the area living in small farms or ranches.

M: Did you know your grandparents from your mother's side of the family?

CH: I remember my grandmother very well. She was a short Spanish woman but according to what she said, and what my mother said, she had Chinese descendants, too, aside from the Spanish and Mexican Indian; but she looked very Spanish. She /had/ light brown hair, light brown eyes and fair skin.

M: Do you know what her family did for a living? You mentioned that the other family owned land and did farming.

CH: Yes, I believe that in México (before she came over to the United States) she had been a nurse in the Mexican Revolution. Then when she got married and my mother was born, they moved to the United States. She was a neighborhood midwife. She delivered many children when that was allowed without a license; I don't know if she had a license. I believe it was allowed without a license at that time.

M: Did you know any of the people that she delivered?

CH: She delivered most of her grandchildren. I know that she delivered everybody in my family.

M: How many were there in your family?

CH: She delivered eleven children in my family.

M: Are they all living?

CH: Ten of us are living; one of my brothers passed away when he was 28 years old.

M: Where did you grow up, Mrs. Chávez?

CH: I grew up in the Upper Valley. We didn't live right in the Mexican neighborhood, but we lived very close to a Mexican American neighborhood.

M: In what area?

CH: The area is still called Buena Vista Addition, I think. It was right next to a school named Courchesne School, right below Cristo Rey mountain.

M: Will you tell me something about your childhood?

CH: Something that has to do with ethnicity?

M: Yes, something that happened along the river, or anything that you might know about.

CH: There was one incident along the river that I recall, and I know that there are many people in the Upper Valley that saw this too--we were eyewitnesses to what happened. This was in the late 1950's or middle 1950's. Doniphan Drive was kind of a narrow street; before that it had just been Highway 80. After Highway 80, they called it Doniphan Drive. Anyway, there was a place called the Courchesne Bottle Neck where there were many accidents. I think the city decided to straighten the area out; it was just before the freeway was built. They widened the street, and as they widened the street I remember seeing what you call a steam shovel and tractors inside the river bed. I think it was in the Springtime or Wintertime when the river bed was dry, when they closed up Elephant Butte Dam and Caballo Dam. Anyway, the river bed was dry and I remember seeing dump trucks, this steam shovel and tractors in there and they pushed the river, I would say from my view it was at least six yards, six to ten yard back. The

actual border which is the river was moved back to México. I think I was in my teens then. I was in high school then and I remember seeing that. It was not mentioned here in the newspapers. México did nothing about it and it just went on. They moved the river for several yards, and that Mexican territory was taken and nobody said anything and it /was/ just kept quiet; but I know that maybe the Mexican people on the Mexican side of the river should have protested or said something. I am an American citizen, but I don't believe my own country should be usurping a piece of another country, especially at peaceful times. I have answered that question to the best of my knowledge.

Oh, I remember one /other/ incident about the river, too. My father had this old Yaqui Indian man. He was a Mexican and Yaqui, I believe. He came from Arizona, and he lived in the El Paso area for a long, long time. I remember him sitting at our dinner table and telling us stories about things that had happened here in El Paso that we know shouldn't have happened, but /that happened anyway/. This was another thing with the river, too. He belonged to this military regiment and all of those soldiers in that regiment were Mexicans. They brought them in one night, set the troop down; they got them down with shovels, picks, and rakes and they were told, I believe, by the officers of the troop to dig up the river and move it further inside to México. I don't know how long this took, but after they were done, one evening right after dinner he went off to the bushes to one side. Just as he was coming back, this was in the dark, he saw that all the Mexican men in the troop /were/ gunned down. No one ever heard of this incident; I don't believe it is in the military records anywhere. And I just wondered what happened to the relatives of those men back home. They were probably told that they were missing in action, because this was either a little before World War I or a little after.

Anyway, the military authorities had no idea that this man had survived. He just kind of crouched down among the creosote bushes or mesquite bushes close to the river. He just crouched down to the side in the dark and when they left he just went AWOL, and I imagine they thought they had killed him too. Anyway, he was an eyewitness to the whole incident. He said that after they had been gunned down they were razed over with the same tractors or whatever they had been digging with, aside from the manual tools they were using. I think they were buried there on the side. I don't really recall what happened to them. This man trusted my father with this information, but he was always afraid that some authority might find out about it, so he probably never, ever told anyone else about this story. I may have left out a few little details, but I think that I made my point clear.

M: You stated that your parents were in farming?

CH: Yes, at one time my father had two little farms, a filling station and a little candy store.

M: Did he ever hire any illegal aliens?

CH: Not to my knowledge. He had this Indian man working for him for a long time, then he had a black man working for him and sometimes he would hire relatives that were out of work. As I recall, I don't think he ever hired illegal aliens. He hired a man from México one time, but he took him down to what must have been the immigration office. He arranged for him to have his papers... He helped that man become a citizen before he hired him. Except that it didn't turn out to be such a good idea because as soon as the man knew he had his legal papers--his citizenship papers with him--he left. He took off and never returned and I don't think he ever paid my father (even in work) back for my father straightening out his citizenship papers.

M: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your childhood?
In this store and service station, did he have anyone else working for him or just the family?

CH: I think it was just the family, as I recall; I was still quite small.

M: What other significant events would you like to tell me about?

CH: Well like things that happened in school or out of school?

M: Both; in school would be okay.

CH: Well, I remember that we had a principal who used to spank some children for speaking Spanish in the school. Most Mexican Americans were not aware of the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo then, because I know that if my mother had heard about this she would have gone out there to talk to the principal about it. Now we know that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo has a phrase that says that the Spanish culture will be continued in this area which consists of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California. So there is no one that can tell a Mexican American that he cannot speak Spanish, he cannot write Spanish, he cannot continue the Spanish American or Mexican American culture in this area. Anyway, this principal was working against that Treaty, but maybe like I said, she was not aware of it either--that she was breaking the terms of the Treaty. As I remember it was a school rule; it was not written anywhere, but the principal did spank the children for speaking Spanish in the schools. Also I would like to add that when I went to school it was a traumatic shock--not very serious, but sort of, to go in a school where the teacher spoke English all day long. (I think the first year we only went half the day.) Since we were Spanish speaking, we were asked to go two years to first grade. One year it was called "low first," the second year it was called "high first." According to the public schools or the School Board it was set up this way so that we

would learn to speak English as small children in two years. I don't know what the idea of holding us back for one year was. I remember my first few days in school, or maybe the first year, I didn't understand a single word that the teacher said. It was very insecure for a small child to go through an experience like that, but I think I overcame. I didn't like the idea that city children (it was a country school then) only went to first grade for one year and children from Mexican American neighborhoods had to go to first grade for two years. This was a standard rule. I think it was changed in 1957, maybe a little earlier. Anyway, getting /back/ to that, I always felt bad that we had to go two years to first grade. I overcame that when I was in fourth grade because I had an extremely good teacher that reinforced the children when they did good. She went by all the educational rules. I got ahead of my class, so she had me double promoted from the fourth grade to the sixth grade. I remember the first day I went to 5th grade she didn't even assign books to me; she told me the following day just to go on to the sixth grade.

M: In the other grades what experiences...?

CH: Well it was another traumatic experience. I imagine it was the character or the personality of one teacher compared with the other. For some reason I felt that the other teacher (her name was Mrs. Sizemore) resented the fact that I was doubled promoted. I remember she even called the principal one time on me. I was very embarrassed in front of the classroom. She said I was disrupting the class and I denied it. She told the principal, "That girl is denying it." I know my whole family--my brothers and sisters before me, my smaller brothers and sisters--we all had a good record in school of not being disruptive children. Anyway, I think I was too scared in that class to ever attempt disrupting it. I remember that if I ever asked her

for help--if I thought I was getting behind in the class--she would tell some other child there to help me, but she never offered to help me and when I asked her for help she never gave me the help I needed in that class. By the end of the school year even that didn't stop me, that didn't deter me. By the end of the school year I was ahead of the other children in Math, English; I was making A's again. She gave me a C in Music which is a subject that cannot be proven with paper in black and white that I was making an A, but the previous years I had made an A in music up until that year. I don't recall what other subject she gave me a C in. She didn't even bother to give me a B. She gave me a C. I remember I was very, very unhappy in that class, but I still tried my best to get to the top of the class. The following year, I think at a teachers' meeting, they considered double promoting me again to El Paso High, but I am glad that one teacher in the group was against it because I don't think my emotional level was on par with junior high school students, so I followed along just one year ahead of my classmates. But when I transferred to a city junior high and high school (Technical High School) I was very much on the level with the other children. Because like I said before, the city students were one year ahead of us, but by this time I had caught up with them.

M: What were the names of the schools you attended? Grade school?

CH: Grade school was A. Courchesne School.

M: Did you ever have to change schools because your parents moved, or something?

CH: No, we never did. From Courchesne School I think we should have been transferred to El Paso High School, but my parents thought that El Paso Tech was a better school and they transferred us to El Paso Tech.

M: So all your grade school was in just that one school?

CH: Yes. Courchesne School and from there on to El Paso Tech for the eighth grade then on to the ninth grade.

M: In what years did you attend grade school and high school?

CH: Well, I started grade school in 1949. I wouldn't say I "graduated," but I was promoted to junior high from Courchesne School in 1956, and then I was in Tech from Fall 1956 to 1961.

M: What grades did you make in high school?

CH: Well more or less the same as I made in grade school. I never made a C except in that 6th grade where I had those problems with that teacher, but it was mostly A's. I think I do have a few B's in my high school record.

M: What were some of the clubs you belonged to?

CH: I belonged to the Pan American Club; I think I was parliamentarian for that club. I was secretary of the Student Council; I was president of the National Honor Society; I don't believe I was an officer in the Future Teachers of America. I don't recall all the honors that I received along the way. I was in the National Honor Society two years and in my senior year I was the president.

M: Did you ever represent your school or your clubs in any competition state-wide or out of town or something like that?

CH: Not in competition, but I remember going to a student council convention in Amarillo representing Tech.

M: How were you treated in Amarillo? Were the people the same as here in El Paso?

CH: I don't believe so. I think there was this thing--racial discrimination in Amarillo, but since we were there as a group, it is very hard to discriminate against children that have their sponsors there. But there was a little

incident before we went. I believe at that time there was a clause in the Student Council Association statewide that said white children shall be members of student councils of Texas, and our Student Council had chosen me, a Mexican American, to represent them. It had to be a boy and a girl. They chose me as the girl and they chose a black boy, who was a very intelligent boy, Eddie Hadden. I remember the counselor calling him to her office and they must have explained to him in hushed tones that no black child would be allowed to represent the school at the State Convention. I remember I was very hurt for that boy then because I think the counselor or somebody should have done something about him going, since we, the student body, chose him to represent the school. I went out there a little heartless because of that--that he wasn't allowed to represent the school and nobody stood up for him; no one in our school--no teacher, no counselor. We had to be 2 girls and 2 boys. Anyway, some other boy was asked to go in his place, was appointed by the counselor to go in his place. I guess some of the other students in the student body took it worse than he did. He took it like a grain of salt, accepted it, and that was it. But he was one of our honor students, too, and he graduated in the top 10 per cent of our class also.

M: In social activities, did you participate in any of the honors that they have for the students of these clubs that you belonged to? For instance, if they had dances did they have queens?

CH: Well, since my parents, my father was a little strict at home I went to very few of the school dances. But I did, I remember at--if you mean the Spring Prom and the Spring dance, yes, I was chosen "All Tech Girl," "All School Girl"; I represented the student body as "All School Girl" at the

Spring Fiesta or whatever it was. And again I think the student body compensated this boy for the incident that had happened before, because he was chosen "All School Boy," which was very rare in the 1950's for a high school in El Paso to have a black "All School Boy."

M: What other interesting events or incidents stand out in your elementary school?

CH: Well, getting double promoted was one. I remember when they gave the IQ tests in the 7th grade before I was promoted to high school, I had the highest score in those IQ tests, if they mean anything. I don't remember what school years, but in most of my grades I received the citizenship award that they give to a girl and a boy--just a student from that class. Almost every year I got the citizenship award except for that sixth grade when I had all those problems. I think I received one certificate for improved writing, and I received a school certificate for being a Patrol Girl, and that was it. The years before I had received five or six certificates--one in English, one in Math, the Citizenship Award, one for Spelling. But that's the year in grade school that I received the least recognition. I don't think it bothered me then. I don't even recall thinking about it or worrying about it. It is now as a grownup that sometimes I wonder how come that year I received hardly any awards.

M: In high school what other honors did you receive?

CH: I was chosen by the English Department of our high school... It was Outstanding Student in the English Department. They considered me from the Math Department too, but they had a school rule that you couldn't be chosen from both the English and Math-Science.

M: In overall rating what was your outcome at the end of your high school?

CH: Well, I graduated Valedictorian of my class.

M: Was there anybody who challenged or questioned you on that honor? Was there anybody opposing it?

CH: I believe it was fairly done. There was one thing that maybe now it wouldn't make any difference, but back in the '50's (that was 1961 when I graduated) things were a little different. I think some of the students believed that some other student should have been salutatorian since we had a married lady graduating with us, and she had been at our school for only one year. But, since that goes by grades, I think maybe it was done far and square.

M: Do you remember what the social activities in your high school were?

CH: Well, aside from the Proms and Spring Fiestas (which were the formal things), I think in my third year in high school they started having a school carnival. Then they had football games, tea dances--now the children call them sock hops.

M: What were the social activities in your neighborhood?

CH: Well, since I lived in Buena Vista Addition until I got married, and according to the newspapers and sociological statistics it is a depressed area, we didn't have a community center. I think there was a small rundown dance hall built by the veterans somewhere in the neighborhood. But aside from that, it was mostly neighborhood dances in private homes.

M: What was the supervision in those dance parties?

CH: In the private homes? I remember my parents were very outgoing. They had a lot of dances at our house. It was very well supervised. I remember it was mostly like family dances.

M: The parents came with their children?

- CH: It was a dance for everybody--the teenagers, young people maybe in their 20's, married couples in their 30's with small children. My parents were in their early 40's or late 30's, and there were other people of my parents' age there--their friends. Everybody danced and joined in the parties.
- M: So it was a family social function?
- CH: Yes.
- M: Were there any cultural activities in your school? In either one?
- CH: No, none that I recall. I was trying to think of anything; but, no, there were no cultural activities.
- M: How was your leisure time spent during your teens?
- CH: During the school year my parents indicated that we should spend our time doing our homework. It was mostly school oriented. On weekends we would spend our time on our farm in New Mexico and also in the summertime. It was one of the most pleasant periods of my life because I remember we were sort of like free souls on the farm--I don't mean free love. We had a very, very good time all summer long on our farm.
- M: (At interviewee's request) We continue in Spanish.
- Aquí continuamos en español. ¿Me puedes decir qué era lo que hacían allá en el rancho de tu papá en Nuevo México?
- CH: Pues, me acuerdo que se empezaba el día muy temprano. Ya para las 5:00 o las 6:00 de la mañana ya andábamos en el rancho ayudando a mi papá; le ayudábamos. Tenía puercos, vacas, chivas y caballos. Pero no nos dejaba pasearnos en los caballos hasta que acabábamos el trabajo de lo que nos daba en la mañana. Después, ya por la tarde, cuando terminábamos lo que íbamos a hacer en la mañana--no hacíamos nada pesado, pero como de darles agua a los animales, algo así, o sacar la alfalfa del cuartito de la alfalfa y darles alfalfa a las vacas y los caballos, si no andaban en la pastura. Ya por las tardes

nos pasábamos el tiempo abajo de los árboles cerca del río, que viene siendo el Río Grande, pero en el lado de Nuevo México.

M: ¿Tu papá no tenía ningún otro trabajo?

CH: Era contratista de camiones de carga, que por mochismo uno dice que es "troca". Y tenía mis hermanos trabajándole y usualmente tenía unas otras personas trabajando también.

M: ¿Y, a dónde mandaba a esas "trocas" a trabajar?

CH: A la ciudad de El Paso y también a una piedra.

M: ¿Qué era el trabajo que hacían allí? Como durante la guerra, ¿qué hacían allí?

CH: ¿En la piedra? Pues como yo nací durante la segunda guerra mundial...

M: ¿Era la Courchesne Quarry que llevaba la piedra para la planta de cemento?

CH: Sí, no me acuerdo muy bien pero sí me acuerdo que después cuando estaba poco más grande, que una vez él dijo (no platicaba mucho) pero nos dijo que él trabajaba en el Courchesne Quarry y estas "trocas" cargaban la piedra a la planta de cemento y luego en la noche en la planta de cemento tenían una como fábrica de pólvora. Esto era durante la guerra. Y así es de que hacían como trabajo de secreto por la noche las "trocas", de transportar la pólvora de la planta de cemento al depot, a los carriles.

M: ¿Del ferrocarril?

CH: Del ferrocarril, que dice uno de mochismo también que es el "tren".

M: ¿Estás yendo a la escuela ahorita?

CH: Después de la secundaria me matriculé en UTEP y tengo 15 horas de UTEP. Después no seguí; me cambié a trabajar y trabajé por dos años, y luego me casé. Ahora que se formó el El Paso Community College, me matriculé en Community College, y estoy yendo a tomar unas dos o tres clases por semestre. Muy despacio, pero estoy acumulando horas y en poco tiempo pienso cambiarme otra vez a UTEP.

M: ¿Qué es tu major en Community College?

CH: Pues, más bien es por el camino de educación. Quiero un bachillerato de educación.

M: ¿Y cómo te está yendo allí?

CH: Todavía en las clases que tengo, tengo "A's". Tuve un incidente en UTEP cuando salí de la secundaria y me matriculé en UTEP. Tenía una profesora que dijo en la clase una anunciación que ella no daba más que una "C" a sus alumnos que eran de primer año de colegio--freshmen. Bueno, en este incidente yo pienso que también fue algo que no había de haber pasado porque en mis papeles que entregué y en los exámenes tenía yo digo que una "B" si no era una "A". Pero como ya había anunciado que a los alumnos de primer año de colegio no les daba más que una "C", me dio una "C". Debía haber sido "A" pero de pérdida me debía haber dado una "B" porque yo la merecí. Y siendo mexicano-americana de aquí no pensé de ir a preguntar, ni a averiguar ese asunto y está en mi record y sé que yo no hice una "C" en esa clase, pero tengo una "C". Pero ésa fue tontería mía por no ir a averiguar eso en su tiempo porque ya esa profesora ya no está en UTEP.

M: Y cuando usted trabajó, ¿qué fue su primer empleo?

CH: De oficina en una joyería.

M: ¿Me puede decir el nombre de la joyería?

CH: Feder's Jewelers. Puede decir uno que había poquita discriminación, pero no mucho porque la persona que estaba de tenedor de libros era una señora mexicana y los empleados eran dos americanos pero tenían posiciones altas en la tienda. Los demás empleados éramos mexicanos, pero también nos pagaban muy poquito; como dicen en inglés, "peanuts"--nos pagaban cacahuates.

M: ¿Y las horas--nunca los dejaban overtime y les pagaban?

CH: Nunca nos pagaron overtime y trabajábamos de las 8:00 de la mañana a las 6:30 de la tarde, incluyendo sábados. Después una señora, la que estaba de tenedor de libros, pidió que nos dieran una tarde de descanso y nos empezaron a dar una tarde de descanso, pero no en sábado--durante la semana.

M: Entonces, ¿había discriminación en las horas de trabajo?

CH: Sí, había. Precisamente.

M: ¿Dónde más trabajaste?

CH: Después en Zork Hardware más o menos por un año y medio o dos años. También las señoritas y señoras americanas tenían posiciones de stenographers, un poquito mejor que nosotros. También estaban de trabajo de oficina. Pero estuve de inventory clerk y después de allí me casé.

M: ¿Y ahorita qué haces? ¿Nomás estás yendo a la escuela y en tu casa?

CH: Pues ahorita hago mis quehaceres domésticos. Tengo a mi marido que tengo que ver por él, y tengo dos niños, una niña de 12 años y un niño de cinco años. Y aparte de eso, pertenezco a lo que le llaman Girl Scouts of America. Soy leader y tengo una tropa de niñas. Aparte de esto, pertenezco a VIPs (Volunteers in Public Schools) de las escuelas públicas, y al PTA (Asociación de Padres y Profesores).

M: ¿De qué otros eventos históricos te puedes acordar de esta región?

CH: Perteneciendo a incidentes históricos me acuerdo que mi papá nos dijo que éramos algo como tercer primos de Cleofas Calleros, quien escribió libros históricos de aquí del suroeste de los Estados Unidos. El vivió en un tiempo al pie de la montaña de Cristo Rey y después se cambió para el centro de la ciudad.

M: ¿No te acuerdas de algunos incidentes interesantes ya sean humorísticos o trágicos?

CH: Pues, me acuerdo de un incidente que nos dijo mi papá---cuando él estaba niño, también que le pasó a él. A ellos los transportaban del "Valle de Arriba" de El Paso cerca del Río Grande. Desde Canutillo los transportaban a la escuela. La única escuela que había era la escuela que llamaban el Smelter Alto. Bueno, este incidente que pasó en el Smelter Alto es que iban todos los niños en el coche que los llevaba a la escuela. Y como mi papá era huérfano de madre, todos los niños se peleaban con él. Su papá le daba dinero o dulces o algo y se peleaba con los niños o los niños se peleaban con él--entre los dos modos. Y a él, de puntapiés, lo echaban para atrás del coche. Tenían que cruzar por donde pasa el ferrocarril (la vía del tren), y este cierto día que iban cruzando, pasó el tren y tocó la mala suerte de que le pegó al frente del coche. Y a los niños que iban atrás del coche no les pasó nada, incluyendo a mi papá; pero a los que iban enfrente hubo unas casualidades, incluyendo el señor que llevaba el coche, que llevaba el caballo, porque eran coches de caballos.

Otro incidente que les pasó a mis papás es que cuando ellos compraron su propiedad, siendo mexico-americanos la tuvieron que defender, defenderla con armas. Una vez vino un señor blanco al ranchito que tenían. Se metió y quería tomar cosas de allí como si él fuera el dueño. Mi mamá le dijo que se saliera de su propiedad y él le dijo que no, y que ya no tenía derecho allí. Entonces mi mamá sacó la escopeta y lo echó a balazos. Ese fue nomás uno de los incidentes que tuvieron que defender su propiedad; hubo varios otros.

M: ¿Otros más recientes?

CH: En un tiempo un maestro de la escuela, como la propiedad de mis papás estaba enseguida de la propiedad de la escuela, trajo a los niños de la escuela para que arreglaran la propiedad de mis papás para hacer un lugar para que los niños jugaran. Tuvo que salir mi mamá a averiguarles que era propiedad

de ellos y que no tenían derecho a meterse a la propiedad de ellos. Y también era un maestro blanco.

M: ¿Había bastante lugar en la escuela para que los niños jugaran?

CH: Había bastante lugar en la escuela para que los niños jugaran. No había necesidad de que se metieran a otra propiedad.

M: ¿Allá en el rancho no tuvieron dificultades con nadie?

CH: ¿En Nuevo México? Muchas veces tuvimos que decirle a la gente que por favor se salieran porque era lugar propio. Y tocó veces que era gente blanca y nos contestaban muy feo y nos daban miradas muy feas, porque yo creo que no aceptaban que hubiera gente mexicana que fueran dueños de ranchitos también.

M: ¿No sabes tú nada del tiempo de la depresión, cuando hubo crisis?

CH: Que la crisis. Pues, no. Yo nací en el 1943 pero sí me acuerdo de mis papás haber dicho, y todavía hay gente en Buena Vista que dicen que si no hubiera sido por mi papá se hubieran muerto varias gentes de hambre. Como él tenía rancho él le regalaba a la gente. Venían a que él les diera de comer en la casa. Mataba algún animal y les regalaba la carne. Tenía su negocito de camiones de carga y tenía contratos con verdulerías, y él compraba por mayor varias legumbres y también las llevaba a la casa. Como las había comprado por mayor, las repartía a sus vecinos, a mucha gente que había perdido sus trabajos. Y no había ninguna otra parte dónde sacar el que comer, comestibles.

M: ¿No sabes nada de la Revolución Mexicana, que fue antes de la depresión?

CH: No sé mucho. Me acuerdo que de vez en cuando platicaba mi papá que su papá de él le había platicado de Pancho Villa. Mi papá una vez presencié algo de que se oyeron los balazos de Juárez a El Paso cuando Pancho Villa pasó por Juárez. Pues estuvo campado en Juárez un tiempo. Aparte de

eso, mi abuelita por el lado de mi mamá participó en la Revolución Mexicana. Como ya había dicho, ella fue enfermera antes de venirse para los Estados Unidos.

M: ¿Y de la influenza español del 1918, no te contaron nada tus papás?

CH: Sí, entre la familia de mi papá hubo unas experiencias muy traumáticas. A él se le murieron sus hermanas y sus hermanos. Un poquito tiempo antes de eso, se había muerto su mamá. No pienso que su mamá se murió del tiempo de la influenza, pero sus hermanos sí. Se le acabó casi toda su familia.

M: Y del tiempo de la prohibición, cuando prohibían el licor aquí en los Estados Unidos, ¿no sabes nada?

CH: No sé mucho pero yo sé que pasaban mucho licor de México para los Estados Unidos. Hay hasta corridos que en inglés les llaman ballads. Uno de éstos es el "Corrido de El Paso". Se me hace que mi papá dijo que él participó muy poco en eso también. Y una vez lo aprehendieron las autoridades de los Estados Unidos, que él traía licor en los garrafrones de leche. Le preguntaron qué traía allí y les dijo que traía agua. Y tocó que el garrafón que abrieron sí traía agua, y lo dejaron ir. Se les escapó por muy poquito, pero se les escapó. Pero él no era el único. Había mucha gente, igual de habla española como de habla inglesa, que pasaba el licor.

M: ¿No sabes por dónde lo pasaban y cómo lo pasaban?

CH: Lo pasaban por la montaña, lo pasaban por el desierto. Pero de allí en más no me acuerdo muy bien como platicaban.

M: Y durante la segunda guerra, ¿cómo los afectó a su familia de ustedes?

CH: Pues aparte...como ya dije que mi papá había trabajado en transportando la pólvora de la planta de cemento al centro a los ferrocarriles. Es todo lo que recuerdo. Aparte de eso, no nos afectó mucho.

M: ¿De la devaluación del peso en el '30, '48, '54 o en '76?

CH: No sé mucho, pero como dice la canción, "Para hacer pesos de a montones, solamente el americano".

M: ¿Y qué más dice?

CH: Pues es todo lo que recuerdo ahorita.

M: "Para conquistar corazones no hay como el de un mexicano". ¿Y cómo empezaste tú a votar cuando llegó la edad de votar?

CH: No recuerdo si todavía existía el poll tax; pero como a los 21 años me moví para California y yo sabía que iba a volver a El Paso dentro de un año, no empecé a votar hasta que volví a El Paso. Sería de 22 o 23 años que empecé a votar. Pues siempre trato de votar educadamente. Leo el periódico, leo lo que dicen los candidatos, y trato de informarme.

M: ¿Estás al tanto de cómo trabaja la política aquí?

CH: Sí, más o menos. Sí, sé como trabaja el sistema. Nomás que es una tristeza que no hay más mexico-americanos que participen en el sistema político de los Estados Unidos. Si nos uniéramos mejor, tuviéramos más derechos que los que tenemos.

M: ¿Me puedes decir por qué hay tan poquita representación en la política?

CH: En primer lugar, por la discriminación. En segundo lugar, porque no hay bastante gente que se interesa hacer algo por su comunidad, a salir adelante a hablar por el grupo de mexicano-americanos.

M: ¿Quiénes habrán sido leaders mexicano-americanos en el pasado?

CH: El Alcalde Municipal Telles. Ha sido otros poquitos. No en el pasado, sino en el presente, uno que yo conozco. (Voy a cambiar otra vez al inglés.) I am very proud of this man because he is a Mexican-American. He is my cousin. He is a close relative. He has been an activist, I guess all his life. He has his Ph.D. now from Stanford University in California. He was

a professor at Berkeley. Like I said, he has always been an activist. He is a dynamic person. In the 1960's, I think, he was fired from Berkeley because he started holding classes out in the open on the college campus instead of the classrooms. I think that from there he started working with the Chicano movement. Right now he is in Washington, D.C. He is a lobbyist for the Mexican-American group. As a matter of fact, he was the head of the Mexican-American lobby in Washington. I believe last month he stepped aside and let somebody else take over because he believed that somebody else might do a better job than he was doing. He did say in the El Paso Times that /Congressman/ Richard White was not doing anything for the Mexican-Americans in Washington. Richard White responded that he was not a prominent person in the community--like who was he to be criticizing Richard White. And it doesn't take a prominent person to speak out in politics. An ordinary citizen can say Richard White is not doing a good representation of Mexican-Americans. I believe this is all I can say about this man, except that all the family--the family circle--aunts, uncles, cousins, we are all very proud of him. He is Manuel Fierro, Jr.

M: ¿Cuándo fue la primera vez que tú oíste la palabra "chicano"?

CH: That was in my teens, but then I think it had a different connotation, a different meaning than it does now. To us as teenagers it was just like a slang for "Mexican-American." Now I think it is the standard word to stand for "Mexican-American." It is used interchangeably. I don't think it is a slang word any more.

M: What is your opinion about the Chicano movement?

CH: I am very much for the Chicano movement as long as it is non-violent. I don't believe in taking up arms or any kind of violence. I believe in

cultural change through the movement, but peacefully.

M: What do you think about illegal aliens?

CH: I have to think a little about the question. I think deep down inside I am against it. I am very much against the illegal aliens. If they immigrate to the United States, become citizens, become responsible members of the community, I am all for that. But if they come over and offer themselves for lower wages which in turn lowers everybody's pay, I am very much against the situation in this way. I believe the Mexican government is to blame for this. They should do something about their own people--either create jobs or find some way to take care of their own people, because they are creating problems for themselves, for the Mexican-Americans on this side, and other responsible citizens.

Before we close this interview I would like to add [this], since I recalled about our days on the farm. There was one incident that I recall that is quite outstanding in my mind. I believe it was in 1958 or 1959 when Vietnamese General at that time, Van Thieu, and Air Marshall Kou Ky were at Fort Bliss. They were touring the area and military officials from Fort Bliss asked the Border Patrol or the Immigration here in El Paso to recommend a farm or a place where they could show these men how small farms in El Paso or in America operated. The Border Patrol in turn recommended our father's farm. They took them in--I think it was two other military officials (American officials) to our farm, and I met Kou Ky and Van Thieu. I think at that time my sister and I were at the farm with my father. It was an outstanding incident in my mind; it was a pleasant occasion to be able to participate in an international--I can't think of the word--well, what you call not an "international exchange," but from one culture to another culture.

M: In closing this interview I wish to thank you for cooperating in recording this Oral History interview for The University of Texas at El Paso files.