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## Interview no. 347

Alice White North

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Alice White North (1885- )  
INTERVIEWER: Virgilio H. Sánchez  
PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: October 9, 1978  
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Poet, teacher

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; childhood in Iowa; her father's experience as a Northern soldier during the Civil War; move to Edinburg, Texas, in 1930; teaching experiences with Mexican children; the Depression; 1918 Spanish Flu; experiences as a volunteer during World War I; her poetry. (Also included is a collection of Ms. North's poetry.)

1 hour, 31 pages.

Alice White North  
October 9, 1978  
Interviewed by Virgilio H. Sanchez Saucedo

S: This is an oral history interview with Mrs. Alice White North. The Towers Apartment, number 714 on October 9, 1978, Edinburg, Texas. Interviewing for the Institute of Oral History at The University of Texas at El Paso, Virgilio Homero Sanchez Saucedo. Well, hello.

N: Hello.

S: Pardon me Mrs. North. When and where were you born?

N: I was born near the town of Logan, Iowa on November 3, 1885. It was a very cold, stormy night, my mother tells me. I am the youngest of seven children. My oldest brother was 25 years older than I. My oldest sister was 23 years older than I. She was already married and had two children older than I was. I have another sister 20 years older and so on down to, I was the last one. The seventh one.

S: (inaudible). What is your father's and your mother's name.

N: My mother was Roxanna Smothers. We think we're related to the Smothers Brothers. (General laughter) That is I think we were. I'm the last leaf on the tree. There isn't another one in our family living because, you see, I was so much the youngest. Twenty-five years difference between me and my oldest brother. He was gone almost before I can remember. I remember a little bit about him. I saw him again when I was seven and I saw him again when I was twenty and again when I was twenty-seven and never again. So that was my acquaintance with my oldest brother because he moved out to northwestern Nebraska. Then my other sisters moved away, to different places and we lived in the same community close to Logan, Iowa until I was nearly ten years old.

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S: What did your father usually do for a living?

N: We were farmers, always farmers. And I was brought up to know how to milk cows and drive horses and do all sorts of things of that type.

S: What do you remember about your father? What do you remember?

N: I remember very little about my father because he died when I was two and a half. All that I remember about him is how my older brothers and sisters tell me I'm exactly like him. It seems so odd I've been trying lately to read up on genes that we inherit and I think that I must have gotten alot of them from my father because I'm more like him, they tell me, than any member of the family. Now of course they're not telling me this now because they're all gone but I used to ask questions about my father and they would always say, "Pa would never believe anything that he didn't want to and you're just like him.". (General laughter) My other brothers and sisters, well one brother and I, were unconventional. We went off on a tangent of our own as far as thinking was concerned, but our whole family loved to read. I was brought up to love words. And anything that was, well, anything from the Mother Goose Rhymes up to the sublimes, Shakespeare. We simply rolled around on our tongues because we loved words. I can't remember...we weren't told to memorize; it was just in the blood.

S: It was just in the blood?

N: We just memorized without being aware of the fact we were doing it. So whenever I heard something new, along a literary line, I was tremendously interested. We read everything we could lay our hands on and sometimes it wasn't particularly good. But I read alot of, oh, the rather trashy novels of the time. Not as trashy as our novels are today, but I mean, oh, the ladies were always, the girls were always fainting, turning an

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ankle, lying down looking beautiful, and some prince came riding by just in time. I defended that years later when a teacher of mine in college said I wasted my time reading those novels. Well, they were all we had. Think of the geography I learned. The words I learned. My mother didn't have a dictionary but she could tell from the context pretty well what every word meant. Often she didn't pronounce the word correctly. I remember the word formidable; she called it formidible. (laughter). But she knew what it meant.

S: She knew what it meant.

N: Those are the things that I remember in my childhood.

S: You were telling me that you were reading the passage of where your family comes from.

N: The Smothers part of our family, they're supposed to have come from Holland...is this on now?...They had turned into Americans long before I arrived in 1885. So had the Whites, who for all we know had originated in England and Scotland. We think that we've just about always been here. There was a White in the Mayflower. Maybe he belongs to us, but we can't prove it. I tried it once. I sent a man quite a lot of money to find out when we came over, either side I wrote him. I didn't care which great-grandfather fought under Washington. We felt sure that one of them must have, or a great uncle. Pretty soon the man wrote he was on the track of an uncle and could he have some more money? So I sent it and then after a while, he wanted some more and so I sent him some more. I sent him quite a lot more. He found someone back there by the name of Nathan Beach. We have at least three Nathan Beaches in our family. I mean that I know about. This one the man had found, had fought at the battle of Yorktown but he couldn't be proved to have been a member of our

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family. An old uncle of mine had told me that the original Nathan Beach had been a peddler. But the man who was looking up the record got in touch with a lady who could prove that the Nathan Beach who had fought at the battle of Yorktown was her honest-to-goodness, uncle. She wished to go on record as saying that hers, this one, most emphatically had not been a peddler. She seemed to have found the idea repugnant. She made quite an issue of it. I shouldn't have minded. I wouldn't have felt let down a bit to have found a peddler in our ancestry, but this lady would. (General laughter).

S: Okay, that's very nice. Where did you go to school?

N: I went to school very sketchily. I went to a country school and then we moved just before I was eleven, to a little town where we had a two room school. I don't know how but by the time I was seventeen I had managed to get a third grade certificate and was teaching in the country.

S: Oh, you were teaching. (General laughter)

N: And as I look back at it I wonder what those poor dear children ever got beside my love. (General laughter). I have some awfully interesting experiences teaching in the country.

S: Okay. You were telling about your first day in school.

N: Well, my first day in school, I thought there'd be a women teacher in the country. And I didn't start until the fall before I was seven because it was quite a long distance to walk. I had rather poor lungs when I was a child. Mama didn't like to have me walk through the snow and of course in Iowa we had plenty of cold weather. I didn't go to school until the fall as I said, before I was seven. Well, when I got there we didn't have a woman teacher we had a young man. Poor darling, he wasn't more than seventeen or eighteen. I cried, I cried all day. I had the little

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write-up in here, I wish I knew what page. Anyway, he walked along behind me and I heard him say something. I didn't understand what it was but my older sister, six years older than I, remembered and told Mama when we got home. And I thought, well, Mama didn't act particularly put out about it and the young man had said, "That is the most precocious child I ever saw." I think he must have been greatly mistaken about the meaning of the word precocious because (laughing) Mama thought it was a compliment and I can't remember doing anything but having wept all day long. (General laughter) So I don't think it took a particularly bright child to do that.

S: What about the stories you heard?

N: Oh, the stories. My mother could just simply tell one story after another as fast, oh, I have it all written down in here. (laughs)

S: Okay.

N: I used to have tangles in my hair and she would comb my hair in the morning and tell me stories and I'd kind of forget about the pulling of my hair. She had a story that, it, all of her stories started out almost the same. Once upon a time an old man and an old woman got married and the old man had a sally and the old woman had a sally and they were often mean to the old man's sally. The two daughters grew up together you see, and the stepmother and the stepsister always did mean things to the daughter of the father, but she always turned into a regular Cinderella and forgave them and the prince came along and married her instead of the bad sister. (General laughter) My mother could just tell one version of that story after another, make them up as she went along.

S: That's very interesting.

N: And we read everything as I said. We read, uh... .

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S: What kind of readers did you use?

N: McGuffey's.

S: McGuffey's.

N: Don't put that down. The McGuffey Readers, everybody who knows about the old readers will remember McGuffey.

S: How were they?

N: They were full of wonderful poems. I grew up knowing Shakespeare and some of the very minor poets. I didn't know who was the best. I had my favorites among them, but I didn't know that Shakespeare was better than somebody who had never been heard of except in McGuffey's Reader. In this, I wish I could find the pages here, I could read it so much faster than I can tell it and I'll forget some of the things. (Chuckles)

S: No, no. I was going to ask you then when you got to be the third grade, I mean got through third grade... .

N: When I got my third grade certificate you mean?

S: Yes.

N: Well, of course, they had first second and third grade certificates. I never reached the first grade certificate but I did get a third grade certificate and you could teach in the country with that. My first school I had forty-one children in a room not much larger...well, not as large as this whole apartment would be. They were all grades, only they were ungraded. If I hadn't gone to a country school I wouldn't have had any idea how to manage. But I had gone and so I managed to get by. But I don't think I taught the children a great deal. I loved them and they loved me. One awfully funny thing happened, while I was teaching in my first. I taught in the fall in the country, two months, then I'd go to school in the winter then I came back and taught that same school in the



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spring for three months, and then to summer school and came back and repeated that for several years. But my first country school, I mean where I taught in the country, was the year I was twenty. I had forty some children in that room and seven of them were almost as old as I. They were within three years of my age and then I had clear down to the beginners. One day the superintendent, the county superintendent, came to visit and all of those older seven children just looked around at the kids younger and behave or else. He thought I was a good teacher. You could have heard a pin drop in that school because everything just went along as though it was perfectly oiled. Just a few days before that I'd seen one of my big boys all ready to throw a paper wad and what did I do? I laughed and he did too. Now that's kind of teacher I was. My discipline was not anything like this today. The children were never insubordinate. I did have a couple of middle size boys who were kind of bad and suddenly they reformed. I never could tell why, I didn't know. Several years later, I found out that the older boys said. They'd call me teacher in school but they called me Alice outside. And they said, "If you don't behave and make trouble for Alice, we'll lay you out on the way home." (laughter) So those boys reformed not for anything their teacher had done except that I had loved all of them.

S: Okay. I wanted to ask you uh, did you ever hear anything about the Mexican Revolution over there?

N: Well, of course I got it in history when I went to school. Well, I was always very much interested and felt that uh, we probably sliced off more than was coming to us. But when I came down here it was so funny because I've helped a couple of people with book reviews and the Mexican, uh, uh, the war that we had and the trouble that we had is told in an altogether

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different way then I had the idea when I was a child, studying history at home. But I'm not great in history at all so I can't talk too much about that.

S: What was the idea that you had when you were a child about the history?

N: Oh heavens child, I don't know it was when I was in school in the country and... .

S: It was different from the book?

N: Oh, I always had my own ideas. (General laughter)

S: Okay. But not the war, I was talking about the revolution, you know. 1910. Mexico fought a revolution within the country.

N: I remember a little bit about it but too hazily.

S: Too hazily. Did you used to get it in the papers over there?

N: Oh, of course we did. I remember the War of 1898 very well. The Spanish-American War. But I remember it more--Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders and how I was so interested in all the songs that were sung on about that time. In here I have a list of the songs that were sung at that time. And one time I sent this to a man in Ames, Iowa and he read it and he wrote back and wanted me to tell him some more about the songs. "Just as the Sun Went Down", some of those old songs.

S: What do you remember about the Spanish-American War?

N: Well, that's it. 1898. And I had never heard of the Philipines in my life until that year. Of course, I had heard about Theodore Roosevelt because we were Republicans and we moved to a little town when I was ten and they were all Democrats. I was the only Republican in town. Believe me I yelled for McKinley. (Laughter) And then my man got elected and it was such a joke on all the Democrats because I was the only Republican and my man got elected. (General laughter) So we had lots of fun.

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S: Okay. After you were a teacher did you continue studying?

N: Oh my goodness, yes! And then after this superintendent came along to visit the school that day and thought I was a good teacher and I wasn't, just within two years he recommended me to go, to teach in a small town in Iowa--Persia, Iowa,--in this same county, Harrison County. It was only third and fourth grades. Well, I was a better teacher there. By that time I had saved enough money so that I went to summer school to see if I couldn't get a few ideas as to how to teach because I never had ideas before. While I was there I took some work in speech. I made up my mind right then that I was going to Highland Park College in Des Moines and finish that particular course. They called it oratory, the Oratory Department. I went back to school to teach and saved every penny I could and I went to school there for twelve full months, right straight through and got a diploma for this Bachelor of Oratory, they called it. But when I was a youngster...

S: What year was that?

N: What? 1910.

S: 1910.

N: You see, I was in my twenties before I got to go to school.

S: You see, 1910 was when the Mexican Revolution started.

N: In 1910, but you see in 1910, that was the year I graduated from this little college in Des Moines. Then I went back to this same school and saved up enough money to pay all of my debts. How in the world I had the courage to do it, I don't know. I told the board of directors that I didn't want to go on. I could have stayed if I had wanted to but I said now I want to use what I have learned. I turned down the school with not anything in sight and that very summer I got a chance to go to out

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Washington and teach reading in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Then at the end of three years--I could have stayed there but I said I'm going back to Iowa and I'm going to coach high school declamatory contests and direct high school plays and that's what I did for the next sixteen years. At first I had to go wherever I went and I nearly starved to death that first year or two because I could hardly make enough money to get from one town to another. By the third year I had eight schools down in southwestern Iowa and it just kept me busy right straight through. And in the summer I had private pupils there.

S: I wanted to ask you were there any Mexican people in Iowa, at that time?

N: No, no. I never met any Mexicans 'til I came here.

S: Okay.

N: I never knew any Spanish-speaking people.

S: Well, but uh, of Mexican origin? Also I wanted to ask you, then by 1919 where were you?

N: In 1918? Uh, I was, uh... .

S: When the flu came.

N: Uh, I was teaching, coaching high school declamatory contests... .

S: Yes, because you stayed all that time. For sixteen years.

N: People were dying right and left, all around us. And my very beloved friend that I had made in Highland Park College died. She was six years younger than I but we were kindred souls. She was a very dear close friend of mine. Then of course, many of our neighbors. But I didn't... .

S: What were the symptoms?

N: Well, it was very much like a what we call flu today. Just a bad cold and the first thing we knew down they went. It was quite catching.

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Everybody was staying away from everybody else except as they needed to nurse them, take care of them.

S: Do you remember any incidents about people that might have not been dead and might have been buried alive.

N: No, nothing like that.

S: Nothing like that. They were nursed?

N: Oh, we had some of those scary stories, of course when I was a child, but they were just stories.

S: Stories. Okay. Then after the sixteen years you stayed there you came uh... .

N: Then in 1930 I came to Texas.

S: In 1930?

N: And I wasn't married until I was forty-four.

S: Okay, but before that. The First World War, what do you...?

N: That's when I told you I thought I was going over as a canteen worker.

S: Okay.

N: We were appointed the three women from the Red Cross. The Red Cross was to send us over. In those days they didn't pay all of our expenses, we had to raise \$500.00 ourselves if we got to go. I was planning to borrow a good deal of it (General laughter) I took the examination for Civil Service and I got an appointment to go to Washington D.C. So I spent the year of 1919 in Washington. I came home at the end of the year because I was doing alot more good teaching children at home then I was sitting in a desk taking care of three cards that an eighth grader could do. And not everybody could put on a play as well as I knew how to do at that time because I'd learned how. I was a good teacher in the thing that I learned to do well, but I wasn't a good teacher in the country.

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(General laughter)

S: What incidents do you remember about the First World War?

N: Well, I was gullible, you want that? I believed everything they told me about how horrible things the Germans did and how lily white we were. And of course, I've outgrown that a long, long ways in these years because if there are two factions fighting they both have regrettable things happen on both sides. But I was so wholly patriotic. My mother had brought me up to be very, very patriotic. I didn't tell you that my father had enlisted in the Civil War, long years before I was born, you see. So my mother brought me up to think a soldier was something very superior.

S: He fought in the Civil War?

N: My father was in the Civil War.

S: Was he, uh... .

N: Oh, we were northerners, you see. I have that in this story here. He was a blue bellied yankee, they called him. (General laughter) I have a very dear friend here in Texas who calls me her damn yankee friend. (General laughter)

S: Where did he fight?

N: Well, that was it. He went to war and he went to the service I mean, and of course he contracted consumption, what we call consumption at that time, tuberculosis and came home in three months and never was well again. And the rest of all us children were born, after that, four of us after that, and not one of us... I have the most wonderful lungs that anybody ever heard about. But when I was born they thought perhaps my lungs were not very good, but I outgrew it, quickly.

S: Thank God. (General laughter) Okay, then you came to the valley?

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N: I came to the valley in 1930.

S: How was the valley at that time? What cities did you know and how were they?

N: Well, I was here in Edinburg, out in the country here, Morning Side Road, five miles out in the country and I immediately began to teach private pupils in speech, as soon as I came. I had all grades, all children, all ages, from preschool to adult classes. I have one adult class that has come around my birthday time for twenty-five years now. This fall will be the twenty-fifth year that that group of women have come and I've outlived all but four. Or else they've moved away. Some of them have moved away.

S: Did you meet Mexicans at that time?

N: Oh yes, the children were all my children then. It didn't make any difference whether they were Anglos or Mexicans. I have children all over this countryside. The boy who came to put in my telephone here said, "Mrs. North, do you remember I was one of your children?". Oh, I hadn't seen the child since he was in kindergarten but he remembered me. I went over to the post office and the boy who was selling me stamps said, or the man, he said, "Do you remember me, Mrs. North? I'm one of your children." (General laughter) I meet them everywhere.

S: That's very nice.

N: I'm a very fortunate person. And now the tourists come down from Iowa, my old, old children I had years ago when I taught in Washington in 1911, 1912, 1913. I had one little girl left, out of all the children I had then, who still writes to me but I had a letter from her not very long ago. And the other day, I had a very surprising letter from a child who graduated in 1922 in Glenwood, Iowa. She had just found my address and

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she had lost me completely, inviting me to a get together of all the children this very week in Iowa. Of course, I couldn't go but I thought about all of them.

S: That's very nice. I wanted to ask you, then in 1930 you came over here. Oh, I was asking you about the...you came over here to Edinburg and how was McAllen?

N: Well, McAllen was very much up and coming as it is now only not so large and I think there were about five thousand people in Edinburg at that time. I'm guessing at that now, but I don't think more than that and I don't know what the population would have been in McAllen but uh... .

S: Did you ever go to Mexico? To Reynosa?

N: Oh yes, I went across the river but then I didn't go to teach or anything like that.

S: Oh, no, just to visit?

N: Oh, yes.

S: How was it over there?

N: Well, it was so different to me and we didn't have much money and we didn't go often because we were pretty hard up during the Depression. My husband had a brother who had forty acres of citrus. And my husband had ten acres, not all in trees but he had a very good orchard on it. I think oh, four acres, maybe, I don't remember. He took care of orchards, my husband did. We had Mexican help and my husband could speak Spanish well enough to get along nicely with his help. And while he was living I learned a great many Mexican words but I never learned the language because I was so busy trying to help these little Mexican children get a good English accent. But that was what I was interested in, in trying to help them to learn their new language on this side of the river. I'm



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very much in favor of that to this day. Because I think it's too bad if we're Americans, we don't speak English well and I feel so sorry for the poor little children who start school and can't speak English. I'm not very much in favor of having the teachers learn Spanish. I'm not radical but if you're going to live in America why don't you speak the language that we speak. If you want to speak Spanish go to Spain or Mexico. Now I wouldn't want to go down and live in Mexico but if I did believe me I'd learn Mexican, uh, Spanish just as fast as I could.

S: Yes, but you can be bilingual.

N: Of course you can but do you have to be? I taught in a little Swedish town in Iowa. Did they all have to speak Swedish? No, they didn't they all spoke English.

S: Let me give you an example. Probably if you went up to Mexico you would learn the language but you would keep your English.

N: Of course I'd keep my English and I'm all for it. I'm so proud of the people who speak two languages and envious.

S: That's what I mean, you know.

N: I would give a good deal if I could speak more than one language.

S: I know. So if someone already speaks Spanish while it would be to an advantage to... .

N: But if I were in Mexico or if I were in Spain or if I were in Holland or anywhere I would want to speak the language of the people who live there.

S: Definitely, but your choice. See like if you gotta choice if you spoke only English and were of Mexican origin or Spanish origin then your choice to learn a second language would be Spanish. The same if like you were an American, you were from, let's say, let's say, you're from Iowa and then you wanted to learn a second language, you knew Spanish to begin

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with and then you wanted to learn a second language then you would learn English because you were from Iowa and that is what this is all about. All the people that are from Mexico originally want to learn their ancestral tongue.

N: Well, I'm all for it but they need to learn English so they can learn English well. Now I lived in a German community when I was a child. Those Germans had to learn to speak English because we couldn't speak German. Why should we have learned? And look at the other people we had around in the community with different...? Now for instance the Swedish people in this little town where I taught. They were so proud of their ancestry. They kept all the old customs and all of those things that they did in Sweden and they were tremendously interesting to me. But the people who couldn't speak English were lonely. They wanted to be able to assimilate. Of course I lived in a German community and the Germans were up against it too. Our people had been here so long that in my particular family we didn't experience anything like that.

S: I can see your point. Okay, now, um, I wanted to ask you more things about the Depression.

N: Well, we were pretty hard up. My husband's brother paid us by the month and the stipend was so low that my goodness if I hadn't earned a little bit and in those days it was awfully hard to get pupils too because the people couldn't afford to let their children take lessons. We were terrible hard up in the...my husband only lived for six years and in those six years he just got steadily sicker. Well, he worked as best he could but I earned the a living along at the last and it was a pretty skimpy living back there in the thirties, early thirties. Then he died in 1936, and we had to leave the home. I had to leave the home that we

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had lived in, a beautiful home that belonged to his brother. I went down in the ten acres that my husband owned and I had two cows (laughs), I sold butter, cream, cottage cheese, and came to town and taught children to speak English. (General laughter) I lived in a little old shack and pretty soon I had the prettiest little house out there that my good neighbors helped me build. And I had thirty years out there on that uh, Morning Side Road, ten acres. The happiest years, I just accomplished so much. The last nine were a little bit hard because I foolishly built an apartment and moved to the apartment and rented my house and I had some tenants that were pretty hard to get along with. I loved all of them but I mean, they didn't pay the rent and there were all kinds of troubles that happened and with very little money to keep the two places going. I think that was a mistake that I made out there. I should have stayed in my own house and not tried to have an apartment, but I was advised to do that, they thought it would be a good way of earning some money. It was not too great a mistake, I had some marvelous tenants, awfully good people. Dear friends of mine yet. Now this is a book I had printed from my children back in 1946. These are all dedicated to the different children. I have two little girls I'm helping right now. I'm doing it just for fun now, I'm not taking any money for it. But they're going to give a program before very long, a first grader and a fourth grader.

S: And all these are your poems?

N: These are the poems I wrote. Then this is a book of poems that I wrote. Johasaphat and Other Verses, is the name of this for the children. I have enough poems for another book this size in children's poems but I'll never have them printed because... .

S: This one is published by Van... ?

North

N: Mathis Van Nort, that uh... .

S: In Dallas?

N: Uh-huh, Mr. Mathis died and the book is out of print today. This one is the One Shining Thread and it was published by our Bern Offerman over here who prints the, in McAllen. They're both copyrighted books but that one is out of print and this one, my friend paid for to have it published. I gave five hundred copies of it to the library here and they sold them for two dollars apiece. So eventually they'll make a thousand dollars here in the library for that.

S: One Shining Thread.

N: And the one shining thread is the golden rule which has run through all the great religions, from the very beginning.

S: Tell me... .

N: Let me read you how I happened to write this. This is in a form called a trialet and a trialet has two lines they must be the same. The last two lines must be the same and the fourth line must be the same as the first line. And its pretty hard to write something and tell something. Well, I felt a little diffident having this book published because I wasn't sure that too many people would want to see it, but I found this "One may twang a loot and yet not be a troubadour" and I felt that hit me pretty hard because I wasn't so sure that my verses were too wonderful. So I wrote that,

That one may twang away upon a loot and yet not qualify  
as troubadour is basic logic.

I would not dispute that one may twang away upon a loot;  
And yet these rhymes I made they constitute my need to sing.  
Although I knew before that one might twang away upon a

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loot and yet not qualify as troubadour.

(General laughter) So that is why my friend made a troubadour on the front of the book.

S: Yeah. That's very nice. (General laughter) Okay, Mrs. North, before I go on I wanted to also ask you, on the Prohibition, what do you remember?

N: I was brought up to think it was terrible to take a drink. (chuckles) And to this day I have no more desire to taste liquor than anything in the world. In fact it makes me ill. I'm not as rabid as I was brought up to be. And one funny thing about when we moved from the country to town we had a cow and we sold milk to the saloon keeper in town. We sold it for five cents a quart. I wish you could have seen that milk with cream on it that thick. (laughs) Everytime I got that thirty-five cents a week, I used to wonder if it was contaminated money because it was from a saloon. (laughs) That is how rabidly I was brought up to be against liquor. (laughs)

S: Okay, but do you remember any incidents about the... .

N: I remember that when we moved to town I was terribly sorry for the horses that were hitched to the old hitching posts in town. Where men came in and got drunk and wandered all over the streets and their horses stood in the sun and waited for them to go home. That's the main thing I remember. We had two saloons in a town of three hundred.

S: Do you remember any incidents about the Prohibition?

N: Well, that was before Prohibition, of course. But after Prohibition I remember the stories that I read about Carrie Nation but we weren't in sympathy with the way she went and banged things up in the saloons. You remember how she broke up all the mirrors. Have you read about that?

S: No.

North

N: Haven't you?

S: No.

N: Well, Carrie Nation was quite a, well, a defender of the rights of people they way she felt about it. But I never felt that going and breaking someone's mirrors would accomplish a very great deal on any sort of a cause. (General laughter) I've always wished that people would begin to have a decent respect to each other by picking up all the litter. If everybody in the world would pick up their own litter just think how beautiful our country would be. Then you walk around out here and look what we see all over this town: gum papers, newspapers, paper sacks, anything in the world people just throw away.

S: Okay, so how do you compare the valley from what you saw at the time to... ?N: When I came here on every road there were beautiful orchards right up to the road, everywhere you went, and I loved it. After my husband died, I had this little ten acres and I had two hundred and seventy-two trees of white marsh. And one year I got a hundred and thirty-five tons from the two hundred and seventy-two trees. Now that's a wonderful orchard. And overnight it froze, I lost it all. I had to borrow money from the government to have the trees bulldozed out and burned. Before that I had managed to put out another orchard and it too was frozen. So those things happened here in the valley and a great many people after such a catastrophe as that didn't put out orchards again, and that is what I miss. That is what I see the difference, the main difference, going up and down the roads. That we were hemmed in with beautiful orchards everywhere back in 1930 and today we have tourist camps, tourist parks.

S: Other than children, what has been your relation with Mexican people?

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N: Oh, friendly in the world. I've got the best neighbors you ever saw.  
(General laughter)

S: Can you tell me about them?

N: Well, when I taught school the children were children to me. It didn't make a difference if they were Anglo or Mexican. Of course, we just, I taught in a little school where we had kindergarten and then uh, a teacher for kindergarten, and a teacher for first grade children who were not six until, who were not quite six when school began. And still they were bright enough to take the first grade and then if they passed they could go on to the second grade the next year. Then I taught speech in this little school and we had a marvelous school. And of course we had one little negro boy who was the cutest thing and he sat by a red-headed Irish child and they had no more idea that there was any difference between them. In our school there was no difference in any of the children. They were all our pupils.

S: You never had any difficulties with Mexican people as far as treatment toward... .

N: Never. I had good neighbors all up and down the Morning Side Road and all the other roads. (General laughter)

S: Excuse me, have you ever the word "Chicano"?

N: Oh my yes, I've heard the word but I... .

S: When is the first time you heard it? Was it a long time ago?

N: I don't know. I never got the meaning of it particularly.

S: You don't know what it means?

N: I never used it. It's a word I never used. I just don't know. I hear it's used.

S: You've never used it you wouldn't know. We're trying to find out the

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original meaning of the word.

N: I have no idea. I don't know. I read it in the papers but I don't hear it used much.

S: Used much.

N: In fact, I can't think of a conversation anytime that I've heard the word used. But of course, you see it in the papers.

S: This is more of an opinion, you know. I wanted to ask you about the illegal aliens, what do you think about the illegal aliens?

N: Well, I'm kind of concerned about our country. I think they're spending too much money. I'm a little squirmy about what they give us here. Now here, just think what I get. I have from my income, I have my social security which I earned and I have a rich relative who sends me fifty dollars a month. I have two hundred dollars and seventy cents a month. I pay just a quarter of that, just a fourth of that for rent. Think what I'm getting here and think what Uncle Sam is doing for millions of people like me. Now, we're having our meals served downstairs. All we have to pay is fifteen cents a meal. I pay more than that because I feel that I should and even yet I don't pay enough.

(Doorbell rings in background; Dr. Oscar Martinez from The Institute of Oral History at U.T. El Paso, joins Mr. Sanchez as another interviewer.)

S: Listen just continue, just continue.

N: I'm not a teacher you know in the public schools. I never have been. My work has always been private pupils. I have never been in touch with the children who are from Mexico, if they are not citizens. I don't know anything about that except what I read. I don't know how, as I started to say, I don't know how our government does so much for us anyway. As I said it makes me feel squirmy to think what I get here. I started to



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tell you with my income just think what I get and they keep giving us more all the time. I don't know how we can afford to do the things they do just for the elderly. We are citizens and have been here forever and how in the world the schools can afford to educate the people who are not citizens I don't know. That is clear out of my kin. I have no connection with it except what I read in the paper.

S: At the beginning you told me that first of all you had been wealthy and now you're comparing your situation if your mother knew about you.

N: Well, my mother would think, I grew up in a house where we had two stoves in the winter. Thirty below zero sometimes up there. She'd get up in the morning and the water pail would be frozen. Both the stoves had to be started with a wood fire in the zero weather. I get up here and I have hot and cold water. Wouldn't she think I was a millionaire? (General laughter) And back in those days all the poor folks had was the poor house. And a poor house wasn't a very particularly happy place to go to. Here, as I said, I feel unworthy sometimes of all the wonderful things that my government is giving to me. And I don't know how they can afford to do all the things, uh, the government does. I wish I had time to read you the poem that Mrs. Gramps told you about, my evolution poem, because it takes up a, uh, whole lot about how we started out and where we are today. But it's too long, it takes twenty minutes to read it. (laughs)

M: Could we get a copy of it sometime?

N: Well, I guess you could.

M: I understand it's going to be published?

N: Oh, I don't think it ever will. I doubt very much. Mrs. Gramps thinks she could. This is it.

North

S: She has done quite a bit of publishing. She has a couple of... .

N: This is a book that I had published of my children that was back in 1946.

Can you see better now?

M: Yes, yes.

N: Those were poems I wrote for children. You see if you teach children to speak poems and to put on little plays you run out of material in no time at all. You're forced to write your own. And I've written skits for the children ever since I can remember. Even in the country schools I used to do that. And then this one was published and I'm not sure that was wise to publish that one. But this is the one that I started to show you.

M: Yes.

N: Oh, this is it. It is "The Idea of Evolution" from the very beginning of uh, and I begin with Ecclesiastes.

All things that happen have happened before.

S: Please read that.

N: That which is done shall be done.

You find that in Ecclesiastes 1:9.

That which seem new is ancestral lore.

All things that happen have happened before.

The door of today is not a new door.

There is nothing new under the sun.

All things that happen have happened before.

That which is done shall be done.

Then I start out, you don't want me to do this, do you?

M: Well, we can look at it, if I may, uh... .

N: You can look at it but I can read it to you faster. (General laughter)

North

Is there an explanation  
To the mystery of creation?

This question has been asked by all the sages  
Who've tried to read the book of life's torn pages.

But

May we not trust the Creative Might  
That in the beginning said, "Let there be light?"

See I try to go back to the beginning.

Now

A really truly scientist is one who's not afraid  
To face up and own up to the mistakes he's made.  
And though it's true these thinkers quite often do not see  
Eye to eye-- in evolution they fairly will agree  
and think it's very likely that all things came to be  
In a cloud of whirling masses of a several sorts of gasses.  
And while they admit they do not know,  
This is the way they reason--

so--

Back, back through countless ages  
At some lost date, the sages  
Agree there was a glow.

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And this fiery glow was hydrogen  
With other gases mingled in  
And this rolling luminosity,  
this furling nebulosity,  
And sun blast, like a mighty gun,  
Flared up and flamed into our sun.

Then it goes on and tells how... .

S: Well, Mrs. North, uh... .

N: You're welcome to look at it.

M: May I? Thank you.

S: Mrs. North, uh, these are all of my questions if you want to add anything else?

N: Well, have you finished the questions?

S: Yes, anything else you would like to... .

N: Oh, I don't think so, I don't know how, uh, important all this is.  
(General laughter)

S: Well, everything you told me is pretty important.

N: Now, remember child, this is the idea with me. I'm not a particularly well educated person. I know my one line very well and I'm tremendously interested in science. I'm really interested in religions. I've studied all the religions in the world. I have studied what I can understand of science. And I would give anything if I were only wise enough to know what Einstein was talking about. But when you stop to think about the speed of light...just think about the speed of light. He says that if we start out on the speed of light we wouldn't get old but the people here would get old and die and we'd come back and be still young. Can you understand that at all? It's just way over my head but Einstein

understood it and a very few people were able to follow him. That idea of curved space, its something that just holds me. And my book The One Shining Thread is all full of that. (laughter)

S: It's a pretty nice book, also.

M: It's just fascinating.

N: (laughs)

S: But I think you're very bright and I think you have done alot for alot of people.

N: (laughs) I'm not so bright but it, um, I'm terribly interested in things. And, of course, along a scientific line which is far over my head. I don't when (I'll) be wise enough to understand it.

S: People like you should be teaching.

N: I am teaching. (laughs) I have two pupils right now.

S: Oh, really?

N: I would teach more if I could. I'd love to get hold of people. The children of today, I bet neither one of you boys ever had anybody teach you to read expressively. For the last generation they haven't done it. Let me tell you a little, uh, "The man went down the road.". Where do I emphasize man? It wasn't a child or a women or a pig or a dog was it? The man went down the street. Alright. Now the next question, the next line is, "He was a tall man.". What's your new picture? Tall.

M: He was a tall person.

N: He was a tall man.

M: Yes.

N: Now, not he was a tall man but he was a, tell me? Tall man.

M: Right.

N: Now tell he that. He was a tall man.

M: He was a tall man.

N: No, you said he was a tall man. Tell me he was a tall man.

M: Oh, I see. He was a tall man.

N: That's it. That's what I want. The tall man met another man. Most people would read it, "The man went down the street. He was a tall man. The tall man met another man. The other man was fat. The fat man had a dog. The dog was yellow." and who gives a hoot? But I can make that so interesting that I can hold two hundred and fifty people, make them listen. "The man went down the street. He was a tall man. The tall man met another man. The other man was fat. The fat man had a dog. The dog was yellow. The yellow dog saw a cat. It was a gray cat. The yellow dog chased the gray cat up a tree." Why? I made it interesting. You see. You see the difference.

M: You're emphasizing certain words.

N: (inaudible) Every word has a picture behind it. And I was brought up to make... . My mother knew how to read and she didn't know the rules that I know to teach the children.

M: I think I noticed that in one of your poems in this book.

N: Of course. "What do you think, uh, the emperor said?" "What do you think the emperor said?"

M: That's it.

N: What do you think the emperor said when he saw Johasaphat stand on his head? Stand on his head in his Sunday hat. He said "Well what do you think of that?" He said it right to Johasaphat as he stood on his head in his Sunday hat. And Johasaphat's uncles and aunts and cousins and all of his relatives, dozens and dozens went home and told about the event. How Johasaphat when he went to the emperor just like that stood on his head

in his Sunday hat. You see how I hold you? You want to know. But if I said, "stood on his head on his Sunday hat and nobody cared." You wouldn't listen.

S: No, you have to express... .

N: Now, I go right down here. This is not egotistical. This is something I'm very grateful to my Father in Heaven that I know. I go down here and men have to have a microphone to make themselves heard in this little, uh, uh, assembly room down here. I turn off the microphone and at ninety-three, I make those people in the back of the room hear ever single syllable that I say, because I know how. I know how to breathe. Now, in here there's a poem that I teach the children. "Old John Jordan was a most peculiar, had a most peculiar dream." Well, almost anyone can say that on one breath. "He dreamed he went to Borneo when so early in the morning." Now listen. "He thought that he was driving his big gray team and he went along to Borneo so early in the morning. And I have breath to carry those two lines right through. I bet you a nickel neither one of you could do it without some help.

M: Probably not.

(General laughter)

N: And it isn't because you aren't bright enough. It's because nobody ever told you.

M: You have to be trained.

N: You've just never been taught. And that's what I teach my children. I've got a little first grader who can hold her breath right straight through and a little fifth grader now. Goodness, I wish you could hear those two children. They were here today having a lesson. I don't charge for my lessons today. I try my very best to give this, gold on a

silver platter, and they don't want to come and take it. They don't have time.

M: Well, they don't appreciate the value.

N: They don't know what they're missing because I had a little girl when she was five years old who gave a, uh, wonderful little program. It was about eleven minutes long. And that little tyke could just read beautifully. She came back to me this summer. I hadn't seen her until she is now a junior in high school. She couldn't begin to read. And I said to her, "Well, honey, read this the way, if you can't be a pine on the top of a hill be a scrub in the valley. But be the best little scrub by the side of a rail. Be a bush if you can't be a tree." She'd say the kids would laugh at me if I read like that. I said they wouldn't laugh at me if I got up and read it for them. They knew what I was talking about. But if you say, "If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill be a scrub in the valley.", who'll listen? Nobody's going to listen. (General laughter) I like my hobby a little too hard, boys.

M: Oh, that's beautiful.

S: Thank you very much.

M: Oh, I think there's tremendous value to that. I wish I would have received the benefit of training like that.

N: Well, I've asked many of my children. Now for instance, last year I had these two little tykes give a program at Christmas. I had one of my older girls come who had taken lessons from me when she was young. She just got up and gave her reading so beautifully. I have another one who gave a book review not very long ago and she said how grateful she was that she had had this training when she was a child. And then she went on and had wonderful training with the speech teacher at the university,



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just a little college we had back there.

(End of Interview)