

1-2-1977

Interview no. 423

Don Burgess

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Don Burgess by Oscar J. Martinez, 1977, "Interview no. 423," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Don Burgess (1939-)
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 2, 1977
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: 423
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 423
TRANSCRIBER: _____
DATE TRANSCRIBED: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

(Linguist with Wycliffe Bible Translators) Born in Graham, Texas in 1939; attended grade school and high school in Alpine, Texas; received bachelor's and master's degrees from Texas Western College (now UTEP).

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Growing up in Alpine, Texas; involvement with paracaidistas in Juárez; border incidents; work as a linguist among the Tarahumara Indians, 1964-1976; life among the Tarahumaras.

Length of Interview: 1 hour Length of Transcript: 30 pages

Don Burgess
by Oscar J. Martínez
June 2, 1977

M: Don, can we start this interview with a little background about yourself-- when and where you were born and where you grew up?

B: I was born in Graham, Texas, over by Fort Worth, in 1939. And I grew up mostly in Alpine, Texas.

M: You went to school there?

B: I went to high school there, and parts of grade school. We actually lived there three different times. And then I went to college at Texas Western College here in El Paso.

M: When was the first time that you went to Mexico? Did you go as a kid?

B: My dad has always been interested in Mexico. And the first time I went to the Tarahumara region was when he was writing some feature articles for the Fort Worth Star Telegram and the El Paso Times about the construction of the Chihuahua Pacífico Railroad. And I was, I guess, about a junior, senior in high school at the time. And the Mexican government took us over the part of the railroad that was being constructed out in the Tarahumara region. And then, two years later, I guess between my junior and senior year at Texas Western, I spent a summer working on the construction of the railroad.

M: You were a construction worker?

B: Yeah. I worked with a crew of engineers who were surveying the tunnels and the bridges. And mostly I just kind of held the rods and things like that. Mostly for me it was a chance to learn Spanish. But being way out in there and way out in the mountains with so few people, we didn't even talk a whole lot of Spanish. But that was the summer that I met my wife, Esther, who grew up in that region.

M: Did you grow up around Mexican Americans?

B: Yes. I suppose half the town was [Mexican American].

M: In Alpine?

B: In Alpine.

M: I'd be interested to know what the relations were between Anglos and Mexicans in Alpine as you recall them growing up.

B: Well, there was a track, and they lived on one side.

M: Really?

B: Yeah. And they had their own grade school over there. And we all went to the same high school. And I think some of the best teachers were over there on their side of the track. In that aspect, I don't think they were discriminated against as far as good teachers went, like that. But, oh, I remember [things people would say] about Mexicans.

M: Do you remember some of them?

B: Let's see. Oh, I guess I remember one that somebody told about...wait a second, I'll have to think.

M: We can come back to it if you want to, give you a chance to...

B: Oh, like one guy would always say that he always thought that manual labor was the name of a Mexican until somebody told him different, or something like that.

M: [Yes.]

B: Manuel.

M: These kind of stereotypes about the abilities or lack of abilities of Mexicans. And how was the town itself, apart from the schools? Was it a divided town? Did Mexicans participate to any significant degree in the institutions of the town?

B: I think quite a bit. I remember some being on the town council and things

like that. I guess one thing that made Alpine a little more open than lot of places was Sul Ross College being there. Perhaps that helped a little bit. But it's mostly a ranching community, and I guess if you ask people, they would say they weren't prejudiced. But when you look back at the things that went on, I guess you'd have to say that there was a lot.

M: Are there any incidents or experiences that stand out in your mind as you were growing up in Alpine?

B: You mean, against Mexican Americans?

M: Well, that or anything else that you particularly remember that affected you, affected the town, affected one sector of the community or the other?

B: I remember my dad, once when we were there, he started the radio station. And one of the programs that he got in there was...well, a period, an hour or two a day when they would have Spanish language programs. My dad was always very pro Mexico or Spanish. And we had a very good Spanish teacher in high school, Melvin Slobert. And I think that helped. I can just remember, I couldn't wait till I got to high school so I could play football with some of the guys on the other side of the track, 'cause that's where some of the best players came from. Instead of having to play against them I wanted to be on the same team.

M: There was only one high school?

B: Yes.

M: Has Alpine changed much?

B: Well, I haven't been back there in about 10 years, so I would hesitate to say. We're having a 20-year class reunion July the fourth, but I expect to be in Chihuahua.

M: Okay, you graduated from high school there and then came to Texas Western?

B: [Yes.] And my brother and I were both on basketball scholarships or athletic scholarships, under George McCarty at first.

M: What years were you at Texas Western?

B: Well, I started in 1957. I was around for about six years. So I stayed and worked on a master's degree and coached the freshman basketball team under Don Haskins in his first year.

M: When did he get there? Sixty or sixty-one? Is about that time, or before?

B: Well, it's around '61, '62.

M: What do you remember about your experiences on working on the railroad in Chihuahua when you were a junior in high school? Anything in particular stand out from that experience?

B: Well, when I was in high school I just visited there with my dad. And then later on [when] I was in college is when I worked there.

M: Oh, I see.

B: And all I remember being very impressed with a man who hasn't received much credit for the railroad, an engineer named Francisco Otoño. He was chief of construction in railroads in Mexico. And he was pretty well responsible for getting that railroad first to cross, across the mountains. People had been trying since way back in the..., oh, I guess the idea first started about 1850 or something like that. And a number of people had tried but had had a lot of trouble getting across. And they finally figured out a way to get across the mountains by staying, getting on top of the mountain and then staying in the canyon all the way out of the mountains and just by putting on one tunnel and bridge after another. And so I remember being impressed by him. One of his brothers was the one that first showed us around. I pulled him out of the Topolobampo Bay once, he was _____ and he fell

in there. He had ulcers, we were swimming and he started going down.

M: You saved him?

B: This other fella and I did.

M: When was the first time that you saw Tarahumara Indians?

B: Well, I guess that summer when I first went down with my dad--seeing them first in Chihuahua City then out in the mountains. Quite a few of them worked on the construction of the railroad. A lot of the construction, at least on the eastern side of the mountains, was done by small companies, which meant a lot of dynamite and pick and ax type of things. One of the cuts that's 90 feet high was done by pick and ax, but on the other side of the mountains there was a large company working with large machinery. But there were quite a few Tarahumaras that worked on it.

M: What was your impression of them back then?

B: Well, I 've always been fascinated with any kind of Indians and Indian lore. And so, that was one of the exciting things to me, was to be down there, even working around a few of those people. The place we were at was called Cuiteco. And there weren't a whole lot of Tarahumaras right at that point.

M: When did you first start doing the work that you've been doing in the last few years?

B: I guess after I got...well, while I was still working on a master's degree, I went to the University of Oklahoma, to the Summer Institute of Linguistics there. [That's] the organization I work for now, which has linguistics schools at various universities around the country. And so I took a couple of summers there, and then...well, then Esther and I were married, and I guess right after, shortly after I finished a master's degree here and she finished a B. A. in Psychology at Stanford University. Then we went

out to Tarahumara country to survey the different dialects, and we spent about a year just walking up and down in the mountains trying to figure out where the language changed, to see if it changed enough in some areas to where we would have to do books for different parts of the tribe, or whether or not you could do one set of books and it would be good for the whole tribe. And we found at least one area where they couldn't understand the books that had been done in one part of the tribe.

M: What year was that?

B: Well, I guess about 1964, but I don't know. I'd have to look [it] up. Then we went to three months of jungle survival training in Chiapas, which is part of our organization's program.

M: What is the name of this organization?

B: The Wycliffe Bible Translators from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which is a missionary scientific organization. In Mexico we work under the Ministry of Education.

M: And this organization's headquarters are in Oklahoma?

B: No, right now it's in Huntington Beach, California. But they have different schools where people from the organization teach descriptive linguistics or how to analyze a language that's never been written before. And they're at University of North Dakota, University of Washington at Seattle, the University of Texas at Arlington, in Oklahoma, back east there's one or two. And then in England, Germany, New Zealand I believe there're also schools.

M: How did you decide to go into that kind of work?

B: Well, I guess all my life, I had sort of a, you might say a religious bend. I was the one of the family that was that way. I always wanted to be either a doctor or naturalist or missionary-type person. And then when I spent

that summer during college working on the construction, construction of the railroad, and I met Esther and her family, who had been doing this type of work for about 15 years in a place called Samachique. And I sort of had my own ideas of how I thought if you were going to work with different people and help them, well, how you ought to go about it--living with the people and so on. And when I was in college up here I would spend weekends across the river, right across from the college, where at that time it was just a place where a bunch of paracaidistas had gone and there were a lot of cardboard shacks. And a lot of kids were dying from diarrhea and stuff like that. And so I spent weekends over there taking diarrhea medicine, and just kind of getting to know the people.

M: Did you do it through any organization?

B: No.

M: On your own?

B: [Yeah.]

M: You would spend your own money to get this medicine?

B: Yeah. And sometimes, too, the Baptist Student Center, they would help some, especially if we needed clothes or something like that.

M: What do you recall about those situations that developed here in Juarez with regard to the paracaidistas? Could you elaborate on the conditions that these people lived in, and if you observed any incidents that took place there?

B: I guess when I first started noticing them was...well, I used to run to keep in shape for basketball up those hills behind the college. And I'd always stop up on top and sit down look down across the border. And I noticed that these houses started going up over there. And then in one of my classes, I can't

remember /which one/, they asked me once to teach a Spanish class at night. I think it was in there that one of the students, her father was a doctor in Juarez. And he had told her about all these kids that were dying from diarrhea, over there. Not that the diarrhea's so bad, but they would get dehydrated and so on. And so that's when I started going over there and kind of looking around, and made a few friends over there. And a lot of the houses were just sort of cardboard houses, where people right away, I think, started sort of fighting for their rights and trying to keep other people from moving in there, trying to set up...trying to solve land problems right away.

And one thing, I worked with the Mormons trying to get water pumped up there. For a long time there were just barrels that a truck would come along dump the water in, and the people would get their water from there and that was where a lot of the sicknesses were coming from. Or else they would just get it out of the river. And I remember once I was going to go over to a meeting they were having on the water. And I'd been taking exams and so I was late and didn't have time to come around to the main bridge so I decided to just go straight across the river. And there's a low diversion dam over there that you can go across. Just before I got there, some guys, some Mexican fellows walked up to me. They were acting real funny. And the guys told me later they'd been taking dope or something. But one of 'em reached in his pocket and looked at me like he was pulling out a knife. So, I tore out of there as fast as I could. And I took off so fast, I busted a blood vessel in my leg, but I kept running and went across that diversion dam. And on the other side of the diversion dam were a couple of these other guys, their buddies sitting there waiting for me.

Well, either go one way or the other, so I jumped right down the middle of them and they chickened out and started running, too. And so then I went on up to where there was some friends of mine.

M: You jumped into the river?

B: No, I jumped into the middle of the guys.

M: You mean you challenged them directly?

B: Yeah. And they left. And then I went on up to where there was some friends. And then I started to walk on to the meeting. As I left, these guys were, here come these guys again, you know, just kind of walking, talking real funny. Then they started throwing rocks at me, but by then my friends ran 'em off and another guy that I know there went inside looking for a pistol. He would've shot 'em, I'm sure, if he could've found his pistol. He couldn't find his pistol. And so I went on up to the meeting. But they did eventually get water piped out to there. And I haven't been over there for quite a few years, so I don't know how it is now.

M: How long did you go to these colonias out there?

B: Well, it must've been, off and on, four years.

M: Did you observe any demonstrations, strikes, things of that type?

B: No.

M: Let's see, you started working down in Chihuahua in 1964? Around then?

B: [Yeah,] about then.

M: Could you trace your work since 1964, what you've been doing? Just take it year by year.

B: Well, first we did that dialect survey to try to figure out if there were places where more work was needed. And we found this one place where the intelligibility was very low. And so first...well, on one trip I went with

a Tarahumara and we walked about 15 days up and down the canyons. And it sounded to me like the language was quite a bit different over there. That was before we actually got married. And then when we got married, Esther and I loaded up a couple of mules and went back and did some testing, and found that it was really different. And so we picked the spot where it was the most different, and it was also the prettiest spot around. So I'm not really sure if my motives are all that pure. (Laughter) It is a beautiful valley up above a canyon.

And so we then went back there and just kind of showed up with all of our stuff. One of the Indians gave us permission to live in under the porch of his house, which was about six by ten feet, not high enough for me to stand up in. And we camped out there for six months, just trying to make friends with the people. After a while, they gave us permission to build a little house, but it took us several months to get that built.

M: Well, that must've been rough, initially--traveling on foot and on mules and so forth.

B: Yeah. By then, by the time we went there, the lumber company had built a road to within about three hours walk of our house. But still, we had to pack in everything by mule from there.

M: Do you remember that period being especially tough, getting used to it?

B: Yeah, it was hard. The rains came and we didn't have any protection, so we got wet. It was hard too because [we were] trying to establish relations with people who didn't particularly want to establish relations with us. We had to prove ourselves first to them. A lot of times we'd go to a house and we'd be walking up to the front door and they'd be running out the back. Or they'd hide in the corn crib or something like that. And, I just finished writing a paper on why Tarahumaras tell lies, and one thing

they do is lie to cover up economic wealth, even among themselves. Like if they don't want someone to know that they have food, or especially to an outsider, they would just say that they don't have any food, if you ask for food or something like that. But the Tarahumara custom is, at least among friends, to always share food; and after we got to know the people a little bit well, I remember many times, we would go to a house just because we didn't have any food ourselves and were hungry and they would always give us something to eat.

M: How long did it take before you were accepted by the people, before you could start doing your work?

B: It's really hard to tell, because as far as actually doing our work goes, there're a lot of cultural opposition to anybody helping an outsider-- especially to do something like learn the language, when they're not quite sure what you're gonna do with it. They're sure I'm selling each word I get. They're scared of a tape recorder because it'll take their language and then they won't have a language, or else...

M: The tape recorder will take their language?

B: Yeah. Or else, if I write it all down, take it away and they might not have it. It kind of goes back to a belief that they have about having to present certain things to God when they die, after they die. Blood, fingernails, hair--anything like that God sends you back to find, and you have to know where they are. And language is included. And so, if I take their language off somewhere, or take some of the words off, they might not be able to find them. So, there are a lot of little cultural things that go on. And also they don't...you can't just pay a Tarahumara to help you like that particularly, because /in the/ first place, they think money is heavy. It

probably won't go to heaven in the first place. Among themselves they had rather trade than use money. Although that's changing a little bit. So, mostly in the time that we were out there and have been out there, we just tried to use that time in getting to know the people, going to the fiestas and working with them, helping them with medicine. We've done a lot of medical work out there, even though we're not exactly trained doctors. But we still...the closest clinic was about two days away, so we had to start doing something. And so, we've lost very few patients.

M: Do you have medical training?

B: Well, outside of what we got at jungle camp, and the boy scouts, and Esther took pre-med, that's about it, outside of some good books. And some doctors here in El Paso that helped us. One especially, Dr. Wayne Grant, pediatrician. He helped us to realize that, basically, there are just a few medicines that you'd really need that cured most things. And so we kind of limited it down to just a few things. We've had to sew up people. Esther had to fix up a guy that had a knife wound in his chest, air sucking in and out of his chest. I sewed up another guy that had a knife wound, and I didn't have anything with me but a needle and a pair of pliers. They all survived.

But a lot of the actual language analysis in the books that we've made have not been done in the mountains there. Because in the first place, I have to spend most of my time doing medical work or packing in materials, or cutting wood or hauling water or just living. And so we go to a workshop that our organization has at Levita, Oaxaca, or Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo. And that's sort of a set up place where there are little duplexes and offices, and I can go there and sit eight hours a day at an office. And I always take a Tarahumara or two with me. And once they're away from the tribal

situation, they don't mind helping on something like that. But when they're right out there where all their neighbors can see, they're very hesitant to help in something like that.

M: Do you have any trouble getting a Tarahumara to go with you?

B: No, I've never had any trouble, because they're all very curious about what it's like down in Mexico City, or I've even had this one fellow up here with me. In fact, recently one or two have sort of volunteered, or sort of let it be known, that they would like to go.

M: How long did it take you to learn the Tarahumara language?

B: Oh, I don't really...none of us really speak it well, I don't think, probably because we don't have practice. The Tarahumaras live very scattered, and in the winter most of them move down to the canyons, and we've gone as long as two weeks without seeing a single person. So, it's real hard to learn, or get a conversational ability, that way. Whereas in other tribal groups in Mexico, especially in Oaxaca, the whole tribe might live in one town. There might be 10,000 people in one town. And so you can't hardly keep from learning. But with the Tarahumara it's very hard to learn the language because of that. And so, I guess I know more about the analysis and I can carry on conversations; but to really speak fluently with them I don't feel as though I know it.

M: What was the status of the knowledge about the Tarahumara language when you started doing this work?

B: Well, the Jesuit priests, as far as back in the 1600s, had been doing some grammatical analysis and made some vocabularies. But all of it, as far as I know, had been done more on the central or eastern dialect, and nothing had been done over in the area where we were.

M: And where was that?

B: In the western part of the tribe.

M: Where is it approximately on the map?

B: It's close to the Sinaloa and Sonora border, right on the edge of the Chinatu River, which is all in the southwest part of Chihuahua.

M: Really isolated?

B: Yeah, but it's kind of interesting. The people in that area do not wear a breech cloth, don't live in caves, like they do in other parts of the tribe. And yet they have, up till recently, they have been more isolated than some of the other parts where they do live in caves. But I suppose it's because of the large mines that were in the area back in...before the Revolution. So, in lots of ways, they're just as "primitive" as other ones who live in caves, but they might wear pants or something like that.

M: Is this where you've done most of your work?

B: Yeah. So, that's where we've done most of our work. Esther grew up in the other dialect, and recently we've been going back there doing some literacy type books. One of the main things that I've tried to do is get Tarahumaras to write their own books, and to write down how they hunt and fish, how they play their sports. We just finished one that's about 350 pages, on Tarahumara plant foods. And these are all being printed in Tarahumara and Spanish for the Tarahumara schools, with the idea that, I think that they're gonna start losing their culture very fast in the near future if we don't do something like that. They might lose it anyway, but they won't lose it all. Because so much tourism is going in.

M: Could we go back to 1964 and could you recall what happened the following year and so on?

B: Well, they gave us permission to build a house. And so we picked out a

place that we thought nobody else would want, a little rocky place. And we kind of picked out a place that was close to good water, too.

M: When you say a place, you mean, a place next to a hill or...

B: Yeah. It was sort of next to a hill and it was rocky. It's right down in close to the creek bed. Tarahumaras would never build a house down in the creek because they like to be up where they can see everybody. And also it's colder down in the bottom of the creek than it is up on the side of the hill. So we picked out this place and asked the guy who lived closest there if that was okay with him. He said yeah, that was okay. So we started working on the house. Several of the Tarahumaras would come in to help us work on it and some of them are very good in construction type things. So, we made adobes right there and built the little house that's about 15 by 20 feet-- one room downstairs, and we made half a floor upstairs so we could sleep upstairs. But then about the time we got started the rainy season came along and kept washing away the adobes about as fast as we made them, so it took quite a bit longer than we'd hoped. And the, one of the Tarahumaras made hand-cut pine shakes for the roof. And, I guess, several months after we started we got a _____.

M: While you were building the house you lived in somebody's porch you said?

B: Somebody's porch, which was about, oh, three quarters of a mile away or something like that.

M: Did you have sleeping bags?

B: We had sleeping bags, yeah. We just all kind of lined up on the floor.

M: And where did you do your cooking?

B: We had just on a little...raised up a little place and made a fire, a little fireplace type thing. Cooked right on the open fire. And all of that can

be very hard. You know, when you can't get the water to boil, wood's wet. But I grew up in West Texas where anything'll burn. (Laughter) But it wasn't as bad in Chihuahua as it was in Chiapas in the jungle when we were in jungle camp. Oh, everything is rough there.

M: You had already been through jungle camp?

B: We had already been through that. And of course, Esther grew up in that area, but still it was a lot different. She was eight years old when she went there, and her dad made a very, rather nice house down there. They were close to a road, so it wasn't a primitive situation like we were in. So it was hard on her, too. But I don't know anybody that could've done any better than she did.

M: How many people lived in that area?

B: Tarahumaras don't live in towns, they live in scattered ranches, villages. This was a valley where there were...the valley is about a mile long and there might have been 10 or 15 families living scattered around that valley, which is pretty good concentration, usually. They're even more scattered than that. Where we built our house, we had one neighbor 100 or 200 yards away. And the next one was about 400 yards.

M: Did they all have adobe houses?

B: A couple of them had adobe houses. Some made out of logs, some made out of rocks. They're usually very loosely put together so the smoke can get out. And we put a porch on our house--nobody there had a porch at the time--just because we wanted to have a porch to sit under. And everybody, all the Indians laughed at us, saying, "Ah, you're like a mestizo." And we went ahead anyway. And within two or three years there were about four or five other porches in the area. So, we realized then, we'd have to be careful

what we introduced. And also we realized that the way to introduce something is not go tell 'em about it, but just to do it yourself. And if they like it, they'll pick it up.

M: What did you do for food?

B: Well mostly, at least when we first went in there, we had to pack in almost everything that we used. And we have planted garden at times, but we have been in and out so much that we haven't really profited from a garden. We haven't been able to have many chickens or anything like that, of our own. And it's sort of against the culture for anybody to work much for anybody else like that, so we've never had anybody to, who would really take care of anything. Which was fine for us, because we didn't want anybody to be dependent upon us in the first place. Which is one reason we built our house up in the upper end of the valley sort of away from everybody. We didn't want our house to become the center of activity.

M: You say you packed in a lot of the food?

B: Yeah. We would get cheese and eggs from the Mennonites in Cuauhtémoc. I'd pack in on a mule, maybe as many as 300 eggs at a time. And once I didn't break a one.

M: Mh. And how far was Cuauhtémoc from where you were?

B: Well, that's close to Chihuahua. And we'd have...as we were going out, we would pick up that kind of things. We have a four-wheel drive car and we'd load it up and it would be really loaded. And so then we'd just leave it at the sawmill or something, or somewhere like that -- a lot of times just sitting out in the woods. We've never had anything stolen from us, never had any problems.

M: You just leave it there for weeks?

B: Yeah, just leave it sitting out in the woods. And when we were living under the porch, we left all our stuff sitting out there, be gone all day, one or two days, and never lost a thing. So especially among the Tarahumaras, there's very little stealing that goes on. The only people you'd have to worry about, I guess, would be some outsider who was just kind of going through or was working at the lumber mill or something like that. We did lose some things at the lumber mill.

M: How long were you there that time?

B: We were there six months the first time we went in, which I think is about as long as anybody should stay in a situation like that without any contact with anybody. And then after that we went to a workshop where we worked on a statement of the phonology and also on some new books, because we'd told the Indians, the Tarahumaras, that we were there to produce books. And so we had to produce books. It's very hard to produce a book after being not even a year, because you don't know the language well enough. But we put out four little books and then we also analyzed the phonology, which was published here at the college, Studies in Languages and Linguistics (something like that), the first one of those that we put out.

M: What were the other four books about?

B: One was a little story book that had six or seven stories that they tell that we had recorded on a tape recorder. One was an alphabet book, one was a Tarahumara-Spanish phrase book, and one was a pre-primer, which we just sort of...pamphlet-type books, no bigger than pamphlets. Maybe 30 or 40 pages.

M: And what were they used for?

B: They used them some in the schools.

M: In the schools.

B: And we gave them out a lot to Tarahumaras. Actually, I guess they were more good for our public relations than almost anything else. But the phrase book, a lot of people have been wanting that and we need to republish that.

M: Was there a school in that valley?

B: They were starting to put one about the time that we moved in, this is the Mexican government. And they had a school there running every year, but teachers, oh, stayed two or three months and then leave. It never has been a very continuous effort. And the Tarahumaras are always wanting us to teach, but we've stayed away from that a little bit, because we don't want them to start depending too much on us. Especially since the Mexican government is making an effort to provide bilingual teachers.

M: So, you went back to a workshop and produced these books?

B: Yes. We were there probably three or four months, and then back out to Chihuahua.

M: And where did the workshop take place?

B: In Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo. North of Mexico City, about 100 miles.

M: And then you went back to Chihuahua City?

B: As best as I can remember. Well, not Chihuahua City.

M: Just Chihuahua. And then what did you do?

B: Then I guess we started working on some other books and also on grammar analysis. I really can't remember exactly, you know, which year we did what. I guess we have it all written down, but I'd have to look it up. We worked on analysis of the grammar, and that has been the hardest thing, I suppose. Especially the Tarahumara verb is really hard, and I'm just

now trying to finish up a grammatical statement. And we also, somewhere in there we went to a workshop, where we worked on just discourse analysis from the tests that we had collected and the stories, seeing how they fit together into some kind of analysis.

And then we started work on other books, like how Tarahumaras hunt and fish; another one on how the Tarahumaras use maguey or the agave. And for a while there was a fellow down there, an older man, about 40, 50 years old who was helping us. And he went with us to a couple of workshops, when we've had different ones go. First, the first time I just went and asked the governor, sort of the chief of the area. He sent his son with us and he was very good. He helped us on the phonology. And then another fellow went back with us and worked on the phrase book and some other things, and he helped us translate also the Book of Mark. And neither one of these fellows could read and write.

And then one Easter, at the Easter ceremonies, part of the Easter ceremony is to wrestle, the Pharisee and Moors against the Jews. They always put me on the side of the Pharisees and the Moors, 'cause they're supposed to win. And I haven't ever lost a wrestling match down there yet. So, one of the guys that I had to wrestle that was really good, a fellow named Dalbino, he started helping me on these books. And he could read and write. He had had 16 days of school and just taught himself. Very unusual for a person out there to just be motivated enough to want to learn on his own like that. And this is a guy that's not like any other Tarahumara I've already met. He's curious about everything, wants to learn everything. When we went to the workshop, first thing he wanted to do was learn how to use a phone. And so every morning at eight o'clock he'd phone me up, wanting

to know why I wasn't in the office.

And then he wanted to learn how to drive the car, so we were teaching him how to drive the car, and he nearly wrecked us. 'Cause he thought he had to drive like those lumber truck drivers out there with his hat on and one arm sticking out the window and... We kind of slowed that down a little bit. But he's a neat fellow. And he phoned me up just the other day from Chihuahua City. Which I think is also neat, that he would phone me up sometimes when he goes to _____ or somewhere where there is a phone. And I try my best not to make him feel that I own him or anything like that, but that we keep it on a working relation, and make him feel that he has as much to do with it as I do. In fact, he has more to do with it. And I just couldn't do any of this work if I didn't have somebody like him.

M: All these books that you were putting together, was that based on the six months field work that you had done?

B: No, these books...well, we've been there 12 years.

M: Those initial books, the four...

B: Well, those first four were...

M: That was based on that field work.

B: Well, but I didn't just write them myself. Like the stories, they were told by Tarahumaras; and then with the Tarahumara and using a recording I would write them down.

M: But during those six months you did a lot of recording?

B: Well, at least...yeah, some recording, not a whole lot out there. Actually a lot of the stories were recorded after we got to the workshop. And the Tarahumara man that was with us was willing to tell us a lot of the stories.

M: When did you go back into the field?

B: Well, I guess we were at the workshop for about three months.

M: At the same place?

B: Yeah. That's where we've been all the time.

M: And you've been at that same place the 12 years that you've been doing this?

B: Well, actually, I guess we've been there half, about half of the time.

We were trying to figure out the other day. Because of going out to workshops. So, you spend about half of the time, half or less, I suppose, of the time actually out in the mountains there. I spent a year and a half working as Director of Public Relations for our organizations with the Mexican government--which took us away from the Tarahumara, but was really great in other ways, because it gave me contacts with all of the people in the Mexican Indian Institute, and even President Echeverria and other people like that. And so I think it was well worthwhile, also as far as my books go, because now I know who to go see when I need to promote one of my books with the Indian Institute or the government. Although with this last change of government things are a little bit different now, and I haven't been down there to reestablish contacts.

M: You say that half of your field work has been at that place. Where was the rest?

B: At our workshop or doing that work in Mexico City.

M: Oh, you haven't gone to another place in the Tarahumara region?

B: No, no. Although as I said, we've done some work. We're doing a little work in the other dialect. But it just takes me a few weeks at a time to do something in the other dialect, I don't have to go there. I know people

over there, and so I can just almost write them and then tell them what I want, and they can start work on it.

M: Well, in the 12 years that you've been doing this, how often have you been back to that place?

B: To that place? Well, I'd say four to six months out of every year we were there, except for that one year and a half that we were in Mexico City. Until recently this year, since August, we haven't been there. But that's because Esther has been sick, for the most part, and we were all sort of ready for a change, too.

M: So, for most of this period, four to six months out of every year, you have been living down there. And how big is your family now?

B: We have three kids.

M: How old are they?

B: Eleven, eight and six.

M: What happens to your kids when you're down there? Do they go to school?

B: Well, Esther has taught them, for the most part, down there. And when we are at one of the workshops, our organization has school set up there. And they have a very good educational system. When we are out in the mountains, we use the same books that they are using at the centers, so that when we go to a center, the kids fit right in. And Esther's a very good teacher, and within half a day they finished everything. And the kids think it's great. They're complaining up here having to go to school all day.

M: Have they had a hard time adjusting to school?

B: Well, not to the school. They were way ahead.

M: They were way ahead.

- B: Yeah. Fact, when we first came up here, they were six weeks late getting into school. And Esther hadn't done any teaching yet, and they were still ahead of the kids up here. So the individual attention is really good for 'em.
- M: What incidents or experiences stand out in your mind from your field work in that part of Chihuahua, aside from what you've told me? Do you want to elaborate further on some of the medical work that you've done? You mentioned some pretty dramatic examples--sewing up people, knifewounds, and so on.
- B: It seem like there's always some kind of epidemic going on. Maybe whooping cough. We've had whole families down with scarlet fever. And Tarahumaras will take medicine as long as they see that it's helping them. But when they start getting better, they have a tendency to quit taking them. And hexing down there is very strong. And we've lost a few people to hexes, you might say. They refused to take the medicine because they believed they were hexed, and within a few days or a couple of weeks they were dead. And sometimes they don't take care of the little babies when they're sick. [They] have these drinking parties, which is a very strong part of their culture, and once we lost a little baby because their parents went to a drinking party and didn't take care of the kid.
- M: What do they drink?
- B: Corn beer. That's the main thing. But then the mestizos of the area have stills scattered around in which they distill a very strong mariete, they call it. Whereas the Tarahumaras call it Devil's Urine.
- M: Devil's Urine?
- B: Yeah. And then when you put that on top of the corn beer, they might be

drunk for eight or 10 days.

M: Literally?

B: Oh, yeah. Several different people might make corn beer. And so they'll drink it all at one house one day, and the next day go to another, and next day to another. And then somebody will bring in this other stuff. And so, when they get drunk, they're drunk for a long time.

M: Well, is that in connection with special holidays or events?

B: Well, their whole society is built around corn beer. Any time they want work done--weeding a field, or building a fence or something like that--you make corn beer and invite your neighbors over. And they work for half a day or so, and then they drink. But then at all of the fiestas they make corn beer. God taught them how to make it. It was the devil that came along and taught 'em how to get drunk and fight. But you have to make the corn beer. And so I guess at all of the fiestas you have corn beer. Tesguino, they call it in Spanish.

M: What do they call in Spanish, the corn beer?

B: Tesguino.

M: Tesguino.

B: Which is a word common in other places. The Apaches call their beer the same name. And I noticed in a Lebanese...in an article on Lebanese cooking they made a drink which also had the same word. And so it's apparently an Arabic word or Lebanese word that has come on into Spanish. The Tarahumara word is Sugi.

M: How do they make it?

B: You sprout corn in a dark place, which takes several days. And then you grind up the corn in a corn grinder then you boil it for so long, and then

you put it in a fermenting pot, a pot that has sort of been cured that has, I guess, yeast and stuff already in it. It starts fermenting, then when it's about ready you add a catalyst type thing, which is certain kinds of grass seed or else ground up wheat. And a few hours after that, it's ready to go.

M: Have you made it yourself a few times?

B: No, I've never made it myself. (Laughter) But it's not bad. It has a taste like beer. Probably much more...probably very healthy because it has so much stuff in it. It's very thick, much of it is.

M: Do you drink it yourself?

B: A little bit. In fact, we had to decide sort of, when we went there, just how far were we gonna go with this. Because when the Tarahumara culture falls apart...that's when it falls apart, is it's when everybody gets drunk. If there are any fights or anything that go on, that's when it happens. And so we decided we wouldn't go very far with it. And the Tarahumaras seem to appreciate that. When they really start getting drunk and drinking, they say, "OK, it's time for you to go home." And I think they're glad to have somebody around who's not drunk, who can fix up anybody who gets hurt. And also when they're drunk for days, then they run out of food, nobody's been cooking, so they know they can always come around to our place and get a little something to eat, some coffee or something. A lot of people have said, "Well, you've got to do away with their corn beer." But if you do that you'll do away with most of the culture. And so we've thought a lot about what are you gonna do about that.

M: Do you recall any fights that might've taken place at times when these people got drunk?

B: Yeah. One fellow stuck a guy in the head with his knife, and they always

call me when somebody's fighting. My neighbor was a police commissioner, but I guess was a little bit chicken, and so he would always come get me sometimes when somebody was fighting. I don't know, usually when they're drunk I can talk to 'em, calm 'em down a little bit; they get excited. But I've seen a father knock his son just flat, or a man hit his wife or something like that.

M: This time when your wife sewed up this fellow who had a knife wound on his chest, how did he get that?

B: I think it was from one of those parties. Somebody pulled out a knife and stuck him. Usually things like that happen over some grievance or something that happened before that they suddenly get brave enough to do something about. My neighbor, for example, has been accused on several occasions of hexing people. And one of the guys that...a fellow who's lost a couple of kids blames him for hexing his children. And once when he got drunk, he and another guy got drunk enough to do something about it, and just whipped the tar out of this guy. I saw him a couple of days later, and he could hardly get up and his ribs were bruised, his head cut. But he says he didn't hex 'em.

M: The lifestyle that you were describing to me, living in this small adobe house, bringing in your food from the outside and really living a very Spartan existence there, is that how it's been most of the time that you've been there?

B: Yeah, most of the time. Just within the last year or two, they've had a schoolteacher there who got everybody together and they made a road down to the school, so we've been able to get our car within a hundred yards of the houses. But mostly it's been sort of the same way. And Esther spends

most of her time washing clothes, or we all do, sort of haul in the water.

When we first went there, I just made a little mud stove with a metal plate on top and a little place underneath where we could build a fire and fire up the mud and adobes so that we could have a little oven. To cook something like a turkey, you'd have to fire it up about twice. And so it was a lot of work. That kind of stove is a lot of work, any way you look at it. But we put out some good stuff, or at least Esther did, I should say. Dr. Joe Leach at the college, in the English department, went down there once, and he still raves about the bread that Esther made for him in that stove. And he was very dissappppointed when we tore that stove down and got a little butane stove. But Esther wasn't dissappointed at that. In fact, she was the one that kicked it down! (Laughter)

And then clothes were washed in a creek just on a rock for a while. And then I got plans from...oh, that the American government had made for people in India, for making a washing machine with two plungers that go up and down. And so I made one of those, and we had that for several years. And that helped some, but that was still a lot of work. And then recently, I guess about three years ago, we got a gasoline operated Maytag washing machine. It has a little gasoline engine underneath it. And it works really good, as good or better than anything we have up here.

M: You took it all the way down there?

B: We packed it in there, yeah. Well, we could get pretty close, within a couple of miles, I guess. And so, the last couple of miles another fellow and I just tied it on a pole and carried it in there.

M: You carried that thing for two miles?

B: Yeah, over the rocks. Some of the things I've taken in there, I wondered about.

M: How heavy was it?

B: Two of us could barely carry it. It's pretty heavy.

M: How did people in there react to machines like that?

B: Well, for a while, we tried to do things that we thought were one step ahead of them that they could do if they really wanted to--oh, like the porch and like the mud stove. But then it sort of got to the point where we needed more time to be able to do more work. And so we started doing things like the gas, the butane stove. And they don't seem to mind; or they get a kick out of it, they always come around to watch it.

M: Now, all these years, have you been collecting stories from these people and analyzing the language further, and doing the same things that you were doing in the beginning?

B: Yeah. You'd think after 12 years I'd have it all done, but I haven't. I guess one thing is that...like there's these books that take so much time to do. It's easy to write them, the initial writing of these books. But to get them perfect, letter perfect, to get them in a book, well, to make all the corrections, to get them pasted up and then actually printed, I've had to do all the paste up in all of these books. I put 'em all together and so on. And it just takes months and months and months to get all that done.

M: Have you had good cooperation from the Mexican government?

B: Yes, from the National Indian Institute. When I get a book ready, I take it to their office in Mexico City and show them what I have. And they say, "Well, we'd like to have 500, or 1,000, or 2,000 copies of the book." And so that makes my copies that I have to pay for much cheaper, which is why I do it. I have three books in Mexico City right now that are just waiting for their approval. But since the change of government, they haven't gotten

everything going again yet, and so they're just sitting there. But since I have to pay for most of it, I'm responsible for paying for all of those books, one way or another. So, if I can get them to buy three or four thousand, that brings the cost per book down considerably.

M: Who publishes them?

B: Our organization does the printing, a department there.

M: In Mexico?

B: Yes, in Mexico City. And they do a very good job.

M: Does this organization have people like yourselves working throughout Mexico?

B: There are about 300 people working in Mexico in 105 languages, I think. And I don't know how many countries they're in now, 25 or something like that.

M: How long has this been going on?

B: It started back in about 1930 something. There's a book in here on it, if you'd like to see it.

M: That's fascinating. I wonder if you can show me some of the work that you've done. Do you have some books here?