

5-15-1979

Interview no. 643

Benito Perez

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Interview with Benito Perez by Oscar J. Martínez and Mario Galdos, 1979, "Interview no. 643," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Benito Pérez, Jr. (1947 -)
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez and Mario Galdos
PROJECT: Border Labor History
DATE OF INTERVIEW: May 15, 1979
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: 643
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 643
TRANSCRIBER: Irene Ramírez
DATE TRANSCRIBED: February 1982

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

El Paso policeman; born and reared in El Paso.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biographical data; contact with illegal juvenile delinquents; incidents involving children ages 8-12; experiences apprehending burglars; group organization among juveniles; contact with shoe shine boys, cigarette vendors, maids, prostitutes; attitudes of Juárez authorities toward juvenile delinquents; problems on the Stanton Street bridge.

Length of Interview: 1 hour Length of Transcript: 36 pages

BENITO PEREZ, JR.

by: Oscar J. Martínez and Mario Galdos

May 15, 1979

M: To begin the interview, Mr. Pérez, could you give us a little background on yourself, where and when you were born?

P: I was born here in El Paso, July 28, 1947. I've lived here in El Paso all my life except for the time that I was in the service, which was three years, from 1967 to 1970. Upon coming back from the military service I worked for about for months at Phelps Dodge. Then as soon as the Academy began on June 15, 1970, I entered the Police Academy and graduated on August the 31st., I believe, 1970. That was the date that I was commissioned, August the 31st., or 13th., of 1970.

M: Did you go to school locally?

P: Yes, I graduated from Austin High School in 1965. When the fall semester at Texas Wester [] began, I [] went for one year, played ball over there. Went into the service after that, came back, and I started again in 1971, the fall of '71. And I graduated from UTEP in December of 1974 with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice.

M: Criminal Justice. How did you happen to join the Police Department? What led up to that?

P: Of course at that time there wasn't very many jobs available. The war was still going on pretty heavy at that time, and the only jobs really available were labor. That's what Phelps Dodge was. There was really no future there and the counselor that I talked to, when he saw my resume and saw I did have some college hours he said that I'd be

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better off going back to school and graduating from school. But of course at that time I was already married with a kid, so I was looking around for an opportunity. And that's when the Police Department came up. I joined it--of course at much lower pay than Phelps Dodge at that time. It still is, but I thought there'd be a better future there. (Pause) Because of the future that the Police Department did hold at that particular time, that was one of my main contentions for joining the police department at that time.

M: When you started with the police department, what was the job that you started with?

P: It was the bottom step patrolman. Well, first you go through a probationary period of six months where you're considered a temporary employee, and after six months you become a permanent employee with the city. You go through that process, then you become a permanent employee in the police department, starting out at bottom step patrolman.

M: And what did the job involve at that level?

P: That entails all functions of police work--apprehension, detection--everything, all, the whole process in the criminal justice system just about.

M: When did you start working with the foot patrol, Officer Pérez?

P: I would say approximately two and a half years ago. I couldn't tell you the exact date.

M: Before you started working with the foot patrol, did you have contact with the problems of illegal aliens?

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P: Oh sure, sure.

M: Could you tell us when you first had contact, and then describe incidents that you've been involved in? And again, with as much detail and take as much time as you want. (Laughter)

P: Okay. Of course a lot of people think that...well, the majority of the problems are down here in the southside, Downtown area towards the border. But I used to work up there by Austin, which is considered central El Paso, and even then I came in contact with the illegal aliens back then. And that was, oh, maybe six years ago, seven years ago, before working down in the southside. Even then one incident that comes to mind was, it was a group of illegal aliens. I guess they ranged in ages from, oh, maybe eight to about 12 or 13, and they were pretty good house burglars; real good as a matter of fact. And at one time we arrested these kids, and I think there was three brothers and the others were just friends of the three brothers. And we cleared up at one time something like 13 residential burglaries with the apprehension of these kids. They were real good. One of 'em, one time we got called to a house and the owner had 'em sweeping up his kitchen. What they used to do is go in there and they would eat. And these kids would defecate on top of the kitchen table. And the owner came in there and he caught 'em coming out of the house with one of his rifles. He jumped out, took the rifle away from 'em. He went inside the house and he saw all the mess these kids had done, apart from all the stuff that they already planned to take with them, and he just came unglued and went there, and he was making 'em...cleaning up. And needless to say the kids were happy to see us because the citizen was very irate.

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M: How old were these kids?

P: Between eight and 12 years old.

M: Eight and twelve.

P: At that time we were having a rash of residential burglaries and it was the same kids, it was the same little group. Real good, real good house burglars. And I remember this other time we got called on illegal aliens begging on Pershing, out there about the 2900 block of Pershing. And I went there to a filling station and the kids, when they saw us, took off. Of course they had their bags with them. But one thing that was real, kind of odd is that the littlest ones, about eight years old, you know, they will never leave the littlest kids behind. 'Cause you know that when you take 'em down to the border patrol and deport 'em, when they go, they're separated. So they'd rather stay behind and get caught than leave the kid behind. So, we held on to the little kid and they all came back. When they came back, of course, they had the stuff [because] they had hit a house. It hadn't even been reported yet, the burglary. So in searching 'em, one kid, the oldest kid, 12 I guess, 11, 12, he comes out and pulls out a big pistol--44 is what it was--that he had between his pants.

M: How old was this kid?

P: About twelve. And he pulls it out [and says], "You want this one too?" (Laughter) And you know, well, the attendant at the service station, he looked in the bag. They didn't think that the kids had any weapons on 'em. So when they saw that big gun come out, you can imagine what they were thinking to themselves.

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M: Well, what did you think?

P: Oh, man! Well you know, you get to know which kids to trust and which ones not to trust. Some kids are violent and some are not. Especially when they're on the spray.

M: On the spray?

P: Right. What they'll do is, they'll go downtown and any store, hardware store, and they'll buy a can of spray for \$1.25, \$1.29 tax and all that. And they'll get cans, empty cans of Coke cans and then just spray the stuff, the paint into the cans and then from there they'll just walk down the street drinking it or sniffing it.

M: Drinking it?

P: Sure, just like you would a beer or liquor or alcohol, you just drink it. After a while you know, you can imagine what it does; they get real high and they just don't care. That's when you get these attacks on older people, especially the older people, 'cause these kids are so fast; God, they're fast. And then us running with all this equipment on, you know, there's no way you're gonna catch 'em unless they're high on the spray.

X: Officer Pérez, what do the kids do with the money or with the goods that they get if they keep them?

P: Well, all these kids have their own particular place they go to sell the stuff. See, the majority of the stuff that they steal on this side, the U.S. side, they will sell it to the people on this side, 'cause they know if they get caught over there in Juárez, the authorities over there will take the stuff away from them, and as a

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result the stuff will not end up coming back over here. So they'll take their chances on selling the stuff here. And each one has their own little place that they go to sell the items to. Like you figure a car stereo, if a particular place is too hot, say that we're on to it and we know which apartment or which house is buying stolen property, well, we'll be watching it a bit closer. And they know it so they'll just take their chances going down El Paso Street into the bars. They may get five dollars for a stereo, sometimes they get ten. Maybe they'll only get about three or four dollars, it just depends on the day of the week, day of the month, you know. If it's towards the end and the people have money, they may get ten dollars for it. Otherwise...

Well, what they do then is, they go out there and they'll just buy their candies. They go to the Hollywood; that's their favorite place, the Hollywood Cafe. I used to work graveyard, and they'd hit a business, you know. Would get to the business before it was reported to the police dispatcher. Well, then you start combing the area. What they like to do is eat. Really they get so...I guess they get so hungry when they come down from the spray and they've gotta have something to eat.

X: The munchies.

P: Yeah, the munchies. The only place that's open at that time is the Hollywood. And you'll see then in the back, five, six are in the back eating back there.

M: In the middle of the night?

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P: Oh, it's three, four o'clock in the morning back there. And each one, if you check each individual there, you'll see the money is all divided equally, down to the littlest kid. Each kid in the group, call it like a team, each kid in this team has a particular part to do. You'll have the two ones that are actually the main persons, characters, the ones that'll go into the buildings, into the cars, grab the purses or whatever. And then you have the other three or four kids as lookouts, maybe on the same side of the street, across the street, half a block down or a block down at the other intersection, just waiting for the police cruiser to come by. And once they see that, shoom!, a signal goes out and you'll never get 'em. There is no way. The reason I know about this is 'cause sometimes, what you have to do is you have to hide from them, hide in buildings, inside stores, where they can't see you from the street, and pick up on a group, and then just watch the group from there. That's the only way you can do it.

X: Do you always wear a uniform?

P: No. We've been pretty successful in working plain clothes. However, being down here so long all the people know you, so even then you still have to hide from them 'cause they can see you a block away in plain clothes. You can imagine how far they can see you in uniform. It's just like it's a game--hide and seek type situation. Of course, like when burglary of autos, they'll pick on a certain area. Let's say that this store down here on Overland and Mesa will have a big sale. They'll have all kinds of clothes out there on the sidewalk just about onto the street, and you'll have maybe 50 people all around these

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clothes. These kids know that, they know that the people that are coming out to buy in bulk, the quantities, have money. So they'll just sit around the area, see where their cars are, see if they take the packages back to the cars, and they can burglarize the cars or grab the purse and take off. There's so many ways that these kids work.

M: Can you describe other incidents that you've been involved in directly?

P: Sure. Once while leaving the Austin area I came down here to the southside, and the southside is really bad. One time we're going down the street, and there in the 400 block of Paisano there's about four or five business. And the only way to check those is to get out of the car or get up onto the roof, 'cause they used to come in through the roof, these kids would. Ended up catching them down there about Fifth and El Paso, which is about two city blocks away. And of course inside their bags they had all the stuff, and big kitchen knives and toasters. I don't know what they're gonna do with a toaster. (Laughter) They got all this stuff in sacks, you know, and you can't miss 'em, you know; once you know what you're looking for you can't miss these kids. Of course this was about three in the morning to around three, three thirty, around there. Rounded 'em all up, put 'em in the car and asked them where they got this stuff from. Well, you have six kids in the car and each one is telling you six different locations. I said, "Now look, I don't have time, it's three o'clock in the morning, I'm tired, I don't have time, let's take the stuff back." They said, "No, no." What they did, they hit all six stores in a row. We had to go up and climb up the roof to the back and check the stores, and sure enough, they had hit each one of 'em.

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M: How did they get in?

P: Through the air conditioner vents. They'll get a screwdriver and they'll peel back the tar from it, and you'll have an opening let's say maybe six inches by ten inches. Long as they can get their head through there they're in there, their body will follow. I don't know how they do it, but they do it. And I've seen it, I've seen openings a lot smaller than this tape recorder, and they get through there. Then what they'll do, in the one location--that's Paisano Distribution, I think, it's about the third, fourth business on the east side of the street from Paisano--well, then you have a drop of about 20 feet from the roof down to the ground, and they lowered a rope. And a kid at the bottom was tying up the stuff and sending it up on a rope, and the kid at the top would take it up, hand it to another, and another one would take it down to the alley. They had it all stashed in the alley. You know, in case the police come, hopefully they'd come back later on and pick up the stuff that was in the alley, if we didn't find it. So, it had to go on for at least two hours, at least. 'Cause you got six stores, each one through the roof, then taking the items by ropes, and climbing up through the window--a lot of stores, a lot of time, too. Anyway, the result, we took 'em back, and same group. As a matter of fact they're still out here on the streets now. The main guy that I remember, of course, then he was about eight years old, call him Orejas.

M: Orejas? Did he have big ears?

P: Yeah, real big ears. (Laughter) I'll tell you, as a matter of fact, we were watching the other day, Saturday. He was trying to hit a car but he saw us. We were about a block away in plain clothes and he made us too

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easy. There was no place you could hide, you know, and still keep watching at the same time. He made us. We have another one that's El Borracho. This kid, that's why they call him El Borracho, 'cause he's a drunk. He was about that time eight years old, nine years old, and he was always drunk. I don't know where he found the stuff, but he was always drunk. As a matter of fact, this last time, I don't know, you probably all didn't hear about it. They had a burglary of a police detective car down here on Oregon Street by Alabama, and it was another little group of kids. And it involved, there was about three of them. And they took his weapon and they took the police radio from inside the glove compartment, completely out. Unscrewed it, took it out and took off with it. Anyway, Borracho was one of the ones involved all right. But we chased him around, it took us about a week to find him. Of course, you know, in looking for these small kids you gotta know where to look. You just don't see them on the streets, and you gotta look, go to the places where they sleep or they hide and all that kind of stuff.

M: Where do they sleep?

P: Well, when they burglarize a place, they'll go up on the roofs there on, oh, El Paso Street. It'll be Alley D. It'll be the first alley east of El Paso Street. You got some stairways that lead up to the roofs and they'll sleep up there. They used to have...well, there's about three locations where they have their mattresses and everything up there on top.

M: Even mattresses?

P: Yeah. I mean, they're old mattresses that they picked up in the alleys and everything. Then you'll have old sleeping bags, and they just sleep up there.

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M: What about in the wintertime?

P: That's a different story. The wintertime they'll go into like Virginia's. We call her Virginia, she's one of the biggest fences down there on El Paso Street. I've arrested her myself for receiving and concealing, caught kids there I don't know how many times. Anyway, there's little, they're apartment complexes down there, and they'll climb up the stairs and they'll sleep in the restrooms, 'cause they have like community restrooms, I guess. There's two of them there. The hall is shaped like a U, a square U, and on each flank of the U you have a restroom. Well, you'll find about three or four of them huddled up together in the restrooms with whatever they can put on, you know, whatever blankets they can get together. Either that or in the hallways of the apartments down there. You would actually have to go down there and see these for you to really see what I'm getting at, talking about. That's what's really bad is in the wintertime. I don't see how they survive, I really don't.

G: But they used to stay here in El Paso.

P: It's whatever benefits 'em, you know. Like, I don't know what motivates 'em to stay here. And you know, when you have little kids, seven, eight years old, you know. And especially there's one, I forget his name, well, anyway, he got hit by a car in Juárez and he never got his leg treated for it. So now you'll see him even today, you'll see him in the streets just hobbling along. Sometimes for about a week you won't see him at all, and all of a sudden he'll come back and here he is. What happens is that when they go back to Juárez, the Juárez juvenile authorities pick him up and they just throw him into their detention

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home. And the reason you can tell is when they come back over here, you'll see 'em all shaved. They won't have no hair at all, that's how you can tell. And then even further than that, you'll see 'em wearing their ski caps so nobody'll tell that you shaved their hair over there in Juárez, and they'll come back across. I don't know how they live. Come over here and sometimes they even like to get caught, especially in the wintertime, on felony charges. They know misdemeanors, you're just gonna take them to the bridge. Well, our procedure is to take them to Border Patrol, and Border Patrol from there deports 'em at a later date, later time. What we do is like on a felony, they're detained at the detention home until Judge Peña comes back with a ruling either to hold them longer or deport 'em back to México. But the reason they like it, especially in the wintertime, is they get fed, they call 'em blanquitos, the eggs, over there at the detention home. Eggs and milk is what they like. They don't mind that, you know, getting caught for a felony. They know like for burglaries, it'll always be burglary of business, habitation, residence or vehicle. It's what I would consider your non-violent felonies. Now your robberies and strong arm robberies, that's another group, now. But these kids--always those burglaries where there is no confrontation involved between an individual and them. But you have another group, now. These are your bigger kids, and you'll see 'em here on Stanton Street. I could show you, you know, take you down there, and you'll always see 'em, there's always three of 'em, two or three together. Now these kids, well, they're not kids, they're about 18 years old. But see, even these other kids, smaller

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kids, and these guys are 18 years old, you can't match them to our kids on this side or kids per se that we know here because of the knowledge factor, the street knowledge. That kid that's eight years old can have a street knowledge of guys 25, 27 years old 'cause he knows so much, he's been on the street so many times. And these kids that are 18 years old, you know, some of the have done time in the pen over here in Juárez, so their knowledge is way greater than... they're about 30, you know. So these guys'll go out there and they'll always go to the bus stops. And you'll see them, Stanton and Overland, Stanton and San Antonio, Stanton and Third, and Stanton and about Seventh and Eighth, all around through Stanton Street. What they'll do, they'll pick their mark first. They'll sit back there and you'll only see one of 'em by the post there or by a window always watching the people, and they'll pick their mark. He'll go up behind them, and all of a sudden you see the other one appear from across the street or wherever, then you'll see the other one come up, and they'll box her in. The majority of the time it's usually an old lady, at 50's on up. Not very strong, you know, kind of frail type. They'll always pick on her, they'll box her in. And the guy, the main guy bumps into her, the other guy sticks his hand in there, grabs the coin purse or he cuts it with a knife and they're gone, running south. And there is no way you're gonna catch 'em, there is no way. 'Cause see, what they do, to them, you know, you're not gonna shoot at 'em, there's no way, you know, there's too many people in the street. They know you can't outrun 'em cause they're so quick. And they know that even if you're pursuing them in a car they can always cut into an alleyway, and there's so many

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places you can hide from them over there. What they're trying to do is get to the Stanton Street Bridge, at the very top...I don't know if that last incident they had a couple of months ago, well, they've always been there. Those guys have been there ever since I've been down here--five, six years. You go up there and you try and pull one of their guys on to this side before he gets to the Mexican side and there's no...you gotta fight on your land. You got 15 or 20 of them over there, there's no way.

M: Have there every been fights there?

P: I remember, I've been there twice now. First time I was what they call a backup unit, 'cause another unit was calling for assistance. Went up there and rocks were starting to fall and everything, and they had lost their prisoners. But the initial unit that was there was trying to bring the guys back. They weren't successful. That's when one of our officers got hit in the head with a rock. He thought he got hit by a bullet. When it hit the guy, he said, "What hit me?" "Just a rock. Next time that they start throwing rocks you know better to duck."

The last time I was up there, we were up there and we got called by Customs. They're good for that stuff, Customs in the Stanton Street Bridge. And they were harrassing the people, the tourists walking across. We went up there, we were just cruising up there to go ahead and send them back, you know. Really nothing you can do you know, it's federal jurisdiction there. The only thing, you can go there is 'cause you're asked to go there. But as far as really being there, you really don't have any authority there. You just start going up. And all of a sudden we see a taxi coming up over real fast from the other side,

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the wrong way, you know. And like, "Ah, what's going on here?" And all of a sudden these two guys, judiciales, or Juárez policemen, jump out of the taxi and they're chasing this one kid. Well, he's not a kid, he's about 21 years old. They're chasing him all through the bridge. "Well, I guess we'll help them." And before we knew it, we had 20, 30 guys coming down towards us. And I barely had enough time to get into the car and call for assistance. And the rocks and all that. That's when it really burned me up, 'cause this guy goes up there and he just barely missed my head with a rock. I mean we're only five, 10 feet away. I went up there and I wanted to grab him, but when I grabbed him, three or four guys came in. And my partner said, "No, no, let him go, let him go." And my partner's pulling my hand one way and I'm trying to get to the other guy the other way, when I saw all the rocks coming, I says, "No, I guess I better let it wait for another day." It's not worth it to get banged up there for nothing you know. I said, "No, I better wait another day." Back down, and sure enough we asked for the Juárez authorities and see if they can help us down there. But they say it takes so long. I've been down there and I've yet to see them come up there within the first hour. Well, they'll call you about two hours later and say, "We're here now, what did you need?" "Disregard it, everything's under control now." But you have these groups of kids, you know, that are 21 years old or in tha area, you know.

M: Does this happen often up there at the brdige?

P: There's guys like myself that've been down here a long enough time, you know. There's like a...how would you say it? Well, it's like, "I don't

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go up there, you don't come down here and bother me" situation.

Only, of course, if Customs calls or tourists are being hassled.

But you know, if I go up there and I start harrassing 'em or whatever, whatever terminology you want to use, you know, I know what's gonna happen 'cause I've been there, I've been there--at least twice that I can remember right now--and I know what to expect. And if they're not doing anything and our federal authorities don't want to go out there and take care of their problem, you know, then we're sticking ourselves out on a limb. 'Cause if we go out there and we get hurt on the bridge, well, then we're in bad trouble. 'Cause the first thing they're gonna say is, "What are you doing up there in the first place? Were you called up there?" And you better have a good answer.

M: Did you have to go to the bridge during the recent incidents?

P: Yes.

M: Can you tell us what you saw, what you participated in?

P: Well, of course, the newspapers take a lot of things out of context. But there was a few agitators there, you know, not more than usual--six or seven. I think what really happened, what really was blown out of proportion, was the fact that, see, the first unit at the scene, you know, I guess they panicked a little bit, what I call panic. 'Cause see I've been there in that situation before. I was in a riot at Bel Air High School--I don't know if you all know about that one--and there was about 400 there. I've been in that one, I've been in about three or four over there on Blanco Street at the projects over there, and I've been in one over here in Diablo, and over here at the Boys Club I've been jumped there before. So, you know, I've been there

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in that situation where you're confronted by a whole bunch of people. And these guys hadn't...you know, they've been on the department about a year, you know. What are you gonna...in a year you're not gonna /know/, you won't know nothing in five years. And then they panicked, you know, 'cause they saw the crowd come in. But all the crowd was doing is coming in to see, because the police cars were there. Anytime you see an ambulance, police car, especially with lights on, it's gonna draw and attract people, and that's what happened. And these guys panicked 'cause they saw the crowd. It's your usual 20, 30 I'm talking about at the top of the Stanton Street Bridge come running down, 'cause they want to see what's going on. Then the people coming out of the stores and they want to see what's going on. All of a sudden you got four or five cars there, and this guy's yelling on the radio for more assistance, and more cars are coming--you can hear the sirens coming--and everybody says, "Hey, what's going on down there?"

We went down there and we were in plain clothes. We just jumped into a car and picked up all the guys and went down there 'cause we thought it was really bad. We got down there, it was nothing. Actually you know, when we got down there of course, /we/ called lieutenant, captain, all the way up to the top. And the first thing the captain says, he went there to view the situation, you know, you set up your /observatory/ post, you know, and you check it out. He sat back and he says, "No, pull everybody else except for two cars as monitors." Pulled 'em back, and the crowd was dispersed within half an hour. That's all you had to do. There was really no incident there at all.

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M: This was at the bridge?

P: Stanton Street Bridge. That's where all that incident took place there, right there at Stanton...well, not really on the bridge itself, it was really on Eighth Street. Eighth and Stanton Street, right in the middle there, middle of the street. But you know, these guys had never been there before and they panicked, they saw the crowd coming, you know. And then you see those 20, 30 guys from the top of the Stanton Street Bridge coming running down, you know, and all of a sudden you see all these other guys from the stores coming out at you, you started saying, you know, "What's going on around here?" You know, these kids, especially the smaller ones you know, they'll be on their spray, maybe a bottle if they find one, but you'll never see 'em trying to pick up on drugs. Never. I have yet to book one on possession of drugs, whether it be heroin, marijuana, illegal drugs, dangerous drugs, whatever. Never.

M: Why is that?

P: I don't know. They have their own...it's considered taboo for them. I guess they figure that, you know--and this is in talking to them--is that they can control themselves with the spray, according to them of course, you know. They know what they're doing when they're on the spray, but they wouldn't know what they're doing, say, if they're on the hard stuff, on drugs. They don't know how they're gonna respond, how they're gonna act. That's the only way I can figure it out, 'cause you'll never see 'em; I've yet to catch 'em. I mean they may, if they pick up a joint somewhere and they smoke it, you know, it's

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'cause somebody gave it to them or they found it or they saw somebody stash it, and they came back there and picked it up. But you'll never see 'em, you'll never see 'em go out and buy that. You never will.

G: Don't you think that they are working for older people, because they are very organized.

P: It's, well, they're organized within themselves, but they're taking care of each other. It's like, you'll always have one guy of the group always in charge. Like let's say, this one time, caught 'em down here /on/ San Francisco, in front of the San Francisco Club. There was about four of them. And they had burglarized a car down on San Antonio and Alley D. Went down there you know, says, "Who sends you to do all this stuff?" "Oh, the guy over there." So we put 'em in the car and went cruising around till finally they picked him up. He was over there by Cleveland Square, which is about three blocks away from there. What he does, he'd come up there and send 'em out. He says, "Go out there and bring me something"--anything on a car or shoplifting, especially shoplifting, "and bring it here and then we'll divide it later on." Of course, he gets the biggest share if you have one that's like that, where he's the main guy, actually threatens them. Then you have like him, who'll be in charge of the little group, and he'll also be in cahoots with about three other guys of his stature in the eyes of the kids. And they'll go out there, and like the shoe shine boys, they'll go out there and say, "How much money do have? Get it all here." If you don't, they take him into the alley and whop him. I've seen that too. 'Cause see, when the kids would tell us,

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they'll say, "Hey, this guy hit me." "How come? How come they're all like that?" "No, al cabo they hit me." So we go over there and pick him up. And we tell him why we're doing it. You know, 'cause these kids are about eight years old.

Which brings up another group, the shoe shine boys. Nobody bothers them, except for the newer rookies that come out that haven't been down here long enough. As far as us here, nobody bothers those kids 'cause they're out there trying to live and most of 'em have people to support back in Juárez. They'll take all their money and they won't spend a dime here, and they'll take all their money back over there to Juárez. And you'll see 'em. Usually the ones, like these little kids that go out there and burglarize cars? You'll see 'em with their dolls and candy and stuff like that, yeah. These other shoe shine boys, no. Of course then you have these other kids that pretend to be shoe shine boys to try and throw you off. But after a while you know who they are; you catch 'em enough times, you know who they are.

And then you have another little group of girls. Now these girls, the biggest is about oh, 12, 11, around there. The littlest one is about five years old, six, about that big, she can barely run. We're in plain clothes and we hadn't done nothing all day, and I says, "I guess we better do something or the sergeant's gonna get on our backs." So we're out there and we're right across the Canton Grocery at Paisano and El Paso, and we're just sitting there trying to blend in with the crowd. Of course, that's hard to do. We're just sitting there anyway, watching them, and here they come crossing Paisano, all of 'em, all

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little kids. And they go into a store, a distributing store there on the other side of Paisano, the north side of Paisano. And one little girl comes out of the store with a doll in her hands. She crosses the street right where we're at, right in front of us, but she doesn't see us. She's looking at her doll like this, you know; she's from here to the wall, and we're just watching her. She goes and she runs down the street and up the stairways, and a while later all of 'em are coming down the street. And they went into the same business and everything, they came back, and they all come running out, each one with a doll, you know. So they all take off running and they cut into the stairway. And I was thinking, "I guess we better do something now." So my partner goes down north on El Paso Street and I go into the alley behind there--that means Alley E--and they don't come out. I says, "I guess they're trying to sell the stuff." Sure enough, we doubled back and they're in the Hollywood trying to sell the dolls. They're way in the back trying to sell them.

M: All little girls?

P: [Yes.] Those are your shoplifters. That's all they do, shoplift, and they're good at it. They are real good at it. They can go into... they like Kress. What's that store next to Kress? Lolita's? That one, the one on Mesa, Franklin's, Myron's, and the ones on Overland Street right here. You know the ones I'm talking about here on Mesa and Overland? They can go in there, and the saleslady will be right there, and they'll go the whole rack like that, pick 'em up, and they're gone. And you'll see 'em, they'll have little bags going down the street. Of course they have like on Fifth Street, some apartments

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there between El Paso and Alley E, a lady in apartment 14 or 11. I've been trying for that lady for a long time. I still can't get her. But we know some kids that'd tell us, "This lady's the one that's buying the stuff from these little girls." And especially on girls, the maternity stuff, God, they like that. That goes real good. Little shorts, dresses, little stuff like that goes real fast. They don't sell them there, they'll sell it right across the street. There's a...what's the lady's last name? A Tebunia I think, in there. Or the bars, the Ritz, especially the Ritz. The Ritz and the Chamizal Bar and a little bit the Hollywood Cafe, not too much. But they're real good.

M: What about cigarettes, selling cigarettes?

P: You don't have 'em like you used to before. Before you used to have a whole bunch of 'em. I guess they're not making enough money. 'Cause this guy was telling me, he's a shoe shine boy now, I says, "How come you don't sell cigarettes anymore?" I used to buy mine from him. (Laughter) I says, "How come you don't sell 'em anymore?" He says, "No, not enough money." 'Cause if they don't take 'em away here at the bridge, the Juárez authorities'll take them away. And if they don't take 'em away, the bigger kids'll take 'em away. So, you know, it's a never-ending cycle, you know; you just can't fight everybody. So he'd just rather not sell 'em. But per se you know, the majority of those are all right, the majority of 'em. You have a few, one or two, but I'd say 95 percent are okay. I've, I don't think I've caught any cigarette boy doing anything wrong. I mean, he'll run from you 'cause he don't want you to take the cigarettes, take him to the...see, you take 'em to

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Customs and they'll tax him. They'll charge I think it's five dollars a pack or something like that, some ridiculous price, and then they'll take him away is what happens. And they'll tax him, if he has any money, 'cause, see, when they buy the cigarettes, they'll have a wad about that big--oh, two or three hundred dollars on them at least. But if they lose that money, Lord have mercy on their soul, 'cause then the big guys on the other side want to know where that money went. But they won't give you any trouble. I've yet to get anything from them to book anybody like that.

M: They're just interested in selling the cigarettes.

P: Right--selling the cigarettes and getting their money, that's all.

M: What about prostitution?

P: Oh, I forgot about that. (Laughter) It's really bad right now, especially among these illegal girls, illegal aliens. Oh, I'd say you would have, you'd have about between 20 and fifty.

M: Twenty and 50 coming across?

P: Right. Not every day, but between the week, throughout the week. What they're doing is, the majority of 'em are at Cleveland Square right over here. As a matter of fact, you go over there right now, they're probably there now. And they just sit there, the whole park. Or they walk up and down by the library, behind the library, the Golden Age Center and all through there, and just wait for 'em to pick 'em up. And you'll see the guys that go there to pick them up. You'll see them driving by, honking, looking, cruising around till they find the one that they really like, you know. One group stays

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there, the other one is down here from the Hollywood of course, in there, the Acapulco, which is right across the street. Then you come down to El Tampico, which is on Paisano and Santa Fe, just the Tampico and the Bimbo's. Bimbo's is the last thing, Bimbo's on Santa Fe. If I take you at Bimbo's at three o'clock this afternoon, you're not gonna believe all the girls in there. You're gonna find in there at least 10 to 15 at least.

M: And they're all from Juárez?

P: Yeah.

M: What ages are we talking about?

P: Oh, now these are bigger girls, now--I'd say between 21 and thirty. The ones that are way over the hill, that I call over the hill, they'll work out of like the Hollywood, you know, and they'll have a guy working for 'em. You've seen him on El Paso Street--great big, Anglo guy. His stomach is about as big as this room. He's huge. Just go down one of these days, you'll see him down there. What he does, he'll go by and get...at the Hollywood and the Acapulco. The reason I know is 'cause we watched him do it before. I says, "You know, how does he get so many girls?" And one time me and Jáquez watched him. So we watched him going down with two girls, down to where the Plaza Grocery is, El Paso and Paisano, the west side of the street. Right next to it there's some apartments. You go up there, well these girls had an apartment already rented out. He's walking down the street with them. So about three minutes later you can see the two guys walking right behind him, going up the same apartment complex and everything. The

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older girls'll work out of the Hollywood using a guy like him, 'cause they're much older, you know.

The younger girls, they're gonna be at Bimbo's, at the Tampico, especially at nighttime. Oh, at nighttime, Jesus Christ. It used to be, on Fourth Street, the Perico's, the old Perico's, they've got a new name for it, The Owl, in Spanish. But you go in there on a Friday, Saturday night, hijo, /it's full/ like that. You can go there sometimes and, ask Border Patrol, they'll pull a raid every so often like at Tampico's, Perico's. But you know, I've yet to see 'em hit Bimbo's, I don't know why. I have no idea why. They'll hit these other places but not Bimbo's. And Bimbo's is a much rowdier crowd. You go in there, and like we'll go in there and you gotta really be careful in there, they're really a rowdy crowd in there. Even right now in the daytime, it's bad. But I don't know why they don't hit it.

M: I understand some girls make it to the classier bars.

X: Granada Royale is where my parents had said they'd seen that they had a bad problem with prostitution there.

P: That's organized prostitution, not illegal aliens.

X: Oh, yes, you're probably right.

P: Yeah. I can believe that. This girl that I know, Debbie Williams, she's a black girl, works out of the Playmate. Well, some of 'em, the girls from this side, U.S., hustle out of the Playmate. And I asked her one time...that's when, I don't know if you all heard about it when she was involved, her and this other guy, they beat up this old man and they beat him to death right over here on the apartment complex

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right here off of Oregon Street and Missouri where he lived. And they guy, he was so spaced out he just whopped him to death for, I think they got \$15 out of it or something like that. Anyway she dropped out of sight. And then for a long time, we finally picked her up and booked her. And I asked her one time, "What're you doing?" "I was working out there at the Smuggler's." "Smuggler's?" "Yeah." "You got action over there?" Says, "Yeah. Business is pretty good over there."

M: Is this Smuggler's Restaurant and Bar?

P: No, it's a disco.

M: It's a disco?

P: It's a disco.

M: It's right next to the Granada Royale?

P: Right. Well, see, you can see a relationship, the correlation between the two.

M: Sure, sure.

P: You have to have some place close by, and then get a discount on the room, also, otherwise it's not gonna benefit the girl. You go out there and you're gonna charge the regular rates, she's gotta make money off the guy.

M: What are the going rates?

P: Downtown? Ten bucks. They'll hit you for twenty. But you know, maybe an out-of-towner might pay \$20, \$25, but usually the rates right now are ten bucks down there. Five bucks for something else that I'm

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not gonna tell you about. (Laughter) I think somebody blushed.

M: What about the problems of venereal disease?

P: I've only heard one complaint. And this guy, an elderly man, but you know, he says he got it down here from this girl 'cause he was looking for her. He says, "Have you seen so and so?" I says, "No." They use so many names, you know, no way you're gonna tell that's the right name on any of 'em. You gotta go by the description. "Describe her." "No, no way." "Well, she gave me this, she gave me that. I've gotta find her." That was the only time. That was maybe about a year ago. But other than that, nobody. I guess they all take their chances and you know, they don't tell nobody. At least they don't tell us about it. Maybe they're too embarrassed.

M: What about the going rates for the U.S. girls?

P: Oh, no, that's something different. Those start at, bottom is \$25, the Playmate down there. Playmate is where you get everything, anything you want there.

M: Drugs?

P: Drugs, prostitution, whatever you want is there. That's a hard place to bust, too, it's really hard. 'Cause you know, the bathrooms are way in the back and the buys that deal sit close, towards the back. By the time you get through the door, the stuff is already in the commodes flushed down. It's a bad place.

M: Where is the Playmate?

P: Playmate is across from Plaza Park. The little bar next to Coney Island?

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M: Oh, yeah.

P: Especially at nighttime, that's when the action is, at nighttime.

It's controlled by the blacks there. Blacks and a few Puerto Ricans.

M: Is it a dangerous place?

P: Yeah. Well, you know, it depends on who you are, you know. If they don't know who you are, like if you were to walk in there, they'd study you, they'd watch you, they'd watch every move you're making, 'cause they don't know who you are. But you know, if I go in there they'll watch me only because, you know, they're afraid somebody else is gonna be coming in behind me to bust 'em. But like they won't bother us, you know. They know, they'll know what'll happen then. But if you were to go in there they'd watch you, they really would.

M: Have you been involved in incidents with prostitutes?

P: With prostitutes? Yeah. There at the Playmate, this guy, I don't know if you know Razorblade Jackson, he used to be a sparring partner for Muhammad Ali. Great, big, black guy. But he's gentle, he'll never give no trouble at all. You tell him, "Razorblade, let's go, get up." "Yeah, all right. Okay." Put his hands behind, he won't give no trouble at all. But there was another guy, another pimp there. We had just walked there and check out the place, 'cause we were looking for this guy that had sold some bad stuff to a guy there by Plaza Park. Walked in there, and this black guy just knocked this girl ten feet in the air, it had to have been. And we're right behind him you know. Say, "What are you doing?" And all of sudden everything came unglued, 'cause he had another girl with him. He had two girls, he was their pimp, and he knocked one of them, and the other one jumped on us and said, "Look at

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this guy right here, look at all the trouble. He hits me all the time, he beats me all the time." And this other girl jumps up yelling also, bloody and everything. So the whole bar came unglued. But what they didn't know, we had a dog behind us. 'Cause we were looking for the stuff, you know, so we brought the dog to see if he can sniff it out. And as soon as the fight broke out the dog started biting. See, a dog doesn't know. They can't distinguish myself from you, you know. If I get in his way, he's gonna bite me too. So when the dog starts barking I'm jumping out of the way, trying to get out of the way.

(Laughter) I know he's coming. Nobody's gotta sit there and tell me to move, you know; I know, I'm moving. 'Cause the dog doesn't know. All he obeys is his handler, you know, and he's biting. And everybody's jumping out of the way.

M: That stops the fight?

P: Yeah; oh, yeah, it sure did. See, there he just turns 'em lose and you can imagine what he's gonna do. And needless to say we had to book the... well, we let the girls go even though we knew what had happened, you know. She wasn't being faithful to him you know. She was keepin' some of the money. That's what I mean by faithful. (Laughter) You know, they expect so much money, you know, per week or per day or whatever, however they collect. He says, "Well, you're not working hard enough. And if you are, you're keeping some of the money."

M: How much do the girls from Juárez make a night, a week?

P: Oh, that's hard to say. They always have money with 'em. But you know, like some of the older girls that are between let's say 25 and 32, 33, 35 around there, those are older ladies, you know. And they may have

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maybe five or 10 dollars, but their money goes all to Juárez, all of it goes over there. We'll see 'em at the Tampico. Like say right now they're right there eating, drinking a coffee, just waiting, you know, maybe something might show up right now. But actually they're waiting for the nighttime to come. But all of their money goes over there.

They've helped us out, too. They ID'd two guys, now. One led to an armed robbery down there at the Paisano. He stole an old safe. I don't know if you heard about that one. He went in there with a gun, but it to his head, then tied up the guys in the coolers. Well, this is right across the street from there. And we couldn't find a witness to save our skins. So she says, "Yeah, I saw." "It was this guy?" She said, "Yeah." We showed her a photo line-up, the whole legal route and everything. She said, "Yeah, that was him." Went to the judge, got the warrant, booked him. This other guy was in a wheelchair. Same girl. Well, there's three girls that work there at the Tampico. And one of the Blue Stars, we call him El Chamuco, he's about 43 years old, he's with this guy drinking. And he led him out of the bar, took him across the street in a wheelchair by the alley. So he took out a knife and he cut him, he hit him. Took \$1500 dollars from this old man. He's disabled, retired, something. He gets a lot of money, but he likes to flash it. And he flashed it once too many that night. And she ID'd him for us, you know. Of course we haven't caught him yet, he's still hiding in Juárez. But one of these days when he comes over here these girls will call us 'cause they have our number and everything. They'll give us a call, let us know he's here. And as far as them, they're pretty good about that, you know.

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M: Have you chased any kids to the river?

P: Oh yeah, oh yeah. [I] remember one time we were going on Chihuahua Street, and these two kids with great, big, old suitcases, the suitcase was as big as they were. And we just barely caught a glimpse of 'em. I get out of the car, and from there where the paved road ends and the regular dirt portion starts to the river, you got about 100 yards to go. So I'm running through the dirt. And these kids are throwing rocks at me, you know. There's three of 'em, you know--one little kid running as fast as he can, and the other guys throwing rocks at me trying to slow me down. Well, they jumped into the water, you know, 'cause you can see the suitcases, just three 'em in there, into the water, you know. I says, "I'm getting even with you guys." I started throwing rocks at 'em, too. (Laughter) It's a game to them.

M: But they got away?

P: Yeah, they got away. Yeah. They hit a...they burglarized a van down there by Santa Fe and Seventh Street. Got away. Well, they got away, so what can you say? You can't catch 'em all the time, they're quick.

M: Can you think of other memorable incidents that you've been involved in?

P: Well, there's so many, you know. There's so many times that we've picked 'em up, you know, and arrested 'em, we just take it for granted. Well, even our arrest cards will reflect that, you know. We led the patrol in arrests per man. And we were twice what the rest of the department was. That's pretty good for a small section. But for illegal aliens...

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G: What about maids? We haven't talked about maids in El Paso.

P: The maids I don't bother, neither do the other guys. The ones that come over here to work, you know, regardless of whether they have papers or not, we don't bother at all. 'Cause you know that they're coming over here to work and support somebody in Juárez or México, you know. And the majority will cross there by the black bridge. We've got two black bridges, one over here by Chihuahua Street. And you can go by there any day, and you'll see 'em, 30 or 40 trying to come across, you know. Or they'll be down here by Paisano, there by the old Hacienda Cafe. Then they cross the river over here coming up this way. And I would imagine down here they've got somebody picking them up, you know, taking them to their places. But like, sometimes like at Plaza Park, they'll call us over here and we'll go up there. You can spot check just by, I guess through experience, I guess, but you can go through there you can see who's got papers, who doesn't; who belongs there and who doesn't belong there. We don't bother them, only if they give us a hard time. But all we tell 'em is, "Tell us the truth. You gonna go work?" "Yeah, I'm gonna go work." That's all. We don't bother them at all.

G: So if they don't have papers you let them go to work anyway?

P: Yeah. Don't tell anybody though. (Laughter)

M: Could you tell us a little bit about the riots that you mentioned that you were involved in? You mentioned Bel Air and Boys Club and Blanco.

P: Of course Bel Air was a long time ago, it was a couple of years ago. And that's when it started out with two girls fighting. And there's three of us, we showed up, and I don't know how it happened, all of a sudden the crowd turned on us. And, oh, there was about 400 of 'em. We just

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stayed together, back to back. It just so happened that it was a shift change, and the guys that were supposed to be out there were already in the station gassing up, and these guys hadn't gone out there yet so it took about 15, 20 minutes for any backup to get there. And the whole riot lasted to about six, six-thirty that evening. There was whole bunch of 'em. I got hit with a rock, a couple of rocks over there. Of course we were walking, trying to get to our cars, but they had us blocked off. So we were in the middle of the street back to back watching for the bricks and stuff like that. I remember that 'cause there was one kid kept coming as close as he could to us, you know. There's no way you're gonna grab somebody there 'cause you're just asking for it. This one guy in the back, I could see him throwing a great big brick like that. It so happened a kid that was in the front row rushed us when the brick came down and hit him on the head. And he turned around and he stared going back into the crowd, you know.

But the other one is at Sherman Project, Sherman Projects over here on Paisano; 4500 Blanco is what it is, in there. And we were trying to arrest this kid for sniffing spray. His mother came out with a broom, and the brother and uncle, and before you know it everybody starts yelling and whistling and everybody's coming in. So what's really bad that time is that the radios were out, weren't quite working. So we're trying to call on the radio for assistance, but nobody's responding, you know. So that took a long [time]. The only thing that dispersed the crowd that day, it started raining. That was the only thing that really saved us, 'cause it started raining and everybody started scattering. And then the help arrived.

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The other one is the Boys Club. Now the Boys Club, it's a gang, the Thunderbird gang, and they've been in existence for I don't know how many years. I don't know if you've heard about all these shootings and murders down here in the southside? It's a result of that gang right there, their feuds with the other gangs on the southside.

X: What age are we talking about in these gangs?

P: Okay, there's two factions to the Thunderbird gang. You got the younger faction which is, oh, 10, 11 to maybe 17, 18, 19 around there. Then you have your older guys--25 to 30, 35, somewhere in there. But the ones that are most active are the younger kids right now. They're the ones that are into drugs, and mostly marijuana. And the shootings, of course. I've been down there and we prevented a shooting. We were behind this car. He didn't know we were following him and the door flies open. That's how they come by. They'll come by with their rifles or their guns and they'll pop the door open and just sit back to the side and just pop away. See, they didn't know we were behind them and chasing them like that. All of a sudden the door flies open. But the guys sees us in the mirror at this time, he takes off. But this other guy was by the curb, I guess, who was gonna be the recipient of the attack. Well, he throws an object to the ground. We cut loose to chase, went up to the guy, and sure enough he had a gun. And that same guy had been arrested for shooting before, a couple of weeks before, and the week before that he got picked up with a rifle and a 357. Same guy, Pedro Estrada. Those guys are...we've pulled I don't know how many raids down there. We've had about two or three raids down there, found kilos

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of marijuana. Dozens of arrests. Went down there one time, and see, they're just just like anybody else, they'll challenge your authority, you know, to see how you're gonna react to it. They'll test you, everybody gets tested. And I got tested. Went up there, guy went into the middle of the group and says, "Come and get me." Well, I've gotta do one of two things: either you go in and get him or you're gonna back down and just forget about trying to enforce any laws in their group. So I went in there; paid for it.

M: What happened?

P: They jumped me, they jumped me, and took a couple of bruises, little scratches and things like that. We came back later and arrested the ones that had jumped in there. We came back later. For the next week every day we came back, took a couple every day, you know. But it was, they just wanted to see how you're gonna react, how you're gonna respond to that stuff, you know--if you either make it or you don't make it. Of course, you know, nobody takes your pistol out. At least I don't, not in a situation like that. You got 20 of 'em there, you take your gun out and any 20 of 'em can take that gun away from you. So they know you're not gonna take it out. So you just go in there, it's just you and them. And see how you respond to that. That's twice that happened to me, I think. Once wasn't too bad, only about five of 'em. And that one time, that guy that we went after to arrest him, Urquidis, Jesús Urquidis, he got killed a week later in one of the shooting deals down there, that same guy.

M: Can you think of any other interesting characters out on the street,

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particularly illegal aliens? You mentioned people like the Chamuco or Borracho. Any others like that with colorful names and colorful personalities?

P: Well, we just give 'em our own nicknames sometimes, 'cause sometimes they don't even know what their name is or where they were born, you know. Oh, that Orejas I was telling you about, they call him the Crybaby 'cause anytime a policeman stops him, you know, they'll yell at him and he'll start crying. But he'll cry in such a manner that you know, God, you think that you're whopping him to death, you know. And there, people'll stop and see what you're doing to him and everything. And he does that, does it on purpose just to throw you off, you know. He'll sit there and cry and he screams, and Jesus Christ, you know. (Laughter)

M: Well, I see we're almost out of tape. Is there anything else that you'd like to add to the interview?

P: I don't know. (Laughter)

M: Okay. We've had you going for an hour. Well, we want to thank you very much, Officer Pérez, for giving us the time and telling us about your experiences. On behalf of the program, we want to thank you.

P: Okay, you're quite welcome.