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## Interview no. 665

Robert Lyons

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Robert Lyons  
INTERVIEWER: Mary Ann White  
PROJECT: Class Project  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 23, 1984  
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted  
  
TAPE NO.: 665  
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 665

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in Florida, moved to El Paso in his early teens; attended Burges High School and U.T. El Paso.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biographical information; experiences at UTEP; past and present work experiences; views on ethnic and sex equality, family life, fitness, children.

Length of interview: 1 1/4 hours      Length of transcript: 43 pages

Interview with Robert Lyons  
July 23, 1984  
By Mary Ann White  
At the home of Ms White

MW: When and where were you born?

RL: I was born June 15, 1954, Orlando, Florida, in Orange Memorial Hospital.

MW: You grew up there?

RL: No, I lived there approximately six months and then my parents were transferred to Washington, D. C. I lived there until I was about 13 or 14 and moved to El Paso.

MW: You've stayed here ever since?

RL: Yes, I moved away for one semester to attend Texas Tech as a freshman.

MW: Why did you come back after one semester?

RL: My dad was with the FBI and he was transferred to the embassy in Mexico City. They didn't want to sell the house and they asked me to move on down, watch the house and watch my younger brother so he could graduate from high school. I resumed my studies at UTEP.

MW: Do you have any other brothers and sisters?

RL: Just one younger brother; he's two years younger than I.

MW: Does he live here?

RL: Yes, he does.

MW: You did get a Business Degree from UTEP, didn't you?

RL: Yes, I did. An MBA in Finance.

MW: When did you go to UTEP?

RL: I started in 1972 and graduated the first summer session of '77.

MW: Did you work while you were in school?

RL: Yes, I worked at Miguel's Restaurant and Bar from 1972 through 1977. I was a dishwasher, busboy, cook's helper, cook, bartender, waiter and assistant manager. Upon graduation, I got a backer and we bought the restaurant. I had the restaurant from 1977 through 1982 and for a brief while I had a second restaurant which opened in 1980 and was sold in 1982, as was the first restaurant. The second restaurant, Lyon's, was located at 2200 Vista del Sol.

MW: Why did you get out of the restaurant business?

RL: My wife decided that the hours weren't very good and I agreed with her. The man that backed me initially in the restaurant business had a job opportunity for me which would be fewer hours and compatible money, so it seemed like the smart thing to do. We got his money out and now I'm working for him. The hours are much more convenient.

MW: You're working at Cowtown Boots as the Production Manager now?

RL: Right. There are the two owners and myself. I do everything, run the plant and whatever needs to be done - production line, ordering materials, firing, firing, plant maintenance.

MW: You're the person who keeps everything going?

RL: Yes.

MW: Back to when you were at UTEP - you were in a fraternity, weren't you?

RL: Right. Sigma Alpha Epsilon.

MW: What was it like?

RL: It was fun. For me, it was really great. I was never really close except to about four or five guys in high school. They all went away to school. Then my parents left to go down to Mexico City. I felt I was virtually abandoned, not that I couldn't take care of myself. I'd had friends at work. It created a new group of friends for me and a place where I could feel comfortable. So, instead of feeling all alone, I had a new group of friends who turned into a family. All the crazy things that went on - it was good for me.

MW: What kind of crazy things?

RL: First of all, you're at the college primarily for academics, although the fraternity tends to distract you. You've always got the beer; there are always the sororities with the girls; there's always sports. It seems like the one thing that brought you to that university - to study - has taken about third or fourth position in your priorities.

MW: Did you do any "Animal House" type of things?

RL: No, I don't think so. We did our share of drinking and partying, but we did some good things. We did one thing that was pretty unique. We had something called the SA Olympics. We took an old dirt lot and had all the sororities

down there for some races and tug-of-war. We dug open a big huge hole and let them have a tug-of-war over that. We greased a big log and let them have pillow fights on it and half the girls fell in this muddy hole. It was pretty neat and novel, that was fun. Plus, we got to have fun at the expense of the girls. We never did anything illegal. You mentioned Animal House - the things they did certainly could have been illegal.

MW: Did you go to dances, or was your fraternity less formal than that?

RL: Oh, yes. None of the dances were formal, but we always had bands at least twice a month for our house parties.

MW: Was anybody invited to come to them?

RL: We had a sister sorority and we invited the little sisters to come. Any friends of friends were pretty well known because they used to come around the fraternity house. Everybody knew them on a first name basis and they were allowed to come. Of course, the guys could bring their dates. That's called "rush", or the introduction of your fraternity to people. We would invite the people that we were trying to draw into our fraternity to come and see us and party with us. So, we invited those outsiders to come in, and occasionally we'd invite some of the neighbors, too.

MW: It was pretty open, then?

RL: Yes, you had twenty members, so you're not going to see

those twenty members and their dates, period. No, we had our little sisters organizations and a few sororities, and, like I said, we invited our neighbors because our parties were loud and we always found that if we didn't invite them, they'd always call the police. If we invited them and they came, they could tolerate us a little more easily.

MW: Was there an ethnic mix in your fraternity?

RL: Quite a bit. We were probably fifty percent Mexican-American. However, those Mexican-Americans were probably middle-class to upper middle-class. Probably twenty percent whites. We didn't have any blacks, but basketball was our best sport, so we always had about six blacks hanging around the fraternity. They never pressured us to let them in; they showed some desire, but there was a black fraternity. They were not members of the fraternity, but they didn't feel they could join ours and snub them and vice versa. We had some oriental people. We even had two gentlemen, Mike Parker and Bruce Wells, that had been in the Navy for four or five year stints. We had one guy as young as 16, a really intelligent guy that graduated early from high school, and guys 23 and 24 who were in the Navy. In fact, there was even one ex-Coast Guard guy.

MW: You guys had a real mix then?

RL: Quite unbelievable, yes.

MW: Your parties must have been quite cosmopolitan?

RL: Yeah. One fraternity was a dooper fraternity, another was a jock fraternity, and we were kind of like the grassroots. You couldn't find really one label to put on us.

MW: There wasn't that feeling of exclusivity or elitism?

RL: No, not at all. If someone really wanted to be a part of our fraternity, they could.

MW: Is there one memory you have about being at UTEP and being part of the fraternities that is particularly poignant for you or that capsulizes your experiences?

RL: I lived at the house for three years. There's not one memory that stands out, but a number of interesting memories. One 4th of July we were sitting right above the Kappa Sig House. Kappa Sig was always kind of a jock fraternity. We had some scholars and some real fools and a few athletes - a real mix. A few people who had money and a lot who could barely afford to stay with us. Anyway, our house was just above them, probably two stories right next to each other. On the 4th of July they were having a party and we were having a party. It turned out that both fraternities had, it seemed, about \$500 worth of bottle rockets (laughter) in each one's house. There was quite a battle of bottle rockets being shot up and down at each other's house. Both fraternities got some pipes about four feet long and lit the bottle rockets in them. They were like a bullet going through the barrel



of a gun. They just shoot out - you can shoot 'em just as straight as an arrow. When you shoot them in the sky, with the revolution going around in the barrel, you can shoot and aim them. As it turned out, our marksmanship was much better and we broke out all of their windows down below us and we started a bunch of curtains on fire. That stands out pretty clear. Both houses were pretty well smashed up. But ours (bottlerockets) going downhill were a lot faster and hit better targets than theirs going uphill, then fading out of steam, but it was pretty funny.

MW: Anything else like that happen?

RL: Oh, gosh, well, we had a fight with them one night.

MW: A real fist fight?

RL: Yeah.

MW: What happened?

RL: I think they were having an induction of little sisters, and we were probably up there drunk singing a bunch of our dirty songs. They thought we weren't showing any protocol and we got in a fist fight.

MW: Did anyone get hurt?

RL: Yeah, a couple of guys went to the hospital - I think with cuts. No one was really hurt.

MW: Any other thing that particularly stands out to you?

RL: Humm. I had a roommate by the name of Bill Lovelady that was always dating two or three girls at the same time.

I lived in one room and he lived in the other and it was always an amazement to me and everybody else. He always had one girl leaving his room and walk out the back door as the other one walked in the front door. And this didn't happen on one or two occasions, it seemed like a daily affair. One would be walking out while the other was walking in and they never met each other. I don't know how it could happen they never confronted each other. It was unbelievable (laughter). That was always real humorous.

MW: Did you start playing golf while you were going to UTEP?

RL: No. My dad was a golfer and I took up golf from him at a very young age.

MW: You continued to play while you went to school?

RL: Yes.

MW: Were you on the golf team?

RL: When I was at Texas Tech I was on their golf team for that one semester. But UTEP at that time didn't have a golf team. I still played with some older friends on the weekends. Some were my father's age or somewhere between my age and his age.

MW: I was told that you were good enough that you could have been pro.

RL: Yeah, I had a chance. These same people that backed me in the restaurant business had some money and they put one guy on the tour that didn't do very well for them.

They offered that opportunity to me. But the idea of golf was always fun to me and going out and having to work at it real, real hard, going from city to city, just didn't appeal to me.

MW: You have won money though?

RL: Oh, yes.

MW: You win most of the local tournaments, don't you?

RL: The ones I play in I do very well in, yes.

MW: But you never had any desire to go pro?

RL: Not really. That life just never really attracted me.

When I was very young I worked in pro shops before coming to El Paso. I'd seen all these good golfers that had pro aspirations end up being broken down and being assistant pro someplace making six or eight hundred dollars a month. It just seemed like you've got to be very, very good and get lucky. I didn't want a job working for someone else at six or eight hundred dollars a month. They were working long hours. They tried it and now they're just cleaning clubs and selling golf balls. It was actually less glamorous than, say, working at Dillard's. After I saw that, I just said well, I'm a good golfer, a very good golfer but there are always golfers better than me.

MW: So you've wanted to retain the pleasure aspect of it?

RL: Yeah, if I could, sure.

MW: You were pretty young to be a partner in a restaurant at that point - was that a big leap?

RL: Yeah, it sure was. The only thing was that I'd been working in that same restaurant that we took over for five years. So, therefore, I knew the day-to-day activities; I knew the customers; I knew the employees. They all pretty well stayed with me. It was a big leap and I was young and the first few days I was nervous. But after that it was smooth sailing.

MW: Was it just the long hours (that caused you to leave the business)?

RL: I was getting in there at nine in the morning and sometimes leaving at one at night. The temptation to drink too much is always there. You make a little money here, you make a little money there, but it just didn't seem to pay off for all the hours you're putting in.

MW: It got down to a diminishing return?

RL: Yeah, that's exactly right. . exactly right.

MW: But you did enjoy the business?

RL: Yeah, I enjoyed it because I enjoyed people. In fact, in that one small way I enjoyed the restaurant business more than what I'm doing now. I'm kind of trading off the extra hours. I have a little more security because I'm working for someone else that has money; I know I'm always going to get a paycheck, as opposed to being with people and customers that I know and enjoy. They kept coming in because they knew that I was going to give them good food and good drink and they were going to get good service. So I'm trading off a little bit one for the other. And,

of course, when you're working in your own business, there's a little freedom there, too.

MW: Is (the restaurant) where you met your wife?

RL: Yeah. It was just before I took it over. She came in to apply for a job and was hired. We seemed to strike it off pretty well right from the start.

MW: And her brother worked there as well?

RL: Yes, her brother Danny, went into that delicatessen for Joe, his dad, for a long time. After that, for a time he came over to me and did a good job.

MW: You had a real family affair going?

RL: Yeah, somewhat. In fact, my brother even worked there at the restaurant. I had to hire and fire him a couple of times. That's got to be done.

MW: That must have been a rough decision - to finally give it up?

RL: Yeah. You felt like you were cutting off your right arm, because, like I said, I'd been working there for Miguel's for five years, and I had it for myself for five years. I felt like I was parting with ten years of my life, like you've been married to someone for ten years and getting divorced.

MW: Do you think you'll ever go back?

RL: I don't know. I've thought about it and I've had people offer some money, saying "Let's get back in the restaurant." But the restaurant business in El Paso is not that great.

They've got too many restaurants and it's too cut-throat. Ninety percent of all restaurants that go into business end up failing, and it's long hours. I just don't see an improvement in my life style.

MW: You think you'll continue with what you're doing now?

RL: Sure. I'm always open to any other business deals that come my way, but for the most part I'm pretty happy where I am.

MW: Can you tell me a little more about your job?

RL: The job of hiring and firing mainly falls on my shoulders. On the production line, when people don't come to work, I've got to move the other people around to make sure the production flow is steady. I order materials, try to make sure that our boots really keep some sort of resemblance to quality control. We've got sixty stores of our own. We take their special orders, get them in and out. When we're putting in stores, my job is to get the wood in, pre-assemble the shelving, and get those loaded on the trucks so we can open up our new stores.

MW: Where are your stores located?

RL: Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and California.

MW: You've had something to do with opening most of them?

RL: This year I haven't, but last year I probably went to about twelve of them.

MW: You end up spending quite a bit of extra time in this job as well, don't you?

RL: Yes. The first two years I was there I bet I was probably putting in fifty to fifty-five hours a week. But, now to make comparisons to the restaurant business, I was in the restaurant from, say, nine in the morning until one at night. At Cowntown I was there at maybe seven in the morning, getting out at three-thirty to four-thirty in the afternoon. Maybe just every other Saturday we'd go out of town and put in a store.

MW: Do you see yourself in this line of work five or ten years down the road?

RL: I don't know. This is a major question I've asked myself. Will I be happy - do I see myself performing the same job five or six or ten years from now? I just don't know, only time will tell. Certainly, I can do it. The employees there have learned to like me and/or respect me, where they didn't when I first walked in there. It's kinda dirty . . and, you know, you're working with a completely different class of people, which is probably the biggest transition from the restaurant. You're working with upper middle-class to wealthy (in the restaurant) to very poor, poor people (at Cowntown).

MW: Would you say most of the people that work for you come from South El Paso?

RL: Yes. They're borderline; they're on food stamps and

welfare. It's not because the pay's so bad; it's because they have about six or eight kids. Some of them live in Mexico, in fact.

MW: Do you have any undocumented workers?

RL: Not at the present time, but we have what's called "resident aliens."

MW: So, you have documented workers?

RL: Yes.

MW: Do you have any kind of insurance plans that cover these people?

RL: They have the option. We have an insurance plan available to them, but most of them don't (use it) for the simple reason that they know that (R. E.) Thomason (General Hospital) will take care of them, the City-County hospital. So very few of them are interested.

MW: If you could change something about the conditions there and the way you have to work, what would it be?

RL: I would probably like to clean up the factory, for one.

MW: Is it really a very dirty job?

RL: What happens is - you've got leather dust from all the sanding, cutting and shaving of leather, and that filters everywhere. A lot of our employees eat their lunch where they work, and just throw their trash down beside them, like there's someone else to pick it up. It creates a fly problem. It's also very hot in there.

MW: You don't have any air-conditioning at all?



RL: There are a couple of air-conditioning blowers, but we're in a metal building. When the sun beats down on it, that attracts and retains the heat. Besides, most of the machinery gives off a good deal of heat.

MW: You do have quite a contrast to the conditions you were working in at the restaurant.

RL: Oh, sure. Cool and relaxed as opposed to hot and dirty.

MW: Do you like living in El Paso?

RL: The only place I can really compare it to is living in Washington (D.C.), where I remember warm, muggy summers, which weren't really great. I can remember really cold winters where sometimes you couldn't even get out of the house for a couple of days, until they dug out the streets or you dug up to the sidewalks. Washington had beautiful autumns and nice springs. You went from a place that had four seasons, quite visibly. El Paso has pretty much got a hot summer and a mild fall and winter. You've got the mountains if you want to go to the mountains. Yes, I think El Paso could very well be my home for the rest of my life.

MW: Do you see a marked difference in the way people live their lives - their attitudes here versus Washington?

RL: I wasn't old enough to make a value judgment. The only people I can remember were my parents' friends and they were just like my parents. So I'd be comparing their values to people who retained the same values, which is

not even a cross-section to evaluate.

MW: Did you have a difficult transition when you first entered school here?

RL: Oh, boy, yeah. I sure did. We lived in Rockville, Maryland, just outside Washington twelve to fifteen miles. And, good Lord, the houses were nice, a lot of big, green trees. We lived up on the side of a hill where everybody could play. The hill was maybe five acres - it might have been bigger, but it was wooded and very nice. We lived across the way from a wooded area and across from that was a big junior high school. Nothing but space and big trees. We had big, vast yards. We came here and everybody's yards were cordoned off by fences. It seemed like everybody got just a tenth of an acre. It seemed like everybody was confined by the walls of their houses, which is the style of tract housing. It's vastly different coming here to small yards and no greenery as opposed to big yards and big greenery. For a kid used to running around in the wild, I felt very confined and imprisoned here.

MW: Did it impress you that you had to really make your way? Was it just the typical fourteen year-old moves to a new high school or did you feel like you were more sophisticated?

RL: No, not at all. I felt insecure in some respects. You didn't have any friends, a whole new way of life. I went from a school that was middle-class to upper middle-class. There

were no blacks at the grade school I was going to and there were no blacks here, but there were a lot of Mexicans. I just didn't know how to approach them. That was something completely new and different to me.

MW: You had no real exposure to different ethnic groups before you came here?

RL: None whatsoever.

MW: How did you deal with that, other than that initial shock?

RL: I didn't know how to deal with it. You hear the people that have lived in El Paso all their lives and they give them all these racial slurs, whether they're founded or unfounded. I've found myself talking more and more in those terms the longer I've been here. But I didn't know how to act or react. I didn't know if they were vastly inferior like everybody else said or to give them a chance, or whether I should even try to be friendly with them.

MW: Where did you go to high school?

RL: I went to Burgess High School in Cielo Vista. It was the East side when we moved here but now it's East-Central.

MW: Was there an ethnic mix there?

RL: Burgess had some blacks because we were in proximity to the military base. We had quite a lot of Mexicans. I'll say maybe forty-five percent white, forty-five percent Mexican and ten percent black.

MW: Were there any problems?

RL: They had a few small fights, but nothing to say there was a race problem.

MW: You'd say that for the most part there was harmony?

RL: Yeah. There were blacks, whites and browns on the football, basketball and baseball teams. They all got along. When I was in high school from 1969 to 1972 everybody was banning around the anti-war thing. They were all rallying around the anti-Nixon/Vietnam stuff and that seemed to be a great uniter as opposed to being worried about racism.

MW: There was a real unity as far as the student movement went that crossed all ethnic lines then?

RL: It seemed so, yeah. Everybody was at their formative age. They saw something they liked, a different life style or value, and they'd grab onto it whether it was for better or for worse.

MW: What did you see as your life style, your values?

RL: I criticized my father's life styles quite a bit, but still, I think my life styles were very much like his. I worked ever since I was a sophomore in high school. I was a lifeguard at the neighborhood pool during my freshman and sophomore years. In the non-summer months when the pool was closed I used to work part time at the golf course. Then my junior and senior years I worked full time after school and on the weekends at the golf course.

MW: Which golf course was that?

RL: This was Horizon. The golf courses now on the East side weren't really in existence at the time. My dad enjoyed golfing, so therefore I enjoyed golfing. I always had money in my pocket; my dad always made decent money and he always had money in his pocket. I got a car as soon as I could afford one. It just seemed that I was on my way to living the middle-class life.

MW: You didn't really rebel against that when you were in high school?

RL: Not really, no. It was a pretty good life style (laughter).

MW: You said you got a car. Then you must have had a few "hot dates" as they term them?

RL: No, I never really did. The guys I hung around with - we dated some, but we were always just kind of nutsin' around with each other. We dated a few girls. I dated this girl for six months and then I don't know whether I lost her or my best friend stole her away. Then he lost her, too. We both decided that women weren't all that great after all (laughter). We'd been good friends and look what she did for us. When his parents moved, he moved in with us.

MW: If you took a girl out and wanted to impress her, what would you do?

RL: Oh, gosh. There was always the basketball or baseball or

football game. Sometimes you'd go out to eat. Sometimes you'd just go out drinking over in Juarez. But we never got totally trashed because we were always so paranoid of having some Federalie pull you over and throw you in jail or take what little money you had.

MW: You did this in high school?

RL: Yeah, drinking age was twenty-one. We also had a fake I.D. so we could buy alcohol. Our little group of guys were best friends with the cheerleaders. We never really dated them, but after the basketball game, the football game, we'd go out and have some wine or beer. I guess it was our junior year they were coming to meet us after a basketball game. We were going to have a few drinks and then go to the dance. We all got caught - the three of us guys and the three cheerleaders. As I said, we weren't really boyfriend and girlfriend - we all just nutsied around. They were good-looking girls, but I guess they were too good-looking and no one really asked them out. It was kind of one of those deals - we were all just kind of friendly. We got caught with this alcohol and we three guys admitted that we did it and said the girls came to talk to us and didn't even know that we had the alcohol, which is the furtherist thing from the truth. We had to save their

reputations and/or their being cheerleaders. Being junior high school, if they'd been going with guys drinking, it would have gotten around that everything else in the world had happened even though it hadn't. We ended up getting suspended for a week.

MW: How old were you then?

RL: I think we were sixteen or seventeen.

MW: I'll bet your father wasn't very pleased.

RL: No. In fact, I was real worried about that. We got caught on a Friday night and I told him that night. He wasn't upset a bit. Their main thing was how it was going to hurt your grades, which it didn't. When you miss school like that, any test you have, they give you a zero. But it didn't hurt my grades and they weren't real upset. I guess they just felt better that he's drinking than on drugs.

MW: You and your father had a real rapport - you were honest with him and he dealt with you like that?

RL: Yeah, yeah. It/see<sup>didn't</sup>m there was any major problem. He felt "Hey, better out drinking than taking drugs." And we were caught with cheerleaders, so that's better than being caught with a faggot. Though the connotations weren't good, it certainly could have been a whole lot worse (laughter).

MW: There were a lot of drugs around then?

RL: Yeah, back in 1969 everybody was smoking dope and experimenting with LSD. I was on the golf team at Burgess and there

were two guys that were experimenting heavily with drugs. One, I think, was on mescaline and we had to beat on his chest to keep him alive one night. We weren't even with him that night - they were out doing whatever the hell they did and we were just driving. We knew they were over there and we thought we'd just say "Hi" to them. The guy was comatose and we had to beat on his chest to keep him alive until the ambulance could get there to take him to the hospital. When you see stuff like that, you just lose all interest in anything.

MW: You confined your good times to alcohol?

RL: Yeah, pretty much. I've never been much of a smoker; cigarettes never turned me on, and smoke itself . . .

MW: Having worked in a restaurant, you certainly got immune to being bothered by it.

RL: Sure. There was always a smoker in the grill, and, of course, most people who drink heavy are heavy smokers, if you ever noticed. They've got to have one of two things in their hands, either the drink or the cigarette - the more they drink, the more they demand one or the other. It was easy to see that those people that drank real heavy and smoked real heavy weren't going anywhere - they were just buying themselves a quick trip to the grave.



MW: I know you run a lot. You've apparently led a fairly clean life and not abused your body. Is that the way you lead your life overall?

RL: I certainly hope so. As you get older, you can certainly sense that you've only got one body and you better damn well take care of it. When you get into high school and you drink too much, you know you never think about tomorrow. It's always for the moment, for that night or for that afternoon. As you get older, you find that there are values in keeping your lungs and your veins and everything else as young and strong as you can.

MW: Do you watch your diet? Is there anything that you totally eliminate or avoid or eat on purpose?

RL: We're now trying to make a conscious effort to stay away from meat. We used to have meat almost every meal. We're making a conscientious effort to have more chicken and fish. We eat a lot of salads. I'm not a health food junkie or a vegetarian or anything like that.

MW: Is that why you run, or do you run because you enjoy it?

RL: Keeping my weight down and trying to help keep myself in shape. At one time I was in really, really great shape and I just let it go. I got real fat and bulky and I didn't like it. Now I've found it limbers me up and I feel younger.

I still need to lose a little more weight and I'm sure I'll get it off in time. But I feel there's a certain freedom you get from running. You're all by yourself. You can go out and play a round of golf, but you're never satisfied. You can go out and play a great game of racketball, and you're never satisfied. You think you'll play a little bit better. But, regardless of how you run, when you finish, whether it's a four-mile run or two-mile run or six-mile run or ten-mile run, whatever is your limit, you feel good about finishing. And there's that certain success and good feeling about it.

MW: It's not so much just for weight control, but more for the mental release?

RL: Sure, sure. I've found when I build up tensions, running is a great release. I find that I think better, I think clearly, and it's kind of self-cleansing. I'm really to myself.

MW: Was this always part of your life style or did you just start running the past few years?

RL: When I was at Texas Tech that one semester, I was on the dorm soccer team. I enjoyed it and played really well. I got knocked from behind and dislocated my kneecap. The doctor said that after it went back into place, running

would be a good thing to help strengthen the muscles around it. Ever since then, I've been running off and on for the last twelve years.

MW: That's very compatible with your wife's life style now?

RL: Yeah, as it's turned out, she enjoys running, too.

MW: Then you got her into running?

RL: I'm going to say yes. When her dad separated (from her mother), he probably wanted to take off a little weight.

MW: And that was in 1978?

RL: I don't exactly know when they separated, but that's probably close. We took up running and I think Cindy, kind of adoring her father in some ways, took up jogging slightly. She was always a tennis player and in good shape. Then I started running and she took up running, too.

END SIDE ONE - BEGIN SIDE TWO

MW: Do you think that you'll continue running into your fifties?

RL: I certainly hope so. There's so little known about running right now because it became such a fad. It takes ten, twenty years to figure out what's going to happen. We may find that all these runners are going to end up with bad hips, knees and ankles. You might all of a sudden decide - Hey, need to stop running, folks! And who knows, then I'll probably take heed. But I would like to think that running will have a permanent place in my life from here on.

MW: It's something you do as a gift to yourself?

RL: Perhaps so. That's probably a neat way to say it. I find the more I run, the more I want to run, which I guess goes with the medical documentation. When I'm running a lot and I miss a day, I'm certainly down on myself. Right now, we're getting up at five, five-thirty in the morning to run. It's neat, because the air is cool and it's clean and you can watch the sun rise. It seems like a great way to start the day.

MW: It's a real bond with you and your wife?

RL: Some mornings she can't get up and run and I'll go run by myself, and vice versa - I don't get up and run, and she'll run. It's not that we always do it together. She'll go out of town for a couple of days and I'll probably still get up and run by myself. I don't do it to please her; she doesn't do it to please me.

MW: Do you share a lot of things? Do you have what you might call an equal marriage?

RL: I think so. She works hard and I cook most of our meals right now, which doesn't put me out a bit, because I enjoy cooking. Cooking for two people is no great chore. Her hours sometimes run very late and it makes it so when she gets home we can eat.

MW: She's a CPA, isn't she?

RL: Right. If I had to wait for her to get home and cook the meal, we'd be having meals at seven-thirty or eight.

This way, as soon as she gets home, we can eat. She's certainly ready to eat, and she's tired, too, just like I am.

MW: Do you consider yourself a feminist in a way? You don't see yourself as doing woman's work - you don't see this as any sacrifice?

RL: I don't know. Some people might consider cooking woman's work. I know the foods I like and when I'm cooking, I'm cooking the foods I like - and we can eat together. I wouldn't call myself a purist of the feminist cause, but I can sure relate to what they're going through. I think there are a lot of inequities in our society today against women.

MW: Do you consider that you deal with women as individuals?

RL: Sure, sure. I don't look at men here and women way down below. I'm not going to be trapped by generalizations. You've got ignorant women - you've got ignorant men. You've got brilliant women, and you've got brilliant men.

MW: As you were growing up, the women's movement was coming to it's forefront. Do you think that the Gloria Steinem-

Germain Greer school of thought had any effect on you,  
or was this something that your parents gave you?

RL: My parents always had real open discussions and they would discuss things and weigh out the goods and the bads, whether it was buying a new car or a new house or buying new furniture. They always seemed to place equal interest in each other's opinions and to weigh things out. There wasn't (the situation of) my dad says we're going to do this and that's what we're going to do. When planning a vacation, they would both discuss it and figure out what they would both like to do, as well as my brother and I. With that kind of open relationship, you tend to accept that's the way things should be, as long as you get honest and intelligent feedback from each other.

MW: You think you inculcated this from your upbringing versus any rhetoric that came out of the Women's Movement?

RL: The Women's Movement never really affected me. I was certainly aware that women were not treated as equals, but that's been the history of our society. My Lord, they had to wait well over a hundred years before they were able to vote. Maybe it'll be another hundred years before they're legitimately treated as equals.

Robert Lyons

MW: You don't have children; do you think you might?

RL: I think we probably will within the next year or two.

My wife's been working on her career, and I've been trying to get myself established.

MW: So it is definitely in the cards for the future?

RL: Oh, yeah. We want to have a few.

MW: Do you think that as a father you'll be a sharer in the actual child rearing?

RL: I don't know. That's a good question; I don't know how I'll do it. We've got a nephew that we adore, (the son of) Steve and Valerie Foster. The few times we see him, we really enjoy him; we enjoy his company and being around him. We see him strictly in the good times, of course. (It's) the nights where you've got to change him or he's sick or he's keeping you awake at night that drastically changes things. We have another friend with a young son about three or four, and we can see his good comings and his bad comings. I just don't know what kind of father I'll be.

MW: Do you anticipate that it would be a rewarding experience?

RL: Oh, yeah. I think we'll both need to have a child for the simple reason that just being the two of us, we're able to get up and go when we want to. If, on the spur of the

moment, we want to drive up to Cloudcroft, Ruidoso, we can do whatever we want. We will all of a sudden have another human being's needs to service, which should be good. I think we're both slightly selfish.

MW: Then do you think this will somehow strengthen your character?

RL: I hope so. Make me more of a sharing person, yes.

MW: Do you see yourself having more than one child?

RL: I don't see it being more than two, really. I think we both feel that two would be all we really want to have unless we had twins or triplets.

MW: Well, you lived together for five years before you married.

RL: Yes, we did.

MW: And you've been married three years?

RL: Yes.

MW: You don't feel that children would interfere with the freedom, the lifestyle you've made?

RL: No, I don't think so. You just make time for bringing them up and loving them.

MW: If it were necessary for one of you to terminate his career to stay home with the child for a length of time, would it be you or your wife Cindy?

RL: I don't know. We've never discussed that, which is kind of frightening. We discussed it but we don't know the answer.



In the traditional household, it would be her, of course.

However, she has some tremendous earning potential; it may even exceed mine - who knows?

MW: If financially the logical choice would be that you stop working and stay home, would that be uncomfortable for you?

RL: Wouldn't bother me a bit. Obviously, when the child is at school, there's not enough to keep me at home. I could probably find something to do for a few hours a day to bring some money in. The major dilemma would be what to do with the child. We don't really like the idea of leaving the baby at home with a maid. . . for the simple reason if (the maid is) Mexican, (the child may) assume that that Mexican is its mother. Nothing wrong with Mexicans, they'd just assume that this other person is its mother. There have been all sorts of cases where they learned Spanish before they learned English. There've been incidences of the Mexican maid stealing the child and taking it over to Mexico and selling it.

*Very  
interesting*

MW: Would you consider a child care facility as an alternative?

RL: That is an alternative, but it seems like you're institutionalizing a little kid real quick.

MW: Would you see it (a child care facility) as almost a necessity if you did have a child?

RL: That's the main thing we're worried about. We don't really

want to dump it on a parent or a grandparent, because it's not fair to them. That's probably the major dilemma right now.

MW: That's the thing that's keeping you from having children right now?

RL: That, and my wife likes expensive cars (laughter). With her car payment and insurance, she has to work; otherwise, she'll have to go back to driving what everybody else drives. That's what she wants, so she must work to pay for it. Like she said, that's going to be her baby for the next three years until it's paid off. We've discussed it and we're saving some money. In three years we hope to get a house and I think we'd both enjoy a swimming pool. We'll get a house and a swimming pool and about that time try to have a child.

MW: Do you think that what you want might have changed in those three years?

RL: Perhaps so. The whole thing is probably a sense of security, too.

MW: If you could place your life into three or four year segments, in blocks, would you say there have been significant changes in each of them?

RL: Oh, yeah. As I get older, more conservative. I was never really liberal or radical, but I find myself getting more

and more conservative.

MW: If you could go back and be sixteen again, would you do something different? How would you live your life if you were sixteen now?

RL: I don't know if I would change anything. High school was never great, but it was never bad. I was always working and it always seemed like I kept working. Ever since I was fourteen or fifteen, I've had a job. I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have a job.

MW: There's nothing you might change?

RL: No, not really. I worked, like I said. Maybe my one fault was I had about three or four very close friends and I just excluded everyone else. We all had the same friends and we were all friends with each other. A lot of people have big groups of friends and they're marginally friendly with all of them. I had a small group that was very close to me. One friend's mom was sick in the hospital with cancer, and we'd sit with her. When one guy's parents moved, he moved in with us. I felt like he was family to me. We'd been through grade school, and when I first moved here, he befriended me and we've been outstanding friends a long time. When I'd go to his house, his parents would say, "Hey, stay for dinner." They treated <sup>me</sup> like part of the family as opposed to just a friend of their son's. We had that kind of relationship.

MW: Do you feel that you missed something by not having a lot of friends?

RL: Maybe so. I went away to Texas Tech and when I came back to town, he (one friend) had gone away to UT Austin, and another (friend) had gone down to Corpus Christi. I was left here without any friends. My parents had gone to Mexico. I'm house-sitting for my parents and my brother still has another couple of years in school, and he's having problems adjusting. Maybe if I'd had more friends I could have had some other things to do. My first year at UTEP, all I did was school and home, school and home. I worked a little, too, and that was it.

MW: Then the fraternity was really a life saver for you, wasn't it?

RL: Yeah, that created a new lifestyle for me and it wasn't a bad lifestyle. It was a new dimension, probably, as opposed to lifestyle. I met people, and there were parties and a little sports activity. . . a real broad dimension.

MW: Do your parents live in town now?

RL: Right. They're still in town, and are gone maybe two months out of the year. We see them probably every Sunday.

MW: Do you consider that you have a close relationship with them?

RL: The problem is, you want to see them but don't want to feel

they are meddling in your life. You want your own life.

MW: Do they meddle?

RL: No, not really. But given a chance, they probably would.

Given enough room, I'm sure they would. No, they don't really meddle.

MW: Are your grandparents still alive?

RL: Yeah, in fact, they live here. They are my dad's parents.

They lived in Spokane, Washington, and my dad talked them into coming here. Grandmother is eighty-two and granddad's eighty.

MW: And they still get around O. K.?

RL: Oh, they get around great. They probably get around better than we do, oddly enough.

MW: Do you get along with them well?

RL: Very well. They're ultra conservatives. I think you'll find middle-class people that are comfortable and happy are conservative; they don't want anything to change. The more you have, the less change you want. People who are downtrodden and stricken are the ones crying for change, which you can understand. They're not happy with their station in life.

MW: How often do you see your grandparents?

RL: About the same, once a week.

MW: Do you usually see them as a group?

RL: Yes. We go over for dinner sometimes.

MW: Is that usually fun; is it pleasant for you?

RL: Usually, it's fun. There is a nice exchange of thoughts.

Normally, we'll sit down waiting for dinner at my place or my grandparent's or my parent's house, with dinner planned for seven o'clock. At eight o'clock my younger brother still has not shown up. He's playing Dragons and Dungeons with some of his friends, or something like that, and we're still pacing around. Everybody's hungry, and we don't know whether John is going to show up or not.

MW: How do the families get along?

RL: I think Sue<sup>(my mother-in-law)</sup> has had my parents over once or twice, which was part of the wedding. She's been over there once or twice.

MW: How is that mother-in-law/son-in-law relationship?

RL: I get along with Sue pretty well - I have no problems with her. There's no animosity or antipathy and we communicate well. The main reason I don't go more often is the thirty-five minute drive each way.

MW: Do your families mesh when there is a big family gathering?

RL: There are no hostilities, but then, hostilities would be on the Foster side of the family inasmuch as Joe(my father-in-law) and Sue are divorced now. Times we've gotten together,

there has been harmony.

MW: Do you think you might get involved in the city - say, run for office?

RL: I don't know. My boss is on the airport board and he's often told me he'd like to run me for Eastside alderman. Right now, that has no great interest for me. There may come a time when I feel more civic-minded. I'll be open to it; I won't close any doors. With the new charter, the mayor rules supreme anyway. He can override the aldermen, so any great effort set forth by one or two or even all the aldermen can be quickly overridden by the stroke of a gavel.

MW: If you had one wish, what would it be?

RL: Oh, just to be comfortable the rest of my life. Good health. There has to be some financial (security) and some happiness. You can't be comfortable if you're broke, and you can't be comfortable if you're unhealthy. Let the good times roll and everything like that.

MW: You're happy with your life now?

RL: Working where I work is a day-to-day, emotional rollercoaster. The high pressure of the business sometimes gets to my bosses, and when they break under the pressure, it passes right on down the chain-of-command.

MW: Is there any statement you would like to make?

RL: There is just one saying that sticks in my mind: "Pick your enemies well, for you will soon be just like them," which is telling you to be very, very careful. The people you don't like are probably very much like you. The people you dislike, you may dislike because they are very much like you. Live and learn by your dislikes.

MW: You've managed to avoid mistakes by doing that?

RL: Oh, I just try to minimize the major mistakes.

MW: Do you think you're a better person because of it?

RL: Well, I hope so.

MW: As far as dealing with other people?

RL: I hope so, especially with where I work. My Lord, you almost have to be a social psychologist to work where I do. To get people to work, you have to be artistic - you can't yell and scream at these people. They don't like whites; they are all Mexicans. They don't like a white man, anyway.

MW: There's an ethnic line drawn?

RL: Oh, boy. When I first went there, no one liked me.

MW: Because you were white?

RL: Yes. I was the white man entering a Mexican world.

MW: The person who functioned in your capacity before had been Mexican?

RL: There had been a series of white guys who had all been failures.



There needed to be a breach between the ownership and the front office and the people running the plant. The Mexican people that had been there before had been successful in running them all off.

MW: You're the front line then?

RL: Yes. There are the factory workers and everything that is performed in the factory, whether it be making the boots or prepping for another store through shelving and pulling boots and ordering. I'm the go-between for everything.

MW: Do you feel like you've been successful in bringing them around to seeing you not as the anglo who is cracking the whip?

RL: Yes. They realize that in many respects I try to work for their benefit as opposed to their detriment. They don't see me as a taskmaster. They see me as someone sensitive to their problems.

MW: How do you convey that to them?

RL: I just get out there and work with them and sweat with them and cut my hands up working with them. The other managers who've been there have tried to dress nicely, would yell and scream at them, and then retire to an air-conditioned office. I'm out there in the sweat house for eight to eight and a half hours a day. (I show them) we're here for

a purpose and we might as well do the best job we can.

MW: There's a genuine rapport with you and the workers?

RL: Yeah. They treat me better and respect me more than they first did.

MW: Do you still feel there is animosity, an undercurrent?

RL: Well, the simple fact is I'm not one of them; I'm not a poor Mexican and I can't be cognizant of their problems and their lives.

MW: How do you feel about that? Do you feel you understand to the limits of your ability?

RL: Well, you've got to go into the whole Mexican lifestyle. There is the patron system. First of all, patron, you're going to pay me a little bit of money. You're not going to pay me quite what I'm worth, so therefore, I can steal a little.

MW: I've heard you frisk the workers before they leave for lunch and then again before they leave for the day.

RL: Yes, because they've been stealing.

MW: Certainly that creates animosity.

RL: Certainly it does, but I've joked with them and tried to develop a little rapport while I'm doing it.

MW: Do they realize you have to do this because someone else tells you to do it?

RL: It's not my own idea, but that's the way they perceive it.

The old patron system says, "I'm going to pay you a little bit, and it's O.K. for you to steal a little bit, and it will all balance out." The other idea is, "We're poor Mexicans and we need to steal a little bit just to make ends meet." At one time, my boss believed in the patron system, but no more.

MW: When did this stop?

RL: When I got there and I showed them that about \$80,000 worth of materials were being taken.

MW: So you have managed to cut losses and yet maintain a rapport with them?

RL: The situation is this. I showed my bosses that a lot of exotic leathers and other materials were being taken.

But what if I didn't see it all? Maybe the \$80,000 was really \$160,000 or \$200,000. Good Lord knows, the boys (the owners) make some money.

MW: Do you feel this is a higher stress level job, even though you're working fewer hours, than the restaurant business?

RL: In some respects, yes. I had regular customers who came in (the restaurant). Probably eighty percent of the people were the same faces, and they came in three or four times a week. You could screw up their drinks, their lunch, and

they had been there so often, it didn't phase them. Yet, everyday is a new problem (at Cowtown), and you've got to overcome it. Like today, the air compressors blew out and air is used in so many things. So, there are always problems - materials not arriving when they should, and so forth. I feel that I can cope with it (the stress).

MW: Is there any final thing you'd like to say?

RL: No, no. No epilogue.