

6-23-1978

## Interview no. 728

Eloisa Carvalho

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Eloisa Carvalho (1895- )  
INTERVIEWER: Sarah E. John  
PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 23, 1978  
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted  
TAPE NO.: 728  
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 728

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Former Assistant to the Probation Officer in El Paso, 1930s and 1940s; campaign worker for various Democratic candidates in El Paso and volunteer worker for various organizations.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biographical information; recollections of old El Paso; work as Assistant to the Probation Officer; her involvement in various political campaigns; problems of senior citizens; improvements in living conditions for Mexican-Americans.

Length of interview: 1 hour, 10 minutes Length of transcript: 33 pages

Eloisa Carvalho  
By Sarah E. John  
June 23, 1978

C: I used to be Cordova, one of the Cordovas down the valley. My maiden name was Cordova.

J: When and where were you born, please?

C: I was born at Ysleta, March 6, 1895.

J: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, please?

C: My parents, as I told you before, my mother died when I was two years old. Then my father passed away when I was five. So really, I don't even remember my mother's features, you know. My sister is the one that raised me. We lived at Ysleta with my father.

J: You mentioned he was a jeweler at that time.

C: [Yes.] He used to make a lot of, you know, earrings and rings and what have you, and some of these what we call in Spanish...or the Mexican people, some are very devout Catholics, you know, and they offer this saint and this other saint, "Get me out of trouble." And my father used to make those little figurines for them and they would take them across the river to Zaragoza. Then you could cross on horseback or buggy and nothing was...you could go back and forth. My father used to go across a lot of times. When people didn't have money to pay for the work he did, he would bring in, take anything--like wheat, and then have it [ground] for tortillas and biscuits, whatever.

J: So it was all in trade if it wasn't in cash.

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C: [Yes.] Or a sack of beans or chile. That's the reason we didn't lack for anything.

J: You mentioned to me that after both of your parents passed away you moved here to El Paso with your older sister.

C: We moved to El Paso after my father died, yes. My sister married William Buchanan. There was three brothers, I think-- James, George, and Bill. William married my sister. Then we came to live here, opened a little grocery store on Tornillo and Second, so we lived there. And my sister passed away, so I was left an orphan with five brothers.

J: You were mentioning to me also about the schools you attended when you lived here.

C: I went to Alamo School for a while, and then I went with the sisters at Sacred Heart till I graduated from grammar school, Sacred Heart. Then I went to Loretto for two years. And Loretto was on El Paso Street.

J: Oh, yes. I've seen some old pictures of that building.

C: And I had to quit school because I had to do the housework for my brothers.

J: We had started to talk a little bit about the social activities of that time.

C: Well, the social activities, we had dances, we had hayrides, picnics. And there was a couple of clubs, you know, for recreation . They had a dance twice a month and hayrides almost every weekend, at night, you know.

J: Where did you go on the hayrides?

C: We went to Ysleta. From El Paso we went to Ysleta and then got

back about 10:00, eleven. We were always supervised, you know. But the boys at that time were pretty decent. And the girls of course were, you know, they taught us, especially the sisters, "Don't even let man touch you." So we were pretty careful about that, and the boys were. And then we had supervision, always had somebody go with us, you know--"No, don't do that. And don't you go away, stay right here. Don't get away from me."

J: You were watched pretty closely at that time.

C: [Yes.] So we had a good time. We had tardeadas. You know what that is, don't you? We had those on Sunday afternoons. And then we had this Alamo park. It was a nice place then. They had music there, and you know how the Mexican people were--the boys on one side, and the girls on the other.

J: Would you mind naming some of the families that you grew up in this area with?

C: Well, there were the Magoffins. Miss Glasgow still lives there. And then we had the Vails, Austins, and I think some Hamlins. There's so many of 'em that I can't recall so many of them. Then of course I got married and I had three boys. One of 'em died, he was drowned, and then I have two still living. I'm a grandmother, I'm a great-grandmother.

J: You had mentioned before that the Mexican American families and the Anglo families got along very well together.

C: Yeah, we got along swell. There wasn't any distinction then about the race or color. Of course, you know, the blacks always, they always kept to themselves, they never came around.

We had very few. I think the Magoffins were the ones that had a colored cook and that's about all. The Coles had Mexican help. But there wasn't any distinction. 'Cause I know my aunts, two of my father's sisters...in fact, I have a clipping, but I gave it to my son, about them having this party up at old Fort Bliss. And [it] mentions two of my aunts, Margarita Smith and Josefa Cordova, which she married a Valdez after that. And I had two uncles, one of 'em was Chris Christopher. He was the first man that drove the stagecoach.

J: From where?

C: From Ysleta to...I think it was Van Horn or Sierra Blanca. And he got held up one time. So I think he killed a man, but it was, you know, in self defense. So we lived there in Ysleta for quite a while with all the Lowensteins, Buchanans, Smiths, Rodelas, McVays--all pioneers down there. There're very few now.

J: Have they all mostly moved here to El Paso?

C: They only ones I know right now are Frank Alderete, Jr. and the McVays; Rodelas, I think two of 'em live down the valley; and that's about all. Because the Buchanans passed away, the Lowensteins passed away, all of 'em passed away. So we have very few pioneers.

J: I guess maybe their children also have moved away from this area, too.

C: Well, they moved away from Ysleta. Usually most of them came to live in El Paso. But some of 'em went to California and different places, you know. My brothers grew up, they didn't

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want to stay here, so they scattered all over--one to California, one in Mexico, and all over.

J: You mentioned that your father used to go to Juarez.

C: He used to cross [to] Zaragosa, you know.

J: And he used to cross all the time. Did you ever go with him on any of those trips?

C: Not on horseback.

J: When is the first time that you remember going to Juarez or to Zaragosa?

C: I think [I] was five years old when my father used to go and have the wheat [ground]. And we didn't have anything like that in Ysleta, so they had to cross the river to get to Juarez.

J: Was there a lot of intermingling with the people from both sides of the border at that time, do you remember?

C: Not very much. Well, I only went once with my father and that was to get the wheat, you know. But a lot of the people in Ysleta used to cross every day and get stuff over there to eat, and they would take [other things] over. So it was very good relations.

J: You were in El Paso during the time of the Mexican Revolution, then, is that correct?

C: When Villa was...?

J: Yes.

C: Yeah.

J: Do you remember anything about that? Did you see any fighting or do you remember any of the feeling at that time?

C: Well, I remember that by the smelter, that's where Pancho Villa

was. They had one of these, what do you call those bridges that swing back and forth? What do you call it?

J: I can't think of the name.

C: Well, I can't either. Anyway, the bridge would swing back and forth as you walked.

J: It was a rope type.

C: Yeah. And we saw the Maderos here at the smelter. And some of the ladies, the young ladies, were rolling bandages for the wounded, and we used to get out there and just sit there and watch. Pancho Villa, I can remember him with a big hat. I can remember when Taft and Porfirio Diaz were here.

J: What do you remember about that time? I know the city went all out for the welcome.

C: Well, the thing that I remember the most is...this is funny. I thought Porfirio Diaz was a big man, you know. And Taft [was] big and fat. So they met there at the bridge. When I saw the president of Mexico, I was flabbergasted because he was so short and the other one was so big! That's the only thing I can remember.

J: Yeah, the contrast between the two men.

C: Yeah. But lot of these young ladies then were doing Red Cross work for the revolution. Oh, so many things happened, you know. They were not bad. They were pretty good about everything. Now what we have is, you know, all these juvenile delinquents and dope. You never had anything like that before. Very peaceful people. And they used to help each other. If anyone was sick the neighbors would come. If somebody died,



the whole neighborhood was at the funeral or helping us out.

So it was a real nice thing.

J: What year did you get married?

C: I got married in 1921.

J: How did you meet your husband?

C: He was a mail carrier, used to deliver the mail. And we just...one of those things, you know, you get married.

J: Well, I guess they didn't have dating as we do now at that time, or did you? I mean, were you able to see him, go out with him at that time, or were you always supervised? Did one of your brothers have to go with you?

C: No, no, no. When I got married my brothers were all gone, married themselves. So I married him. After we got married we used to go to the show. That was the only thing.

J: Is that how you spent your typical weekends?

C: We didn't have a car or anything. We could have friends in or we'd go to the friends' houses and spend the day. Or take food and have a picnic either in the backyard or go someplace, those that had buggies and horses.

J: Did you work anytime either before or after you got married? Did you have any jobs?

C: Oh, sure. I worked for the American Express Company for some time.

J: Is this after you were married or before you were married?

C: After, when I lost my husband. The American Express Company, I wasn't married then when I worked for them for about a year. Then after my husband passed away, why, I got a job [as] the

Assistant to the Probation Officer, Mr. Guinn, in 1933. Judge McGill defeated Judge McClintock, who had been County Judge for 25 years. And then Jack Guinn was appointed by Judge McGill as Probation Officer for juveniles, and I was his assistant. And I worked there for 17 years.

J: Are there any interesting stories that you can remember about your years working there with the Probation Office?

C: Oh, we had so many interesting stories because we used to handle delinquents, underprivileged kids, adoptions. And during the war you know, when the soldiers were here, we had all these Mexican little girls from nine up to 15, 16 coming over, having sexual relations. And it turns out that all of these girls, we had to pick 'em up. And then there was something in a paper about me, that "Eloisa Carvalho states that more soldiers have been sick with this contact with these young girls than war fatalities."

J: Was this during World War II?

C: [Yes.] But they were terrible, those little girls, you know. Then we had a man--finally he was sent to the penitentiary--having all these young girls come from Juarez. And he had two rooms on South El Paso Street with dirt floors and a couple of those Army blankets and had all these men come in there to have sexual relations with these little girls. And then he was a fence for a lot of these juveniles stealing bicycles and what have you, and he would buy them. So finally he was sentenced to the penitentiary.

J: That's a very interesting story.

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C: I feel very proud about myself because one of my girls, the worst, one of the worst delinquents in El Paso went and joined the Army and she married one of the big shots, a colonel. And she still lives up in San Francisco. Then I had another one that joined the Waves and she married an Admiral. Then I had another one and she joined the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Ysleta. So when she received her veil, she asked the sisters to please have me there because I was the only one, she didn't have a father or mother, that took care of her; and hadn't it been for me, she doesn't know what would have become of her. So she said, "Would you please have her here?" I did. And it was a very happy occasion 'cause I was so glad that she joined the sisters. And some of the boys, I had about 124 boys in the different branches of the Army, the Navy. Instead of sending them to the training school I used to ask the judges to give me a chance to get in touch with the Army, the Navy, the Air Corps, and they would take 'em in, see. So I had 124 kids that were writing to me and I was writing to them.

J: That's nice.

C: And here the other day, you know, I had belonged to the Veterans of Foreign Wars for 35 years. I met a young man; well, not young, about forty. And he looked at me and I looked at him and I thought, "Gee whiz, that face is so familiar." And he looked at me, he says, "Eloisa." I said, "Ray." And that was Raymond, one of my worst boys. He went to Gatesville and he was so mad at me, you know. So he came up and he said, "Eloisa, if it hadn't been for you, I don't know where I'd be

now." He says, "I have learned everything about mechanics." And he has a shop, his own shop, works for himself, and is doing beautifully here in El Paso.

J: So you were sort of a counselor, foster mother.

C: I was everything--mother. (Chuckles) We had one incident that was really pitiful. I mean, I felt terrible. We had one of these Anglo boys--very good family, the father is a physician and the mother was a school teacher. They had a beautiful home. He had a car, his mother had a car, his father had car. And he goes out and steals a jeep from Fort Bliss. So they brought him in, you know. It was a federal offense and they were gonna send him to the federal reformatory. I said, "Give me a chance to talk to the boy." He wouldn't say one word why he did it. So anyway, they gave me a chance with the boy, about a half hour, and he told me his whole history. He said the reason he did it, that he stole this jeep, is because to get even with his mother. His mother was having a boyfriend. And he resented it very much but he wouldn't tell his father about it. So, that's why he did, just to get revenge on his mother. So, "Let's give him a chance and let him report to me monthly." So he straightened out and went to college, and he's a doctor himself. I had a lot of these experiences.

And one time Dell White and I went up to pick some kids, and believe you me, we sat 'em in the back seat. We never thought a thing about these kids, they were from Juarez, until we got upstairs to search 'em. And two of 'em had a gun each. Oh, they could've killed us, you know. We never thought

nothing about it.

J: How old were the kids?

C: They were only 12 and thirteen. They had stolen the guns.

J: That was a close call.

C: [Yes,] it was a close call. So oh, I don't know. There are so many things I can remember, you know, but it would take you all night.

J: Well, as many as you want to tell, we're willing to listen to all of them.

C: We had a case where the Goodwill Boys Club used to be where the Catholic Daughters of America [is now].

J: Right up the street.

C: [Yes.] And some of the kids, there were about 12 kids involved, and this place had a basement. But it wasn't like it is now, it was all torn to pieces. And there was about 12 kids stealing dynamite. They had dynamite in that building, they had guns and they had everything. It so turned out that the dynamite belonged to Fort Bliss. Then we found out, someone said, "Well, there was a boy mixed up in it about 12 years old and he was wearing tennis shoes, blue tennis shoes." "Oh, oh," I says, "I know who that is." 'Cause it was one of our boys, in east El Paso. So we went there at night and we picked him up. He confessed that they had stolen [it]. And they took us out right by the river you know, by the riverbank. They hid the guns. They dug a hole and put the guns in there. So we never knew anything about it until the kid told us. And every one of 'em could've been blown to high heaven.

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J: Did they give you any reason why they had done this?

C: No, it was just one of these things, and they thought, well, it was a lot of fun to play with them. When one of these Fort Bliss officers came over, he says, "My God, these kids could have blown the building and blown themselves to high heaven." Twelve of 'em.

J: That's amazing.

C: So there're many things.

J: Lots of experiences.

C: But I don't know, I was very happy there because there's some people I could help, you know, and others I could not help. Then some of the little babies that were left during World War II, that their husbands went away and the ladies were infatuated with the soldiers. They forgot all about their kids. They were getting very good money from the government and still the kids were eating out of the dumps, because their mothers had gone to Juarez to the dance hall and forgotten all about the kids. But we filed on them, brought 'em back, make 'em realize the responsibility they had with these children. Some, oh, they started crying and they didn't want their husbands to know. As far as we were concerned everything was confidential. You just couldn't divulge anything. But they came around and made pretty good mothers after that. Then we placed a lot kids up for adoptions, you know. I still have two of them that visit me once in a while. They're in business for themselves and just doing beautifully, married with children of their own.

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J: You worked there how many years all together?

C: Seventeen.

J: Seventeen years. Boy, how many experiences you went through in those years.

C: Father Thomas and I were going to write a book on juvenile delinquents, but he left.

J: That would be great. You could do it, you should do it by yourself.

C: Well, Sometimes I started thinking about it. You know, at night I start thinking, "Well, I could write a book. Or I could write some of these stories that would really, you know...things that really happened." But I'm too darn lazy, I guess. Now what else do you want to know?

J: Well, I'd like to know, do you remember the first time you voted? What year it was, more or less?

C: Let me tell you, the first time I voted was in 1933. We used to have hand ballots, you know--piece of paper with the names of the candidates. And you'd put a cross here and a cross there, and that was the way we voted. It took weeks to find the results of who won the [election].

J: It was hand counted.

C: Yeah. Not like now. Sometimes they'd take a whole month before the poor candidate knew whether he was elected or not. It was funny. Down the valley I used to see--I was too young then, I didn't vote, of course--but they had a bunch of these prominent citizens, you know, like the Alderetes and Escajedas, who was the first county clerk here. And they had the

grandfather. So every time they had an election, he would go put his gun there. And then if they didn't vote for the one that they want, here's the gun. I'm telling you!

J: There wasn't any privacy at all.

C: No, it was terrible. Now I think it was the most terrible thing that could happen. And then one time they got all these wetbacks, you know, from Juarez that came over, and they got 'em all drunk. So they took 'em to the county jail. But you know their purpose, the next day was election day. They got all these guys, put 'em in the jail. They said, "Okay, if you vote our way we're gonna let you out." Well, every one of 'em said, "Of course we will, you just let us know who." They were even aliens, they were not even citizens. The things they used to do before.

J: The politics weren't too clean at that time. (Laughter)

C: They had a lot of fun. I mean, you know, they got their man, whoever it was. No women of course, then. So they all got elected, but they had to get all these poor guys drunk. They didn't even know what they were doing. And could care less because...

J: They were gonna get out of jail anyway.

C: They were terrible.

J: How did you become politically involved in this city?

C: In 1933 when Judge McGill ran for office. I got interested because McGill was very good to these Catholic people, you know. So he ran for office and defeated McClintock. So I was a widow with three kids, three of my own, and my sister's child



that I raised, four. So I had to work for a living. My husband had passed away. And at that time everything was so hard to get, you know--jobs. So I said, "Sure, I'll work, if you promise to give me a job. I need the job very badly, because I have to support my children." So, the County Judge said...not he, it was Perkins. And Bill Griffith told him, and he was County Commissioner then. So he got the others. They compromised that if they would give a job to Perkins, they would also put me to work. So it was arranged. So I went into work, and I was there for 17 years. And then one of my probation officers, one of my boss, got killed coming from Gatesville. The car overturned and he killed himself. Fortunately the boys didn't get one scratch. So there I was, 17 years sweating it out, "What's gonna be next?"

You have heard about Callie Fairley?

J: No.

C: She was a policewoman. And she and I used to work the bars, you know till two, three o'clock in the morning to get these young girls out. It wasn't then like it is now that they have these probation officers and counselors and all what have you. We used to go out and get the girls out of the bars at that time, and put 'em through the clinic and see how they came out, and then go see their parents and tell them about it. So, it was a real...one of these jobs that a lot of people wouldn't touch. But Callie Fairley was, she was a little woman, put boy, she was [a] dynamo. And as soon as they saw the [two of us], "Here comes Eloisa and Fairley, let's get out."

J: They knew you meant business.

C: And then we had a lot of these underprivileged kids or handicapped. We had a guy that was going blind, and his father and mother, they had three boys. And oh, you should see the condition the oldest boy was in. He was feeble minded completely. But we got a call that these people were having this boy live out in a tent like a dog. They used to tie him and just hand him his food, you know, right in the middle of the sun. So we went out there to investigate. And sure enough, oh, he acted like a wild...like a beast, not a human being. Anyway we persuaded...we had to put the parents in jail to give us their consent to send that boy to the state, I think it was Waco. And the other one, the youngest one was going blind. He's still around here. And every time he sees me, why, "Here comes my mama." So anyway, he went blind. We sent him to Austin State School, and do you know now he's one of the big politicians here. He works politics. He's not a, you know, officer or nothing, but he works politics. And he knows how to read and write, and speaks beautiful English. But we had to put the parents in jail 'cause all of them were syphilitic, and that was the reason they were feeble minded. And that guy's still around.

So we had so many things like that we had to contend with. The parents wouldn't believe in sending the kids out there, but they believed in tying the kids, put a tent up there, and the sun was just...I don't know, they were just like animals. And both the father and mother had the same thing. So we kept them

in jail until they were clear. So, I don't know. I can think of so many things. But as I said, it would take you all night.

J: Did you ever work for any political campaigns or anything like that?

C: I worked for every candidate here in El Paso since 1933 to the present.

J: Who are some of the people that you worked for, you helped?

C: Well, I worked for Judge McGill, I worked for Judge Mulvey-- every one of those men in the courthouse--Sam Callan and Shulte and Berliner, Galvan, Judge Pena. Oh, I worked for so many. We worked for Hubert Humphrey, we worked of the presidents, and for Kennedy. George Finger was his campaign manager. And I have worked for almost every one of these candidates. The last one was Mickey Solis, and he got it. But it's hard work. Now the people are more voting-minded, especially senior citizens. They have come to realize it. And the candidates have come to realize that the senior citizens are the ones that get them elected. The young people care less. You know, they won't even go to vote. They say, "Oh, okay, we'll be there," and, "What's the difference, he's just like the rest of 'em. But senior citizens take it very seriously. Dan Ponder was here yesterday at the high rise, had a meeting there, and promised us that, oh, he would fix San Antonio Street, and a light there where these people, handicapped people that have the walkers and have to have a cane or a help to go across to the Dairy Queen for their meals, he said he would do it. So we're just keeping our fingers crossed and hoping.

J: In all those years you worked for all the candidates that you mentioned, do you remember any funny stories or interesting stories that came out about any of those campaigns?

C: If I did I don't remember now. But there were a lot of funny ones, I'll tell you.

J: What type of work exactly did you do?

C: Well, I was first assistant to the Probation Officer. I used to go to schools for the truants and even to the churches. Once my boss sent me to this colored church on Virginia Street where they were baptizing those great big ladies and men, putting 'em in a tub of water. Oh, it was funny. And I did so many things, you know. At that time we had all the juveniles--like orphaned kids, adoptions--until the welfare came in.

J: With the political candidates, did you pass out handbills or work counting the votes, or what did you do with your candidates?

C: Oh, I have always worked...well, let's see what I was. I was precinct chairman when I first moved to Northeast El Paso with one of my sons. We didn't even have lights over there. So there was nothing about elections or voting or what. So I went in there and I got elected as precinct chairman, and then I got people interested in politics, like Ray Gilmore and Frances Butler, Jackie Cazares and Juanita Adams, and so many of those ladies in Northeast that had never taken part in anything like that. So then we started and we organized the Northeast Democratic Club with Sam Rutherford and John Stewart, and so many of 'em that have left town. And then Northeast El Paso

came on the map.

J: Where were you living at that time?

C: I was living on Whyburn Street in Sun Valley.

J: That was pretty far out at that time.

C: Yeah, Lord! And then the buses were running every two hours. It was terrible. Nothing but sand--no roads, no sidewalks, no streetlights. And the buses running and stopping at these places, and it was so dark you didn't know where you were getting off.

J: What year was this when you were precinct chairman there?

C: I think it was '35, '36, '37. And then I went to organize, got the people together, so we had the different schools to work in. Frances Butler left El Paso. They became very wealthy with oil wells. And I think they moved to Houston or Austin.

J: Do you remember any important Mexican American politicians in the earlier days?

C: Well, in the earlier days, down the valley we had the Escajedas, Alderete, and Lowensteins, Bob Creighton, Louie Foyt. And here we had Bill Griffith, John Andress. Ivey down the valley, Commissioner for Fabens. And Andress was the upper valley, Ivey was down the valley. Bill Griffith was here, and Alex Gonzalez was Commissioner from Ysleta. The Gonzalez family and the Alderetes and Candelarias and all those are related. They were born and raised right there in Ysleta. A lot of the boys saw service overseas.

J: Why do you think that until recent times the Mexican Americans have had such little representation in Politics? Lately we've

had more, but in the earlier days why do you think they didn't have so much representation?

C: I don't know. They were not interested in politics evidently, because as I said before, every family down the valley--we're talking about those times--had enough to eat and they raised their own...they were farmers most of 'em. They raised their crops and bring 'em to El Paso to sell. And they didn't want to be bothered with politics. In fact they didn't even want to vote. And then at that time we had to pay a dollar and 75 cents for poll tax.

J: Do you think that was a strong deterrent at that time?

C: Evidently it was. But I see now that more people are now interested in politics more than ever, because we think that the Mexican American, that we are the minorities now. We're the underprivileged people. Because the black now has everything he wants. And President Carter has been, you know, very good to them. And he promised some of the Mexican people here, Mexican Americans, they had a meeting in Detroit and he promised that he was going to give more American Mexicans responsible positions than ever before. But it isn't true. Now they have very few. Like here in El Paso, now they have Alicia Chacon and then Danny Anchondo who's just a Democratic Committeeman, and I don't think that's such a big responsibility. Now of course more women are coming in, for which I'm very glad, because before their husband wouldn't let them go alone, or they wouldn't register 'cause they have to stay home and take care of the kids. The Mexican man has

always been like that. He thinks himself muy macho. And some of 'em are not worth the powder to blow themselves. They forget about their families, and the wife has to do all of the work, take care of the kids. But now it's getting much better.

J: In your eyes has there been an improvement in the way of life or conditions for the Mexican Americans here?

C: Oh, very much so. With the government complexes that we have now, our people are beginning to realize that they have a... Like for instance you take my neighbors next door. They never lived in nothing like this. They used to have toilets outside, the water outside. They didn't even know how to flush the toilet, they didn't know how to turn the electric stove on, 'cause they had never had a chance like that until now that the government is opening up these places. And they're living much better now, they're cleaner. And they are trying to improve themselves. For which we should be very thankful to the government. Like for instance, me. Where could I get an apartment like this for less than \$150 a month, or more? And we can't afford it. So some of these people \_\_\_\_\_. And they've got everything. Nutrition centers, they have their food, their noon meal there, and they have very good food. They don't have to cook. Two of the ladies here said, "Well, we like to go because we just don't want to wash dishes no more." So they go over there and have their meals and then come home. Some of 'em are very...they do beautiful work with their hands, you know--knitting flowers, so many things. Still they're not very active in politics. These people here, the

men will go out and vote. The ladies that are here living by themselves, they have all registered 'cause I've had the registration and got 'em all.

J: So you haven't quit yet.

C: No, I haven't. I don't know, I'll quit when I die, I guess. My sons are always after me, "Mother, are you ever gonna quit?"

J: Did you ever work for Woodrow Bean, or work with him at all?

C: Yeah. The old one or the young one?

J: The old one.

C: Both of 'em. Yeah, I've helped Woodrow Bean in everything that he has run for.

J: He's a very colorful character here in this town.

C: Oh, I love him because it was through him and Nick Perez that I got this cottage. I was living up in the high rise, in one of these apartments we call efficiency, where they have a kitchen and everything in just one room. And so they made it possible for me to get this. So I'm indebted to Woody. Everything he's run for I worked my head off for Woody. And I did for his son now. Woody was the one that gave me a beautiful purse made at Tony Lama's. Dr. Martinez was there when we had this farewell party for Alicia. He presented me with this beautiful bag. And George McAlmon is also a very good friend, Mrs. McAlmon. Bert Williams, el pajarito.

J: He grew up in this area also.

C: Oh, he was born right here on Olive Street. We worked when he was real young selling papers to help his mother, his mother was a widow. And she lived in the high rise for about two



years. So he learned Spanish before he did English.

J: Yes, he lived in the same area that my godparents and my mother and her family also lived, on Magoffin and Olive during several years. They also grew up in this area, and they remember him very well.

C: Yeah, San Antonio Street was the most famous street in El Paso. And the longest one, because [it starts] from way west way up to East El Paso.

J: That's right. It went all the way.

C: And the people, well, we didn't have money, but our morals, whatever you call them, were good you know. And all the people that lived around here were very nice people. Some were wealthy like the Magoffins and Coles and Vails. But we lived among them and it was real nice.

J: I'd like to go back in time again a little bit and ask you if you remember anything about the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic. Did that hit El Paso pretty strongly?

C: Oh, yes, it was terrible here. They didn't have enough nurses or hospital rooms to put them in.

I remember one incident, I was still very [young], my mother was living, I think--that Salt War. The Indians, you know, used to come up to Ysleta. We didn't have the windows like we have here now. They were real high and very small. And they were afraid of the Indians with that Salt War. And I can barely remember that one of my aunts was making sopaipillas, you know what they are. Then these Indians came by and started hollering and dancing. So she got close to the

window, and then she threw one of these pans, un sarten, of grease, shortening, that she was making the sopaipillas, at the Indians. And I think she burned that Indian up. But they were so, they were impossible. They would steal everything you had. And then they couldn't afford the windows like they are now because they were scared to death. And they had those big chimneys, you know. Some things I remember, I don't know why it's been in my mind that I saw my aunt with this sarten.

J: That's very interesting. Things like that will stay with you.

C: Then I could hear this Indian crying, you know, wailing or something, or hollering. So we were scared to death and we got under the bed. (Chuckles)

J: That's probably the safest place you could've been at that time. Do you remember anything about the Prohibition era in El Paso at this time?

C: That was, they didn't have any liquor. They made their own beer. These bootleggers, they call 'em bootleggers, they used to make their beer at home, then sell it. I wasn't interested in that, you know, because, I don't know, my people didn't drink, and I never thought about it. But I did know that some of 'em would go; went to buy this homemade brew. I tasted it once. It was bitter. Forget it.

J: What do you remember about the Depression years here in El Paso?

C: Oh, boy, that was terrible. Everybody was on welfare. And the food that they were putting out, this oatmeal with a lot of little worms in 'em. The beans were just as old. Cook 'em and

they never could cook the beans, they were so black. Because that's what the welfare was dishing out, and potatoes, and that was about all; sugar. At home the boys raised our vegetables and we didn't...thank the good Lord we never went on relief. But we saw some of our neighbors, what they were getting, and it was horrible, the things that they were putting [out]. It's not like it is now, it's a racket now. People on welfare can afford hams and chickens and stuff like that, that we can't.

J: Now let's see, you were working through, with Probation at that time. So you were pretty lucky in being able to have a job at that time.

C: Oh, absolutely, yes. I was very thankful because I had three boys of my own and my [sister's] girl, I had four to support. And then we were only getting \$125 dollars a month. That's all they paid. And it was hard to pay rent. And then three boys and one girl. But it developed, I don't know.

Then I've been [in] all kinds of volunteer work. I'm with the VFW, Veterans of Foreign Wars. Been there from Guard up to District President, which is the highest that anyone can [get]. And then with the COA, Council on Aging, the Red Cross, the March of Dimes, United Way, the church. What else? Then I worked at the United Way and as CC religious teacher. And I've been at nutrition centers, volunteer my work there. Volunteer every place.

J: What makes you do this? Do you just love people?

C: I just love people.

J: Or do you want keep busy? What's the reason you get so

involved?

C: Well, it keeps me busy, and I don't have to sit here and look at the four walls because I'm always busy doing something. I like people, I love young people. And as I said, give me the young people anytime to work with, you know, because they are so grateful. When I had these religion classes, the kids would run to meet me, take my books and, "There she comes. There she comes, Mrs. C." They used to call me Mrs. C. And you can see in their little eyes how thankful they are, the love that they have for you. And right now I'm here with the church, with Immaculate Conception, started the Altar Society to help Father with all the expenses that he has had, you know, renovating--bought rugs and what have you for the church. And so we're there and now I'm stuck with him. So every month we have a dinner, Mexican food, coffee and cake after the masses, to help him raise that money that he got \_\_\_\_\_. And I don't know, everything else.

I used to belong to the NIA. You know what that is, from Project Bravo? I also belonged to that, volunteer. That's Neighborhood Information Association. You get the group of neighbors around here, then we have a meeting a month and discuss our needs, what we need, like transportation for senior citizens. Project Bravo furnishes that. And also this Project SID from LULACs. They take these people, they go grocery shopping, take the people on picnics, to the races, and they have a wonderful time.

J: That sounds great. I was thinking, when you were a little girl

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did you ever hear the word "chicano"?

C: Never. Do you know this, that if you called a Mexican "chicano," they were insulted.

J: Why was that?

C: Because they never heard of that word and they didn't like it. Because a chicano made us believe that he was from Mexico, that he came over here, un chicano. As far as we were concerned, we were insulted if they called us chicanos. And some of the boys would fight, because [we were] americanos. Mexican americano, nacido en los Estados Unidos. Pero chicano no, it's just recently that chicano has been brought in, you know.

J: What does the word mean to you now?

C: Well, what it is, is just like the Mexicans many years ago, they called the Anglos los gringos. And I think they got that from, I think it was during some war that the Americans went in Mexico or something, and they used to say, "Green grows the grass." And then they got to calling them gringos, see. But chicanos, we didn't even use that word. It was an insult.

J: This is when you were a little girl, it was an insult at that time?

C: [Yes.] But now you know, it's just lately, a few years that we have had the Chicanos, and Chicanos here and Chicano there. And we still, nobody knows the meaning of Chicano. Do you know it or have you heard of anybody?

J: Well, I've heard different things about it, but I just wondered what you thought of it or if you had heard it before, if it had any particular meaning for you.

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- C: Not before. Because as I said, it was an insult to call un mexicano born here [a] chicano. Oh, it was an insult. The boys used to fight each other for calling [them] chicanos.
- J: Does it have any meaning for you now?
- C: We can't find out what the meaning is. And I think I heard on TV saying that they could not find "chicano" in the dictionary. And so I don't know where it came from. And these guys that have been coming from out of town, like these guys from San Antonio or some other places, the Chicano Movement and the Chicano this and the Chicano that, never had anything like that before.
- J: What are your feelings about the Chicano Movement? Do you have any views on that?
- C: I don't know, we just don't care to mix in something like that, Chicanos, because we never had it before, and I think we still can get along without it.
- J: The evening that they had the party for Alicia Chacon, when you were presented with your award, can you tell me a little bit about why that came about and who was involved, what happened?
- C: Well, I think it was George McAlmon and Blanche Darling (Moreno's sister), were the ones that got that up, I guess. And this new Democrat...what do they call 'em? MAD, Mexican American Democrats. We didn't have that before. We used to call it the El Paso County democrats. And then they have a Cathy White Democrats, were the other people in Northeast El Paso. Then Alicia used to belong to that. It was a Democratic club, we didn't say Cathy White or anything, it was just

Democrat. Helen Keleher was there, this lady Rosswagon from Fabens, and Laura Rivas, Lupe Bain, myself, Francis Butler, Jackie Cazares, all those nice people, you know. And we'll have one meeting a month and we had election of officers, we had [a] party.

Okay, through Alicia I know that it was prepared by Blanche and that they were going to give her [a party]. I had a date with Alicia. When she left here she says, "I want you to put this on your calendar, the 21st of that month," and it was in wintertime. "You have a date with me." And it was \$10 dollars a plate. And I thought, "Well, Alicia's just..." She has been swell to me and I love Alicia, because I also worked for her like nobody's business. I had the whole \_\_\_\_\_ here working. She defeated five opponents.

So anyway, she invited me, she and Joe. They came after me, picked me up. She gave me a beautiful corsage. She was dressed, you know, formal. And everybody was in formal but me. Until they called me up there and I didn't know what to do, I didn't know what to say. "My God, why didn't you tell me before?" Anyway, I just said a few words. I think I said I was a Democrat and died a Democrat. And then Woodrow Bean presented me with a purse. And as I said, Alicia gave me a beautiful corsage. And that was it. I have always thought of Alicia as my own, you know. Anything she wanted done, why I would do it for her.

[PAUSE]

C: ...out of the love for her.

J: What other political candidates do you think have been beneficial to the Mexican American community? We were just talking about Alicia Chacon. Are there any other people that you specifically could think of who have really helped the Mexican American community here in town?

C: Well, now, George McAlmon is one of 'em. He has been very good about it. And let's see, Sam Callan is another good man. And I think Pena has done a lot of good work. There's so many of 'em that are really conscientious. Here's Woody Wilson, he's another good man. And Judge Berliner is okay. And Robert Galvan was another good one we have in there. And, oh, Marquez, Judge Marquez is a very good guy. I'm on the committee, you know,, membership, for Council on Aging. And I have gone to him, he got a life membership, and so did Pena, and they're always helping the senior citizens. Every time I go they always give their donation, yearly donation, \$25 dollars. So I think it's wonderful, really. And you go to these others and they...like Clyde Anderson and Judge Udell Moore.

Now, we had some money come in for the Council on Aging that the government has [given], and I think it was going to go through the Commissioner's Court. So we went out there, Mr. Worth, Miss Hubbard, myself, and Attorney Goodman, who is attorney for COA. And you know that Anderson wouldn't go with this. He said no, over his dead body. He would not give this money. So we had three against two. Udell Moore was another one that said no, nothing doing unless it goes to welfare. And



we didn't want the welfare to handle it, because we wouldn't be able to help some of these people that we have here living in the back. By the middle of the month, they are eating their beans with a spoon because they haven't got the money for a loaf of bread. Now that's the honest to God's truth. And those people just don't have it. And to see somebody being so callous as to say [we weren't going to get the money]. But we had Telles in favor, and Sanchez and Maddox. Udell Moore and Anderson said no, over their dead body.

So we have a lot of really poor people here with us. By the middle of the month they haven't got anything left. After they pay their rent, few groceries that they buy, and pay insurance or whatever they have to, they haven't got it. I have this lady there that I call her to come over, and the food that is left and that I can't use, why, usually I give to them. They're tickled to death to get it. Old clothes and stuff like that. A few dollars once in a while. But there're many, many of 'em. I have a lady in the high rise that's going blind. She can't go out, she's covered with arthritis. Her hands are crippled. And she sits there on that chair all day long, every day of the year without going out, because she wants to be independent. And she does her work, but how does she do it, I don't know. And besides that she's going blind. She has high blood pressure and you name it. And it's really pitiful.

J: That's one of the problems. I think that a lot of people either don't consider it, or they don't want to think about it, or they just forget it totally.

C: Yes, I think they just want to forget it, forget the people, senior citizens, that were able to do so many things for the country and are so grateful to live in the United States. Now I think that they're more conscious of this.

J: I think so, too. I think it's evolving to the point where people are appreciating them more and understanding.

C: I was reading this Maturity magazine that we get from AARP, and they talk about the senior citizens and how these politicians will do more for the senior citizens now because they know [they] always get their vote. But there're some pitiful cases, just pitiful some of 'em, good Lord. Sometimes I don't blame the people for coming to see what entertainment [there is]. But we have entertainment here. We go to the Chamizal and we go to the races and we have people coming in here to play, like the girls from down the valley, Ysleta school, the marimbas. And Rosa Guerrero comes over and puts [on] those Mexican dances for the people. They enjoy them very much.

I don't know whether you know Mrs. Johnson, she used to be a music teacher here in El Paso for many, many years. She lives in the high rise and she's in a wheelchair. She's so darn independent, she doesn't want anybody to help her. You know, I go with her and say, "Okay, what do you want?" "Nothing, [I've] got everything." "No you don't." "Yes, I do." Oh, Davis is another one. She's a beautiful person, in a wheelchair also. And she volunteers three days a week in the different hospitals. And she's in a wheelchair herself. Isn't that wonderful? And so many grateful people, people that used

to work and support themselves and still have that pride. They don't want to be on welfare, none of 'em are. But when you see those people and you knew them before, you just feel... Like Abraham Chavez brings his music over during the summer. And he met Mrs. Johnson and he said, "You used to play the piano with my father." And she said, "Yes, I did." She they became acquainted and now he's one of her favorites. He comes over and brings her a little gift or something. But it's really nice when people like that think about people like us.

Of course I don't lack. Gee, I never stay home. I go here and there and every place. But people that can't walk or can't see, those are the people that really... One man there, Mr. Williams, let me tell you (I think he's a Jew), but he's so independent he's so crippled with arthritis, his back, he walks like this almost to the floor. But do you know that he washes his own clothes, makes his own food, 'cause he will not let anybody [do it for him]. And you should see the man. Oh, you just feel he's so helpless, but he's not. He washes his clothes, he cooks his meals. Now lately finally I got him, with this nutrition center El Pinto, to send him his food because lately he's been very sick. So those are the things we do with one another.

J: That's good, because as you said before, you're still doing something, and it's good for you and it's good for them. They get the help from it, too.

C: But I can't understand why some people, and they're much younger than I am and able to do everything, go to Juarez, get

their groceries or what have you, not to go out and take more interest in their neighbors, you know. I used to live on the high rise and I used to call the people on the fifth floor every morning. Here it happened a woman died and for four days she was in the bathtub dead, nobody to go see \_\_\_\_\_. Finally the paper boy noticed all the papers accumulated and he went down to find out where she was. She was dead in the bathroom. And some people say [they] just don't care to get mixed up in anything like that. But I think eventually they'll learn. We have more good people than bad.

J: You're very optimistic.

C: Well, hell, we've got to be. I always say, "Well, we'll learn."

J: Well, I myself have run out of questions to ask you. Is there anything else you'd like to add or you'd like to say?

C: Oh, I think I have told you the half of my life. (Laughter)

J: I just want to say thank you very much.

C: Oh, You're welcome.

J: I appreciate the interview. You're helping us at the Institute.

C: Well, I hope I did. If you think of anything and I think of anything, why, I'll let you know.

J: I appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW