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Laurance N. Nickey, M.D.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE:	<u>Laurance N. Nickey, M.D.</u>
INTERVIEWER:	<u>Barbara K. Dent</u>
PROJECT:	<u>El Paso Medical Community</u>
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	<u>August 7, 1991</u>
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

El Paso City-County Health Director; born May 25, 1931, Fort Worth, Texas; attended Dudley Elementary School; 1948 graduate of El Paso High School; attended Vanderbilt University, Texas Western College, and Baylor University College of Medicine; interned at Jefferson Davis Hospital, Houston, Texas; entered U.S. Army in 1958; served in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, 1958-1959, William Beaumont Army Hospital, 1959-1960; practiced pediatrics, 1960-1983; former President, El Paso County Medical Society and District I Medical Society of the Texas Medical Association; Chairman, Texas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; current President, U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association; Chairman, Counsel on Public Health for the Texas Medical Association; Vice Chairman, Texas Board of Health.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Recollects early years in El Paso, Texas; work experience as a youth; participation in El Paso's first Sun Carnival; World War II POW camp in El Paso; internment of German rocket scientists; collection of waste fats for War effort; landing of German V-2 rocket in Cd. Juárez; crash of B-24 Liberator Bomber on Mount Franklin; work as an orderly in emergency room at Thomason Hospital; distribution of SABIN Oral Sundaes; formation of El Paso County Medical Society Foundation; public health problems and issues along the U.S.-Mexico border; border environmental issues; history of El Paso City-County Health District; reflects on relationship of officials in El Paso City-County Health District to counterparts at William Beaumont Army Hospital and in Cd. Juárez.

Length of Interview: 1 hour Length of Transcript 34 pages

Q Did you live -- was the house on Cincinnati your grandfather's house or your family house or what?

A At one point in time, we lived at 915 Lee Street. I lived there for about the first, oh, I think four and a half or five years of my life, and then we moved from there to 901 Cincinnati Street and lived there for the next 40 years of my life, and I moved out of that house in the early 1970s. My children still use the house from time to time. It's a very wonderful old home and sort of a classical home with -- it's two-story, and it's got four large two-story Corinthian white pillars in front, and it's sort of a landmark of Kern Place.

Q Do you know who built it and when it was built?

A I've been told that. I think that it was an individual who had something to do with the legal profession, but I'm really not sure. I just can't remember who that was. I have it in my files, I just can't remember exactly who that was. But the house is extraordinarily well-built, and it has been maintained fairly well over the years and was built in 1911. I do know that. So it's been here quite a while -- 80 years now.

Q It must have been one of the first ones that went into Kern Place.

A It was one of the first -- exactly. It was one of first ones that went into Kern Place, in fact. And maybe, by the end of this interview, I'll remember the name of the individual who built it.

Q And where did you go to medical school? Did you go to El

Paso High, first of all?

A Yeah. I went to Dudley School. It's the old Dudley that's no longer existent. That was at -- down on Robinson Boulevard - - the corner of Robinson and Kansas. That was torn down because it was unsafe. I went eight years there -- actually nine years because they had a kindergarten -- and eight years -- and then I went to El Paso High for four years. Graduated in 1948. This was a couple or three years after World War II -- three years after World War II was over. And then I got a scholarship to Vanderbilt University -- an academic scholarship. I went to Vanderbilt in 1948, stayed there a year, and then came back to Texas College of Mines and went to school., and then it was changed in the middle of it to Texas Western College. I went only for three years to college, and they accepted me into medical school -- and went to Baylor University College of Medicine at that time. Now it's called Baylor College of Medicine, but it was Baylor University College of Medicine at that time. And, of course, went four years to medical school, and did an internship in Houston where the medical school was at the Jefferson Davis Hospital. Houston, then, was the focal point of seven years of my life. All of my medical training was there, and I married in Houston, had my first child in Houston, and went into the army in 1958 and served for about a year in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and went from Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, here to El Paso in 1949 -- or 1959, rather -- and served at William Beaumont until August of 1960 -- was discharged and went into

private practice in pediatrics in El Paso for about 23 years and enjoyed every minute of it.

Q And then you came to the City/County Health Director down here?

A I -- in 1950-- I'm sorry. In 1983 I retired from practice in the first part of January and took this job as City/County Health Director in March of 1983.

Q You were also president of the County Medical Society, too, weren't you?

A I was president of the County Medical Society in 1981. I was president of the Texas Pediatrics Society in 1981, also. I've been chairman of the Texas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics for a couple of years -- two or three years. I was president of District One Medical Society of the Texas Medical Association on two or three separate occasions and did a lot of work with that organization over many, many years. I've been very involved with the Texas Medical Association. I'm currently president of the United States/Mexico Border Association, which involves four American states and six Mexican states that have joined U.S./Mexico Border. That keeps me very busy travelling to and from many places all over this part of the country and northern part of Mexico. We have been very involved with the Texas Medical Association in many parameters. Currently, have been chairman of the Counsel on Public Health for the Texas Medical Association -- have been for the last three years or four years -- and am very involved with that at many different levels.

Also was a member of the Texas Board of Health for six years and was vice-chairman of the Texas Board of Health for five years, and very actively involved in that organization, too.

Q Can you tell me a little bit about growing up in El Paso?

A Growing up in El Paso. It was a marvelous experience. I'll never, never, never regret having grown up in El Paso. It was a terrific experience. I had friends. We -- the culture of El Paso was a wonderful thing. My children have grown up in it, and I am very grateful for the opportunity, too, to do so. An awful lot of good people -- an awful lot of interesting things have happened to me in my life in El Paso. I've managed to raise four children and three stepchildren, all of whom have grown up and gone on to college and graduated, and I married a second time in 1977 to a wonderful lady and we've had -- I have had four natural children and three stepchildren, all of whom have been very different and very wonderful. And I have four -- let's see, four stepchildren, all boys and -- grandchildren, that is -- four grandchildren, all boys and two grandchildren on the way. So that's lots of folks.

Q When you were little, you were a page in the Sun Carnival. Can you tell me something about that?

A Well, that was a long time ago. That was in -- what was it -- 1935, or 1936? I can't remember. It was the very first Sun Carnival, and I was the ring bearer for the princess whose last name was Staton, and we had a -- the Governor of Texas was here. His name was Aldridge -- Alred, rather -- at the time, and I

think Ann Schwartz and Pakita Zork, if I recall correctly, were two train bearers, and I was the ring bearer. We were all dressed up in a little page boy's uniform, and this was at the old Liberty Hall in the County Courthouse. And it was quite an event! Of course, the Sun Bowl grew and grew and grew and, finally, economics played a large part in -- they changed that now to the John Hancock Bowl, which is unfortunate.

Q Yes, it is.

A It really is. It's too bad.

Q Now, your costume is on display at the History Museum, isn't it?

A I don't know where that costume is now. I gave it to the Sun Bowl Association, and they had it on display at U.T.E.P. for a while, and it may be down at the History Museum. I'm not quite sure. But we had it intact, and we thought that was sort of a special thing. We still have a photograph of me and two trumpeters, Barry Edwards and Bill Deal. Turn that off and I'll show it to you. Let me talk just a moment about my grandfather. He came out in 1881 with the railroad, and went down Parral, Chihuahua, to work in the mines with the Compania de Fresno, and also a company which was one of the conglomerates -- one of the companies that was put together to form ASARCO. And then, in 1911, he came back up to the United States during the Mexican Revolution to work with -- at the smelter here in El Paso. And worked for several years and then retired. He died when he was 63 years old back, I think, in 1935 or so -- 1933, 1935 -- 1935.

My mother came out from Arkansas, actually, and from San Antonio in 1911 because my father -- my grandfather had travelled back and forth between Mexico and Parral -- in Parral -- to Arkansas, and my mother and her sister, my aunt, came out here in the early teens of the century, and she taught school. Started out at the old Lamar School, which was Montana -- I think the corner of Montana and Lee -- and also at the old Franklin School. She taught ultimately for 43 years in this community. She was president of the El Paso Women's Club, I think, in 1936, was very active in the Chamber of Commerce and, of course, her husband, my father, had passed away two months before I was born. That was in 1931, while in Fort Worth, and she never remarried. And my aunt and mother did marry. In 1929 they had a -- it was a dual wedding.

Q Oh, really?

A Yeah.

Q In Fort Worth?

A No. Here in El Paso. Here in El Paso in what is now the First Baptist Church, and I still have lots of pictures of that. And we had a -- growing up was sort of a special event because I grew up with what amounted to, really, two mothers -- my aunt and my mother. And then I also had sort of a nanny who worked with my mother for about 35 years and, really, more a part of our family than anything else. My mother died when she was 63 years old, in 1961, and my aunt -- my mother's name was Jenny May Langston Nickey. And my aunt died -- her name was Francis Wilma

Langston Merrill -- and she died in February of 1989 at the age of 95 years.

Q She lived a long time.

A She lived a long time. She surely did. My mother was only 63, but my aunt -- her sister -- was 95. I was an only child. I got pampered, but I don't think it did too much to me that was bad. I enjoyed being pampered, but I worked. I think I worked every year of my life since I was about eight years old. I delivered newspapers for two or three years, and I worked in a bowling ally, setting up pins in bowling allies, and I worked my -- worked during high school -- did all kinds of odd jobs -- and worked at Orié Pernell's Standard Station down at the corner of Cincinnati and Mesa. During the summers I went to summer school in high school -- got out of high school in about three or three and a half years -- three and a half years, I guess. Then, of course, like I had mentioned previously, I had went to Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tennessee, for a year. I think the reason I got back to El Paso -- I think I got homesick, and I was very young. I was only 16 when I went to college, and I turned 17 very quickly, but I still was very young compared to the people that were there because many, many, many of them were veterans, and were coming back from World War II, and this was in 1948. And I think I got lonely for El Paso and my friends. I had lots of friends growing up here and still maintain those friendships to this day.

Q What was the war like in El Paso?

A What was the war like?

Q Do you remember much about it?

A Yes. I do remember a lot about it. World War II is a very vivid event in my mind and is burned in my mind and my memory. Fort Bliss was a huge military reservation at that time, training soldiers, and there was a large -- at the end of the War -- there was a large German contingency here that was prisoners of war.

Q Where was the prisoner-of-war camp?

A The prisoner-of-war camp was out on Dyer -- way out on the end of Dyer Street and, I guess -- what is the area of, now -- oh, perhaps Northgate area and it was a huge, huge operation, and many of the German scientists that were rocket scientists were interned as POWs here in El Paso. For example, Verner Von Braun, who the father of rocketry as far as military use was concerned, I guess, was housed there and helped start White Sands and all of its rocket research and later went on to be the administrator for NASA.

Q They took him from the POW camp and sent him up to Las Alamos?

A Sent him up to White Sands, and that was for rocket research -- was being initiated. I can't recall exactly, but I know a lot of work was done with the old German V-2 rockets. In fact, one of the rockets that was fired from White Sands -- I can remember very vividly -- landed, apparently, in Juarez, and that caused quite a stir. I can remember coming home. I was coming home. I was driving home, and you could feel the ground shake under you

as the rocket impacted near a cemetery in Juarez. That caused a little bit of a flap, but I think it all got solved, all right. But that was after the war, of course.

Q Now, Larry, you were only 11 years old when the war broke out. Did you-all collect waste fats and newspapers and scrap metals and things like that?

A We did collect waste fats. In fact, I have a poster that is in my room that I use as an office at home that is in mint condition, almost, and it says, "Collect waste fats for explosives," and we did. We collected tires, and we collected all types of metals, and we collected all manner of things for the war effort. And that was a big issue in El Paso. And we had drives -- the school -- Dudley School, where I went to school, was very involved in that. And, my gosh, there'd be mountains of old tires there that they carted away to -- I guess, to recycle, if you will, as the term is now used. So that was always a big event. Lots of military things going on -- Biggs Air Force Base was a big air force base -- a large air force base at the time, and I can remember sitting on my front porch on Cincinnati Street one evening. There were three soldiers who lived next door to me. They had rented a home right immediately next door to me across the street -- across a little street called Nye Way -- right immediately across the street. Three soldiers and their wives lived over there. And they were sitting on my mother's front porch, and we were talking, and this was in the evening, and the sun had gone down. It was about 9:00 -- 8:00 or 9:00 at

night. I can't remember exactly what. And all of a sudden we looked over at Mount Franklin, and there was a huge fireball that went up on the other side of Mount Franklin. And we came to find out that was a B-24 Liberator Bomber that had hit the mountain, and, of course, everybody died instantly, I'm sure. And that was very vivid in my memory, and the whole war was very vivid, still. That's still -- one of my hobbies is World War II, and all of its many, many moments, and we just -- I guess children of my age -- or young people of my age lived and breathed World War II.

Q Yes. In New Orleans, where we had a number of prisoners working at a number of the bases -- I guess I was the same age, just about -- we used to play a game --

A Oh, sure.

Q -- we called Herman the German.

Q Herman the German. That's right. Oh, yeah. And this was a very vivid, very active part of, I think, all people's memory. You couldn't help but have it burned into your memory with all of the -- I can remember -- for example, on December 7th, 1941, we had a vacant -- there was no house to us at that time. It was a vacant lot and now, of course, it has a home on it. But I can remember in the vacant lot I was outside playing with one of my friends and playing soldier with little toy soldiers, and my mother came to me and my aunt and said that war had started. That was on a Sunday, and it was -- I think it was near 8:00 in Hawaii, but it was several hours later here in El Paso, and I can remember that very vividly. In fact, I can just remember my

mother coming out to tell me that war had been started by the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor. As a matter of fact, I had the opportunity this past year -- this past December 7th -- to be at Pearl Harbor celebrating the 49th birthday of that tragic event. That was a very emotional trip.

Q Yeah. I bet so. In your house on Cincinnati, you had an umbrella stand -- a mirror stand -- that you have so kindly donated to the Turner Home. Can you tell me something about it?

A Well, that's been in our family for many generations previous to my birth and several -- I think, three or four -- generations prior to my birth, and it came from England. It had been resilvered while my mother was in possession of it, and it was her relatives that owned it. It came through Arkansas, then San Antonio, then in El Paso. I think -- I'm not sure if it was my grandfather's side -- which is the Langston side -- or if it was from my mother's mother, who was -- her name was Lucy Maud Sterrett, and I'm not sure who that was. I'm not sure which that was. But my mother and aunt had told me many, many time that had been in the family for generations, and it had come over from England. It was a very simple but elegant piece of furniture, and we were pleased to donate it to the El Paso County Medical Society's Turner Home.

Q Thank you. Tell me about -- well, after the war, were you involved as a teenager or as a young man with the medical community here before you went to medical school?

A Oh, yeah. But more importantly than that, everybody that

went to high school -- and I did go to El Paso High School -- was in the ROTC. I mean, that was just part of it. It was a very large part of growing up at that time. And I can remember going on maneuvers, if you will, where the El Paso Rehabilitation Center is now, and shooting blank cartridges, using an old M1-Garand 30 caliber Rival to do that. We had quite a time. What was the question, Barbara?

Q About your connection with the medical community growing up.

A We worked at -- I knew lots of doctors, of course, and we worked at Thompson Hospital starting when I was age -- oh, 16 or 17 years of age -- and worked as an orderly and worked in the emergency room there. And I remember working in the emergency room all night long from 11:00 at night to 7:00 in the morning and then going to summer school -- and took a physics course. The gentleman's name that taught it was -- his last name was Ballard, and I'll never forget him because he was a very wonderful gentleman because I would fall asleep sometimes in class, having worked all night, and he wanted to know why I was falling asleep in his physics course. And when I explained to him that I'd worked all the previous night, he, I guess, sort of made a special case out of it. And he would help me out after class to understand physics, which I really didn't understand. Everybody knew how to use a slide rule just like it was part of an extension of their arm. I didn't have that luxury, and I tried to do it all in my head, which was a bad mistake. But, anyway, we came out of that course with an "A", thanks to him,

and I'll never forget him for his kindness.

Q Who were some of the doctors over at City/County Hospital at that time?

A Oh, gosh, there were so many doctors that donated so many hundreds of hours of time. One of the ones that stands out is Dr. Manny Cowen, who did a lot of chest surgery out there that we helped with. Interestingly enough, when I was in medical school as a -- through my sophomore and junior year and between my freshman and sophomore year, we used to work out of Thomason or, as it was called then, City/County Hospital. And Dr. Celso Stapp (born in Brazil, parents were missionaries) donated -- good Lord -- hundreds and hundreds of hours out there -- deliver babies that were hard -- that had problems -- some others had problems -- do Cesarean sections and gynecological surgery of all types. And many other doctors -- Dr. Dieter, Dr. Wilcox -- oh, my -- so many, many of the old doctors that were here donated so many hours of time. Dr. Sorenson was one of the doctors. Dr. Barrett, I guess, was one of the first anesthesiologists here -- or, if not the first one, donated time. I remember vividly him doing anesthesia-- both of those gentlemen doing anesthesia, there. And some of the neurosurgeons donated time. Dr. Al Lockett donated a lot of time out there, I remember, and many of the older orthopedic surgeons, the internists, Dr. Charles Langston(Pichwhich, Texas). Many of these people are dead now, and Dr. Langston, who was a cardiologist, donated hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of hours out there. And I

don't know if they ever got credit for it, but I don't know that they ever wanted credit for it. What they wanted to do was to provide a service for unfortunate individuals, and did so, and did that with a smile. It was a wonderful thing. Dr. Palafox was there; Dr. Carlos Fernandez was there. They were there as interns and, gosh, just a whole host of folks. My goodness, so many people.

Q Now, after you came --

A Dr. Budwig -- I might add Dr. Budwig's name. He -- when I was between my sophomore and junior year in medical school, I almost had charge of the pediatric board. And I can remember Dr. Ira Budwig coming out and making rounds -- and Dr. Rennick and a few others coming out and making rounds to help out. And it was very much appreciated.

Q And then when you returned as a pediatrician --

A Uh-huh.

Q -- then they built the new Thomason Hospital. Can you tell us something about that?

A They built that new Thomason Hospital. I'll tell you who had a lot to do with that. That was Dr. Russell Dieter (born in Brazil, parents were also missionaries) -- had a awful lot to do with that in bringing that to fruition. He and Judge Bean really engineered that new hospital, which was completed -- what was that -- in 1963 -- I can't remember the date, but it was pretty close to that. And we spent many, many, many hours with the interns and residents with pediatrics problems out there over a

course of many years before Texas Tech got here, trying to help out with the care of indigent children that needed it -- babies, of course, and mothers. Did lots of things at all hours of the day and night for an awful long time.

Q Tell me about the polio vaccination city wide.

A Yeah. That was a big effort we --

Q Now, was this the first injection, or was this with the sugar cube?

A This was a sugar cube. This was Sabin vaccine, and it came out, also, in 1983, and --

Q 1983?

A I'm sorry, 1963. Excuse me, 1963. And we had to give it in three sittings. And we got people from the Medical Society to donate time -- and from the Pharmaceutical Association, from the many different service clubs -- and we gave this in schools. And we lined up all over everywhere and gave it in the churches and gave it out at the El Paso Sheriff's Posse and gave it downtown at the San Jacinto Plaza and gave it all over west Texas and southern New Mexico, also. And I was general chairman of that. I was still quite young. I think I was -- what would I be -- 32 or something like that and eager and full of vim and vigor and saw the real challenge ahead of giving the polio vaccine. And we did, to virtually all the population of El Paso -- people in nursing homes and everywhere. And the interesting thing was that we had a population base that was not that large, but we ended up -- because we gave type -- it was interesting -- we gave type

one polio, and then we gave type three polio, and then we gave type two polio, with about a six-week interval between each of those. And the El Paso Natural Gas Company donated hundreds of thousands of little cups, and Furr's Supermarkets donated all the sugar cubes.

(end of side one)

And we could impregnate them. And we'd have people go through the lines and take these sugar cubes, and the ones that were too small we'd just give drops in their mouths. And we called them Sabin Oral Sundaes, which is SOS, and it was a big event. And we charged a quarter, if you can believe that, for that vaccine. We ultimately gave out -- I think it was almost 800,000 doses of that vaccine. A lot of people came over, we understand, from Juarez and got the vaccine. We did a lot -- you know, Alpine was -- Texas and Pecos and Fort Stockton were simultaneously doing this, and, then, of course, Las Cruces and Alamogordo were simultaneously doing it because publicity was being emanated all over the Southwest by the drive in El Paso. And we charged 25 cents for it, and I think it cost us 11 cents a dose. So we made about \$40,000. We thought we were going to lose money, and the El Paso Natural Gas Company -- at that time, Mr. Cy Perkins was president -- they were going to make any deficit that we had, but we didn't make a deficit. And we made \$40,000. And that's the way that the El Paso County Medical Society Foundation (a charitable institution) got started.

Q Oh, really?

A That's the start of that. That was the nucleus of it was that \$40,000, and I think it's prospered since then and has done very well. And we were able to get a County Medical Society that is able to give out proceeds from the interest from this Foundation, which has served the County Medical Society very well. We met with -- it's the old International Club down on -- what is it -- West San Antonio, I guess. No. Not West San Antonio.

Q Magoffin?

A No. It was -- oh golly, what's the road that leads right by the Civic Center? That's West San Antonio.

Q Yeah.

A Yeah. And I met there with Mr. Chris Fox, who worked for the State National Bank, and Mr. Bob Reed, who was at that time the public relations man for the County Medical Society, and the president of the County Medical Society and a couple of others. And we formed a foundation over lunch one day. And it has since prospered and done, I think, very well.

Q Larry, were you busy in any of the foundations of the hospitals here in town -- the foreman of any of the new hospitals here in town or the Medical Center or anything like that?

A I was not directly involved in that, but we have been with the -- we've been a member of the Board of Trustees of the El Paso Community Foundation. We were certainly a member of that. We were a member of the Texas Health Foundation Board of Trustees and were members of the Providence Board of Trustees, right

now -- Foundation, that is.

Q Were you instrumental in getting money for the new Providence or anything like that?

A Yes. We worked on that. Of course, Mr. Sam Young was the guiding force behind that, and that came into being in the early 1950's, I think, 1951. And a lot of people were involved in that. He certainly was the leader of that excise.

Q Is that when the new Providence --

A That's when the new Providence became a reality, was in -- I think 1951, as I recall. And he did all -- he did the work of engineering that, really -- and stayed on that Board as Chairman for years and years and years. It was, at that time, probably one of the most well run community-based hospitals -- not for profit -- community-based hospitals, I guess, in the whole United States. He ran it like a banker, and it ran like a bank.

Q When you went into practice, did you go into practice solo?

A When I went into practice, I went into practice solo in the University Towers, which is 1900 North Oregon. And then about two or three years later Dr. Paul Huchton joined me as a partner, and we moved down to 1515 North Oregon Street. And I was there for -- let's see. I stayed at the University Towers for about six years, I guess, all together, and then I was down at the 1515 North Oregon for the remainder of my practice.

Q Now, Dr. J.M. Varaski (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) joined you at one time?

A Dr. Varaski joined us at one -- he was a pediatric

cardiologist who had an untimely, premature death from -- probably ventricular fibrillation, as I recall, and he died in the parking lot of Furr's Food Store, as a matter of fact, trying to pull his car over, which is unfortunate. He was a very good cardiologist -- the first pediatric cardiologist.

Q Didn't he have his beeper on?

A He had his radio on trying to get --

Q -- help.

A -- trying to get, and he just never made it. They found him in his car. He had passed away. And then after that, Dr. Paul Lynn Rogers was a partner of ours for about five years. And he went back to Andrews, Texas, which was his home. He and his wife and children went back there. And I left the practice of pediatrics January 1 of 1983 and assumed this position. We assumed this position on March the 1st of 1983 and have been here now eight and a half years. And it's been a real challenge in that we're a very vastly underbudgetted, very vastly undermanned, but we have a lot of good people that are working for us that do a very, very credible job in many areas that this city needs very desperately. We have a lot of people that need help in this community. At the current time, we have a poverty level of 21 to 27 percent. That's an awful lot of folks -- and many, many public health problems, like AIDS, for example, that we are always having to combat and educate people as best we can. Problems of septic systems and water for our *Colonias is always a pressing problem. I've been very active in that area. And

recently, of course, cholera has made its presence known in the South American country of Peru. It has now come to Mexico, and five states in Mexico have had cholera. We are very concerned about the border because of the poverty, undereducation, general lack of good sanitation in many areas and problems with potable water and proper sewage disposal. We have about 58,000 to 68,000 people living in our county in 350 different Colonias who either have no potable water or proper sewage disposal or both. And in Juarez they have somewhere between 300,000 to 400,000 people with no proper sewage disposal and water that is in their home. So the area is a ripe area, as is the 2,000-mile-border, for the encouragement of cholera in our area, and we have a big concern about that. We recently had a big meeting in El Paso dealing with cholera. The Centers for Disease Control and the Pan-American Health Organization, the Texas Medical Association and a whole host of other organizations -- the City/County Health Department, of course -- were all instrumental in getting world class experts here to talk about cholera. And that conclusion was that it was not a matter if cholera will get to the border; it's a matter of when it will get to the border. So, that's a big issue. Many other issues of prenatal care and access to care for people that either do not have insurance or proper access to care -- medical care, that is -- and many other issues of environment. Air pollution is a big problem in this community. We've got a very active air pollution and air quality division. We have seven operating divisions in the Health Department, all

of them very busy in maternal and child health. Last year we gave 150,000 immunizations, about 50,000 of which were in response to a large measles outbreak that we had here. We had 300 cases of measles in El Paso last year, and at the same time - or the same outbreak -- Juarez recorded 1,628 cases, with nine deaths. We have a big concern, of course, with getting children immunized prior to entrance into school. We actually have a very excellent immunization rate. We have a 99.98 percent immunization rate when they enter school. But youngsters prior to that time -- we have a problem sometimes getting them into the system. And we're working on that very, very much in many directions at this time. Prenatal care is always interesting. When we first came on the Board back in 1983, we looked back and saw that the previous year there were only 420 visits that had been recorded in one clinic. And we felt that was not enough, so we got interested and hired some more nurses. We got a grant, actually, from the Texas Department of Health. It was a Job's Bill grant, and we put people to work providing prenatal care. And we went from one clinic to seven clinics. We now have 12 clinics. We went from 420 visits to 17,500 visits -- and keeps going up and up -- and giving prenatal care to mothers that can't otherwise afford the care. About 96 percent of the people that we see in our clinics are poor -- either at or below poverty. That's a lot of folks. We are expanding slowly but surely in the many other areas, like care of diabetics, a lot of cancer screening, now, and cancer detection. We're working a research

project with the National Cancer Institute in concert with the Texas Department of Health and many other issues like that -- we've taken on. Certainly, the matters of our environment give us great cause for concern. Like I mentioned before, air pollution is a bi-national problem here. There is no -- there is no magical line in the Rio Grande River that says, "Air pollution, you either stay North or stay South." Last year we had -- you know, we do have -- we do deal with two sovereign nations and two states and the two largest border cities directly on the United States-Mexico border. And last year there were over 42 million border crossings between El Paso and Juarez, and that's just going North, by the way. So it's double that. And it makes us the second largest port of entry in the world. And you don't keep measles on the south side or you don't keep chicken pox on the north side. It doesn't work that way. What happens in one city happens in the other city almost immediately.

Q A few months ago you told me a very funny story about a visiting dignitary from Washington at La Hacienda Restaurant.

A Oh, yeah. That was a fascinating story. This was a young fellow. He was 34 years of age, and it was right after Thanksgiving in 1985 -- the latter part of November, 1985. And he came down -- and it had snowed a day or two previously -- and it was bitter-cold. And we had a temperature inversion. There was still a lot of snow on the ground, and he wanted to go see the air pollution. So we took him on Doniphan Drive out by the La Hacienda Restaurant, and then we rode on the levee. And there

were hundreds upon hundreds of homes with little chimneys, and smoke was coming out of these chimneys and swirling upwards and going up about two or three hundred feet. And then it would just layer out. And I remember very vividly him looking at me and saying, "Dr. Nickey, aren't you the health authority for El Paso?" And I said, "Yes, sir, I sure am. " And he said, "Well, why don't you do something about that?" And my answer to him was two-fold. I said, "Number one, those are mothers trying to keep their babies from freezing to death. And number two, that's a foreign country. That's Mexico, and I would be invading a foreign country." Whereupon, his mouth literally dropped open and he said, "Do you mean to tell me that's Mexico?" And I said, "Yes, sir." And that was in the latter part of 1985. And in the middle of January, 1986 -- this was about six or eight weeks later -- we got a letter from EPA -- Washington acknowledging the fact that air pollution in Juarez could affect El Paso. We thought that was big of them to understand that fact. I don't think the people really -- until just recently, have they understood just how close we are to Mexico and that Mexico is a third-world country, and that even though we have 606,000 people in our city and county, they have 1,200,000. And we cry about our budget of \$11.5 million for the Health Department. But the Health Department in Juarez only receives about \$500,000, with twice the population and many, many more problems than we have. But things have changed. Things are beginning to change. The drum has been beaten loudly, and we've talked everywhere we can

talk. And we continue to do that and tell them about issues on the border. We've had the opportunity of testifying before the Senate in Washington and anywhere that they'll listen. We'll go and talk and tell them about border health issues and border environmental issues, and we're very concerned about those issues and are trying, along with many other people, to get a commission started on border health and environment that has the full force of both governments behind it. and it looks like that is getting a lot of emphasis. I know that the American Medical Association -- the Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California Medical Associations, as well as the United States/Mexico Border Health Association -- Border Health Association -- have endorsed this point of view. And this is something we think is very positive. In one form or another -- we don't care what it's called or how it comes about -- one form or another we think it's going to come about, and when it does, it will serve this border well. One of the reasons is, at the present time, four out of the seven poorest communities in the United States are on the Texas-Mexico Border. El Paso's the fourth largest city in Texas, but it's the fifth poorest city in the entire United States. And you can't force international problems on the backs of our local taxpayers. We've got to get some federal help, and we've got to get some state help, and I think that's coming. I think the free-trade alliance is going to help it to move in that direction.

Q A little while ago we also talked about the history of the City/County Health Unit, and you said something about 1933?

A 1933 -- the City and County Health Units of El Paso were combined to form a City/County Health Department or Unit, as it was known then. It's been changed to District about the last seven or eight years because we do operate as a health district, spreading out a little further than perhaps the county confines from time to time. I wish we could find more history about our very special City/County Health District.

Q Do you know who your predecessors were in your lifetime?

A Well, my immediate predecessor was Dr. Bernard Rosenblum, and he had been in office for about 13 years prior to retiring. And he came from the United States Public Health Service after, I think, 30-some-odd years of service in that particular branch of government, and prior to him was Dr. Hornado -- Dr. Manuel Hornado, who had been with this health department for over 30 years and retired when he was in his 70's. And prior to that time there were a series of people that were involved, but not as long as Dr. Hornado and not as long as Dr. Rosenbloom were. It's been a real experience.

Q I bet it has.

A Oh, it's been a real experience. Lots of -- when I took this job, I was told that there were never any politics, there were never any problems, and you only have to work eight hours a day. All three of those are lies. There's a lot of 10-hour days. I'm a very peculiar person. I'm a morning person, so I get up at 4:00 every morning. And I have an office at home, and I start my day there. And I can get more done in two or three

hours that are quiet -- exactly. Two or three hours there than I can all day long here, and lots of politics involved and lots of problems.

Q You were also very active in District One, or you reorganized it at one time. Can you tell me something about that?

A Yeah. I did. Thank you for mentioning that. Yes. We were involved with the old Southwest Medical Association, which was the western part of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Nevada. And that had been ---gosh -- as a part of southwestern medicine for many, many years. And we were president of that organization for two terms -- One, I think, in 1968 and one in 1970 or 1972 -- I've forgotten exactly when. And then we worked for 14 years bringing Texas Medical Association's District One Medical Society, which included the six or seven contiguous counties as far down as Pecos and Fort Stockton and Van Horn and Alpine and Presidio and places like this together. And we had some wonderful meetings that we had engineered. And I got local speakers, and we alternated between -- each year between El Paso and then "out in the country," as we called it. We'd go down to Pecos or we'd go town to Fort Stockton or Alpine and have meetings, and we had wonderful meetings and wonderful times with the doctors out in the country and got to know them very, very well -- and Kermit. That's another place. And we had lots of fond memories of that and got to know those doctors very well. And, of course, that served El Paso well because that was a line

of referral into El Paso for many cases. And these were things that were, I think, good for El Paso and good for medicine in general -- and enjoyed doing that. We were very involved with it for about -- about 14 years, as I recall. President of it for three times -- three times.

Q Is District One active now?

A It's not as active as we think it ought to be, unfortunately. It's too bad. It was a grand organization. But the Southwestern Medical Association isn't either. Each state then developed their own medical organization, and they sort of went the way of older medical organizations, if you will, and that served a very useful purpose, also. El Paso was the hub of medicine for many years prior to Albuquerque becoming involved. And, of course, Tuscon, Phoenix, and then all of the cities started growing up and got their own medical needs taken care of. These were wonderful, glorious times, and it's just -- it's too bad they had to pass, but things change, and I think things change, generally speaking, for the better, so --

Q Yeah. These are the good ole times right now?

A Yeah. These are the good ole times with the young fellows coming in, right. The good ole times for me were 25 or 30 years ago. And now they all have fellows that will come in and refer to these as the good ole times, too. I'm not sure these are the good ole times, though. There's an awful lot of government intrusion in the medicine. It's just unfortunate.

Q Yes, it is. It really is.

A It really is. It's tragic. There's been a big wedge driven between the patient and the physician, and that's too bad because the physicians I know were all very good people and tried to do to the best they could for all the patients that they needed to take care of. And that's just a shame that there has to be a lot of government intrusion into that. That's been a tragic mistake.

Q Do you remember anything about the old Masonic Hospital?

A I do indeed remember the old Masonic Hospital. That was at the corner of Piedras and Montana, where the Sears, Roebuck building, then, was there for many, many years. And now the El Paso Police Department is headquartered there. And the old Masonic Hospital was sort of on a rise. It was an old red-brick building that had white trim that was painted. I can remember going into that building as a youth on many occasions to see individuals that I knew that had been -- had their tonsils out or had a baby or one thing or another. That was a few years back. That was -- oh, Lord. That was 50 or 55 years ago. That's a long time.

Q What about Southwestern Hospital. Was that --

A Southwestern Hospital -- I still have fond memories of that. Of course, that was the tuberculosis hospital when it originated, and all of that glass was to let the air in because that was heliotherapy -- that was sun therapy. Rest in the sun, you know, and good diet were the only things that were known to really help tubercular patients. El Paso had many sanatoriums of a similar nature, but that was the largest one, and it was started by old

Dr. Robert Homan, Sr., and lasted for a number of years and then became a general hospital. I remember very vividly having my tonsils out in 1935, and I can remember my pediatrician, who was Dr. Travis Bennett, giving me anesthesia -- drip either -- to get my tonsils out, and Dr. M. Spearman (Iowa) took them out. And I still have the bill. I was in surgery, had my tonsils out, and spent two nights in the hospital with my mother staying there, and the bill total was \$35. I still have it.

Q Do you have it framed?

A I still have it to this day. I don't have it framed, but I have it in a safe place. It's amazing. Things have changed a little bit.

Q A little bit?

A Yeah.

Q What about Beaumont Hospital? Did you have any --

A Beaumont Hospital, when I was a boy growing up, was way, way out in the outskirts of El Paso. It was not even in the city limits, and then, of course, you could get there by car or you could get there by trolley. The streetcar used to run right up to the front gate and then turn around and come back. And that was an interesting experience. And we used to go out there and almost have a picnic, it was so far out of town. But now, of course, it's almost in the center of town. We've developed, by the way, an excellent relationship with the military, as far as this Health Department and their similar operation is concerned. And the last few commanders have been very good friends of ours.

And the last commander was Dr. Richard Proctor, who was a pediatrician, also, and a very community-minded, very community-spirited individual who is now with the Texas Department of Health in Houston. And those have been good people. And we worked with them very well in a whole host of issues. And I might add that we have very excellent communications and very excellent relationships with our counterpart in Juarez, too -- and at the State level. We have excellent communications. It's really, really delightful to see. Yeah, it really is. It's a big plus for El Paso because we need to know what's going on over there, and they, frankly, need to know what's going on over here. So that line of communication is always open. It's Wednesday, today, and on Monday we spent all morning in Juarez going over a whole host of problems that we share, from cholera to occupational health and all manner of violent traumatic deaths and a whole host of things. So we really ---really work together quite well.

Q Getting back to history, there are two things that I can't find a question to. One is, did the City/County ever have a health unit in the jail?

A It was next to the jail.

Q Next to the jail?

A Yes. Next to the jail. It's where -- the jail was where the El Paso Police Department downtown parking garage is now, and --

Q The old one or the new one?

A The old one. And that was the old police headquarters and jail -- a long, interesting story about that. And right next to it with the health department. It was about three stories tall and a very narrow building. And, of course, they outgrew that very hurriedly, and then they went -- took the health department to the old library building -- the old Carnegie Library Building, which is on the corner of Franklin and Oregon Streets, and that -- the new library is there now. And the whole old library was used as a health department for many years before we currently moved here in 1968 -- which is at 222 South Campbell Street.

Q Now, at one time did they have clinics down in the basement of Liberty Hall?

A That, I can't remember, but they had clinics in the basement of the old library because I used to hold them -- tuberculosis clinics -- for children. We would treat -- oh my -- many, many, many, many children with tuberculosis.

Q Some of the elderly school nurses that I interviewed said that they had a few clinics down in the basement of Liberty.

A Certainly could be. That was an old structure, of course, and it certainly could be, but I don't remember that.

Q While we're speaking about Liberty Hall, I heard a rumor -- or a story that during the war -- before the Turner Home belonged to the Medical Society -- that they stored all of the records of the El Paso County Medical Society in the basement of Liberty Hall and they've never been able to find them since.

A Well, that may well be true. I'm interested in that from a historical point of view. I certainly would love to visit some of those old records, but I have not seen them. And the records -- we purge our records here. Unfortunately, we have to do that. Requirements of space demand that we do that, so we purge our records every few years or so.

Q Do you not put them on microfilm?

A No. We're going to start that in the future -- putting some of our records on film -- but most of administrative records we don't keep because we don't have the space to keep them in, which is unfortunate because a lot of history goes -- or health history goes wandering off into the garbage can or the incinerator or something like that.

Q Well, I've taken a lot of your time. Can you think of anything else you'd like to say?

A Oh, gosh. It's been a pleasure. El Paso is, in this current time -- in 1991 -- is in a growing phase. It's a wonderful town with a lot of wonderful people, and I just hope it continues to grow in a meaningful manner that my grandchildren will enjoy as much as I have enjoyed it -- a terrific amount of good folks that are doing lots of good things, and we do them with very little.

Q That's for sure.

A We do them with very little, and, you know, maybe that makes it better. We appreciate it more. But I spent a number of years in Houston. I spent a year or so in the army away, and it was

always an absolute pleasure to get back to El Paso. It's got its own kind of beauty, and I hope that it never goes away. I still love to look at our mountains when the sun rises and the sun sets. Very few places in the world I'd rather be.

Q Me, too. A true southwesterner. Well, this concludes our interview today. Thank you very much.

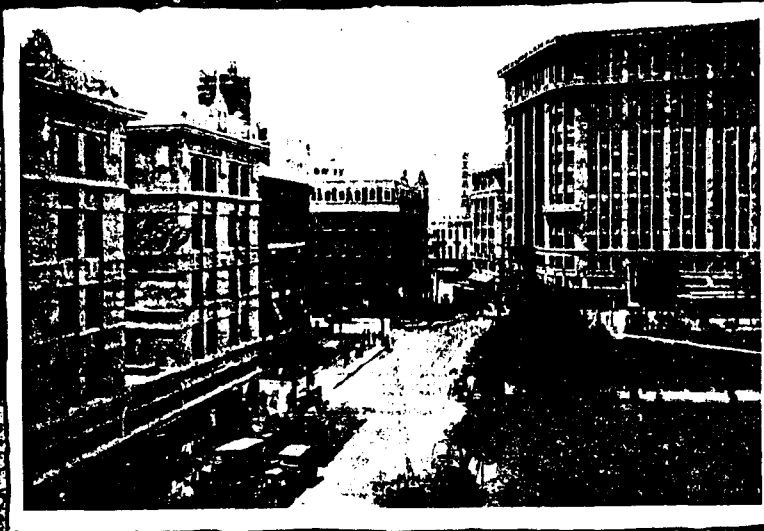
Q This is a postscript on Dr. Nickey.

A We were talking about tuberculosis. And when I first came back to El Paso in the army in 1959, I was asked by a couple of doctors if I would help take care of the children with tuberculosis here in El Paso County. And I said, "Yes." And I've been taking care of them ever since. I can remember the old tuberculosis ward at R.E. Thomason Hospital, which was then the El Paso City/County --or rather the El Paso City/County Hosiptal. I had 27 children hospitalized with severe forms of tuberculosis.

(end of tape)

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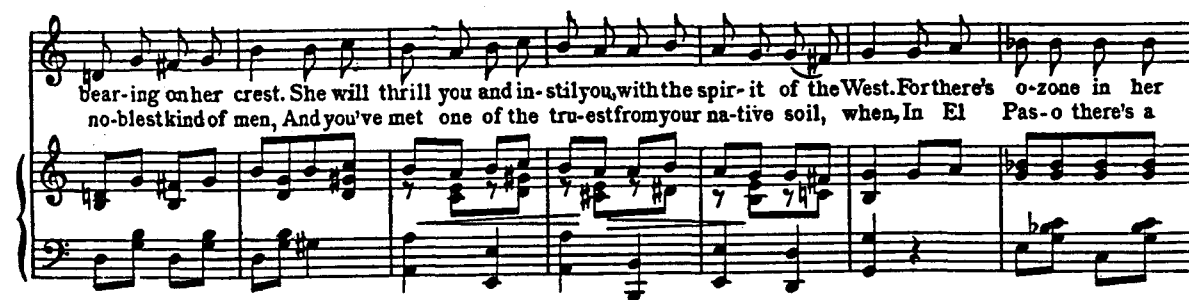
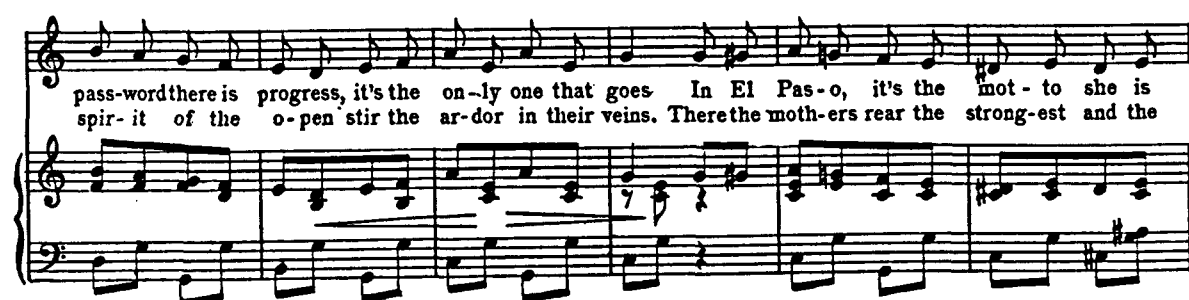
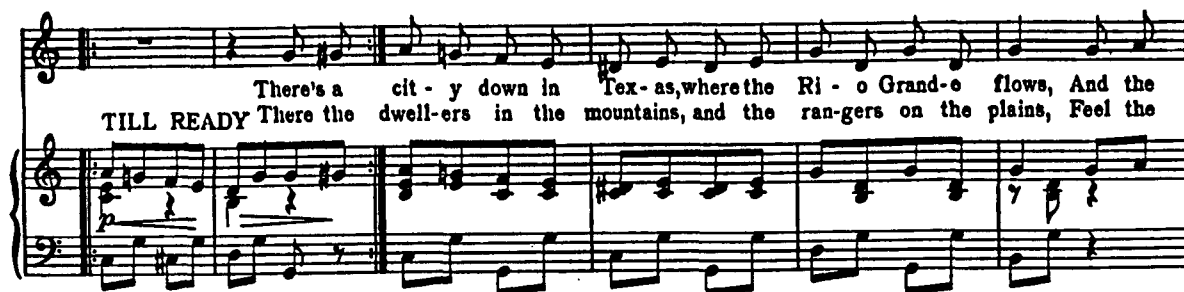
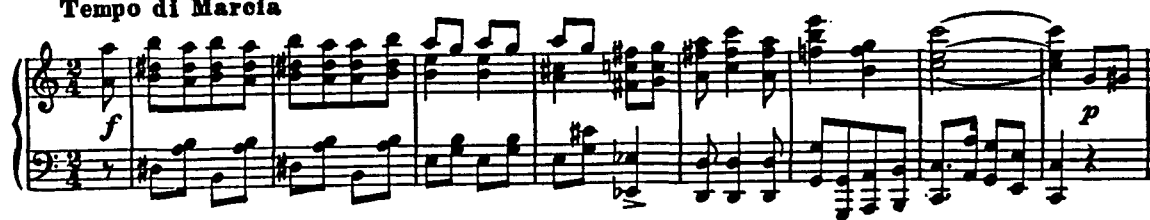
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true In a mes - sage of love, and a call to the West, Where her trail leads to the

land of the best. Just re - mem - ber that she is right in step, And you can

bet that ev' - ry step has pep! So when you see the glist - en on the Ri - o Grand - e,

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The musical score is written for voice and piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The piano part includes a *p-f* (piano-forte) marking. The score consists of six systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The final system includes first and second endings, marked with '1' and '2' above the staff.

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