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Interview no. 834

William Bass

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Chamizal Oral History Project

William Bass
By Michelle L. Gomilla

March 10, 1994

This is an interview with Mr. William Bass, former Chamizal resident. This interview is part of the Chamizal Oral History Project. The interview, by Michelle Gomilla, is taking place at the home of Mr. Bass, 5905 Athens Court, El Paso, Texas. Today's date is March 10, 1994.

G: Before I ask you to talk about your recollections of life in the Chamizal, Mr. Bass, would you like to tell us when and where you were born, please?

B: Well, I was born here in El Paso in 1921. And, well, so far, I got married and we've been married for fifty-two years. And I went to the Navy and I spent there two and a half years and then I came home in 1946. In 1947 I bought the house [in] the Chamizal area, you see?

G: What was your street address in the Chamizal area?

B: In the what?

G: Your street address, can you remember?

B: 1303 East 13th, yes. And then from there, well, like I say, we lived there a very comfortable life because the neighbors,

like I say, we always got together. [If] everybody had a party everybody went together to a party. And everybody [was] most friendly. Here it's friendly too, but not like that.

G: What was the neighborhood like?

B: Oh, [it was a] beautiful neighborhood, yes. At the start there were only about three houses when we moved there. So it looked like, you know, real dark. Like we lived way up in the sticks way up there. Pretty soon there, you know, everybody started building houses again there. So everybody got together and got signatures and we got the pavements on the streets, the sidewalks, and the street lights. And after awhile, about maybe four or five years later, we got the bus to come through there, the city bus. So we had a very, very, good time there living there for nineteen years that I lived there.

G: Did you attend church in that area?

B: Oh yes, Sacred Heart. We went to go...[Mrs. Bass corrects Mr. Bass's answer] No, San Ignacio. And then - well, most of the time she did because I was working on Sundays.

G: Your wife?

B: Yes. I worked with the railroad for forty years and I retired from the railroad.

G: Which railroad, Mr. Bass?

B: Southern Pacific. And I'm very glad that I did stay there so long because I got a good pension out of it and so does my wife. So we're living a comfortable life right now, just me

and her. Now my son is here, but we always lived by ourselves for a long time now since he got married. And my daughter got married too, see?

G: Did your children go to school in the Chamizal area?

B: Oh yes. Well, Bill did. My daughter went to Jefferson [High School] here.

G: And what was the name of the school that he attended there?

B: Bowie High School. That's right. And when we moved over here, Mr. Pallet(?) was the principal at Bowie High School. He told me, "If he can make it over here to Bowie High School because it's out of the district," he said, "but if you can make it on time to come to school, I'd like to have him here at Bowie School." So he graduated from that school, you see, because he said, "He's a very good student and we'd like to keep him here until he graduates from Bowie." And my daughter graduated from Jeff[erson High School]. So everything, you know, turned out pretty good.

And I bought this house here because, well, they wanted \$17,000 for it. And I brought them down for \$11,000 cash, see, because with the money the government gave me and [with] what I had, you know, I paid out \$2,000 difference. I paid out in a year and a half, see?

G: When did you first hear about the Chamizal Treaty?

B: Well, there were some surveyors going around and things like that. I said [to them], "What the score is?" And they said, "Oh, we're going to build another street through here." And

that was a lie. [chuckles] They were planning on the Chamizal, see? So, oh, maybe about two or three years later they came around, you know, asking questions if I wanted to sell and this and that, but...

G: Who was asking you questions?

B: Well some real estate [people], I guess, or something like that. I'm not sure. But the appraisers that came around was a colored man and a white man. And then they appraised the house and they told me what it was [worth], see, how it was.

G: Can you describe your house...

B: Huh?

G: ...in the Chamizal area? Can you describe your house, what it looked like?

B: Well, it was a one bedroom and [it had] a real small kitchen and a big living room. But later on, after I got through paying [for] the house, I added two bedrooms to it.

G: Do you remember...

B: So I had a house with two lots instead of one, see?

G: Do you remember how much your house payments were back then?

B: Well, my payment was \$34.50 a month.

G: \$34.50?

B: Well, you know, that was [low] compared to what I used to pay on the apartments where I used to live. [I only paid] \$5.50 a month. [chuckles]

G: Did you have a car?

B: Oh, yes! I always had a car. When I was in the service I

sold the car that I had. When I came back I bought another car - a convertible - that a sergeant from the army wanted to sell because he couldn't make the payments. And so he turned it over to me and I gave him a couple of hundred dollars and I finished paying it out. And then that's when we moved to the Chamizal, when we had that convertible, see? But I always had a car because from there to work [was quite a distance]. I used to work on Piedras Street. The Southern Pacific [Railroad] used to be on Piedras Street there. And then when I bought this house here - I wanted this house because I liked it and then the distance to my work - I used to work at the yards right here with the railroad so I'd come back and eat at noon. Never had to take no lunch so that made it a lot easier for me, see?

So I was glad, you know, that I bought this house here and that, like I said, the government come and checked it and they seen what I bought. They said, "I'm going to show people what you bought with that money the government gave you," see?

G: Let's back up to when the appraisers...

B: Uh-huh.

G: ...went to your home. You already knew that you and your family were going to have to relocate?

B: Yes. But they gave me [as much time as I needed]. They said, "[You have] all the time you want," see?

G: So they came into your house and they looked at it. They...

B: Yes.

G: ...They took pictures, they...

B: Yes, they took pictures [of] everything and looked at it and said, "The house is pretty well up-kept." For nineteen years, you know, I used to paint it every year inside and outside and everything. I kept it pretty well up-kept. And then I had grass and I had trees and everything. So it worked out pretty nice, see?

G: And when did they tell you how much they were going to offer you for it?

B: Well now, that was about maybe two or three months later that they told me. And they told me, "You can hire any moving van. We're going to pay the expenses for moving you and everything." And then [they said], "You got" you know, "thirty, sixty, [or] ninety days [or] whatever time you need to move. So you can start looking for a place so you don't have to rush [and be forced to take care of everything] in a month."

G: Did they give you any indication of an area where you might be interested in living or were there...

B: Oh, yes. There were real estate [agents] coming over there like flies to try to show you houses every place. [Turns to Mrs. Bass and says, "Right, honey?"] They even showed us [homes] up here where Hidden Valley [is]. You know where Hidden Valley is?

G: Could you tell me, more or less, where it was located- Hidden Valley?

B: Hidden Valley is right here off of Alameda, past Ascarate Lake. See, that's new houses they were building there. And they ran up to \$15,000 [or] \$20,000. And I said, "No. I like this one better." I liked the way it was built and everything, see?

G: Where did your neighbors relocate to?

B: Well, one neighbor is located up here on - [turns to Mrs. Bass and consults with her on the name of the street] Simpia. And another one that's - let's see, there's two of them, I think - went to Hidden Valley. And then, well, [Mrs. Bass begins recalling names and residences of former Chamizal residents]. But those people have died already. And Mike Martínez [moved] to Hidden Valley, too. So, it's kind of scattered around here.

G: How did your neighbors react to the news that they were going to have to move?

B: Well, most of them were comfortable because, like I said, they got their money's worth out of the property, see?

G: Were there any help centers located near your neighborhood where, for example, if you had questions or concerns you could go and seek information?

B: No, they just told us, "Just go ahead and look for whatever you want and, well, you know exactly what you're going to get out of your property, so that'll be easier. Buy it cash or pay it in payments. [Do] whatever you can do with the money [or do] whatever you want to do" - which [is what] a lot of

people did. They only made a down payment on the house and still owed [money on] the house. I said, "Not me." I paid [for] this house. Let's see, it was nearly twenty-seven years [ago] that I paid it. I was two years. Two years after I moved here I got clear title to it - everything - see?

G: Did you have any relatives living in the Chamizal besides your immediate family?

B: She did. [gestures to Mrs. Bass] Her sister [lived there]. She lives in San Antonio now. So [they used] what money they got from the house here [to buy another house]. [After] that, he got transferred over there to a job at an insurance company. They paid [for] their house over there [with the money they received from the sale of their home in the Chamizal].

G: So how much did you get for your house in the Chamizal?

B: \$9,000.

G: \$9,0000. And you thought that was a fair price?

B: Well, I got \$8,500 because I feel I [still] owed the two bedrooms that I added to it, see? So they made the payoff on those two rooms and then [they also paid] the taxes on the house, see? And they gave me the money in November.

G: Of 19...?

B: Nineteen sixty-seven. [Mrs. Bass corrects the date given by Mr. Bass]. [19]65? [19]65. Nineteen sixty-five, see? And then, well, I bought this house here in November [of] that same year. [bangs on table] Right here.

G: So do you think this neighborhood is an improvement from the neighborhood that you were living in [in] the Chamizal?

B: Well, not much like I tell you because I say everybody is friendly here, too. But like I say, [it's] not like [it was] over there. We'd go visit each other, but here they go by the street [and say], "Hello, how are you?" And that's it. Just this lady over here. She's about the only one that comes over here and talks with her, [gestures to Mrs. Bass] sits on the porch there, and go out for a walk in the afternoon and stuff like that.

But over there, it was more friendly than anything else, see? Everybody got together. [If you] had a party, everybody [would] go out there. So, like I say, I'm not complaining because, like I say, I like it here. It's nice and quiet. It's [a] nice neighborhood. It's close to everything. You can drive to a shopping center in less than five minutes. You've got Chelmont, you've got Fox Plaza, Bassett, [and] Cielo Vista [shopping centers] right there. Grocery stores [are also located nearby]. You can even walk to the grocery stores. There's a bank that's right here - a mile and a half - where I do all my banking [and] cash my check, see? So I'm very satisfied. I'm a lot closer to everything [here] than [I am] from downtown, though. [When I lived in the Chamizal area], the only thing I was close down [to] was downtown, but the shopping centers and stuff like that, that was quite a ways off. But here, right on there.

G: [Let's talk about] the housing in the Chamizal area. Were all the neighborhoods similar in appearance?

B: Most of them, yes. Well, they were built by the same contractor.

G: In the Chamizal [area]?

B: Yes. [They were built by] Mr. Oscar Ornelas. He was the contractor [who] built the houses. Most of them built adobe houses, see?

G: Was your house [constructed] of adobe?

B: Right. And the two bedrooms that I added to it were [constructed of] cinder block because it was hard to get adobes at that time then because they used to get adobes real easy, but then they stopped. They had to bring them over from Mexico. And this way, it takes longer and it costs more. It was cinder block. They had two bedroom [homes] built up [quickly]. In a week's time they were built. And they were beautiful bedrooms, real nice.

So Mr. Ornelas, well, he died already, but his house was on 12th Street and his house was part stone and part adobe, see? But my house, like I say, was all adobe and, like I say, that's what the building material was at that time, right? Now it's mostly cinder block, see? [However], some of them wouldn't use that [adobe as a building material]. Like at Hidden Valley [for example], all those houses are frame houses, see? Sometimes they got brick on the outside. They're half brick. This is a frame house, too. But...

G: Did - I'm sorry, go ahead.

B: Go ahead.

G: Did most of the people living in the Chamizal have clear title to their home?

B: Well, no. Just a few of us, as veterans, [had clear title to our homes] because we were the first ones to move out there. And I paid my house [off] in less than eleven years, see? And some people moved later on so, maybe, they got a thirty-year contract instead. I had a fifteen-year contract, but I paid it [off] in less than eleven [years] because I kept the payments in under the escrow [and the interest] that was supposed to come to me, I just made it go in there. So [I] made the payments a lot faster, see? So, I don't know, I paid it [off in] about eleven years, I guess, or a little less. But most of us, like Tomás and - Tomás was the only one that that moved out there was when I moved. And he has his house paid for, too. Tomás [consults with Mrs. Bass on last name] Arreola, yes.

G: Where does he live now?

B: He lives in Hidden Valley. He worked with the railroad. He retired from the railroad like me. And he's like five or six [years] older than me. And when they moved him he said, well, [that] he got his money's worth, too. He said, "I'm happy and I got it." Because, well, he liked it over there, too, like I said.

Nobody bothered you, nothing. We were [living] right by

the border. Wetbacks came across everyday [and crossed] back at night and day and they never bothered nobody. They never did. The only thing they stole from us over there was my son's bicycle because, see, at that time, a bicycle [was] what you called, really, transportation in Juárez, see? That's the only thing that they ever stole from us. [glances at wife and says, "Right, honey?"] We used to go to San Antonio, maybe twice a year, and we'd leave the house. Nobody would break into it or anything. Nothing. Everything [was] fine. And this house here, the first year that we went on vacation, they broke into this house.

G: My goodness!

B: You see?

G: Were there any type of community organizations formed to protest against the [implementation of the] Chamizal Treaty?

B: Well, I don't think so because everybody was, you know, like they said, "We're going to get more [for our house in the Chamizal] than what we paid for it." So like I was getting ready to buy another house anyway. Like I told her, I said, "[We need a larger house] because the family is, you know, growing more. It's a kind of a small house, you know."

G: So you had plans on moving...

B: Yeah.

G: ...regardless of the implementation of the Treaty?

B: Yeah, before then, yes. I wanted a bigger house, you know, because, well, my son was growing big. The daughter, the same

thing. And I said, "We only have two extra bedrooms," see? Because the other bedroom that we had we made into a dining room because the kitchen was real small, real small. So we made that [into a bedroom]. So that one bedroom was for my daughter and my son but they were growing and [I knew that] it's not right for them to sleep together [chuckles], you know, in the same bedroom. So I said, "We're going to have to buy another house." So when they told us about the Chamizal I said, "Well," I said, "like I think it's okay."

G: How did you first hear about the Chamizal [Treaty]? Were there announcements on the radio?

B: No, no, no. Just like I said, [there were] people out there surveying [and] this and that. And I thought it was like, they said, "Oh, we're going to build another street over here." That was a bunch of lies. They [were] just surveying where the line was going to be, see, because they had to measure there because they had railroad tracks right there by the border. And they had to be removed and everything so they had to figure everything out, you know. And...

G: Were those the railroad lines of the railroad company you were working for?

B: Part of it, yes. You see, there was freight that came over from Mexico [that] stopped there and then the Southern Pacific [would] go and pick up the loads and take them to the yard over here, see? [In the] same way, Southern Pacific [would] take cars over there and go to Mexico, see? That's what they

call that Black Bridge. That's where the trains came across, you know. And...

G: Where's the Black Bridge located, Mr. Bass?

B: Right there by Santa Fe Street, yeah.

G: Do you have any pictures of your home in the Chamizal or any pictures of the area?

B: Probably so, yeah.

G: Perhaps you could share them with us later.

B: I don't know where they're at though, but we did have pictures because we used to take pictures of the kids out there in front of the house and stuff like that. But [as to] where they're at that's a different story. [turns to Mrs. Bass and discusses possibility of locating photographs] Yeah, we got them in there, but where they're at we don't know. [Mrs. Bass comments on location of photograph album. Mr. Bass asks Mrs. Bass to locate the album] Well, go see if you can find them. Don't look too hard, whatever you can find out there. [Mrs. Bass exits to search for album] She has trouble starting to walk with her leg, you know. It gets cramped. She had an operation on her knee.

So that was a real comfortable living there. I liked it because, like I said, I didn't have to worry about nothing there. See, Immigration [officials] was always around there right close by. They never bothered the kids coming across or anything. The only thing they were looking for was contraband, you know, but...

G: Was there much contraband at that time?

B: Well, the only contraband that was going was going to go that way. [It would] go to Mexico because at that time, see, you couldn't buy a television over there unless you had a permit. So they smuggled televisions through there - radios and televisions - so you wouldn't have to pay the, you know, the whatever they call it, the *mordida*, see? So coming back this way, well, they came across just to either go up there and find out if they could clean your yard for you or wash your car [and] stuff like that.

G: Do you remember Cordova Island?

B: Oh, yes! That was a beautiful little island.

G: Could you tell us a little bit about the island?

B: Well, it's right there - where those projects is right now - right before you get to Bowie High School. That was a nice place because there was corn [and] chile. You could see it from Paisano Drive - the little ranch they had there, the little farm. Everything [was] real nice. That was the Cordova. They used to call it - they had a little name for that little island there. But that was right there close to the United States, see? And part of the United States was on the other side where Peyton Packing Company was, see? And that was right in the middle, see?

G: If I recall, Peyton Packing Company was forced to relocate, also.

B: Yes. Yeah, it was in the Chamizal area. That one and the

stockyards, too. The stockyards were right there, right there before you hit the little Cordova Island there.

G: Can you remember the names of any other businesses that were located [in the Chamizal] and were forced to relocate?

B: Well, let's see. Wait a minute. Well, there used to be Lone Star Cotton Mills, but then later on it was El Paso Pipe, or something like that - that was a big building - because I worked there right before I started working with the railroad. That was in 1941. I worked there at the cotton mill as a boiler operator. I used to go in at four o'clock in the morning and get off at seven in the afternoon.

G: That was a long day.

B: [I worked] for a dollar and twenty-eight [cents] an hour - no - yeah, [I was paid] one twenty-eight an hour. That was the only way to make money. [I had to] work that many hours. Then I used to [walk to work] when my car didn't start in the mornings. So I had to walk. So I'd go down the railroad tracks where that little Cordova Island is, see? That's why I know [about] all the corn and stuff like that. Sometimes the Immigration [would] come up and give me a lift and take me back to the cotton mills, yeah. And when they'd see me with my lunch box they would pick me up there. On [some] Sunday afternoons, a train coming down bringing cars from Mexico - [The train engineers would also] give me a ride up to (unintelligible) Street.

Well, like I tell the wife, I was real happy with my job

but when I seen they were hiring at Southern Pacific I said, "Well, heck. It's only two blocks from my house." So I went up there and applied and they gave me a job right away.

G: Did most of the employees working there at that time, were they living in the Chamizal area?

B: Well, most of them. We had about four or five [Chamizal residents] working with the railroad right there and then [we] had some from the Post Office, some with the service, and some with the smelter. Everybody was working. Like my *compadre*, Villa - the one I told you [about who] used to sign those planes.

G: What was his first name, Mr. Bass?

B: I can't remember. He was a real jolly old man. He died that last year [1993] - Mr. Villa. And he used to be a painter for the schools. [Turns to Mrs. Bass and asks her if she remembers the first name of Mr. Villa]. José? José Villa. Joe Villa.

G: And he lived in the Chamizal area?

B: Oh, yeah. Yeah, he built his house there. His [home] was one of the houses that wasn't built by that contractor. He built his house himself - him and his wife - and well, a few friends, you know, and stuff like that.

G: And he was a painter?

B: Oh, yeah. He was a good painter. *Hay está. ¡Mira!* [Mr. and Mrs. Bass show and photographs of family and home taken in the Chamizal area]

G: Perhaps we can save them for after the interview and I'll...

B: Okay.

G: ...look at them.

B: Well, there isn't much more to say because, like I say, that about covers everything. Like I said, I'm glad, you know that, like I said, I needed to buy another house anyway so when that thing came along, I said, "Why not?"

G: If I asked you to share with us your happiest memory of life in the Chamizal what would you tell us? [Share with us] your fondest memories.

B: Well, I say, I still dream about it because I really loved that place. I really loved it because I was real comfortable living there because everything [was] so friendly and everything, see? I still tell the wife in the morning when I get up, "You know, I was dreaming about my house over there [on] 13th Street," see? [I can remember it] the same way as [it was]. [Time] doesn't change anything, see? So, I say, I was glad that what happened, it's for the good.

People that lost out was people that were renting because there were a few people there renting the houses. They weren't buying the house. And that's the one that people lost because they had to, you know, move out and you couldn't find a place cheaper than that to rent, I guess, I don't think. But most of us, the owners of the houses there [didn't lose out].

There was another little island there between - on 11th

Street - right behind Hart School [consults with wife on name of island], the Ranchito. There was only a few apartment houses there and it was enclosed in right behind the houses that were from the Chamizal. Those people had to move out, too.

The only business [forced to relocate] was that propane company that was there, too. And it moved out to someplace up here on Hawkins up there. And then the Peyton [Meat Company also relocated] and then the cotton mills. [turns to Mrs. Bass and discusses names of additional businesses that relocated]. Barq's [Bottling Company also relocated], but they moved out a long time before then. Yeah, it was there, but it moved out before the Chamizal though, before they settled that thing with the Chamizal. The only thing that was there was that propane gas [company]. And then, like this Lone Star Cotton Mills used to be there, but they sold out to a pipe company, some pipe company. I don't know what the real name [was]. But everything turned out pretty good.

So when they made this Border Highway over here, it went right by there where our house was, yes. So when we go to downtown, or something like that, we take Border Highway and we're there in five minutes, see?

G: I can imagine when you're driving along the highway it brings back a lot of memories.

B: Oh, yeah, you can say that. That's where our house was. [Mrs. Bass comments on the change of river channels] The

river and everything. They brought the river back this way. But on the long run, I think, the United States made a better bargain than Mexico because Mexico got some land back, but the United States got a better piece of it. Like where Bowie High School is that used to be Chamizal, now see? Look at all that that used to be the little Ranchito. Cordova Island there, that's where it was. Where Bowie High School is, see? So we got a better deal out of it than they did. I figured that. They were fair in getting all those houses and everything like that but, like I say, the government was going to get their money for them. So, if they didn't want to pay for them they tore them down. There was nothing left. [chuckles] So what they got was just the land. And, like I say, I think we got a better deal out of it because they got part of the city dump. That's where the city dump used to be, see? And [they also got] Peyton - Peyton was a real old building anyway - and the stock yards. That's about [it]. I don't think they got anything better than we did anyway. But that's it. That's the kind of deal they wanted so they got it that way.

I'm satisfied I got my part of it. [chuckles] I'm better off than I was before because I got a bigger house and everything - four bedrooms [and] two full baths. You don't see [gestures] living rooms the size of that.

G: It's a good size.

B: All the living rooms [in other houses] are real small. Look at that. [gestures towards living room] My bedrooms are

eleven by eleven. You don't find them [larger] than eight by eight in mostly any [other] place, see? But look at the kitchen here. The only thing that I did to the house - it used to be what you called ranch style. So we had a gable put on it. And that's about it to what I did to it. And [I added] the carport. But, like I said, what I spent on this house, everything probably [came to about] under \$22,000 altogether. And what did I pay for it? Maybe \$11,000? That's what I did altogether to it. I'm very comfortable.

I like it because the location is [convenient]. I can even walk to the bank if I want to. In about ten minutes I [can] walk [to the bank]. I get up in the mornings and go walk around all the way up close to the Border Highway and then back in the mornings when it's nice. But when it's windy or too cold I don't go out because, like I said, I don't want to get sick. [chuckles]

[Mrs. Bass remarks on the condition of Mr. Bass's eyes] And my eyes, you know. She got operated on her cataracts, too. But she uses glasses. I don't use glasses. But the doctor told me, he said, "Well, you can go through your life the same way you are." This eye [gestures] is to look long distance and this [eye] is [to look] short distance, see? See, I can read the newspaper [gestures] here - the little letters and everything - say, like this, stuff like this, stuff like that - with this eye. [I can read] all the newspaper, but with this eye [gestures] I can't. It's for

long distance. So he made me a prescription so both eyes can be the same. So [he said], "You can use your glasses whenever you want to. When you don't want to, you don't have to use them," see? But most of the time I don't use glasses, see, like I say. But I'm satisfied with what [he tells me]. Yesterday he checked me out and he said, "Everything's okay. So I won't see you until November." So...

G: That's good.

B: Yeah, real good. Dr. Ramos(?) He's a real good eye doctor.

G: Would you like to add anything else about the Chamizal, Mr. Bass?

B: Well, I don't think. I think I about covered everything. Like I said, I think I made a good deal when the government paid me for my house to buy this house. Otherwise, like I said, I couldn't get much rent for that house over there because the rents were too low to make the payment on another house, you know. So I think we made a good deal because this way, with what money I gave into this house, right away, I came out with[out] any balance. I didn't pay no interest on what I owed, because that mortgage invest[or] told me, he said, "Mr. Bass..."

End of Tape One

Side A

Beginning of Tape One

Side B

B: Okay. What do you want to know more? About what?

G: I can't think of anything else I'd like to ask you for now.

B: Well, like I say, I think we about covered everything. And I'm very glad that you came over here to interview with me because, like I say, I'm not ashamed. And I'm not mad for what happened and everything because I think the government has the right to do whatever they want to if they are fair with you, too, you know. Because if they are going to push you out, you know, and just take the land away from you without paying you anything - now, that's different, things like that. A lot of places are [like that]. That's just like those Indians that are fighting over there in Mexico because they tried to take over their land without paying them for it, see? That's the bad part about it, see?

And I figure that the government treated me fair and I'm glad. I'm not sorry about nothing. She liked this house, too. When we first came over here, I said, "Look," I said. [Mrs. Bass adds that she did not like the house initially. Mr. Bass comments on her statement.] Well, at first, no. Well, because you know why? She seen the bedroom and living room in the back. Well, people don't have to come to the living room like [in] other places [where] you have to go through the living room to get to anyplace, see?

G: Correct.

B: So here, it's nice by itself [gestures] over there. And we enjoy it now. We like it here. Like I said, [it's] a big house for both of us but we have a lot of company sometimes. Like - what was that - at my daughter's birthday, we had a full house. [chuckles] I said, "It's a lot of room. You want to go to the bathroom? Well, there's two of them. You don't have to wait in line for nobody." So everything's very nice. So would you like to see some of those pictures? Well, let's see.

G: Perhaps we can stop talking for now and you can show us the pictures, but I'm very appreciative of the time that you took to spend with me talking about the Chamizal.

B: Well, like I say, alright. Because I like to have something like that, you know, like, if somebody wants to know something that really happened, you know. And that's history, that's right. And like I say, people that are sorry for that I don't know why because they got their money. If they didn't buy another house, well, that's somebody else's fault. That's right, like I say. Like I told the wife, "I don't want to have to pay [on] a new house again." Everything [is] just like it's supposed to be again because, like I said, she didn't ever work in her life, see? She gets a pension from the railroad. [She's paid] from my paycheck, see? She gets her check and I get my check, see? Used to be - before - all the pension came to the men. But they [would] wander off and

left the woman high and dry [with] no money. You see, that way it's split. She gets her part and I get my part. (chuckles)

And we live very comfortable. Like I said, fifty-two years married and we still enjoy ourselves real good, see? We were a little over a year married when I went into the service. And when I came back, well, I said [to my wife] - because I was going to buy a house before I went into the service but they wouldn't have [had] one [available for us] because the bank wouldn't allow us to [buy] one because I was [classified as a] 1-A. And I said, "If you go into the service who's going to pay for the house," see? So I told the wife, "When I first now get out," I said, "we're going to buy a house." And we did.

When this thing came around, there was a Mr. Harold Hoffman, the owner of the Wabash Bar. We met overseas and he said, "When we get discharged" - and he lived here in El Paso, too - he told me, "I want to look you up. I want you to go with me and locate a business that I want to buy because you know most of the businesses here in El Paso." So I said, "Okay." So we got discharged. He came up to my house. We went out looking for a place and he settled down on buying this Wabash Bar. The Wabash Bar is a bar and a hotel on top. It was right there in front of Southern Pacific. He had a lot of business, see?

G: And what was the name of it?

B: Wabash.

G: Can you spell that?

B: Wabash Bar - I don't know.

G: That's okay.

B: Wabash Bar. That and the El Paso Bar were the only two bars there close to the railroad, see, and they had all the business. And I went to work for him in the afternoon after I got out off work. I went up there and worked for him, especially Friday and Saturday. See, I used to go up there and work from six o'clock to twelve o'clock at night for him, see?

So when this deal came across from the Chamizal, he told me - he's the one that heard about it, you know - and he told me, "Would you like to buy a house over in the Chamizal?" I said - they didn't call it Chamizal at that time, they called it [consults Mrs. Bass as to name of area] Rio Linda district - "Well, let's go." So we looked at it and he said - and I showed him the contract - and he said, "Now buy this house here. This one has two lots. The rest of the houses only have one lot." So I took that one. And he even gave a down payment for me - a hundred dollars, see? He liked me so much, you know, that I would work with him and take care of his business and everything, you know. He trusted me because he'd go home, I'd close the bar, I'd take the change from the cash register, and in the morning I'd go by there and I'd leave it there. He trusted me that I wasn't going to steal anything so

we got along pretty good.

And when he sold the bar he went back to the service and he came back one time and he said, "How do you like your house?" I said, "I'm doing fine." I said, "Well, what are you going to do?" He said, "I'm back in the service" - he was a major in the Air Force. He said, "I went back to the service."

Later on his wife said that he died from lung cancer. He never smoked. So, you know. But he's the one that gave me the down payment for the house - a hundred dollars. That was the down payment. [chuckles] And I paid \$34.50 a month. That's including the insurance and the taxes and the house [payment] and everything. When I got through paying the house I seen the taxes as [costing me] about \$60, \$70, or \$80 a year.

G: Back then that was a lot of money.

B: Yeah, that was a lot of money, yeah, but, like I said, it's not the same as paying rent. Like here we pay about, say, \$60 a month in the bank or have the taxes paid by the year, see? Where can you live with \$60 a month? Not even a garage! (laughs) So, I told her, I said, "The best thing to have in your life is your home. A roof over your head, see? The rest you can make it one way or the other. Like I tell you - me and her - we get along fine. I help her. She helps me [with] everything.

G: Okay, Mr. Bass. Well, we'll stop for now and if you like, I

can come back another day and we can talk some more. But once again, I'd like to thank...

B: No.

G: ...you for your time.

B: No. That's going to be about it, this time. I'm glad you came and, well, I'm glad I answered most of your questions. And, like I say, everything that I say is true because I don't have no regrets on anything. Everything's fine. I'm getting, like I say, I'm getting old and I'm glad I got my house. And I feel fine and everything else, right, see? I'm a grandfather. And today I'll have my granddaughters today. I'm going to pick them up at school today. I get them twice a week. Take them over here, yes.

G: Okay, well thank you very much...

B: Alright.

G: ...Mr. Bass.

B: Yeah, alright.

G: This is the end of the interview.

B: Okay.

End of Interview