

10-1989

Interview no. 875

Salvador F. Treviño

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Salvador F. Treviño by Charles H. Martin, 1989, "Interview no. 875," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

Salvador Treviño
Interviewed by Dr. Charles H. Martin
October 13, 1989

During the interview in El Paso, Texas, Pollard Rodgers was present. Transcript reflects his comments with a P.

M: Okay. Why don't I start off by asking you where you grew up and how you first learned about the College of Mines?

T: My being in those days in the United States was due to political asylum. My father was exiled during the later part of the revolution, and so we came to the United States. I was raised in San Antonio, Texas. I came to the United States when I was eleven years old. We lived in San Antonio until graduation from high school. There were two reasons for my coming to the Texas [College of] Mines. The first one was that my grandfather on my mother's side, was a miner, a prosperous miner, a successful miner in Chihuahua, so I had that background. Then I would have been an army man just like my father was, but the political situation wasn't quite favorable. I could have gone to the military academy in Mexico. I had the right to have been there, but the political situation wasn't right. I was looking for an outdoor life. Definitely I had one alternative which was taking agricultural training, but then the agricultural picture in Mexico wasn't too good after the revolution ...

M: Sure.

T: ... so mining was my alternative. And since we were lucky enough to be Texas residents, and we could get into a state

college of the University of Texas paying the minimum tuition, which was very important because in those days, none of us had any money. I don't mean all students; [I mean] no one. The faculty didn't have any money either. (laughter) None of us! It was no distinction to be poor.

M: Umm, hmm.

T: We were all struggling. [to P] In your interview you got the alphabet letters of the Roosevelt administration wrong. It was the NYA that paid us thirty cents an hour, not twenty.

P: I think it was twenty. (chuckles)

T: And it was NYA, not NRA. It was National Youth Administration. They paid us thirty cents an hour and it really helped us all.

M: To do what kinds of jobs would the NYA have you do?

T: Yes, I had a number of them. I helped Indian Joe for quite a while on the gardens. "Gardens," lets put that in parentheses [quotations] because they were mostly rock gardens. (laughter) I was a gardener for years! Then I was the fire assaying student instructor.

M: The what?

T: The fire assaying ...

M: Oh.

T: It's a chemistry course. And I was the student instructor there for a couple of years. That has a story because in my last year as a senior, Professor Seamon...

M: Which Seamon was this? [to P.]

T: W. H. or was it ...?

P: Uh, well...

M: One of the Seamons.

T: I'm guessing at the W. H. He was the oldest one, the only one surviving in our time.

M: Okay, the one that was still there.

T: And he had a light stroke or light heart attack, and White Father Wiggins, that is what we called him.

P: White Father.

T: The White Father called me up to his office and said, "Look, you're gonna have to take over that class until we can get a professor that is duly qualified." I was only a senior student. That was very interesting since I was making the usual, the maximum of the NYA program, thirty dollars a month. You couldn't work for more. You could work for more but they wouldn't "pay you more." [All three say it at the same time and chuckle.] Wiggins says, "You're going to have to take over that class." Of course, I thought maybe I'd get instead of thierty, I might get forth. (chuckles) So I asked and he said, "Let me find out." He called someone and said, "You're going to get paid eighty-five dollars a month." I was rich from then on. Eighty-five dollars! It lasted a few months because they could not get anyone because the war was coming on. This was in my senior year.

M: Um, hmm.

T: They couldn't, you know...it was difficut because young people were all going into the army.

M: I forgot to ask you, which year specifically did you attend College of Mines?

T: In which years?

M: Yeah. When did you start?

T: I started in 1936 and ended up in 1941 becuae I took all three options.

M: Okay.

T: Mining, metallurgy, and geology, which have been a lot of help, all three of them.

M: Those are all options under engineering?

T: Yes.

M: Mining engineering.

T: You got your engineering degree with an option in mining, geology or in metallurgy.

M: Okay.

T: I took all three of them. That meant I took all the courses.

M: Um, hum.

T: I'm glad I did. It all helped.

M: How many students were in, how many students got NYA jobs because I hadn't realized we had an NYA program here? Was it quite a few students get jobs or just a handful of them?

T: Most of us. My gosh, I don't know if anybody could have made it without. We all had some help. By the way Cap[tain] used to manage that, Cap[tain] Kidd. And he was very careful to distribute it out the best he could. The students from Mexico they were just as hard up as the local ones. There was no

distinction there. (chuckles) Then I told him, "Okay, but remember I've got to pay fourteen dollars for this whole course." Imagine a flying course for fourteen dollars! (chuckling) "What if something comes up?" He says...

M: Umm, hmm.

T: "You go ahead and take it and if something comes up, I'll get you your money back." Eventually I took my first solo flight one morning. Cap called me in the afternoon and said, "Just drop it. Just don't go. Don't argue with me. Just don't go." (laughter) Something came up where I shouldn't be taking it because I wasn't an American citizen. That's what the whole program was about, to make American pilots, not to make Mexican pilots. Then I said, "What about the fourteen dollars?" Cap said, "I'll get them back to you one way or another." He did. That's a good story. It tells so much about the quality of the professors that we had.

M: Who were some of the professors that you did have classes with?

T: It was very few of them. I'll tell you we had classes with all of them. Let's start with the peedoggie professors.

M: Okay.

T: They were Egg, Dr. Norma Egg. Did I get that right?

P: Yep. Proceed.

T: Gladys Gregory was the history professor. Dr. Egg, Dr. Zimmerman, and Dr. Sonnichsen were our English teachers.

M: That's right. He was there.

T: So those were the peedoggie professors that we had to deal with. The engineering professors were, of course, Cap Kidd, Graham, Seamon, Thomas, Lake and Ball in chemistry. And electricity was Professor Decker, Dr. Knapp and Howard Quinn, and Nelson in geology. They were all great. They were not only professors, they were friends.

P: Yeah.

T: They knew all of us. They knew our problems. They knew who we were. It was a very personal relationship.

M: Uh, huh. Which one or ones in particular made an impression on you? Obviously most of them, but which one in particular?

T: All of them, but I remember Graham. Professor Graham was a sour (accents the r) character. He wasn't too popular because he was silent, and not...but I got along just fine with Graham. One time I was working - in those days we had access to every place -- on one of the metallurgy classrooms off hours. I was using the blackboard, and Graham came in and said, "Son, what are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm planning my future." He said, "Okay." He looked at it and says, "That would be pretty good if you can make it." he says, "You keep trying. Follow it." And that was the end of that. One anecdote about Professor Graham. I came back from a year of working up north. I got my "master's degree" in two mines: one in Colorado and one in Wyoming. I'll tell you that degree was worth its weight in gold. (chuckling) One full year to the day I worked as a miner, not as an engineer.

M: Uh, hum.

T: I came back and was talking to Prof. Graham. He had a letter under the glass on his desk of recommendation by his boss. Sitting there with him, I saw that letter. I said, "I got a better one." He said, "Ahh, it can't be better than that." I said, "I've got a better one." Graham asked, "I'd like to see it." I said, "I'll bring it this afternoon." So I did. He looked at it and said, "You don't have to work for AS&R [American Smelting and Refining]." I had gotten a job with AS&R in Mexico. That was the only one that answered my letters. So I was going to be just a lowly engineer with AS&R. I had been offered a job at \$125 a month. "I can get you a better job." Can you imagine the difference that that made in my career? He said, "Can you wait three days?" I said, "Sure can." I had all kinds of money. (chuckles) Gee whiz, money was sticking out of all my pockets. I probably had \$500, and I paid off my college debts which were probably about \$300. Still had a fortune, \$200 left! So two days later Prof. Graham said, "You got a job. You're going to get \$185 instead of \$125." I said, "Boy, that was...." Few years later I was manager of that company.

M: Who did you get the job with? What was the company?

T: That was the Refinadora. It was an important producer of antimony. A few years later I was manager of that company. It was a big step. I've always remembered that. He said something that's interesting. He said, "Every young man

should work for AS&R when he's young enough to quit."
(laughing)

M: Let me ask you a little bit, since you mentioned going to Mexico, about the number of students who were attending at the time from Mexico or whose families had been from Mexico but, like you, were maybe ...

T: Sure.

M: ...here temporarily in the United States.

T: Let me say this. These figures are in my head, whether they're right or one percent off of twenty percent, I don't know. The students from Mexico, mostly from Chihuahua, we were about fifteen percent of the freshman engineering class.

M: Ahh.

T: But sometimes, we were eighty percent of the graduating class. There was one year in which we were one hundred percent. There is only one explanation for that. Like Graham used to say, he said, "The best students in this school are the Mexicans, and the worst are the Mexicans." (laughter) "There is nothing in between." There was quite a distinction: those from south El Paso and those that did come from Mexico. There was quite a difference. And there was only one explanation for that high caliber. They weren't just the run-of-the-mill like the El Paso Mexicans that came here. They were just graduated from high school and came to the nearest college. Those of us who came from Mexico, we were chosen. And important factor in

any university, [we] wanted to be mining engineers.

M: Sure. Where did most of them go to work then, after they would finish? Would they go back to Mexico?

T: All of us Mexicans, in those days I don't remember one that ever planned to stay in the United States. We would give ourselves one year in some mines here to get our "master's degree" in the mines and then go back to Mexico. I know of one that came back, but certainly none of us planned to stay in the USA. We were Mexican mining engineers, and we were going to work in Mexico, at a time that was historically very important, a generation that has been very important.

M: Uh huh. We'll come back to what happens when people go back to Mexico in a little bit because I want to stay on the College of Mines for a while, then we'll come to work in Mexico in a little bit. What were some of the typical activities, social activities, that students, and in particular yourself and your friends, were involved in back at that time?

T: You know we used to go to the movies and see pictures of Joe College boys and all that fuss. (chuckles) There wasn't much of that in our time. It was just nothing but hard labor.

M: Uh huh.

T: It was work and study and hard labor, very little Joe College stuff. Truly, the . . . our social activities were tied to the Scientific Club and whatever activities were on the engineering side of the school. We went to Juarez very little, not very often; it took money or walking down all the way.

Besides as we look back we were not heavy drinkers, drugs. We never even heard of them. (chuckles) We didn't even know what they were. We were a pretty clean bunch of boys and girls.

M: Uh huh.

T: The girls were respected. There was nothing around, out of line. It was a very clean situation.

M: What about some organizations that had existed at least a couple of years earlier, like: Phi Beta Mex and the Latin America Club? Were they still active when you were a student?

T: We had damn little to do with sororities or with anything else. It's really...

M: Scott Odin, I think, was in Phi Beta Mex which was mostly for students from Mexico.

T: Yeah, yeah. I remember that. It was founded about that time. Some of the Mexicans were active in that but I was too busy. I was a track man. I was an Alpha Chi, which at that time had something to do with the scholastic merit.

P: It had a lot to do [with it].

T: (Chuckles) Scholastic something or other, grades. Barstow [Pollard Rodgers] and I were friends for many years.

M: Uh, huh.

T: Really our social life was quite limited.

M: What about things like M Day or I saw something in the annual that's called Snow Fiesta.

P: That was later.

T: That was...it must have been later. The M Day was the day we

took care of the freshmen if you were not a freshman. But I remember that everybody wore their little cap, that freshman cap, quite a bit of it was worn. The freshmen wore that beanie. It was a pretty clean celebration. It wasn't bad. Nobody was hurt.

M: So Cap ran his side [of the campus]?

T: Oh, he ran it very much. He was criticizing the peedoggies all the time and chewing tobacco the whole hour he was lecturing.

P: And wouldn't spit.

T: And wouldn't spit until the class was over. Let me tell you a story on Wiggins. I got a summons from his office to report to his office on some day some hour. I didn't know what it was all about. When I got there I realized there were all Mexicans being summoned. And Wiggins said, "Okay, boys I understand you don't like some of the things we do here," or something about St. Patrick's was coming up and he didn't want any difficulties or exaggerations or hurting anyone.

M: Uh, hum.

T: So he was lecturing the rough Mexican boys and he said, "Look. To make this very clear, we run this show the way we like to run it. If you don't like it, you can go home." That was the end of the revolutions. (laughing) And there was no discussion. There was no argument. If you didn't like it, get out. Simple as that. There was no talk back.

M: It was not a discussion.

T: No, no discussion.

M: What about the St. Pat's Day initiation? Did you go through that or participate in that?

T: Yes, we all participated. It was something very...but that's not saying anything exaggerated, nothing that hurt. You got painted with silver nitrate, a cross or something. I remember we had one Jewish boy from New York. They put a star of David on his forehead with nitrate (laughs) that lasted about two or three days. That's about as bad as things ever got. You (addressing Pollard Rodgers) don't remember his name?

P: Oh year, Sp...

T; Spo, Spar, Spar.

P: Spar. Oh, yeah, an engineer, yeah.

T: Yeah, and Cap was talking, he says, "Well." He was pretty good in his classes and what-not, and he said, "Well, if you last out, you're going to be the first Jewish mining engineer."
(laughter)

P: And he did.

T: No, he didn't finish.

P: He graduated.

T: You are right about Spar. Where we are wrong is confusing him with the boy from New York. He left befgore. He was here a couple of years. We were pretty mean with him. He didn't have any idea about west Texas.

M: Mmm.

T: They used to keep him scared as hell. They told him that in the dorms there were a bunch of rattlesnakes. But that wasn't

his fault.

M: What about...?

T: Another story on Cap. We had a classmate, Cobos. He was a hurdler, quite good. He was struggling through his studies. He went to see Cap and said, "You know, I've been invited to go to the Olympics on the Mexican track team" - Central American Olympics or something in those days. He says, "You know, Cap, I'd have to miss a few days of school or a couple of weeks or something." Cap looked at him. Cap made a mistake that time because he told him, "Look, you go to the Olympics." He was insinuating that he was never going to make it here. (laughing) He was wrong about it. He says, "You go to the Olympics." That was Cap all right. I'll tell you later a story about the red E that Cap gave me by mistake.

M: A red what?

T: E. In my term grade.

M: Mmm.

T: He made a mistake and gave me a red E which was not normal.

M: So what happened?

T: Well, a lot of things happened. I got bawled out by Cap as usual. I met Dr. Quinn with a big smile, ear to ear, and he said, "You got a red E." They used to personally put the grade on the little book. Each professor wrote the grade personally. When he put the A on my geology course, he saw a red E on my book. This was my junior year, I think. God, he was so happy. I said that can't be! It was in Hydraulics. I

had to spend the whole Christmas vacation, because I couldn't go home, taking care of the museum, which was brand new in those days.

M: The Centennial Museum.

T: So I was watching that museum, had nothing to do. I just sat there and studied, so I worked every problem in that Hydraulics book. I knew it all. Fifteen days with just doing nothing but working Hydraulics problems, because we knew that Cap's tests were very tough. Sure enough he comes up with a red E.

End of Side One

Beginning of Side Two

M: Okay, it ought to be back on.

T: (Imitating Cap) "You, all of you students who think you're good, aren't as good as you think. I know what you're here for now, get out." That was the end of the discussion about that red E. On the second semester of the course I got an A from Cap. He used to brag about how somebody that loafed the first semester got an E, made an A the second semester, that he really worked at it. After that was over I walked into his office and said, "Cap, I think you made a mistake." He says, "I don't think so." He gave me the key to the safe. He had a room with a safe door, one of those bank doors.

M: That's a walk-in?

T: Yeah, walk-in safe. He says, "Go in there and look for your blue book." So I walked in, and sure enough I had gotten an

89. He looked and said, "Treviño, a hundred years from now nobody is going to care if you made an A or a B or an E. That's all right." He said, "We won't change anything."

M: Earlier, before I turned on the tape, you were saying something about him maybe not being the greatest classroom teacher but being a great teacher about life or something like that.

T: Yes, because looking back, the man knew...he was guessing of course, he was criticizing the policies, the foreign policies that were preparing the country to fight against the Germans when he thought the real enemy of the future would be Russians.

M: Umm.

T: In those days we used to be fed pictures, you know, about Ivan the Hero. They were trying to get the country to prepare them to be allies with the Russians but they sure weren't getting Cap to go along with that.

M: Umm, uh huh.

T: He used to lecture us on that for hours. We thought it was a waste of time but the man was really telling us. That's just one of many things. He talked about so many things. We could go on and on, and we could think about a lot more things. Let me say something about what I consider my great gratitude to this institution. From the day I graduated to this day, I never have had an economic need or a shortage of anything that's reasonable to make a good living. That is the bottom

line of a preparation to compete in life. That can be said for many of our classmates. I can certainly say it in my case. We, the Texas Miners in Mexico, have kept a very close relationship with ourselves. The proof of it is that we're here today on this occasion because one of our group is having its golden anniversary. What is common amongst us is the fact that with any deal made with any of the Texas Miners, you didn't require any papers or signatures. Everybody was punctual, has been punctual. If you have a date with one of them, they'll be on time. There is no discussion about honesty. There was never any discussion about the work ethic that we got from our professors here. The one thing that was common to all of us was our education at Texas Mines.

M: Umm, hmm.

T: So we credit Texas Mines with those very important characteristics that have distinguished our group of Mexican mining engineers. We're all very grateful to this institution. We all considered it a tremendously great college. It was just what we needed to be prepared to face the world. I would say that when important aspects of the development of mining in Mexico came along, such as the Mexicanization of the mining industry, at least half of the industry was run, directed, by Texas Mines engineers of our generation. We were precisely on time to take over that situation.

M: Let me ask you a little bit about what you did after you

returned to Mexico. Could we trace a little bit of your subsequent career? The first job you said you got through Professor Graham? After him, it was which company again?

T: After I got my "master's degree" at Wagon Wheel Gap and Sunrise, Wyoming, I went to work for the antimony company, Refinadora was the name of it, in San Luis, Potosi. First, I was in charge of an exploration in Chihuahua. Then I was in charge of a mine in Queretaro. Then I was superintendent of their biggest unit, which was in Wadley, San Luis Potosi. Then I was assistant to the general manager, or the second dog in the company. The number one was a Texas Miner by the name of Stover. We were pretty much Texas Miners. That went on for four or five years. Then I went to work at a gold mine in Guerrero.

M: Guerrero?

T: Which was a very important step in my career because we're working that mine today. But now we don't work it for somebody else. It's our mine.

M: Umm.

T: From making quite a success of that gold mine, I went on to being in charge of Vaupell and Garcia's mining operations in Mexico City. From that day on I had my residency in Mexico City. It was after ten or twelve years of working out in the mines. After a few years I went to work for the Comision de Fomento Minero, which was the mining development agency of the Mexican government. I was general manager of that for

thirteen years. After that long stretch - quite a successful era for that agency - I went to work for Peñoles Mining Company, which is one of the biggest mining companies in Mexico today. It didn't take long before I got to be general director of that. I had made up my mind that whenever I got to be fifty years old I would leave whatever job I had. I didn't want any more jobs after fifty. I had gotten to the top of my profession as far as jobs were concerned; I had probably one of the most important jobs, mining jobs, working for a salary. I was a few months late on that deadline. So I went off to hang my own shingle as a consultant mining engineer, which I worked at quite successfully for twenty-five years. And only [just] left it...as any income from consulting was not really significant anymore. During those twenty-five years I was a mining consultant for maybe half of the mining industry in Mexico.

M: Did the Mexican graduates from College of Mines, and other graduates, ever have reunions from time to time?

T: We do. We do. When Barstow [Pollard Rodgers] and Primo Miller went to Mexico both of them happened to be together - we planned it that way - I got all the Texas Miners engineers for a get-together at my house. What year must that have been?

P: Oh, four or five years ago.

T: Uh, more like fifteen years ago. (laughing) Four or five years ago I was here. Yes, we get together very often, in fact at least once every two years simply because at the Mining

Engineers' Convention of the Association of Mining Engineers in Mexico, we have a Texas Miners' reunion, banquet or dinner or whatever, in which we get together. There's usually twenty, twenty-five of us. We're a very close bunch of friends.

M: Okay. Let's see, is there anything else in particular that stands out?

T: I would just say I was very grateful to have been chosen as the 1961 Outstanding Ex-Student of the Year, 'specially because I represented the Mexican mining engineers. I was representing a lot of us, and many others were more deserving of such a distinction but I was very grateful that I happened to be chosen. I'm very happy to come back to El Paso, and 'specially this institution for which we have been so grateful throughout our lives.

M: We're happy to have you back with us again.

End of interview