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Carroll (Kelly) Norquest Jr.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Carrol (Kelly) Norquest Jr.

Interviewer: Homero S. Vera

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: Edinburg, Texas

Date of Interview: April 3, 2003

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Transcript No.: 1549

Transcriber: Myrna Avalos

Carrol (Kelly) Norquest Jr. was born on November 27, 1934, in Edinburg, Texas; her father owned about 100 acres of farm land, and the primary crop was cotton; as a child she helped work the land, and later as an adult, she ran the farm; in the late 1940s and all through the 1950s, her father hired braceros to help with the crops. Ms. Norquest recalls growing up as a child on her father's farm; her family owned 100 acres of land, and they rented another 200 acres; their primary crop was cotton, but they also had carrots, citrus, corn, grain, and tomatoes; she and her siblings would help during the harvest by picking and weighing cotton; in the late 1940s and all through the 1950s, her father hired braceros to help with the crops; there was an average of five to ten workers that stayed on year round, and more during the harvesting season; her father hired a number of skilled laborers, such as irrigators and tractor drivers, on a permanent basis, and a few of them later became United States citizens; she mentions that her father had to abide by strict government standards with regard to housing, pay, and medical insurance; some of the braceros preferred going to doctors in Mexico, and her father would drive them across the border if necessary; he would also give workers bonuses at the end of a season as an incentive for them to come back and work for him; she recalls one instance when her father did not have enough money to pay everyone the minimum wage, but they agreed to work for him anyway; one worker reported him to government officials, but he was shunned by the bracero community for having made such a statement; she goes on to recall other specific incidents with braceros as well; overall, her family developed great relationships with the braceros, and a number of them stayed in touch with the family long after they stopped working together.

Length of interview 63 minutes

Length of Transcript 24 pages

Name of Interviewee: Carrol Kelly Norquest

Date of Interview: April 3, 2003

Name of Interviewer: Homero Vera

April 3, 2003 we are here at the Houston, Texas Pan American in Edinburg at the Lord Rio Grande Valley Astorga Collection. Today I am going to interview Carrol Kelly Norquest who's from the Edinburg area. Her father had a farm. Of course this is for the Bracero Oral History Project at the University of Texas at El Paso.

HS: So Kelly before we start this. Can you give us your full name and when and where were you born?

CN: My name is Carrol Norquest Jr. Everybody calls me Kelly, that's my nick name. I was born here, right here at Edinburg on the farm just outside of town in November 27, 1934.

HS: Okay, so you grew up here and went to school here?

CN: I was born here and I grew up here and went to school here my whole life. Thru, from first grade on thru the university.

HS: Okay, so your parents were they farmers, ranchers in this area?

CN: My father was a farmer. He was a farmer right here. His farm was on the north and west side of town. In fact, a portion of it was part of the university where we are holding this interview right now. My grandfather came here in 1922. My father's father came here in 1922. He traded his farm in Kansas for the farm here in Edinburg and came down here for his health. And my father farmed it for many years until he death in 1981. And I farmed after I graduated from college, went through the army, came back. I farmed this same ground myself for a while and eventually went to work for the Texas Employment Commission for many years, which I am now retired from.

HS: What did you all farm? What crops?

CN: We raised, at the time we're talking about, during the bracero days. We were growing mostly cotton. We were also growing some grain and corn and some vegetables such as carrots and tomatoes. Those were mainly the crops. We had some citrus also.

HS: What years was that in?

CN: During the years I'm indicating right now probably would have been from 1940 thru 1965 approximately. The years we're talking about when you get beyond that or before that we'd be talking about a different type of farming in either case.

HS: And you said your family did own the farm?

CN: Yes.

HS: Your dad traded the farm?

CN: Yes, my grandfather traded his farm in Kansas for the one here. We owned the farm. We rented, let's see we owned a total of about a hundred acres about the time we are talking about and rented another maybe two-hundred acres in the same area here in north-west part of Edinburg.

HS: Can you explain to us when you first heard about the Bracero Program?

CN: Well, the Bracero Program, I first remember it when I was a kid. It probably would have been in the late 1940's late 1940's, probably right after the Second World War, I imagine. And then all through the into the 1950's my father had contracted with braceros to work off and on during that fifteen or twenty year period of time, maybe. My memory isn't exact on the dates but say the late 1940's through the, at least, the late 1950's. At which time I went off into the army for a while. When I came home, I don't recall that we were working any more braceros. It was mostly wet backs or illegal aliens at that time.

HS: But you might recall when you all employed the braceros. Why did you all employ them? Obviously to the farm work but was it strictly for picking crops?

CN: Yeah, as far as the work itself. They were hired, the ones that were hired as braceros were usually the most skilled laborers. Laborers are well skilled, when their skilled laborer isn't exactly the word. You get an irrigator it's an art. It's an art. Tractor driving, adjusting the machinery and everything, it's an art, a science. These guys were skilled workers. And they were the ones that my father would try to, try to get on a permanent and legal above all, a legal bases where he wouldn't be interrupted while they were doing their work. And they were also wanting, wanting to come over here for the same reason. So they could have more secure job and eventually a number of them became citizens here in the United States.

HS: Okay, do you recall what government agency administered the program back then?

CN: I don't recall. I don't recall. Of course always in my mind it's the INS. The Immigration Service but I don't recall. I assume there were also Mexican agencies that handled it from the other side. I do know that when the final, some of the final paper work had to be done down at the bridge. In fact, that's where they took the pictures for their ID cards. I remember one time my father, in fact that's one reason I brought this book along to show you a picture. I remember one time he had five of the guys that had gone through the procedures to become braceros. And all they lacked was now the picture to go on their paper that they would carry, the card that they would carry. And they went down to the bridge and they, and what else they did they were more signatures or not I just don't remember.

CN: And I was not along but he took the five of them down there and the reason the picture taking sticks in my mind. They were taking two pictures at a time. There's a frame here and a frame here, two frames and the guys would put their heads in them, you know, like photographer would do and they'd click the picture and the next two would come in

and they'd clicked the pictures. There were five of the guys and when they came to the fifth one he was on the frame by themselves so my dad always said it is a border patrol man. Told him, he says, "Hey, why don't you get in the empty one there and take your picture with him." And then all the guys started laughing, they said, "Hey Carlos get on in there, go ahead Carlos." Anyway, this picture in this book, this is the picture that was taken there.

HS: Oh, that's a good picture.

CN (She laughs) that's the picture. So he and five of the braceros all took their pictures at the same time.

HS: We are looking at a book here that his father wrote called *Rio Grande Wet Backs, Mexican Migrant Workers* which was published by?

CN: The University of New Mexico Press.

HS: 1972. The University of New Mexico Press and on the back it has this photo that we are talking about that he took along with these braceros on the bridge, which is a very good photo.

CN: That's why he kept it for many years. You know my mother made a big picture of it and framed it and everything. (She laughs).

HS: That's a good thing, a good picture.

CN: Another thing that I think when you asked the question about why did they become braceros, we were talking about the type of work they did. Which was basically, they were the more skilled. But they also, the reason they, they wanted to, of course, was to get more stability in their job.

CN: They would come to my dad. They knew about the Bracero Program. They'd encourage him, "Hey Carlos, how about let's do this." It wasn't so much from his perspective that he had to because he had plenty of other workers. But they would come and talk to him about it. "Hey Carlos this is gonna benefit both of us." Says, "Why don't you do it?" And he'd say, "Well, you know, you got all these government regulations right now.

We both flow freely everywhere. You gotta have your pictures taken, you gotta have your cards, you gotta have whatever shots.” Another thing they did was check them for communicable diseases. Tuberculosis especially. In fact one of the men that we’ve know for years, since the time he was young, got turned down for that very reason. They wouldn’t let him in the country because it should up TB on him. And they gave him six months to live. Well ten years later he was still alive and it was just a big jolt to him, you know, cause he’d been working over here all these years and suddenly he couldn’t come over unless he resorted to swimming the river again. And so they had to go through a lot of red tape. Now there’s, I think they did, there were benefits also. I think they had a certain amount. My understanding was that they had certain amount of medical coverage that they could get.

HS: This is through the government?

CN: Through the government or so. I don’t want you quoting me on this, really, because this is an impression that I’ve had. Because my dad would take them to the doctor, of course he’d take the illegal ones to the doctor too, the wet backs to the doctor but there is a little different story there. And there didn’t seem to be when they’d get sick, there didn’t seem to be a problem about getting money and so forth for the doctor. I’m talking now from the impression as a kid that didn’t understand a lot of things. I do remember one time and I think he was a bracero that got sick.

CN: I think the story is in here. In the book, in this book, yeah, right here in this book. I think it’s in there. I read the full thing a long but he, let’s see Benito. I believe it was Benito Arredondo, I believe, anyway. He was irrigating for us and he was irrigating south, across Highway 107 here. We had sixty acres over there, where some of those schools are now. He was irrigating and he started feeling bad and he had to quit. So my dad got me out there and I took over the irrigation. He wanted to go home to Reynosa. They would always prefer to go home to the Mexican doctors.

That's what they were familiar with and everything. So my dad took him on down to the bridge. Took him on home over to Reynosa, took him to the doctor over there. Well he had tetanus. He'd been irrigating, while he'd been irrigating he had, I don't know whether he'd lost his socks or something, anyways he injured his foot. And it aloud to get in there and you know they irrigate twenty four hours and their off twenty four and then they'd irrigate twenty-four again. Each one was called a *turno* and they would irrigate a couple of *turno's*, two or three *tuno's*. And he was getting sick, so it turned out it was tetanus and they started treated the best they could. My dad went over a couple of times to visit him during that time while he was going over it and recovering. And always the concern was how they were going to pay for it. He'd tell them don't worry, don't worry that's gonna be taken care of. There's money available for you and he tells them the story how they would, the doctor would send him off to get medicine somewhere and they'd come back and so forth. This was a big concern but I remember that because apparently he was telling him not to worry about it and trying to make him feel better. He eventually recovered and came on back to work. So apparently the medical insurance, or whatever it was called at that time, must evidently helped him out.

HS: Now this was in Mexico. So they were also paying the Mexican doctors.

CN: Yeah, now how this worked, I don't know. And if you go back and look at the legality of everything. I may be proved wrong. This is just the way I remember it. They were able, my dad would lone them money himself. He would lone them money. He would give them money when they had problems like this but that was a larger expense. That was a much larger expense and I don't think my dad with all the seven kids at home and everything, and as tight as money was, would have that amount of money to do that. But it was a big comfort to them when they realized they weren't gonna have to worry about it.

HS: You mentioned that they would say “Carlos, Carlos.” Is that your dad’s name to them? I know his name was Harold.

CN: Yeah, oh yeah. It was Carlos and as far as his last name they always called him Monteño, Carlos Monteño. El Norteño, yeah. That was his Mexican name, yeah. That was his name.

HS: El Norteño.

CN: You know all these Anglo farmers down here then they had their Mexican names. I remember Jon Bails over here. His name was Juan Pacas. (Both Laugh). But then there were others, everybody had their nicknames back then too. *El coyote y el Tronco*, you know. Calabacitas was another farmer that had raised many little, a whole bunch of little pumpkins, *calabasas*. They all had their names like that. Our farm right up north, just about north of here or west, the homestead they always referred to that as *Rancho Colorado* because of the big red barn. A big red barn we had, *el Rancho Colorado*.

HS: More or less, how many braceros did you all employ?

CN: We had, as far as the number wise, anywhere from five to ten probably. I don’t ever remember a larger number, although it’s possible. For a short period of time we may have had a larger number.

HS: Was this for the harvest or year round?

CN: No, those would have been year round workers. If we had a larger number at anytime, it would have been strictly for the harvest. Although they, when the harvest was going on, these guys did the harvesting too. Because they could make a lot of money picking cotton. And so they’d do the harvest, well they’d do the whole thing. They’d do tractor driving, irrigating, harvest work, all around farming.

HS: How were they taken to those farms? Did the government bring them in? Did they get to walk in?

CN: The only transportation that I remember, I don’t remember the government doing any transportation for them. My dad would transport

them or they'd get taxi's if they were coming across the bridge. They'd come across in taxi's and provided their own transportation.

HS: Do you recall the processing center? How did you say the bridge was used for taking photographs, that sort of thing?

CN: As far as I know, that was the processing center here. They did the processing there at the bridge. Now, to expand on your question little bit about larger number, now the cotton gin here, which was a co-op, a farmer co-op. They would contract braceros in large numbers. You know, several hundreds of them and they'd divide them up into crews. Up north and east of us a little bit about two miles was a big barn like structure. That was kind of a big long barracks that they housed them in and I know at one time on the east-side of our land they were talking to my dad about putting up either that structure or another one like it there. But he never did, never did go any further with that. Now as far as building though, each farmer that got individual braceros, they had strict codes that they had to abide by.

HS: The government?

CN: As far as living conditions, yeah.

HS: Most of the regulations the government put on you? So the ones you all had, did they live there in farm with you all?

CN: They lived on the farm, oh yeah. They lived right there in the farm with us. As did the wet backs, the illegals, and even some of the citizens.

HS: Did they live together and mingle or in separate quarters?

CN: There were times they did intermingle but most of the time, especially when there were large groups. If there was only one or two illegals they might intermingle. But during cotton season when there were maybe anywhere from twenty to forty of them, around the place there, they didn't. The illegals would hide out. I mean there was brush around. There was citrus orchards. They'd camp out in them, camouflage themselves. The legals, the braceros and a few of them that were

American citizens, that lived in Mexico, they would live in more open. We had a house that we didn't own it. It belonged to one of the people that owned land that we rented. It had several bedrooms in it that, I don't know, six or eight people can live in. And then I remember we had, my dad actually built a little house right over here. It was the edge of town then. It's in the middle of town now. A little house on the sixty acre south of Highway 107. He built that little house for the legals, the braceros to live in. And they were right there. They could just step ten feet over into the lot. They could just step ten feet over and they were on our land. And they could just work that land there and that was their home while they were there.

HS: As far as food, did you all prepare the meals? Or did they prepare their own meals?

CN: That was always interesting. They'd have their own cooks. Either one among them was designated as a cook or they'd take turns cooking or the wife of one of them would come over, stay with them, and do the cooking.

CN: Sometimes there were several wives, larger groups of people, maybe several of the wives stayed. They came over specifically to cook. Well I don't know, the women had come over and they'd pick too. But there was always some designated cooks that would do that. And sometimes, like I say, it was, the men would do the cooking too. My dad would do the food purchasing. They'd give him, each little group, kitchen group or whatever, each mess group would give him their list. He'd take it into town over here at Trevino's grocery store and he'd just leave the list with the Trevino's brothers over there. They'd fill it during the day and he'd go back in and get it and take it out to their camp or their house or wherever they were staying.

HS: They would pay for the food?

CN: Yeah, right, they'd pay for their own food. And he'd just keep record of it and then they'd saddle up on Saturday's, pay day, and so forth. Now if

someone would come in and this applied mostly to people that were illegal the wet backs. They'd come in generally during the night and they'd show up in the yard in the morning. My father would fix them food. They'd be out in the barn, hiding out there and my dad had come in. "Hey they're two or three fellows out here that are pretty hungry." So my mom would put some more pancakes or whatever that she was cooking and take it out there and if you'd have work for them well you'd put them to work. If you didn't why he'd at least send them away with a full stomach.

HS: Do you recall, you said they got paid on Saturday, do you recall what kind of salary they made? If they got paid per day, per hour or per week?

CN: Generally they got paid by the hour. But payday was weekly. They'd get paid every week. But it was figured by the hour. And there was a going rate generally, you know, if you didn't give what was the going rate. People would go work for somebody that did.

CN: The government at some point on the Bracero Program, the government did stipulate a minimum wage. And that was kind of an interesting thing. I remember one incident, one of the fellows, I've forgotten who it was, my dad especially if he didn't really. My dad always treated him, treated his hands real good. He always paid them well. They could always depend on him. He'd always had money to loan to them and everything. And he would, there was never any money problems. He'd give them bonuses when the season was over they'd get bonuses. And depending how long they had been there, whether it was braceros or whether they were the wet backs, in order, you know, and inducement to stay for the whole cotton season. He'd give them bonuses and all but. You had to watch your expenses. Now I remember, one year anyway, things were awfully tight. It may have been when we were getting into the draft years. And he'd said, "Hey, I just can't afford you guys this year, I just can't do it." Well I'm gonna tell you some people may look on it kind of funny but he

said "I just can't afford you" they said, "Well, Carlos" what the government is saying is more than what we get as wet backs but "we want the money, we'll work for whatever, what we're getting paid now. We're satisfied with that. We're taking money home. It's more than what we'd be getting in Mexico by a long way. But will you go ahead and do it?" And so he said okay and made a deal with them. "Ill go ahead and pay you your wages." As braceros they had to sign their little pay booklets and so he did that. I don't know, it was ten, twenty-five cents and hour less than what they were suppose to get. Well everybody was happy until one of the guys decided he wanted the full pay and went and turned my dad in. And he, so my dad, it wasn't that big a deal. He had to come up with the money to give him his back pay and everything.

CN: And he went through whatever problems with the government and they finally worked it out and all.

CN: But you know this guys family over there some of whom were fellow braceros. They just ostracized him. They would not speak to him. They just, the old grandmother, she laid into him. She just really laid it on him, gave him all kinds of hell. It took several years to live that down. They told him "Carlos has always been good to us, you know, he'd always helped us out. We never lacked from money while we were working with him. And then you go do this." Well legally what he did was a criminal act, you know, against what he'd agreed to do but by weather that went on anywhere else, I don't know or not. But I know that one instance when that happened.

HS: Do you recall if he had to withhold taxes or anything else?

CN: I don't know. I don't know if they were collecting taxes from them or not. I know they sure would be now. (She laughs). The IRS would sure be getting their share of it now. But I really don't remember.

HS: Did any government officials like the INS or the Border Patrol come check you all out?

CN: Yeah, they did especially when it came to housing. They had to have certain specification for the housing. Right now it would look kind of primitive, the housing that they were requiring, but at the time it was what the federal regulations called for. But they would check these things and I guess, I suppose they would check the books, make sure the signatures where on them and all of this sort of thing. And see what conditions they were living under.

HS: Were you all a member of any kind of agricultural organization or committees?

CN: Well my dad was members of the co-op gin and the where he barter money co-op. He was member of the farm bureau. And you know member of the lets see what is it, well our electric co-op and so forth. You know there's mainly these kind of things.

HS: Did they have any influence on the program?

CN: They would probably have an influence by the number of braceros they would be hiring. And that influence may be in the logistics of the thing, how they determined the logistics. How to make the flow and everything when they were hiring two and three and four hundred at a time like that and then of course all the farmers were members of the co-op or a lot of them were.

HS: When they were out there doing the fieldwork, did you all provide all the tools and any kind of clothing or hats or gloves?

CN: All the tools were provided and anything that pertained to, that you can consider a tool, as far as their own clothing they determined that themselves. They bought their own and so forth. My dad would provide the living quarters for them and all the tools they used. He would take care of transportation, these sort of things.

HS: You mentioned earlier about what kind of work they did and besides the manual labor you said that some were really gifted, you know, they could operate tractors, machinery, and the irrigation. Was it just a select few?

CN: Well generally, through experience they learned how to do it. My dad would train them. He'd teach them and as they showed a proficiency for it or as they learned or as they'd had experience it became much more valuable to him and he would. So it was on the job training really. Now although he said, as far as irrigation, actually these fellows mostly were small farmers. Most of the ones we dealt with lived right on the river and they were small farmers. But they didn't have tractors and it was mostly hand work. And they knew how to do all the hand work, worked with mules and so forth. But irrigation, they knew that over there because they did irrigation so usually they were already proficient in irrigation when they came. They knew how to do the irrigating with simple tools.

CN: A hose and a shovel and they can make the water go anywhere. The tractor driving mainly is what my dad taught them and that would have been after the Second World War. Because before that the farming right here was pretty primitive through the depression coming out of the 1920's. I remember when the courses mules and my dad had there that he used and anybody he hired at that time would use. But it was after the Second World War going on and after that when tractors, modern tractors became usable and my dad learned how to use them. He taught the fellows and so forth.

HS: Did any one of all the braceros you all had, did you all appoint one as a foreman or a lead man, where they were going to take the initiative that they were going to be the guy to tell the braceros what to do, or anything?

CN: Not formally. My dad was the boss of course. He was the guy that hired them and we were not a large farming operation. So he was, he didn't pass the instruction, although when they were here, there were natural leaders among them. There was always somebody that took charge. There was always somebody there to look up to. Maybe it wasn't uncle, maybe it was a father or several of them or maybe it was just someone with natural ability and they'd kind of take charge.

HS: But not really say, "I'm the boss?"

CN: But as far as a farmer organization, no there wasn't.

HS: (unintelligible)

CN: That was our operation, anyway, other places may have been different.

HS: Now, did they have any days off?

CN: No. The regular farm routine, the norm, for my dad, for us, everybody, the normal farm routine was a ten hour day. Well gosh maybe that isn't quite right. We usually started at seven in the morning and quit at six in the evening. It might be a ten-hour day. That was the normal day and about four hours on Saturday morning.

CN: And Saturday afternoon everybody got paid. They went to town. They did this and that. Sunday everybody was off. Monday morning they were back at work.

HS: So they were off on Sunday's?

CN: Yeah. Sunday's and Saturday's afternoons.

HS: What did they do for entertainment or fun?

CN: Well, you know, when there were larger groups of them I remember we had organized baseball games out there. My brothers and I played. I was a bad baseball player but we played baseball. At home more leisurely they'd sit around talking, tell stories. They'd get out and, they'd go into town. We were within walking distance of town. So illegals, or legals, both would go into town Saturday evenings and try whatever fun was going on there. Sometimes my dad would have to get them out of jail, they drunk too much, you know. But many a time I could hear them, things were quieter back then, no air-conditioning, many a time in the middle of the night I could hear two or three of them coming home from town, singing at the top of their lungs. You know, just beautiful, you could hear them singing along ways off. They had harmony, nice harmony and everything. Some of those Mexican songs that they knew

there different than what we hear now. But you could hear them a half mile off or a mile off singing.

HS: What kind of religious services? Would they go to mass?

CN: Sometimes, sometimes. Normally my dad would take them. If they wanted to go he'd give them transportation to the church. They basically were not actively religious, although, he tells some of the stories in here and other places, that deal more with superstition as entered religion.

CN: Like this one kid he tells about, and this was the son of his tractor driver one of them that was a bracero for a number of years, that Antonio, the mother, swore somehow. She made a vow when the kid was born. She wouldn't cut his hair for such a long period of time. My dad felt so sorry for that little baby. He'd get lice or he'd get whatever in there and it was a little kid. To my dad, he felt like it was child abuse. But the mother would say, "Oh, I made a vow, this is a sacred sort of thing." The little kid, I think it's the same one, ended up in Vietnam. He didn't come back. I mean he came back in a casket. He was a fine young man later on you know. And then I know another time that when a child died too that my dad, they made a coffin and they were used to just doing it that way over there. My dad talks about taking it in the pick-up and so forth. But I don't remember the details of whether they had a church funeral or what, or anything. And I do remember at times though, they'd want to go to church for one reason or another. He could make sure that they had a way to go. He'd help them out that way. But it wasn't a major part of their life, although they'd invoke *dios* many times about many things. (She laughs).

HS: When the work ended, they did actually have an actual contract?

CN: There were signed contracts.

HS: When that ended, did they go back to Mexico or did they stay and worked as an add on?

CN: I think, well for my dad, they would work as long as the contracted lasted and as long as they could come over legally. And then they'd go home.

HS: They didn't renew the contract for next year?

CN: That depended on, to get the people they wanted, they had to kind of tweak the system.

CN: I don't know weather there were any bribes passed to the Mexican authorities but normally, I guess that differed at times. Sometimes it was easier to get the people you wanted other times you had to take first come first serve, you know, that sort of a thing. But I know in my dad's case, he always ended up with the fellows that he knew that he wanted to work. Know how they did that, I don't know exactly. Sometimes it took a little finagling to get the job done though.

HS: As far as problems, were there any fights or criminal acts, strikes? I know you said that one guy wanted a little bit more money or whatever.

CN: He wanted to get his money and that one was not. My dad never held it against it really. It was his own family that did. In fact, I think he worked again for my dad later on, after everything cooled down, probably as it went back again. But, you know, during all those years I don't remember any serious fights going on or any serious criminal activities. Although things did happen, yeah, there were always bad eggs here and there. But in our farm I don't ever remember anything really happening. Oh, there was scuffles I guess at times and so forth. But I don't ever recall anything of a serious nature at all.

HS: Besides that one complaint, was there any complaints of their food or where they lived?

CN: Oh, yeah, there was always something, you know. And there was, now that you mentioned it, there were a time or two that they would come

around hitting my dad up for more. "Hey, the cotton has gotten pretty bad, we need more than two and half cents in the pound or more than a cent and a half, its not worth it anymore." They'd haggle it back and forth. I remember it. One time a whole crew, it wasn't a large crew, it was a smaller one.

CN: They just walked off the job, came home, and sat over there in the front yard sulking until my dad came out and they heshed it over. And he always worked it out with them. They were good people. They were friends of his and they'd work. You know, they'd got to thinking about almost like family, you know, and they'd work things out. In our case he may have been a lot more close to them than some other farmers around.

HS: How would you compare the work of the braceros to the work of American or Anglo or Mexican-American farm hands?

CN: Well, they were good workers, let's put it that way. They were awfully good workers. They were use to hard work. They were use to farm work. And they were anxious to get into it but then I've seen Anglo people and I've seen Mexican-American people that were the same way. So I think it dependent on the individual and how they'd been brought up and what their background was and so forth. My dad can get out there and work hard as any of them. He tried to get us kids to work as hard as any of them too. I mean we'd work out in the fields with him too. We'd be out there picking cotton with them too and hoeing and so forth. In fact, my dad, most of the time we had two crews those that were illegal and those that were legal. And my brother and I would, and my sisters too, would weight the cotton for him when they were picking the cotton. But the way he would pay us, he'd say "Ok, you're gonna alternate." He says "One day your gonna pick, the other day you're gonna weigh the cotton." The cotton weighing, that was easy. He says, "But, the amount of cotton pick, that amount of money is what your gonna get the next day for when your

weighing cotton. If you don't pick, you not gonna get paid much. If you get busy and pick, you're gonna get paid more." So that's the way that worked. People over here, people that were coming across, braceros or illegals, either one, they were use to hard work over there.

CN: They were looking for a better life. The work they knew was this hard work and they'd get in with it with their full heart. They were, it was a big opportunity for them. And they were getting paid much better wages over here so they'd put a lot more into it. Because the psychological perspective was that way people over here tend to, there's better jobs available for them here. They can get education. They can get other jobs. Their thinking was looking beyond that. Although they may have started out this way, now their looking, they don't need to look over their shoulders for the Border Patrol or anything or getting when their contract is up, like the braceros going back. They have opportunities to go further. Those that were coming across for either legal or illegal reasons, their opportunity was the short time they were here. Get in and as much as you can. They liked, for instance, an irrigator, twenty four hours days is the normal. Well, and especially the bracero ones because they were legal. They didn't need to keep one eye over their shoulder. They'd want to go on a thirty six hour *turno*. Because the irrigation, they could rest during that time and somebody not use to irrigating can kill themselves at it. But they would pace themselves. They could pull in thirty six hours, they'd be off twelve, put in another thirty six, be off twelve and put in another thirty six. Then it was time to go home or whatever or payday and they'd put in a heck of a lot hours and made a lot of money. And so their perspective on what they were doing psychologically made it a little bit different. They'd get in with a lot of gusto and go to work.

HS: So what do you think the advantages and disadvantages of the program, until the end of the program?

CN: Well the advantages of course that everybody was legal. And you weren't looking over your shoulder for the law or anything.

Disadvantages, I guess, they wore you on under a lot of government regulation, both the farmer and the bracero.

CN: Neither one of them particularly enjoyed that government regulations. And especially when it was international agreement and contract. This made it even doubly more.

HS: So you think that was a main factor to the demise of the program?

CN: Well, when you've got that kind of a thing then politicians enter into it. And the politicians respond to pressure from different groups. And people over here say that there, by contract, taking our jobs away from us. And this makes political pressure. And then suddenly the bracero finds himself in the middle of that political pressure. And suddenly his contract is up and they were gonna renew it and he can come back. And then the farmer has been use to having him and used to having illegal people working for him and both of them suddenly got a new mind set. They've got to do it illegal again. And so this, the government enters into it through political pressure and makes things more, if it works the way it's suppose to, its good for everybody I think.

HS: Do you think the Bracero Program should be reinstated and if so change it to make it better?

CN: Now that part of it, I really don't know. I haven't thought about that.

HS: During our last election I think. Of course there's politics and everybody talks about these ideas.

CN: There's pros and cons to it and it's an awful lot more complicated now than it was back then. You've got more interest groups, more self interest groups of different kinds that are much more active and louder and they've learned how to work the political system when they've got gripes and so forth. "If your gonna let those people in why I'm gonna do

something else here, for you as a politician.” It seems back then it was much more simple, I think. But I think it’s a lot more complicated.

CN: And then of course having working thirty-one years for the Texas Employment Commission I saw a lot of this happen.

CN: A lot of these changes happen and attitudes change. That reminds me, you asked about what government agencies entered into it. I think before I went to work for the Texas Employment Commission, I think they were involved in it. In having to certify that there were no local people available and they had to search for local people. But that was before I went to work for them. But I think they were involved, The Texas Employment Commission that had to the certification for the need, for the need for braceros. Now whether it went further than that about any other certification or paper work, I’m not to certain about it cause I wasn’t involved at that time. But I do know that later on even after I did go to work with the Texas Employment Commission it wasn’t the Bracero Program per say but it was anybody that wanted to get legal status over here. Employers would still have to put in an order with the Texas Employment Commission that they wanted such and such worker. And they’d have to certify that there were none available, yeah. I didn’t deal directly with that myself but I was aware of it.

HS: Okay, I think that’s about most of the questions I have unless you’ve got something you want to mention for the record.

CN Yeah, I’ll tell you, let me take a restroom brake and get a good drink of water and get my talking going again. I’ll think about it a little bit.

HS: We’re back from our brake and we’re gonna add a few more things to the story.

CN: I was thinking now about one of our braceros. He was a tractor driver. He worked as a wet back for us and he became a bracero. A tractor driver, irrigator. My dad, he didn’t know much about farming other than the primitive farming that he’d done there in Mexico but he as a pretty sharp

young man. In fact, his name was Pablo Tovar. And he work a number of years for my father. An excellent tractor driver and all and we didn't hear about him for many years.

CN: He was not immediately from here on the border like many of our workers. He was from a little further in Mexico. I don't know just where but they kept in touch with each other. But up to ten, fifteen years later, about fifteen years later after we were no longer farming and these people, braceros or wet backs, both were long term friends. Many years later, they still, even now, they'll still come and visit us. And there's questions always asked, "What happened to so and so, and what ever happened to somebody else?" They died or they did well or they've gone on to school and become citizens or what, but anyway. This Pablo Tovar, we found out that eventually he became a big time farmer in Mexico. He'd learned his farming well here on my dads farm and the last we heard and this was about twenty-five, thirty, about thirty years ago now. Twenty five years anyway, that he was a big time farmer, farmer thousands of acres of land over there. And had done very well, become quite wealthy in the agricultural.

HS: Do you know what state?

CN: No, I don't. I never did find out. It was not here on the border. It was further down somewhere. But he did very well for himself and the other and somehow the other people here had stayed in contact with him.

HS: That was a big success story. He learned the tools of the trade here and took them down to Mexico.

CN: And others often eventually as they came to the United States, they did other things as they got their papers through the years managed to get into other occupations. When I, as I said, over the years they've come by. They've come by to see us. They would come by to see me at Texas Employment Commission. They would go get assistance from my brother

Neal as an attorney after a little kid that had grown up. They'd get in to other occupations as the opportunities presented here.

CN: My own house when I built it about in 1976 I found out that the two guys that were putting up the wallpaper in the house had been workers there on our farm when they were young. And then about ten years later when my brother was building his house the people who laid the foundation were from over here at Mission which is right south of there, where their farms were in Mexico, south of Mission over there or Granjeno. The people that laid the foundation were some of those same guys that picked cotton in the same land where he was building the house, you know. And so it's these kind of things that we run into. Anyways makes a lot of interesting stories. Like I said, we could probably go on and on. (She laughs).

HS: Well I think we're just about done.

CN: I was gonna say if you come up with any other questions or thoughts why send me an email and well.

HS: You did mention that you did bring some photos here and I'd like to scan some a few of these. You know, we could use them.

CN: Sure.

HS: Especially the ones where their all in the pickup and the little trailer in the back. I just think that's a classic photo there. Of course there some other ones over here where their in the field. What exactly, what kind of crop is this?

CN: This was two crops. This is cotton and this is corn.

HS: I identified the corn.

CN: What happened was that my dad planted a field of corn and it was growing very well and then it turned out, I think, what's the date on this? 1947, then cotton had turned out there was gonna be good prices for cotton. So what he did was went in right next to the corn and planted cotton.

CN: And the corn, they grew up together and then it was roasting ears. It was not for dried corn. It was for roasting ears. So they picked the roasting ears and then there was a dairy farm out west of town that needed feed. So he got all the guys out there and with machetes and they hand cut that corn out of the cotton, piled it on his trucks and he took it over to the dairy and then the cotton was growing and he went ahead and had a second crop on it. Now their primitive way of working over there in Mexico, that's the only way he was able to this because they went in there with a mule and planted the cotton within the corn. And then they cultivated that way. We had tractors then but there're was still mules and horses around that knew how to do that. A few still in 1947. And these guys knew how to do it. So they did all that, all that planting and everything, all of it by hand. So I guess the whole thing was by hand. The only thing that was planted by tractor was the initial corn. After that the cotton was planted by mule and horse and then they cultivate it and then it was chopped out by hand. The corn was harvested by hand got them out of the way and of course, the cotton was picked by hand. And then the tractor came in to play when it was time to get rid of the stocks. The old rolling stock cutter, you know.

HS: Ground everything up.

CN: Yeah, that was just right across the street over here over across Highway 107 that sixty acres we had over there. There's a bunch of the guys over there. I've got other pictures of broomcorn that my dad. See he'd make crops like broomcorn afterwards. They'd want to stay longer and there was several years he grew broomcorn. He didn't make any money on it but it provided another season of work for them. That was their crop. And all he got out of it was enough to pay for it.

HS: What is broomcorn.

CN: Okay that's the stuff they used to make broom with. It's a Sorghum, it's a tall Sorghum and its got well that sweeping things.

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