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Interview no. 1561

Arnulfo Pompa

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Arnulfo Pompa

Interviewer: Alma Carrillo

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: UNKNOWN, Arizona

Date of Interview: January 12, 2008

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Arnulfo Pompa was born August 14, 1962, in Litchfield Park, Arizona; he is the youngest in his family of six; his two oldest siblings were born in Mexico, while the other four were born in the United States; his mother was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, and his father was born in Los Mochis, Ahome, Sinaloa, Mexico; from 1947 to 1956, his father worked with the bracero program; two years later, in 1958, he began working for Goodyear Farms, and the family moved to a labor camp in Litchfield Park, which is where Arnulfo was born and raised. Mr. Pompa talks about his father and how he worked in the bracero program from 1947 to 1956; he initially traveled back and forth between the United States and Mexico, but he was eventually able to immigrate with his family during the early 1950s; in 1958, he began working for Goodyear Farms, and the family moved to a labor camp in Litchfield Park, Arizona; Arnulfo describes growing up in the camp during the 1960s and 1970s; he explains that the camps were set up with two to three apartments grouped together in about three lines that ran roughly five rows deep and housed around one hundred families; as a young boy, he began working in the fields with the rest of his family; he began to realize how poor his family was when he went started going to school with other children from town; moreover, he was often teased by his classmates, because he smelled like onions; even so, there was a strong sense of community among the other families and workers at the camp; they often gathered after work to socialize and unwind; he also mentions that there was a store at the camp owned by Goodyear Farms, where they all shopped; they were allowed to charge their purchases, because they worked there; as a result, they were always behind and in debt; in his opinion, it was a legalized form of slave labor; he offers several other anecdotes about his experiences living in the camp; Arnulfo went on to obtain a bachelor's degree and work as an accountant; overall, it was his father who inspired him and instilled in him a strong work ethic and the importance of integrity.

Name of Interviewee: Arnulfo Pompa

Date of Interview: January 12, 2008

Name of Interviewer: Alma Carrillo

My name is Alma Carrillo and I'm interviewing Arnulfo Pompa. Today is January 12, 2008 and this is for the Braceros history project. Thank you so much, Mr. Arnulfo, for being here today.

AP: You're welcome.

AC: Can you please share where and when you were born.

AP: I was born August 14, 1962. I was born here in Arizona in El Miraje, a little town a little bit northwest of here.

AC: Can you tell me a little bit about your family? About you growing up?

AP: Sure, there's six of us. My dad came over as a Braceros in 1947, I believe. I might have, I might be off by a year or two. I'm the youngest of the six, and of course, being the youngest, I was always the protected child with my parents. The one thing I do remember growing up, I don't remember the early years, obviously, when he came over because my sisters and brothers are much older than I am and they probably have those stories, but one of the common threads, and this is one of the things I was going to mention to you earlier.

One of the common threads of all the friends that I had made in the labor camps growing up — my memories probably start around three or four years old because I do remember, we used to have to go out to the fields and pick onions and do that kind of things. That was the only life that I knew. One of the common threads that I remember just from all my friends that we grew up all in the camps, we were all having fun. We didn't know any better. We thought this is a great life. You know, you get up in the morning, you're mom has breakfast, tortillas, beans, whatever, and you go out and play and do your thing with your friends and your buddies in the neighborhood.

I call it a neighborhood, but I don't know if you have an experience with a labor camp, but it literally was that. It was two or three apartments, duplexes put together, two or three rows, four or five rows deep, and there's probably 100 families living in those labor camps. This was probably 1964 or '65 when I started getting some of those memories. That's the time when I remember mostly

about what my dad was like. He made — he knew we were struggling. As I got older, now that I know, looking back, but the thing that I cherish about him so much was that he made it so seamless. He never let on about how bad we were doing and he would not let his family suffer.

There was times there when I wouldn't see him for two or three days, obviously because he was working for Goodyear Farms when I was born. Goodyear Farms actually created this whole West Valley; that's part of that historical society that we were talking about earlier. Working with Goodyear Farms, he was — there was points in time where I wouldn't see him for two or three days because, I think today they call them double shifts. Back then they had them working 18 hour days. From 6:00 a.m. probably until 10:00 at night out in the fields, taking care of the water, taking care of the — irrigation was part of his deal.

You know, this was when I was four or five years old and I don't remember a whole lot of him back then, but then I started realizing I'm not seeing him because of that. My mother was there to take care of us in the morning when we were going to school. She also had to work out in the fields to make a living for ourselves. The point in time when I started bringing all these memories together as I got older, you know things start triggering and like I said earlier, the common thread is just the fun that I had growing up in those labor camps.

Now, as I grew a little bit older, you know started going to school, at 5-years-old, going to kindergarten, being part of Litchfield Park, and I'm not sure how much history, or how much knowledge you have of that area. Back then, in the early 1960s, Litchfield Park was the ritziest town in Arizona, in my mind. You had the doctors and the lawyers and everybody living there. What happened was you know we have Litchfield Park here where — it still exists today. It's a beautiful city. You have the Wigwam Resort, which is a five-star resort. Everything there was owned by Goodyear Farms. That's who my dad worked for so our labor camps, there were five of them that I can remember.

I lived in one called Camp 53 and this was probably, I don't know two miles west of Litchfield Park. What happened is, these kids of the farm laborers, they had to go to school somewhere, right. So we all got registered and we all went to Litchfield Park Elementary School. That's where we started. That's — I started there when I was five-years-old, but I think when I was in first or second grade, you know, six or seven years old, that's when I started realizing

how poor we really were. I would go to school and my mother always took care of us as far as clean clothes.

We always had a clean pair of jeans, slacks, whatever, but seeing the way some of these other kids grew up in Litchfield Park, you know I made friends very easily, as we all did. I remember in first grade a friend of mine, he had just moved from another state, his dad was a doctor, Greg Brandenburg; he invited me over to spend the night at his house. I said, sure. He goes, why don't you give me your telephone number so I can call you. I said, well we don't have a phone. Let me just ask my parents. Okay. So the next day I asked my dad, can I spend the night on Friday night, you can pick me up Saturday.

Sure. So he — we walked home from school that evening because I had permission, you know it was probably a ten-minute walk from the school to his house, and when I got into his house, I'm like oh my God. Is this how people are really living? That's when it triggered. I'm like — it wasn't envy. It was more or less like, there's another world out there that I don't know about. I'm in first grade, I'm six-years-old. Greg was my best friend probably from first grade all the way through seventh or eighth grade and we still kept in touch through high school. He moved out of state, but he is one of the biggest memories that I have growing up because he taught me the other side and he would — I don't think he — I always asked my other brother Roberto.

I said, do you think Greg is giving me his bicycle because he feels sorry for me? He goes, no don't think about it that way, I think he's just being a good friend of yours. He would give me things. His mom would give me clothes and one time, another time I spent the night there with them, it was Saturday through Sunday, so Sunday they drove me home and I said — I was begging them, no, no, my dad will come pick me up, don't worry about it. Oh no, don't worry about it. We'll take you home. I get in this brand new Cadillac, right. They're driving me home and they go, okay just give us directions on how to get to your house.

I'm like, oh my gosh, how am I going to get through this one. So sure enough, they're driving me home down Indian School Road, which is right here. They're taking me home and we get to the labor camp and I go, you've got to turn left here. As soon as they turned into those labor camps, they're dirt roads and they're just little — I mean, apartments that are so small, just two-bedroom apartments for eight people. That doesn't work. You know, they drove me in there. I'm in the back seat just, oh my gosh, what am

I going to do here. There's kids out there playing basketball in the dirt with the — it wasn't even a manufactured hoop; it was just a rim on a post.

Oh **Oronoco**, do you play basketball with these boys. I said yeah, occasionally I'll come over here and play. So they're driving me home. The car's getting full of dust because it's all dirt out there. I was so embarrassed. They got off and they knocked on the door. I walked in and I said, well you guys don't need to come in. I'm good now. I was really embarrassed because they were going to meet my folks who didn't speak a word of English. My dad was working I think that day, but my mother came out and she introduced herself with the parents and to this day, — well, my mindset changed a few years ago, but there was a point in time where that was probably the most embarrassing moment of my life.

As I got older, I started thinking, you know what, they probably didn't even care. Just like I wouldn't today. You know, we're all doing well. If I were running into the same situation, I had to drive a kid home, I wouldn't care. I didn't know any better back then. That was a huge experience. I'm only six-years-old. At that time I start thinking, okay maybe there's other things out there that I need to concern myself with. One of the things that my father always told us is that you have to have an education. He came to this country without being able to read or write, even Spanish. He didn't even have an education in Mexico.

AC: He didn't go to school at all?

AP: He didn't go to school at all in Mexico. I think he probably finished like two or three years.

AC: What did he do in Mexico?

AP: He was, I think he was more of a laborer down there as well. He had six or seven brothers and like three sisters. They were a huge family. I think from the onset, because they were poor down there as well, he had to work. He was probably working since he was seven or eight years old as well.

AC: Where is he from?

AP: He is from Los Mochis and I think that is in Sinaloa. He was born there.

AC: And your mom is from there as well?

AP: My mother was born in Chihuahua Mexico, and my dad moved down there at some point of time in his life, and that's how they met. He ended up bringing her back up here, I don't know, probably in 1952 I think.

AC: So he was working as a Braceros for how long?

AP: I think, he only worked as a Braceros, and I could be a little off on these dates, but I think he came over in 1947 and I think he only worked through 1956. Probably eight or nine years because at that time, he was coming back and forth from Mexico because that was the, I guess they had provided him that luxury to go back and forth. So when he met my mother, he went back, married her and then he had the two older children Elio that Ida interviewed and then Envalia, and they decided — you know he decided to bring them back here. He applied for the paperwork, whatever. He became a legal resident. My mother became a legal resident and they came through El Paso, I think, so they lived in Texas for a couple of years. That's where my other brother was born, Roberto.

AC: So when he was working as a Braceros, was he also working at Goodyear?

AP: No, no, see I was born, I was born way after the fact of the Braceros impact. He was in Braceros from '47 to '56, I believe. He started working at Goodyear Farms, I think it was like '59, '58 or '59. As he was working for Goodyear, I mean, that's a whole other story. When he was working for Goodyear Farms, it was a place that he thought, it was work, it was labor, it was working out in the fields, but the company was so huge that his friends at the time were telling him, you know this is a great company to stay with, you'll get a retirement, and that never happened.

I mean, ten years ago, he was still trying to get some money out of Goodyear Farms because they didn't even — as far as I understood, they didn't even put together any retirement package for any of their employees. He was laid off at the time and I think that was their excuse to say, sorry, you don't get anything. After he was laid off in the late 60's, early 70's he kind of roamed around different farms.

AC: So, when you were little, you were living, you said at Goodyear?

AP: We were living in, it was called Litchfield Park. The whole area was called Litchfield Park, but it was a labor camp. They deemed it — they called it Camp 53. It was Camp 53, Camp 54 and Camp 52 and it was funny that all of us ended up — because we were all so close proximity wise, we all ended up going to Litchfield Elementary School. You know, you had your 80 percent rich kids that came from Litchfield Park and then we had the other 15, 20 percent labor family. That's not a bad thing. I think integration is always really good, but I think a lot of — I think there was a culture shock for a lot of people, especially on the other side of the fence. We all got integrated very well and I think we did, for the most part as far as I can speak for my own family and for one other family that I know, we all did very well growing up in that area.

AC: Do you parents speak English?

AP: None at all. My dad — we grew up speaking Spanish, obviously. The first day of kindergarten, I remember, I still — I should have brought that picture. I have tears in my eyes. They took a picture the first day of school. Tears in my eyes, I had the [inaudible] going on. I didn't know a word of English. None of us did. I didn't know English until I got into school. But I think, looking back, that was probably the best way to do it.

English was very easy for all of us to pick up. Low and behold, by you know, second grade, I was at the top of my class practically. There was one other kid that was just above me all these years. I was trying to catch up, it was always him I was trying to catch up to. Jeffrey Richie, that was his name. It was interesting growing up there.

AC: So how was life living at that camp, at that labor camp?

AP: It was — I think, with the earlier years that I'm telling you about, those were the fun years. By that I mean, by my age, I was born in '62, so by '67, '68, I was still very little, very young. I was still having fun working there, or living there. As I got older, it was a necessity for the rest of the family to start working to support the family. I tell my kids this because they need to know. We used to come home from school. I think I started probably when I was in sixth grade. I'm sorry, when I was six or seven years old. We were — when we were coming home from school, we come home to what they called [inaudible].

You get home, you pack a meal, bean burritos or whatever, and then you go out and work in the fields after school from 4:00 to

whatever, 8:00, 9:00 at night. I remember the, you know the actual farmers would actually put big flood lights out there so that these families could go out there and pick onions. Okay, so that piece of it, it started grinding on me after a while and I think of going to school, and smelling like onions, and getting made fun of sometimes because I smell like onions. You couldn't get the smell out of you. That was what I remember growing up mostly as far as working was concerned. As we got older, my dad had the idea of like being a [inaudible].

Like going out and hiring folks, like the middleman, to go out and work in the fields and the cotton fields so that he would get a little bit of a commission I guess. You know, back then they were paying \$1.20 an hour, I believe. He'd pay these workers \$1.10 an hour and he'd make ten cents for every head that he would bring in, kind of thing. Even then, that's all that he knew how to do and although he instilled education in us, it was really difficult for the fact that, as I got older, now that I realize it, I could have worked somewhere else. I could have worked at a McDonald's or you know, at a grocery store or something. As well as I did in school, it never dawned on me that I could go and apply somewhere else.

AC: How — until what age did you work in the field?

AP: Oh, I worked in the fields until I was a sophomore in high school. In the summers, as soon as school was over in May, boom, we were there. I was there anyway, me and my older brother Bert because he was living at home at the time. Ramiro and everybody else, they had already gotten other jobs, but I didn't know that I could apply anywhere else. I was old enough but it was just that mindset.

AC: How as it that you were able to work so young — wasn't anybody checking on it?

AP: No, back then — and I don't know the laws, but I know that as the labor families, the ones that really meshed and became really close, I think — we're still friends with some of them and most of them are still alive as far as the parents are concerned, but we would all go to the fields together and it wasn't, it wasn't a fact that the mom and dad and the two oldest kids would go and somebody would stay home and babysit the little ones. No, they would drag us all and sometimes it was fun. You know, we'd go out there and — I remember when I was five or six years old, my dad had a little bucket for me to fill up with onions. I'm sitting there clipping and doing my own thing.

For me, it was fun, you know, when I was little. They didn't have anybody checking. I remember that being out in the fields you could have — you could make it a whole — like a picnic type of thing because you'd work from 5:00 in the morning picking until like 1:00 or 2:00 and then you'd go home and use that days earnings to go buy some food and go home and eat. Basically, that's what it was for.

AC: And did you have any like immigration coming around?

AP: Yes, there were, but we had nothing to worry about.

AC: But were there other worker's there that didn't have documentation?

AP: Not that I recall. There was probably a few, but back then it was — I shouldn't say it wasn't like it is today because I don't know what the field workers, or the laborers are doing today, but back then it was just assumed that everybody was legal. It's kind of a weird thought, but yeah, I remember seeing the [inaudible] out there every once in a while, but they'd nab maybe one or two people out of the 100 that were out there working. That, to me, is not a whole lot. I'm sorry. So I remember seeing these guys coming in their green suits and their white vans but it really was never a threat.

The one story I do have is with Elio and he's going to hate this, but we were out working in the cotton fields. This was probably when I was maybe eight or nine years old, and we're out in Rainbow Valley working in the cotton fields and here comes the [inaudible], right. We're out there chopping weeds and my dad, he was the biggest jokester in the world and Elio was born in Mexico, and the [inaudible] comes up the rows and you see these guys in these uniforms, they come up and [inaudible], my dad would take his wallet out and be like, here's my green card. With us kids, you know, we were bilingual but they would ask us, where are you from.

I was born here in Arizona so they would say okay, you're fine. My dad, he scared the heck out of Elio, he goes, [inaudible]. He started balling so the [inaudible] comes up to him and he goes, [inaudible] and he was just balling. He's five or six years older than me, so he's 13-years-old. He's scared because he really thought that they were going to take him. They're like, ah, you're fine, don't worry about it. You know, that was that experience. It

was hilarious and that still — that joke still was — I mean we would always talk about that even — until my dad passed away a few years ago.

AC: And can you describe a little bit about the labor camps. How do they look like?

AP: You know, I think I did bring maybe one picture, but they were, it was essentially duplexes. There were like three little apartments together and then you'd have a little gap and then you'd have three more, but there was one, two, three, there was like four or five rows of these duplexes and they would go all the way across. The campus split in half and then on the other side of the dirt road there was houses. If you did well with the company, from my understanding, you'd be able to move into those houses. There was even division within the camp.

You know, here's the Pompa's living on one corner over there in a little two-bedroom apartment, they weren't even bedrooms, they didn't even have doors, but two-little-bedroom apartment with eight people living there, and you have the Lopez's living on the other side because there dad was a foreman at Goodyear Farms, so he was able to get a house. The houses back then, that I remember, you'd walk in and, wow, kind of, I wished I lived on this side of the camp.

It was interesting. It was, you know the families that all lived there, there was probably 80 percent of them worked at Goodyear Farm. I don't know how the other families were able to live there, but I think there were owned — I know they were owned by Goodyear Farms. Everybody had to work for Goodyear. One member of the family at least had to work there.

AC: How about, where there more men than women working there?

AP: No. Well, I would say it was probably a two-to-one ratio. My mother has some great pictures of her and her friends working out there too. There was one picture that I do recall and it's at her house right now. Tina, Tina Iola used to come and pick her up every day in a jeep. Before — this was like 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning. She would have all our breakfast done and all our clothes were laid out for school, and she would take off for work with Tina Iola and there was one picture that she showed with us that they took after work.

My mother was probably 45, 48-years-old and they have the big Coor's beer cans like those, drinking after work and they're sitting there with their work clothes and — they decided to get drunk that day. There was probably four, maybe five women in that particular group that were always hanging around together. I do remember one thing about Goodyear Farms. It was almost slave labor, you know for the people that were working there. My dad didn't get — there wasn't minimum wages back then. My dad didn't get paid a whole lot of money. There was a store there called Abraham's and it was in Litchfield Park and again, this was all owned by Goodyear Farms.

That was the only grocery store that we knew of. It was two or three miles from our house. We would drive up there and shop for groceries. The arrangement that they had was, you were allowed — as long as you worked at Goodyear Farms, you were allowed to charge your food if you didn't have any money. I remember, it was always trying to catch up. My dad and mom could never do it. It was, we were always a paycheck behind because there were six kids that they had to feed. We'd get to the store and I remember my dad and mom buying food. There was probably, I don't know it was like a \$48.00 bill or something like that.

You know, go ahead and charge it, here's my account, I don't have any money. They would automatically deduct it out of your paycheck. I remember the next paycheck, he'd get paid every 15 days. I think the paycheck was probably \$2.00. We're expected to survive from, you know, from Point A, where you don't have any money for another 15 days. That's why my mom had to go out and work in the fields as well. She was a stay-at-home mom for a little bit that I remember, but for the most part, she was gone during the day as well because we were in school anyway.

AC: What happened to the money that you and your brothers and sisters made?

AP: There was a little rule with my father. We — everything came back to him because we had to support the mortgage payment, and the rent, or food, and clothes, and all that stuff. So everything came back to him. If we worked on Saturdays, whatever we made on Saturday, we went ahead and kept. As the kids got older, as Elio, and Rosa and Bert got older, they were able to keep some of their wages for the week. I'm guessing here, maybe a day or two's worth of wages. That was probably \$8.00 or \$9.00 a day.

AC: Were you able to work while going to school?

AP: This was in the summer, but during school we always probably 80 percent of the school year, we probably ended up working anyway. You know, you'd get out of school at 4:00 and back then, we used to go to school until 4:00, I think, we used to get out. The bus used to take us home. [Inaudible] he'd be there waiting for us. Not again, please. I don't want to go. At the same time, we had to do all our homework. It was an interesting experience. The Goodyear Farms thing, I think still, I think there was still a lot of bad blood there even when my dad passed away because they didn't treat him nor a lot of other people right. I think there was a class-action lawsuit, if I'm not mistaken, to try to get some of that retirement money that they were supposed to have been promised as well.

AC: So did you father, when did he retire? When did he stop working?

AP: Completely you mean? That was by no choice of him. I remember I was at our house. We had since then moved from the camp to another little neighborhood. He and Elio, and my oldest sister, and my other brother, they were out working in the fields that summer, and I remember they came home early. I think I was like 12; 10 or 11 years old. I was there helping my mom with the house. They came home early, and I looked out and I said, mom [inaudible], it was like 10:00. Elio runs in and he goes, my dad's really, really sick. I'm like, wow, shoot. What's going on.

We went out there and it took all of us to try to bring him in. He ended up having rheumatoid arthritis and he had — he never knew about this, never knew anything, but he got an attack out in the field and he couldn't even walk. It completely crippled him. From that moment, it was just like, you know, the pain was so hard. Those were hard times because he was at least working for Anderson Farms, I think is what it was back then, and he ended up with that rheumatoid arthritis. It took forever, he finally got a doctor's notice to say yeah, you can't work anymore because you're disabled, basically is what he was labeled.

I remember those — that was a lean probably two or three years as well. I mean, leaner than what we were used to. There was no income coming in. You know, my mom and dad were very proud of not going and applying for welfare, but we finally had to, but that paperwork takes forever. We're talking probably 1971, I think, and one time, my other sister, Rosa, who is not here. Her, and I and my father, and my mother, and my dad wasn't feeling well at all. I remember getting up one time, having to go to pick

onions, and there's the green ones, the ones that you would wrap with a rubber band. It was the middle of the winter, we had to go do that on a Saturday, just to make enough money to go buy a dozen eggs and some tortillas.

That's etched in my mind. It's like, man, we need to figure something out here. Again, our fall back, all of us, was education. That was the only way that I knew of to get — and again, I think all these experiences build your character and make you who you are going forward in life. It was rough. There were times when you know, I had holes in my tennis shoes and that's all I had and I'd tell my mom, [inaudible] what are we going to do, and she'd so [inaudible] she was an American, she was always treating us just a little bit better. Hi Mrs. Janus, my mom sent me in there to see if you have any extra jackets or any tennis shoes, especially.

She'd go yeah, come on back. There was lost and found. We'd go through the box of lost and found. Yeah, these fit, can I have them. Yeah. Oh man, I was all happy. Brand new — or used pair of shoes, but for me they were new. There was another time when the Litchfield Park, or the elementary school was having a Christmas play, Christmas pageant, and we didn't have a tree that year at the house. We never really had any tree or Christmas. My sister Rosa, she got a bright idea. She's like you know what, this is the last day of school before we go on Christmas break, I'm going to go see what they're going to do with that tree.

So she asked one of the teachers, I don't know if she was a principal or something. What are you guys going to do with this tree? Oh, we're going to through it away because we're going to be closed down for a week or two. Can we have it? Yeah, if you guys can come pick it up. So she — we went home and she was all excited, got my dad, got in his old pickup, went back to school, we picked it up, took it back and decorated it.

That was really cool that my sister thought about doing that for the rest of the family. I think that was the same year where somehow or another, they figured out a way to go shopping and provide for us, at least something real minimal. My brother got an Etch-a-sketch that year. I think I got a pair of socks and my brother got a deck of cards. You know, little things like that but it was at least something. We weren't used to any of that stuff. You know, I don't mean to drag on — but that's really how it was.

AC:

That's just part of live.

AP: That was just the way it was. I mean, we did have a blast. We did have fun all the time, but it was reality setting in saying wow, this is going to be our lives, and we're going to have to figure out a way to get through this struggle.

AC: So you were saying that you used to have a lot of fun when you were little, including when you were helping your parents with the onions. What else would you do for fun with your siblings or with your friends?

AP: **[Inaudible]**, that you just met a little bit ago, he and I, were only two years apart, so he and I grew up basically together. One of the things that I do remember because the road that were out there — we didn't have like landscaping or anything, it was just dirt, so we would go out and grab a couple of garden hoses, you know the **[inaudible]** and we'd make little trails like this, and we'd take rocks and make our own little like forts and stuff. We'd have a little Tonka toy and that was it. We could be out there for hours playing with these toys and then we'd have our other friends, Louis and Ricco, he was another guy, Arthur and Ricco, they were cousins, and they lived just right around the bend, right around the corner from the camp.

They were in the camp but they lived right around on the other side. They used to come over and they had bikes and we used to swap, and I used to ride on the handlebars. I used to — it was fun back then, it was all open area out here. We used to just hop on those bikes and just cruise down the dirt roads as far as you could go, cotton fields everywhere. To us it was like being Tom Sawyer, you know we'd be out there, just out in the fields messing around and when it was time to come home and eat we would come home. That was it. We would run around, we played kick the can a lot. I don't know if you've heard of that game.

AC: No.

AP: It's kind of like baseball. You literally, you get a tin can and you put it out there in the field, or in the middle of the road and you kick it. You kick it as far as you can and then you just try to run bases. That was kick the can. Have you ever seen the movie, gosh it's slipping my mind right now. It's a little baseball movie with kids. My kids know it well. We actually started that — I feel that we started that whole deal because there was a — we lived on the last row of houses and back here was just an empty dirt, there was nothing there. Sandlot, you've heard of that movie?

Every day the other kids that we were — [inaudible] all of that family, they were great baseball players, awesome baseball players. These guy, back then when I think about it, I'm like wow, if these guys would have gone to college and maybe tried out for baseball, I bet some of them, one of them would have made it. In the summers when we weren't working or on a Saturday or Sunday, we'd go out there, and they'd lay out the bases and we'd be out there playing baseball. That was one of the big things. It almost turned into like a tournament practically because there was so many — there was so many kids in that neighborhood that — yeah, we'd all gather there in the sandlot.

AC: Did you ever play with any of the adults?

AP: I do remember — I used to hang around a lot with my dad. My dad and I were like this when I was little. No matter where he went, dad [inaudible], I'd go with him. He was always picking up one of his friends. He was always helping somebody in the neighborhood, you know growing up in that labor camp. Giving somebody a ride somewhere or doing those kinds of things. A lot of his friend, I got to know very well. The adults, they were like in their own little click. They didn't really — you know, it's like, you kids go out and play, we're going to do our thing here. There was a lot of partying and drinking. I'm not going to lie to you.

The parents, they figured out a way — when things were good — I know I'm jumping back and forth for year to year, but when things were okay, I mean, they would go out and buy their beer and — they meaning, my parents and their parents and their parents. They'd have little block parties. They'd be out there drinking beer.

AC: Tell me about those block parties. Did they have music?

AP: Oh yeah.

AC: Was it loud? Was it the radio?

AP: It was a radio. It was, you know just basically — really just keeping your door open, your front door open and whoever had the phonograph, stereophonic radio, you blast that. The houses were so close in proximity. I mean, the street was probably no wider from here to that wall, so the next group of houses was right there. If you opened your door, they could hear your conversation or you could hear their music and that's really what it was. It was interesting.

AC: What kind of music were they listening to at that time?

AP: My dad always liked the, the — oh gosh, I know there's a name to it. I think it's called **[inaudible]**, is that a type of music?

AP: Is it more like **[inaudible]**?

AC: It's a lot like accordion music and stuff. They would have that music blasting all the time. That was — to me, in my mind, that was what was always fun. I remember, this is like it happened yesterday. I can still remember these memories. One time they were having that block party. We were washing the car. I don't know why we would wash it because there was dirt out there, but it was like a Sunday. I know it was a Sunday. My dad had this old grill. I don't even know where he got it from, but we had for whatever reason, we had steaks that day.

We were cooking out steaks. I remember looking up and going God, please don't let this day end. I don't want it to end. We started cooking out and we were having so much fun. You didn't want that day to end ever. You just looked around and my brothers and sisters are all playing around the front yard. You've got the other neighbors, it's was fun.

AC: What was your father cooking?

AP: It was **[inaudible]**. He was cooking steaks. That was a rare treat. He probably went to Abraham's and charged them. He probably wanted to make sure that he had at least, you know — not that we — I'm not painting the picture that we were — I mean, we had beans and tortillas to eat. At least there was something to eat. But that was a treat. It was something that we never had. It was pretty rare actually.

AC: When you were hanging in the fields working, were there any like divisions like between the people who had families and the people who didn't have families?

AP: Not that I recalled. There was, I don't think there was any single adults, I'm sorry, childless adults. I think everybody had families. Not — I don't remember anybody not having any kids. Like I said, there's still probably a hand full of men now that we keep in touch with that we all grew up together in that area.

AC: You're still friends with them?

AP: One in particular. He was — he was our best friend. Well, he was a good friend from Camp 52, and then we, you know we all got close in school and then in high school and stuff and that. As a matter of fact, he married my wife's cousin. Eddie Valenzuela. He would have been a good story, but his dad was a Braceros. His dad was a lot younger than my father, but he grew up in the labor camps. His dad worked for Goodyear Farms as well. Like I said earlier, I came way beyond them, way after the Braceros program.

AC: You were say that education was like an answer for the hard work that you were having at that time. Can you tell me more about that?

AP: Well, I don't want to pat ourselves on the back, but all six of us are very, very bright and nobody ever really instilled that in us until my dad, at some point, you know I must have been eight years old when he finally said, hey, you know thanks for bringing home good grades and keep it up. That kind of thing. I thought well, I'm going to get rewarded for bringing home decent grades. Since that point, like second grade on through high school, I mean, I was making straight A's. It was like, it was my goal. I've got to do this. You know, everybody, we're all very, very sharp. We all have different levels of education but back then, and this was in the 60s again, and 70s.

If you didn't have a college degree, it was real difficult to get a job. My sister, unfortunately fell upon hard times. She wasn't able to graduate but, you know I was the first and only child really to — well, all of them went to college but I was the first one to go and complete my BA, in accounting of all things. I wanted to get into the business world. I think if you were to see my family, [inaudible], everybody's family, how successful we all have been, I mean, the material things really, yes, we all have nice houses.

We all are driving nice cars and as the old saying goes, you only live once. Why not. I think it's a reward. I look at it as a reward or myself. I'm a tightwad, just because of the way I grew up. I hoard my money, but at the same time I want to have fun and I tell my kids that every single day about you know, you've got to think about how things can go from good to bad in a blink of an eye.

AC: So right now, you're still working as an accountant?

AP: I've been kind of back and forth. After college, well actually, after high school I decided to go to ASU, Arizona State University, and it took me a while. I was on like a six-year program because I was

going part time. I got a job at — back then it was Mountain Bell. It was AT&T back then. With all the break ups, and the mergers, and all that stuff, it's now Quest Communications but I've been there for 25 years. Hopefully five more and I'll be able to get out of there, but it's all about the education. As soon as I graduated from college, I started applying for management positions and as long as you do well in the interview, you're in. It's been a progression for the last, you know 15 years and doing very well there.

AC: What did your father have to say about that?

AP: It was amazing. I think one of the biggest things was — my dad was humble, but at the same time if somebody, if some of his friends jabbed him about things, he would let them know. There was one friend the Enriquez's, I hope it's not too derogatory but his — that family, they're the ones that lived in those houses that I was telling you about. Remember how there was a division. The fancy houses over there, they weren't that fancy, but that's the way we looked at it. That family, they were huge. There were like 14 of them. They were always thinking — I mean, arrogance is really what it boiled down to.

They were just thinking that they were always better than everybody else. The father especially. He would always jab my dad. You know, your kids aren't ever going to amount to anything and you know, they're going to be doing this. At least my kids are [inaudible]. You know, they have a company truck, from Goodyear Farms. They have the company truck and they're working. I know it hurt my dad, but we were still young. When Elio became a fire chief and a spokes person for the City of Glenna Fire Department, Ramiro's a big honcho at Bank of America. I'm doing really well at Quest Communications. I mean, he just, he would gloat on that.

I'm so proud of you guys and he would tell us. He goes, instill that in your kids. Make sure that they do the right things in life, and this and that. We weren't perfect by no stretch. I mean, we all had our scrapes and bruises. We all got in some trouble, but I had to write a paper in high school about who your hero was and it was always you know, George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. I wrote a paper on my dad.

My English teacher said, are you — this is a truly warming, from-the-heart paper. Did you really mean to write this. She actually questioned this. I said yeah. I said, I'm not, we're not the riches

people in the world but if it had been any other family — and we did see this with some of the families. The kids just strayed, and got into drugs, and they're in jail, and some of them are dead. You know, it was tough.

AC: So how is it that your father inspired you?

AP: It was one of the — one of the things that he always told us, and I remember this again, like it is was yesterday. If an employer hires you and you're contracted to work eight hours, go in there and give them eight hours worth of honest work. That's all that he would ever ask. Give me eight hours or whatever, ten hours, whatever you're asked of. Make sure you have that integrity because the integrity part was huge. You know, never steal, never lie, never do anything bad to your employer. I mean, he did this even after working at Goodyear Farms. It's like, if you're going to go to work somewhere, just go work. I think he worked around enough lazy people that it probably upset him enough to say, you know this guy's not pulling his share of the work and it was really that. It was just, be honest, have a lot of integrity.

AC: Did he ever talk of the period that he worked the Braceros?

AP: He may have told me, but I'll be quite honest with you. I don't remember a whole lot. I just know that the bigger story I do remember is working in Northern California. There's a city there, little town called Gilroy, I think, picking cherries or something like that. But he was bouncing. Before he was married to my mother, he bounced from California to Idaho. He even says he worked in Michigan, I think or Wyoming. Wyoming it was.

I never really got into depth into any — if he told me, I don't remember. The stories I do hear is from my sister and I had a brother — I think looking back now, my interpretation of what I hear is it's pretty much legalized slavery is what happened. You know, you know the whole story because you're the expert, but you know they were brought over there to work for measly wages and I don't know what kind of labor camps they were living in, but I never heard the intricate details of what, you know, how he lived, but I know that they were taken advantage of.

AP: So what does the word Braceros I think, he always told me, Braceros okay. I guess I just looked at it too clear. It was just, you know American was World War II and there was a labor shortage. That's really all I ever thought about, that word being Braceros.

AC: Well, thank you so much for sharing your stories. Is there anything you would like to add?

AP: Just, like I said, I hope it doesn't come on too hard that it was rough. You know, because it was, but that's just the way it was. There's really no painting a pretty picture about it. It was a hard life. It was fun, we had a lot of fun, like I said, but looking back at it, it's like wow. I survived that. My other brother and sister and the older kids, you know, when they first lived in Texas, they had to live in a bus. I didn't have to go through that experience. For me, at least there was an upgrade living in the labor camp. But even some of the friends that I keep in touch with from Litchfield Park, some of those guys, the rich guys that I deemed back then were rich, they ended up in trouble and in jail and on drugs. It happens in every aspect of society.

I even happened in our. Again, I think it all goes back to my father. That is the biggest thing I can relate to you is that he made it as seamless as possible to not show that this is not a bad life. He knew it was. He knew it was better than Mexico, but he knew that there was more to accomplish here that he was never able to do.

AC: Did he ever tell you about his life in Mexico?

AP: Mostly just funny stories. Just the funny stories about he and his brother, they'd just get in trouble a lot. He was — you couldn't — he wouldn't stop talking. Like I said, you could have had him in here for eight hours. I'm the quite one of the bunch, but he could have been in here for eight hours and he was getting in trouble a lot.

AC: What is the best story he shared with you?

AP: It's pretty bad.

AC: Go for it.

AP: Go for it? I think he was probably 14-years-old and this was in Mexico. He was having an affair with a married woman. She was probably — I don't know how old she was. I'm guessing maybe 18, 20 years old or whatever. So he goes out. **[Inaudible]** and I guess he was at her house when the husband came home and it's that whole story about jumping out the window and running home. Running for his life because this guys was going to kill him. He was a lady's man. You know, I could show you some of those

pictures. Even in his 80s he was a very handsome man. He had a lot of girlfriends.

I'm not going to lie to you. He tells us those stories from Mexico that, it's common, it's a common thread down there that if you're married, I guess, you're allowed to have some mistresses, sometimes. I don't know how that works, but I know my cousin's still do that, which I don't understand, but that's just the way of life down there. That's the way he was brought up and like I said, he had seven or eight brothers that probably all did the same thing. That was probably the worst of the bunch. Getting caught — almost.

AC: Was your mom jealous when he'd do this after they got married?

AP: Yeah.

AC: Did your mom ever say anything?

AP: Yes, it caused a lot of — as a matter of fact, that's another story from the camp. There was a lady that lived catty-corner from us and her name was Lupe Cisneros, Guadalupe Cisneros. A big lady. She had the hots for my dad, forever and ever and ever. She had the hots for my dad and I don't know, to this day I have no idea if he had an affair with her or not, but my mom believes that he did and she took me and Ramiro, because we were probably — I remember this again, like it's etched in my mind. She took us across the street, the dirt road, to Esperance [inaudible]'s house for her to take care of us.

I'm like, what's going on. I'll be right back. She goes over there and beats the living crap out of this woman. Just beats the shit out of her. I mean, literally just laid her out, and just scratched her all up and you know, you touch my husband again or you contact him again, you're going to be in big-ass trouble. So she beat her up, came back, brought us back home and then she had — she had a friend or a boyfriend, they used to call him King Kong because he was dark, dark skin, big dude.

For me, he was like a giant. So he wanted to come and kick my mom's butt. My mom jumped on his ass too. My mom's a little lady. She's 5'4". Like I said, Ramiro, it's probably etched in his mind too, but I remember her just walking us across the street. She goes over there and she did come back with some scrapes and stuff, but she kicked her butt.

AC: She was no little lady.

AP: No. She was a strong woman and unfortunately she's got Alzheimer's right now. My sister's taking care of her and she would have some great stories to tell. But the poor thing. Her mind is just gone. But yeah, it was, she was part of the big picture. Right now when it's winter time, one of the things that she always did for me anyways is that she would always take my clothes before I went to school and she would put them on top of the stove because it was a gas stove. We didn't have heat. So she goes **[inaudible]** she'd heat up my clothes. Oh yeah, this feels good. I tell that to my sons and they're like, they almost cry. Did you really have to —? I said yes.

That's just the way it was. We had not heat. It was just — overall though, it was — you know, in hindsight, people always say yeah, I could have had a better life. Yeah, everybody could have a better life but that's — it's your destiny. That's just the way it was planned out.

AP: Well, thank you so much again.

AC: I appreciate it. Thank you for calling us over.

AP: Thank you for coming.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 53 minutes