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Interview no. 1562

Eleanor Martin

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Eleanor Martin

Interviewer: Richard Baquera

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: March 17, 2003

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Transcriber: Vanessa Macias

Eleanor Martin was born on March 1, 1932, in Colorado City, Texas; her father worked for Southern Pacific Railroad, and as a result, they moved around quite often; she attended Texas Women's University in Denton, Texas; in order to support herself financially while going to school, she began working at Allison Farms as a payroll bookkeeper for braceros during the cotton season. Ms. Martin briefly recalls how she spent much of her childhood moving around due to her father's job with Southern Pacific Railroad; after graduating from high school, her parents moved to Tornillo, Texas, and she began going to school at Texas Women's University in Denton, Texas; in order to support herself financially she moved to Tornillo with her parents and began working as a bookkeeper for Allison farms; she kept the payroll books for the braceros during the cotton season; it was her responsibility to handle all the paperwork and financial figures for the weekly pay of the braceros; she details how they were paid and how and where they worked and lived; in addition, she describes how the cotton was weighed in order to calculate their salaries; because the cotton season lasted from September through January, she was able to go to school during the spring and summer semesters.

Name of Interviewee: Eleanor Martin
Date of Interview: March 17, 2003
Name of Interviewer: Richard Baquera

This is an interview of Eleanor Martin, taken on Monday, March 17, 2003 at her home at 151 Papaya in the Lower Valley in El Paso, Texas. The interviewer is Richard Baquera and this is for the Bracero Oral History Project at the Institute of Oral History at UTEP.

RB: So, Eleanor would you please tell me your name?

EM: Eleanor Martin.

RB: Is that your maiden name?

EM: No, my maiden name was Carlton.

RB: And you were born where?

EM: In Alleyton, Texas.

RB: Gosh, where is that?

EM: That's in Colorado County. The county seat is Columbus, between San Antonio and Houston. My father was a railroad agent, so we lived all the way from Houston to Tornillo, up and down the railroad tracks wherever they needed an agent.

RB: Which railroad was that?

EM: Southern Pacific. Well it was the Texas and New Orleans, T & NO.

RB: And your birthday is?

EM: March 15, 1932. I was seventy-one, last Saturday.

RB: Happy belated birthday. So, you went to school in various different places?

EM: Yes, I, in 1942, we moved to Valentine, Texas railroad. It was a terminal at that time, it's dead now. We lived there for eight years, long enough for me to finish

high school. Then I went to college in Denton. It was Texas State College for Women at that time, now it's Texas Women's University. I went there one year, my parent's agreed to pay for one year. After that, if I wanted to continue going, I had to find a job and pay for myself. At that time, between the time that I graduated from high school and the next year, they had moved to Tornillo. Which is, what, thirty-five, forty miles down the valley. It's a farming community. At that time, it was, everybody raised cotton or alfalfa.

RB: Did the railroad send him here?

EM: Yes, he was the agent there. In fact, the depot was two story and we lived upstairs.

RB: Do you know if it's still there?

EM: No, it's not there anymore.

RB: Another one that disappeared.

EM: I don't know what they did with it, (laughs) it's gone. Now the one in Fabens, I think it's still there. It's been turned into a residence or something. But it's two stories. We lived upstairs over the depot.

RB: This was?

EM: 1950.

RB: This was after you finished high school?

EM: Oh, I had already been in college for a year. When I left, I left from Valentine. When I came home, it was in Tornillo.

RB: Did you continue your college career anymore?

EM: Well, yes. But I had to pay for it. So, I started looking for a job as soon as I got home. And I couldn't, you know, I was eighteen. I had had my eighteenth birthday at school. I was only seventeen when I went off to college. Well I

couldn't find any jobs, so I agreed to work for a man, just bookkeeping, answering the phone. I won't say what business he was in because it'd be too easy to identify him. Anyway, my parent's okayed it. Another gentlemen heard about it and he came to my parents and said, "You don't want her to work for him. He drinks all the time." So, they kind of agreed. They were Baptists and nondrinkers. (laughs) So the guy that came and talked to 'em was the head bookkeeper at Allison farms.

RB: In Tornillo.

EM: So, we agreed that he needed somebody to keep books just for the braceros because he was keeping books for the whole farm business, the cotton, the alfalfa and Mr. Allison had race horses.

RB: Do you remember how big a farm it was?

EM: Uhhh, fifteen hundred acres. Cotton and alfalfa and a few pecan trees. Now it's nearly all pecan trees. They just needed somebody to take care of the bookkeeping for the braceros. And so that meant that the job would last from the first of September until the first of January, because the cotton was finished then. In other words, it would only last while they were picking cotton. So I thought...well okay, then I can go to school the second semester and summer school. So, I made enough money from September to January 1st to pay for the second semester and summer school.

RB: Where were you studying at? I guess it was Texas Western at the time?

EM: No, no. Texas Women's University. I was going back to Denton. Oh, yes, I was going back to Denton.

RB: I thought you would have been here.

EM: No because my major at that time was home economics education and UTEP, Texas Western, well it was College of Mines, didn't offer any home ec classes at all. I would have had to drive to New Mexico State and paid out of state tuition,

so I couldn't afford that. My dad since he was a railroader, I had free transportation. I had a pass, so I would just get on the train, go to Denton the first of January or right after and go to school that semester and summer school, sometimes I didn't go all semester, sometimes I ran out of money, depending on what kind of shoes I liked. (laughs) Then I would go to work. I worked there four years, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953. Then I met my husband and got married.

RB: Was that here or back in Denton?

EM: Here, he was stationed at Fort Bliss. My sister was engaged to a guy from Fort Bliss and his car was broke down. So I got home from college last day of August and he, they wanted to go out on a date, but his car wasn't working. So they decided that he would get this buddy of his a blind date and use his car. Six months later, we were married. Then I didn't work anymore and I don't know if they had to hire somebody else, I just don't know.

RB: And your husband's name was?

EM: Was Tex Martin.

RB: Where was he originally from?

EM: He was from, it was really kind of strange, he was from the same county that my parents had grown up in, so all of our relatives knew each other, it was just that we didn't know each other. (laughs)

RB: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

EM: Three sisters, all younger. I'm the oldest. So, they were all still in school. My youngest sister was in the second grade, and my other two sisters were in high school and I would work. The transportation, we only had one car and my dad needed that. He couldn't let me take it out to the farm and just leave it, so he started out taking me out there and leaving me, and then coming after me. But then we found out that the school bus went out there everyday and picked up the kids, so I would catch the school bus as he was leaving town and ride all the way

to the end of the county, all the way to the end of El Paso County. Then he would start picking up kids on his way back in. He would let me out right in front of the office.

RB: I see, so the Allison ranch is way...?

EM: It's two miles out of Tornillo. On the way back, daddy would have to come and get me because I couldn't leave that early. So I was, about fifteen minutes later than I was supposed to be every morning, but they just adjusted it that way.

RB: So you had certain work hours that you...?

EM: Yeah, I worked, I was supposed to work from eight to five, but I got there about 8:15, so I'd leave about 5:30.

RB: I guess maybe the best way to explain would be your typical day?

EM: Well the braceros when they came were issued a ficha.

RB: Right, how were they brought to...?

EM: I talked to Elias Bonilla, I told you about him. His father had the commissary and they were furnished a home out there and they lived at the farm. His father would meet the bus when they brought them from Rio Vista. They would all get off the bus and they would be issued, he would issue them a mattress and whatever they needed. They had a square of little rooms, pretty good sized, I think some it still out there I'm not real sure. But each room, I think, slept four men and they had cots, probably bunks in there.

RB: Would they give them little stoves or anything? Could they cook in there?

EM: They, there were stoves in them. But they liked cooking outside. It was around an opening so all the doors opened onto the opening, kinda like an old Spanish type thing, like a...

RB: Like a central square?

EM: Yeah, well, with these rooms all the way around it, it was like a motel, all the rooms were connected, you know, you had to go in this area, one entrance. They would, at night, in the evenings, of course, you can't pick cotton after dark. So they would have a bonfire out there and they would cook and sing, somebody played the guitar.

RB: Do you remember how many?

EM: The most I remember us having at one time was two hundred. That was quite a few.

RB: Sounds like it. You had to keep financial records for all of them.

EM: When they got up every morning, they reported to the cotton fields with their sacks and they picked three times, I think. Each field, cotton doesn't all open at one time. It happens at the bottom first and then higher and so they would pick the first picking and then they'd go back over the same fields again. When their bags got full, they would take them up to the wagon, there was a wagon that was pulled by a tractor or parked out there by a tractor. There was a person who stayed at the trailer. Every time they came up with their bags, they were weighed. They had to show their ficha, you understand, I think it means tag.

RB: Was it a token or tag?

EM: It was a brass, um, about the size of a silver dollar. It had a number stamped on it. So each man was given a number and on this, at the end of the day, they brought me the cards that they had recorded the people's picking on. It would have the ficha numbers at the top of the card and under the numbers it would have how much the sack weighed each time. I would have to add up all those weights and enter it at the bottom. Then at the end of the week, I would have, you know, all those totals to add up, then I would figure their pay according to that and put money, cash money, in an envelope with their ficha number on it. In order for them to get paid, we had a window that opened at the bottom like a...

RB: Like a pay window.

EM: Like a pay window, yeah, a teller window. They would come up there and show me their ficha and I would give them their pay envelope.

RB: They wouldn't show any identification, just the ficha.

EM: The ficha. They had to hang onto that ficha because that was the only way, there would have been too many Jose Gonzalez's. (laughs)

RB: They would pay how much?

EM: Well...I think it's about a penny and a half a pound. You have to remember that this is the time when seventy-five cents was minimum wage. But, most of them could pick somewhere between 100 and 200 pounds a day. It's backbreaking work— Then they would send the money, you know...we had a commissary. Some of the farms did not have commissaries and they would load all the men in the back of the truck and take them to town. There was a little sort of a grocery store there that they would take them and they'd buy supplies, food supplies. But we had a commissary and so they could go in there and get anything they wanted to eat. He would give me their bills, what they had charged and I would take it out of the pay before I gave it to 'em. Most of the money that they got, they sent it to Mexico.

RB: How did they send it back?

EM: They sent money orders.

RB: Now I understand, they wouldn't get paid the same. The first picking was?

EM: No, the first, I can't remember on the third picking. I know the first and second pickings probably in they might have only picked twice, but they got a penny and a half for those because the bolls were full and it's easy to pick to get the cotton out. The last picking was what they called bollies. They were bolls of cotton that

hadn't quite opened all the way, so they were allowed to just take the whole boll off and they got two cents a pound for that because there were fewer of them.

RB: Were they heavier?

EM: They were heavier, but they were not as plentiful. So they got two cents a pound for those.

RB: There was no, the ranch didn't provide, when you mentioned a commissary, I kind of thought they were also provided meals?

EM: No, well, they may have been provided some staples, but they would go and get Cokes and, you know, everybody has to have their junk food. (laughs)

RB: I was thinking in terms of, they cook their own food all the time?

EM: Oh, yes. Now, I don't know, I guess for lunch, I can't remember them taking any lunch to them at all, so I think they had like burritos or something packed.

RB: Do you remember ever talking to any of them?

EM: Well, see, I don't speak Spanish...

RB: Don't know Spanish, I see.

EM: So, I was, you know...

RB: I was curious if you ever found out, I'm sure you realized they were there to help their families, to make money.

EM: Oh, yeah, that's why they were there. There was one that came, that did speak English and so they put him to work in the commissary and he stayed. He went back to Mexico and got his wife and came back, so he got his green card. He loved it here. He just, it was kind of funny, his wife had a baby and she was from old fashioned, superstitious, so she shaved the baby's head because there is a superstition with the Mexican people down in Mexico that if you shave a baby's

head, it'll come back curly. And it was a girl, she wanted her to have curly hair, so she shaved her head and he was so embarrassed. He didn't want anybody to know that his wife was so, what he considered backward.

RB: And that she would believe something like that?

EM: Yeah.

RB: You don't remember where they were from particularly?

EM: No. I know that he went to, after the Bracero Program was ended and he wasn't needed there anymore, he found out he could make a lot of money in the Pacific Northwest working for a logging camp. He went up there and was killed when a log fell on him. He was the nicest guy. He was Carlos.

RB: So basically what you would do during the week was add up their totals.

EM: I had an electric adding machine, one of those that just had the, all it did was add and subtract.

RB: No tape so you could see your...?

EM: Oh, yeah, I had a tape. So if I didn't balance, I had all that tape to go through (laughs).

RB: Go back and reconcile.

EM: Yes.

RB: Did you have your own little office?

EM: No. I had, there was sort of a large room when you first went into the office and another door and that was Mr. Allison's office. They put another desk in there for me. When things got slower, well he had me helping him paying bills at the end of the month and things like that. Most of the time, I just did the bracero work.

RB: Which would be plenty if there was a couple hundred.

EM: Yeah, two hundred. (laughs) The head bookkeeper got the mumps, his kids had the mumps and he took the mumps, he had never had them before. He was, I don't know, his kids were twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old and he had the mumps. So he couldn't go to the bank for me and it was time to payday...

RB: Do you remember his name?

EM: Yeah, Sybert, I don't know what his first name was. And, but see George ____ (?), was the manager, he was also Mr. Allison's son in law, they're all dead.

RB: Oh, sure up there in Ruidoso.

EM: No, up in Sunland. Yeah, in 1953, one of his racehorses Invigorator came in third in the Kentucky Derby. Yeah, it was a big deal. Then they brought him back to the farm and everybody had to go out there and look at the Invigorator.

RB: So the head bookkeeper would be the one to go to the bank?

EM: He would go to the bank, but he had the mumps. So, I had to take his truck and it was five speed transmission and I had never driven one that you had to put it in reverse by pulling it over and coming down. (laughs)

RB: I've never learned that.

EM: I didn't realize, I'd always driven a stickshift, I didn't, I've never driven an automatic. So, I went to the bank in Fabens, downtown Fabens. Just parked, didn't think anything about it. It took me fifteen minutes to figure out how to get out of there. (laughs)

RB: Why is that?

EM: Because I couldn't get the truck in reverse! (laughs) I had to get twenty something thousand dollars in *cash*, small bills, see to put in the envelopes.

RB: Was that typical?

EM: No that was when we had two hundred, that was quite a bit. I can remember how nervous I was. With that much money, I had never had that much money in cash in my hands at one time. I drove straight back to the farm, I didn't stop. (laughs) And if I didn't come out, I had the money counted to the penny before I started and if I didn't come out exactly right, I had to start looking through those envelopes to see where I had, yeah, whether I had given somebody too much or too little.

RB: There must have been an awful lot of change.

EM: Oh, yeah. It was. My hands felt so dirty when I got through. Money is so dirty (laughs).

RB: I bet. So, when was the payday?

EM: I guess it was on Saturday afternoon. I guess, no, it was Friday afternoon, I didn't work Saturday. On Monday morning, I had an extra card on my desk.

RB: Because they worked...

EM: They picked on Saturday, yeah, they picked on Saturday. They did not pick on Sunday. The Border Patrol was afraid, and rightly so, that some of the farmers would hire illegal aliens to pick because they would just mix in with those others and who would check everybody's id, you know? So, they would fly over the farms to check to see how many were there because they knew how many braceros every farm had.

RB: I see, and they could count maybe...

EM: They could just estimate, yeah. But, Mr. Allison didn't go for that. He was...

RB: Basically, you never checked their cards?

EM: Oh, well yeah, when they first came in they had to have their documentation, but then they were given a *ficha*, so I didn't have to check their documentation

because if they had that *ficha*, then they must be who they said. They guarded those things.

RB: Basically then you were just the payroll end of the...

EM: Yeah.

RB: You never did anything else for, you know, I don't know, checking documents or anything else?

EM: No, no.

RB: You never knew their names, well, I guess you would know...

EM: Well, I had a list of names, but the *ficha* numbers were, with two hundred people, you just...

RB: I was just curious if some ever came back, like you mentioned...

EM: Some of them did. For those four years, some of them were there every single one of those years and I got to recognize them, you know, they were always real friendly and we spoke to each other when I was giving them their paychecks, pay envelopes, but since I didn't speak any Spanish.

RB: Do you happen to remember more or less what a typical Bracero could make in a week?

EM: I just don't remember.

RB: I guess you figure a penny and a half and some of them could pick two hundred pounds, that would be what, three dollars?

EM: About. I'd like it when they were doing bollies I could do that in my head, I can multiply by two in my head.

RB: I was just curious about how much they could make in a week.

EM: It didn't seem like, well, it didn't seem like a little bit then, but now, it would seem like nothing.

RB: But at that time.

EM: Yeah, at that time.

RB: And they save pretty much most of it to send back.

EM: Pretty much because they were pretty much taken care of. They had a place to live, they had their basic foods furnished. All they were spending, the ones, their were only a few that would come into the commissary and get Cokes and candy bars and things like that. Most of 'em were pretty frugal.

RB: I guess also being that your out there, it's a very rural area, even I guess till today, they would stay on the farm the whole time?

EM: Oh, yeah, they stayed on the farm. The only time that they would ever leave the farm was if somebody who worked for the farm took them somewhere. They were not allowed to go, you know I was talking to my sister yesterday and she said that, she was the one that was like in the second grade when I came home, and she said she can remember being at the grocery store and a truck would drive up and all these guys would get out of the back of the truck and go inside and buy goodies, you know.

RB: This would be the grocery store in Tornillo?

EM: Yeah.

RB: I see, I was just wondering if they ever would buy clothes or things for their families to take back with them?

EM: I don't know, there was no place there to buy anything like that.

RB: What about church? Would there be, was there a church, do you remember like on Sunday where they could go? I'm assuming most of them were Catholic?

EM: I just don't...yeah, probably.

RB: You weren't there, that's right?

EM: No, I was not there on Sunday, so I just don't know. They may have had somebody come out there. But I just know that they, the farmers were afraid, I mean they *really* needed these guys and they weren't gonna let them take off on their own and go somewhere because they were afraid they wouldn't come back. They really needed them, so...

RB: Did you ever have any, I don't know, complaints, problems? Fights?

EM: As far and I know, I never heard of any. They all got along.

RB: But that doesn't mean...

EM: No, if that had happened, it would have happened probably in the evenings around, you know, in their living area. But I never heard the foreman talking about it or anything like that.

RB: The foreman's name was?

EM: Well, the manager's George ____ (?). They had a shop foreman and I can't remember his name right away, but he just worked on the machinery, you know, and things like that. The foreman, I can't remember his name. Zeek would know it, Elias Bonilla, we all called him Zeek. I asked him if anybody ever calls him Zeek anymore, he said, "Just the people that knew me then." (laughs) He would probably know and he probably had heard if there was any trouble, but I never heard of any trouble. I know some of the farms did send some of them back, because they were causing tension, but we never had any.

RB: They knew that if they caused problems...

EM: Oh, yes.

RB: Immediately they would...

EM: They knew they would just be taken back over to Rio Vista and they would be sent back.

RB: There is some talk about, well, in Mexico, I don't know if you've heard about this, some of the ex-braceros from that period are talking about how supposedly at the time that they worked, social security or there was a certain amount taken out of their paycheck. Now some of them are saying that they want that money that was, do you know anything about that?

EM: See, we didn't...I don't know. I read about that and it said it was an agreement between the farmers to send some of their pay back to Mexico to be held in escrow for them to claim later. But we never did that. They got every penny that they earned.

RB: Except for what they had charged.

EM: Except that.

RB: I was curious because there is that...

EM: I read that and I thought, I don't, you know, we didn't deal with that. I don't what what the deal was on that. Maybe it was if they had a certain number of men, I just don't know.

RB: But you all had a couple of hundred.

EM: Yeah.

RB: The Allison Ranch, do you remember how old, how long it had been in operation down there.

EM: He homesteaded that land for, you know, somebody, in the early the 1900's when they were opening this land for agriculture.

RB: Do you happen to know would that would be the time they built the dam up the river, maybe that's when more irrigation...?

EM: Might have been when the American dams, might have been. Mr. Allison was, how old was he, I imagine that he was in his sixties then, so that would have been...you know, but he came there as a young man and claimed that...

RB: That area.

EM: Yeah.

RB: And basically, it is irrigation land, right, that's what they came down there...

EM: Well, they had to drill some wells in the sixties because of the drought. I saw the paper this morning where some of the ranchers are clearing debris and trash and weeds and things from around their wells and getting ready to...get them together again.

RB: You mentioned Ryan Allison, did somebody take over after Mr. Allison died.

EM: His name was Riley. I don't know what the L was for, but it was L.R. Allison. His son in law took over. His wife died, they only had one daughter. He was divorced, his ex-wife was murdered. (phone rings) His ex-wife was murdered and found in the trunk of a car that was parked at the airport. They'd been divorced for quite awhile. They had one daughter. She was married to George ____ (?), so he was the manager of the farm. They had five children, uh, four boys and a girl. One of the, well, she had four pregnancies, one of the pregnancies was a set of twins, a boy and a girl. Two of those boys have since died in accidents, but she died, oh goodness, 1950, I'd say '57, '58. She had an intestinal blockage and she died.

RB: So who runs the, is the farm still there? Is it in operation?

EM: The farm is there and it's still in operation and I really don't know whose running it, but three, two of the boys of her sons have a recording studio in the old home. And they do recording. According to what's been in the paper, it's a very state of the art recording studio. And so if there are any pictures or anything, they would probably have access to them. But George ____ (?) is gone, his wife's gone, Mr. Allison's gone, Sybert's gone.

RB: Do you know any of the other ranches around? Any of the names, maybe?

EM: Are you familiar with the name Jim Bowden?

RB: No, well, he was a UTEP Bowden.

EM: Yeah, that's him. Okay, Jim Bowden. He worked on the farm next door. You keep saying ranch and they're farms. (laughs)

RB: Right.

EM: The farm next door was his father-in-law's. He would come by and visit with us once in a while. On his way to go somewhere and he wanted a few minutes to goof off.

RB: They had Braceros? Everybody had Braceros then?

EM: I'm sure they did. But now he's, he's gettin' kind of old. He's probably eighty, I think he's still living though but he was a big football star at UTEP, well, College of Mines. (laughs) Maybe his kids would remember.

RB: A couple more things maybe. Would you describe your role basically as bookkeeper, is that how you would describe it?

EM: Yeah, that's how I would...bookkeeper.

RB: Was there any other duties, like did you have to like prepare like a monthly statement or um...

EM: Well, like I said, when the picking, when I got though with my work earlier because there weren't as many as, uh, and I guess when the, by the time the end, some of them had left because they weren't needed. I would help with paying the bills and things like that and just doing regular bookkeeping.

RB: I was thinking in terms of just say, would you have to prepare a monthly statement...

EM: On the Braceros?

RB: Yeah, right.

EM: No. I just figured up how much they picked and paid them.

RB: And that was, that kept you busy?

EM: Oh, yeah, it was an all day job everyday. Because, the thing about it was that I needed to finish that, the previous days by the end of that day because otherwise I would have too much the next day. So, every morning when I got there, those cards that they had used at the wagon were on my desk and were ready for me to work on them.

RB: So, you couldn't afford to get sick and miss a day.

EM: No, I never did, you know, I never did get sick.

RB: Also, was there just one field where they would be picking?

EM: No, they were all over the place. So I would have more than one card, each wagon would have a card. And different people, different numbers, you know, for each wagon.

RB: The men that weighed, what were they called, supervisors, weighers? Do you remember?

EM: They were usually women. Like, the foreman's wife, you know, people like that. Gave them a little extra money during cotton season.

RB: So they would also be paid just for weighing and bringing...

EM: Oh, yeah. Sometimes they would have a line of men waiting to get weighed.

RB: Once the cotton, the sack was weighed, it had to be emptied...

EM: They dumped it into the...

RB: Who did the dumping, the men?

EM: The women. Well there was a hook where they weighed the sack. That held the sack up and she could just dump it into the...

RB: Oh, I see. I'm thinking in terms of, well, I've seen some the trailers with the high...

EM: That's them. Slats on the side, cotton sticking out in the cracks. (laughs)

RB: But they seem kind of high and it would be...

EM: She would be on a platform and the scale, so they would hang the sack on the sack for her, she would put down whatever the... Have you ever seen a cotton scale?

RB: Yes, I have. As a matter of fact, my mother grew up on a ranch, the Ivey Ranch down here. I remember being very, very young, seeing...

EM: I have one out here. I could show you. (laughs)

RB: I'd like to see it. It's been while since I, as a matter of fact, I remember my mother saying sometimes when she would pick, she would weigh cotton.

EM: My husband collected all kinds of old tools and, uh, horse collars...

RB: Harnesses.

EM: Reins and harness, yeah all that kind of stuff that nobody uses anymore. And, uh, he knew all the names for everything. We have some shoe ___ (?) that my grandfather and his great grandfather used to make, they mended their own shoes out on the farm. Couldn't take them to town. (laughs)

RB: I would like to see that stuff. So, there would be several of them then going on?

EM: Oh, yeah, there would be a line of men, so they would put their sacks on the hook, it's a hook, and it pulls down and the number it stops at. So, then they would

dump it into the wagon and when the wagon got full, the tractor would take it away or bring an empty one. Then at the end of the day, the tractor would take them all to the gin.

RB: Which was close by?

EM: In Tornillo.

RB: Tornillo, yeah. I think I've seen...

EM: Well, there's a new gin there now.

RB: It's a lot more automated, mechanized.

EM: Oh, yeah, yeah. But this was the kind where you parked the wagon under the vacuum tube and the vacuum tube vacuumed all the cotton out.

RB: I remember, well, I grew up in Ysleta and I remember near the old mission, right now there's a parking lot for the casino. I remember a cotton gin right there, across the street from Zaragosa.

EM: Uh-huh. There were several down on Zaragosa, not Zaragosa, uh...

RB: North Loop? Alameda?

EM: No, San Elizario road, That road, Socorro Road, isn't it? Isn't that the name of the street? There were several out there.

RB: So, just a couple of other things. When you got married, you said you didn't work there...

EM: No.

RB: After your marriage, what did you? Raising the family or...?

EM: We lived at the Broadway Courts in Fabens for three months. (laughs). That was, really. He worked for, he was waiting for Texaco to put him on. And he worked

for Texaco for thirty-two years and we've lived in this house for forty-seven years. So, uh...

RB: So this area is that old of at least development of this particular.

EM: When we bought this house, there was no mail delivery. We had to go down to the post office that's now Alamo Auto Parts or something down at Ascarate and pick up our mail.

RB: Yes, I think I know where you're talking about.

EM: Yeah.

RB: Just this side of Fox Plaza? Down from...

EM: Yeah, by Clark, I think, street. But there were not houses, the next two blocks were just bare. So we watched them build those houses.

RB: And the river is right here, so you probably could walk over, could you just walk over?

EM: But there weren't any houses over there. See on the other side of this irrigation ditch, here, there were no houses. My grandparents came to visit us one time and my husband and my grandfather took the, I guess, twenty-two rifle and went hunting down on the river. You know, just, and my grandfather thought that, here we lived in a city and this was so neat, it's like being in the country. (laughs)

RB: (laughs) What did they hunt, do you know, was it rabbit?

EM: I don't know. I don't think they say anything. They just took the gun in case they did.

RB: So, now all of a sudden, now you're in the middle of...

EM: Yeah, middle of they city. And people are always saying, "How are you doing in this area because everybody else speaks Spanish." And I say, "Well, I was here

first and they all came and I like them, so I stayed.” We have the best neighbors. Everybody on this block has been here, most of the people on this block are the original owners of the house, so...

RB: Now, I guess are they, their children are they...?

EM: The people next door, they moved in about three months after we did. They bought their house and moved in. So now, they're living with their youngest daughter and her husband and two of her kids, and so all of our grandkids know each other.

RB: Yeah, I bet. Well, anything else that...

EM: No, I had a *ficha*, I wish I...I don't know where it is.

RB: If you ever find it, you've got my phone number, you can call me. I guess one way to end this...

EM: And I don't know whether all the farms used that method or not. And I, see in the shop, it was like a blacksmith's shop, you know. He could have made them, but I just don't know.

RB: It sounds like a pretty efficient...

EM: It was really efficient because those guys they had to, I think most of them, they had a hold on the side, they were about the size of a silver dollar, they had a number stamped on 'em and they had a hole so they could put it on a string or anything and just put it around their necks and wouldn't have to worry about it gettin' lost because they knew that those were their tickets to get paid and...for everything.

RB: I don't remember if you mentioned, do you remember how much you were paid?

EM: (laughs) You know, I can't remember. I still get statement from social security telling me how much and, of course, the first couple of years that I worked there,

the farm workers did not have to pay social security, so they didn't take any out. Then they started taking it out, but I, just can't, it was around \$600 for that September to January.

RB: I see, so overall, do you look back on it with good memories?

EM: Oh, yeah. In fact, I was laying there thinking about it, they have discontinued so many of the pesticides that they used to use, DDT, discontinued 'em and when I was working out there, they would hire a plane to fly over and crop dust. I would get out there and the smell of that, for a long time after I quit working out there, if I smelled that, it was kind of a homesick feeling. (laughs) Isn't that silly? But it triggered a nostalgic feeling.

RB: It happens, I mean, I there's certain aromas that I, you know, like a kitchen or something. The only problem with what you're relating is that, it can be dangerous because you never know...

EM: Yeah, it's probably harmful, but to me, it was, it smelled like home.

RB: It triggered certain memories in your mind.

EM: Yeah, uh-huh. I really enjoyed working out there, I really did.

RB: So you were happy that this other man came along and took you away?

EM: Yes, oh yes.

RB: The first job...

EM: I wouldn't have enjoyed working with somebody that was drunk all day long. I imagine that he was probably harmless, but just the idea that, you know... And I would have been the only one there with him. And out on the farm, Mr. Allison was there, off and on. He rented the penthouse up at what's now the Plaza Hotel. He had the penthouse, so that, if he had people, businesspeople, horseracing people, he and Clinton P. Anderson were real good friends. He was a senator from

New Mexico. So he had the penthouse there so he could entertain and have a place in town where he didn't have to drive all the way out to the farm with them.

RB: So it sounds like this was a money-making, not that much money, but enough to where he could...

EM: Oh, yeah. Well he also had half ownership in lumber place with Clinton P. Anderson. Like a...well, it was like a Lowe's or Home Depot or that kind of a store.

RB: Lumber supply, I see.

EM: They had a partnership in that. The first time he walked in the door and Mr. Cybert was not there, he looked at me and said, "Get Clint on the phone for me." I had no idea who Clint was. (laughs) So, I waited until Mr. Sybert came back in, you know, and I said, "He wants us to get Clint on the phone. Who is that?" He filled me in. (laughs) After that I knew to get Clint.

RB: I did think of something else to ask you. Tornillo at the time, how many people would you?

EM: I don't know, but the railroad was pretty busy. They had a platform where they tied all the cotton bales to be shipped out now. My dad also shipped out cattle, there was a place where they held the cattle and loaded cars. I just don't know.

RB: What about Fabens?

EM: Well, it was the big city for us. We went to church in Fabens because Tornillo didn't have, I would say maybe Tornillo was around 450 people at that time. I just, but I didn't know.

RB: How often would you come further up the valley, say to El Paso?

EM: We didn't come to El Paso very much. Until we started dating then we went to the Bronco, or the El Paso drive-in. all the drive-ins.

RB: I remember the Bronco. And a few others.

EM: And over here where that high rise senior citizen building is, well, the El Paso drive in was there.

RB: I thought, that would be, let's see, it's the other side of Paisano it goes up?

EM: Yeah, no...I think it's...

RB: The other side of the freeway, between is that, no that's not Paisano, is it? Because it's near Bassett and I remembered that there was a drive-in, but I couldn't remember.

EM: Well, Bassett Center at that time, was not in existence. Do you know what was there?

RB: No, I sure don't.

EM: A gravel pit. It was a place where the cement trucks were in and out. I guess it was El Paso Sand and Gravel.

RB: I see, now that I don't remember. I remember the drive-in, the one you mentioned, but I'd forgotten the name. The El Paso...did you ever go to the Rio Vista at all?

EM: The farm?

RB: Where the Braceros came through?

EM: Went by there, I never went to the, you know, knew of it, just knew, as I went by. But I had no reason to go out there. That was the men's job, you know.

RB: I thought you might have been curious.

EM: No.

RB: I'm asking this question of everybody I've been interviewing, but, uh, the weather, today's weather, what was it, do you think today's weather, is it warmer than it was? Do you remember more snow, more rain in those days?

EM: I don't remember very much snow or rain at all then. Because during cotton season, that would have been catastrophic, they couldn't pick that day.

RB: And besides you were gone in school.

EM: Well, I was gone from January to around the first of August anyway.

RB: Other times that you were here, do you remember?

EM: When I first came to Tornillo, I came home from school I guess the last of May and came home, on the train. I had never been to Tornillo before, but I've been living in Denton. Well in Denton, you have to have a raincoat, you have to have rain boots, and you have to have an umbrella and carry all that stuff with you all the time because we had ice storms and rain regularly. Well, I got to Tornillo and July the 1st, it started raining, it rained every single day in July and the only way to get the mail was to go to the post office, so I got elected to go to the post office everyday and everybody would just stare at me. I was the only person in town with a raincoat and rubber boots. (laughs) All the right equipment. But otherwise, you know, I can't even remember if the weather was all that much different.

RB: Then it is today. What about wild animals? My mother talks about how when she was young, she can remember hearing coyotes.

EM: Oh, we could hear coyotes every night. Every night. Course, we were living on the railroad tracks, upstairs, above the depot, so we had, you know.

RB: And you got, I'm not sure exactly where the railroad line runs and where the depot is, but—

EM: Well across like, the railroad tracks was a barb wired fenced and bare grounds, but there was nothing, sandhills.

RB: Any other kinds, do you remember?

EM: I don't remember ever seeing any up there, you know, close enough to see. But we'd hear them at night.

RB: My mother talks about that. I never heard one now, of course, down there. Actually, I live down near the Rio Vista.

EM: And you've never been down to Tornillo and the—

RB: Well, would you believe my mother was born in Tornillo?

EM: Well, did she go to school there?

RB: No, then they moved to Ysleta. Her father was a foreman at the ranch where Del Valle High School is now, on the farm, (laughs) I keep saying ranch. The farm where Del Valle High School is now.

EM: Was that Ivey's?

RB: No, it was Rosenblum was the man's name, then Spence. Across, a little bit over was where the Ivey Farm was.

EM: Oh, okay. Because I knew some of the Ivey's. There was a bunch of Ivey's down in Tornillo and Fabens.

RB: We have a family who has a farm down there, past Tornillo, I think it is. It's been a few years since I've been down there.

EM: You know, now, instead of raising, there's still quite a bit of cotton down there. Uh, my husband died a year ago but we had that motor home and while they were working on the freeway, they had all the lanes narrowed and everything. We would drive all the way to McNary to get on the on freeway. Drive through the Lower Valley just because we liked the drive. There's a lot of chiles down there now. You see there weren't...

RB: And pecan groves.

EM: We love pecans.

RB: This family friend that we have, his name is Chavez. He grows cantaloupes and chiles and that kind of stuff. My parents go down there.

EM: Allison, he had alfalfa and cotton. And what he would do is he would grow alfalfa on a field oh, about three years, then he would plow it all under and plant cotton there. He would rotate the crops that way. He was very, very smart, management.

RB: Do you remember what kind of cotton it was? I know there's differences.

EM: First, it was regular cotton, then he started putting in pima.

RB: Is that the shorter?

EM: It's the longer staple. The short staple of cotton is where you had the first year I was there, but then he started putting in the pima.

RB: The advantage of the pima, the long staple?

EM: The cotton, manufacturers of cotton cloth want pima because it's a longer staple and it makes a softer fabric. The funny thing was that I, when I met my husband, his father was a farmer. He was raised on a farm, but down in Gonzales County where they have to depend on the rain, no irrigation of any kind. They raised cotton when he was growing up and he had to pick cotton. So, he, we had a lot in common. He went home and told his dad that we had two to two and a half bales per acre down here, that the cotton was producing. His dad did not believe it because they were doing good to get a fourth of a bale an acre. Well, you know, it was just, they had to wait until it rained. And so since it didn't rain very much, they just didn't get very much cotton. So he came all the way out here on the train when he found out that his son had gotten engaged to some girl out here that he had never seen. So, we took him out there and showed him the cotton fields and he said, you know how the truck goes into, trailer comes into town, stuff blows

off, you know, and it's along side of the road. He says, "There's as much as I've grown on the side of the road." (laughs) He just couldn't believe that they could have two to two and a half bales per acre out here. So we finally convinced him by showing him that it was because they were watering.

RB: The water does make quite a difference.

EM: Oh, yeah, they know exactly when to water, too. If it rains at the wrong time, they get a little upset.

RB: Oh, yes, I know, 'cause, well I lived, in the area there's cotton fields around me, onion fields now sometimes.

EM: Yeah, a lot of onions down there. And a lot of, uh, I don't think it's, yeah, I guess it's maze.

RB: Milo maze.

EM: Yeah, milo maze.

RB: For feed?

EM: Yeah.

RB: And I remember a few years ago, right at the corner of Zaragosa and Americas, there was a sunflower field. I don't know if you ever saw that. That was very unusual. I don't think I ever seen it since.

EM: See they, uh, you were asking if I did anything else, they would bring in, at that time, nobody in this area, nobody grew maze, milo maze. So they would have to order it from up around Lubbock. The would bring it in a truck and one time, they brought higuera instead of milo maze, which is a different color grain. They didn't have the same nutrients that Mr. Allison wanted. So when they saw that it was the wrong color, they told me, "Tell him that not to unload, send it back, that's the wrong stuff."

RB: What was the name of it again?

EM: Well, higuera. It's just a different kind of maize. One of them is red and the other one is, uh, real white tanned.

RB: So he was using it partly—

EM: He was feeding cattle.

RB: But also as a nutrient for the ground?

EM: No, for the cattle. He wanted the cattle to be healthy. He was paying for that truckload and he wasn't going to pay that for that other stuff, that wasn't as good as what he wanted. (laughs) So, uh, there was, you know, that's where they would come if they had a delivery of anything like that, come to the office. But most of the time, Mr. Sybert was there and I was busy with payroll. I got so good on that adding machine that I didn't even have to look, you know, it was just like, touch.

But you ask what I did later, when my youngest child went to the first grade, I started substituting and I found out how much work that was, so I went back and got my degree at UTEP, but I had to change my major to elementary education. So, I graduated from UTEP in 1970.

RB: Okay, and you taught at what school?

EM: I taught at Thomas Manor one year and Riverside Elementary which is now Tejas Academy of Choice. I taught there nine years, then they closed the school. Then I taught at Cedar Grove. I stayed in the neighborhood.

RB: Sure, what grade was it?

EM: Fifth and sixth. Well, I taught third grade at Thomas Manor. That was enough. One year of the third grade was enough for me. When they threw up on the desk and don't say anything.

RB: You wanted them a little older then?

EM: Oh, yes. They're just beginning to notice that there's another sex in the room.
(laughs) But, it's, I enjoyed them. I really did.

RB: Then you worked for how many years as a schoolteacher?

EM: Uh, seventeen. The reason why I retired when I did was because my husband was retiring and we wanted to travel in the motor home and there was no way I was going to leave him at home by himself and work three more years. (laughs)

RB: Oh, I see. So you wanted to work three more years to get, what, twenty years?

EM: Yeah. You get the maximum; you get the full retirement at twenty years.

RB: Twenty, I see. Did you get to travel some?

EM: Oh, yeah, we did. We've been to the Pacific Northwest and all over Texas.

RB: Good. Well, anything else you wanted to?

EM: No. But I do want you to call Elias Bonilla because he said his dad would wake him up at 2 o'clock in the morning to go down there, you know, when they brought 'em in. So evidently they came in the daytime and it took them awhile to process all of them and then they would bring them out to the farm.

RB: Sounds like he doesn't have very fond memories of getting up at two in the morning.

EM: Well, no, he, well he was whatever, fourteen or fifteen years old. But I think he was the oldest boy in the family.

RB: I see. Well, thank you very much.

EM: Oh, I enjoyed it.

RB: This is the end of the interview.

End of Interview