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## **Interview no. 1567**

Ray Reaves

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Ray Reaves

Interviewer: Richard Baquera

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: February 19, 2003

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Transcript No.: 1567

Transcriber: Vanessa Macias

Ray Reaves was born in Missouri, but due to difficulties with his mother's health, his family moved to Alpine, Texas, when he was an infant; his mother died when he was only four years old, and he was raised by his step-mother; in 1945, he began working with the Border Patrol; later in 1950, he worked with the Trans Pecos Cotton Association and the Bracero Program. Mr. Reaves vividly recalls the details of his childhood and early adolescence; during World War II, he tried to enlist in the service but injuries to his knee kept him from being accepted; in 1945, he was hired on a temporary basis as a Border Patrol agent; he recounts his experiences as an agent and how he patrolled certain areas in west Texas; his appointment with the Border Patrol became permanent in 1951; he later began working with the Trans Pecos Cotton Association and the Bracero Program; it was his responsibility to ensure that the farmers' contracts were fulfilled with the correct number of workers; in addition, he describes how he would travel to various recruiting centers in Texas and Chihuahua, Mexico, to process the braceros.

Length of Interview 121 minutes

Length of Transcript 48 pages

**Name of Interviewee:** Ray Reaves

**Date of Interview:** February 19, 2003

**Name of Interviewer:** Richard Baquera

This is an interview of Mr. Ray Reaves who lived at 4232 Buckingham in El Paso, Texas. The interview is taking place on Wednesday morning, February 19, 2003. The interviewer is Richard Baquera. This is for the Bracero Oral History Project. So, Mr. Reaves, your name please?

RR: Raymond E. Reaves.

RB: And your birthday?

RR: June 29, 19 (unintelligible).

RB: And you were born, was it here in El Paso, where you were born?

RR: I was born in (unintelligible), Missouri and my mother's health wasn't very good and the doctor advised us to move to a warmer, drier climate, so we moved to Alpine, Texas when I was three months old. So I was born and raised, I was raised (unintelligible).

RB: Is that where you went to school?

RR: Yes, (unintelligible)

RB: And Alpine High School. How much education did you have?

RR: Well, that's a long story. We were, things didn't go well, my dad spent, he had a nice farm in (unintelligible). He sold that and he spent every penny that he could get his hands on trying to save my mother's life. She died when I was four. Two years later, he married my stepmother and she raised me, so I didn't, wasn't raised by my mother, but a good stepmother. I didn't have no problems with that, she was very good. Just an old farm girl, no education, no (unintelligible) school, but how to run a household and how to cook and all that. So, I grew up and started in grade school at Alpine. My dad was a good, honest, hardworking man, but with no education. So, he worked at two or three different jobs during the years that I was growing up, but none of them ever paid very well. So we were raised real, real poor. (Unintelligible) our home was about a mile north of town and he had bought two or three cows and we'd sell a little milk. (Unintelligible) came about, he worked for the Texas Highway Department at the time and there was two,

three individuals who could see he was making a little extra money in addition to his salary with them. So they began to complain (unintelligible). So one day, the boss told him, the man in charge of the district, "Mr. Reaves, we're gonna transfer you to Fort Davis come the first of the month," just to break up the little (unintelligible) making a few extra bucks from working his tail off. I was, too, I just old enough to...

RB: Do you know how much he made?

RR: Just enough to pay the bills. I have heard them discuss, now I remember this, the trouble they were having raising twelve and a half dollars a month for a hospital, so that's how poor we were. We didn't have a vehicle. I walked (unintelligible). Walked and delivered milk (unintelligible). He bought me an old second hand bicycle and my stepmother made me a canvas bag like a paper boy and I'd fill that with milk bottles and take off. Morning and night. I got to where I was making six trips in the morning and six at night, so we were (unintelligible) twelve cows then. (Unintelligible) operation, a lot of work. I wore out one bicycle, he bought me a new one. By the end, we were doing better. And, um, 'bout that time, I was (phone rings). Gosh, that phone never rings. Excuse me. (tape interruption)

RB: Okay, now I'm sorry, go ahead.

RR: Now, uh...

RB: (Unintelligible) They were going to move him to Fort Davis and...

RR: Yeah, the highway department.

RB: Right and he...

RR: He resigned, rather than move. He come home and he say, "Well, we got to get (unintelligible) 'cause I just quit." We knew that was a possibility, didn't come as a shock to (unintelligible). So he went back and talked to the (unintelligible) who was a very close, personal friend of ours, anyway. He and his family I was raised with, his boys are like a brother. And, uh, let's see. His, the name was Crawford and I guess it's his grandson, it was just recently finished his doctorate at UTEP and he's also a full blown minister. And a, that's the kind of family they are. And there're problems, too, right there (unintelligible). Pretty good sized family, but they were awfully good to me when we lived out there in the town. They treated

me like I was one of their own. I look back on that for many years and treasure their friendships, still do, although Mr and Mrs Crawford is gone. (Unintelligible) Mr Crawford told him, he was the banker, he says, "Earl, you see a cow you want, just buy her and write a check, we'll take care of the check, don't worry about it." We didn't have any money, so two, three cows at a time and we wound up.

RB: What kind of cows were they?

RR: Milk cows. Jerseys.

RB: Oh, jerseys. Okay.

RR: I got into that (unintelligible) and I was having a great time. My dad, I respected and enjoyed that part of our (unintelligible) and we hired some help when the fall season come around and I need to stay at school, after school for ball (unintelligible) practice and whatnot. Then he decided to...

RB: (unintelligible) Oh, football.

RR: Well, I played them all. Football, basketball, baseball. My daddy used to play some semi-pro ball in Missouri while he was a young man growing up. So he was kind of strong on baseball. (unintelligible). Then he, the reason I'm hesitating, I'm trying to get the events right. One day I told him, I was about seventeen, I said, "You know, there is no way you and my stepmother can do all this work 'cause I got to get out of here." He said, "What?" I said, "Well..." You know, the war had broken out in '41 and I was about (unintelligible) and I said, "I'll be eighteen in a little while and I sure don't want to be a foot soldier, I want to fly." And he said, "Well, I've got news for you." I said, "What's that?" He says, "You don't have to worry about anything," he says, "I've been down to the draft board, talked to them and they classified us as food producers and your eligible for deferment." "(unintelligible). No, I can't do that." "What do you mean you can't do that?" I said, "Hey, everybody I know, been around all the boys, my friends, are all enlisted just like that. I'm going, too." He said, "Well, you're gonna ruin our business." I said, "Well, Dad, that's why I'm telling you now, to give you some time because I have to go. And I am going." He didn't like my determined attitude. He thought he could sway the other way. Well, I left under a

(unintelligible) cloud of...He didn't want me...(Unintelligible) He didn't like it, but he got over it.

RB: Were you the only one in the family?

RR: Well, I had a brother three years older than I was. I think I was nine when this event occurred. He had a testicle lodged in the bottom of his (unintelligible) somewhere or another. And this is a lesson with all, I think, could lack from. Alpine was a small town and I think it had two doctors. This one guy had examined my brother and he says, "I don't know why, I said, my nurse, we'll take care of that in just a few minutes." And he convinced my folks, as I say, we still don't have any money, but that was a thing that (unintelligible) when they operated, they used ether in those days. And the average amount of ether that you could give a twelve-year-old boy is two cans. Well, they're giving him a fifth can and noticed he's dead. Just smothered him out. So, that's why I don't have any brothers or sisters. I had one, but he (unintelligible). And he was a different type of individual, my daddy used to tell me at one time, he says, "If you ever go off," then he goes (unintelligible) and I even guess we got taken up pretty good, he says, "We'll whoop you again until you (unintelligible)." He's kind of a, I don't want to say a cow, he wasn't that strong, he wasn't aggressive at all. He could get by mistreating (unintelligible) if he wanted. And, man, I just (unintelligible). So I learned to fight pretty good (unintelligible). (Laughs) I had an older friend, blacksmith, and we had been to stunt school this Sunday and (unintelligible) just my brother and I was (Unintelligible) walking back, right up by his house. About that time, we had encountered a couple of guys we knew real well. Kind of a bully type, one of them decided to whip John Martin, my older brother, because he just wouldn't fight and I, the other guy said, "Well, I'll take on the little one." So, he was about two years older than I was, (unintelligible) and I just whipped his butt 'til fair do well. And this old blacksmith saw it start. He was settin' in his living room looking out the window and he thought, oh, boy, I don't want that little one hurt. So he grabbed his hat and come running out here and tells us this story. He said, "By then, this little boy had been knocked down twice, but he was up after

them again and (unintelligible).” (Laughs) I guess he (unintelligible). But those were, growing up days.

RB: So you left home when...

RR: ‘Bout seventeen.

RB: Seventeen.

RR: And that was about twenty-three, I guess it was about ’41 when (unintelligible) December 7, so that would be ’42. 1942. Any my experience was kind of hard for me to take, but I didn’t have any choice. First, I had volunteered for the air crew. Made high mark, but I had just a little (unintelligible). I didn’t say a dang (unintelligible) to ‘em about it. And I got all the way to Korea and this guy says, “You know, I better report you back to the flight surgeon. He needs to look at you a little closer.” (Unintelligible) So, I thought, well, I’ll try again, so I think I took the same exam up here, I know I took one in San Angelo, one in Pecos, and one in here. In the process of that, there was a Navy B-12 recruiting team (unintelligible). And that’s flying for the Navy. They’d teach you to fly off the carriers. I thought, boy, this is just for me. So, I signed up and we had encountered a young fellow from down there San Antonio named Borandi Wheeler. He was real poor and he was about a week ahead of registration for (unintelligible). (unintelligible) took him downtown and he was, “Ray, (unintelligible). I’m gonna have to go home, I can’t stay ‘cause I don’t haven’t any money. But I won’t be in school this semester.” And I said, “I thought and I thought and I said, I’ll tell you what, let me talk to my dad at work and I’ll see you tomorrow.” (Unintelligible) we hired him to help with the work at home for room and board. And that was it. (Unintelligible) So that was a big help to him and a tremendous to us. (Unintelligible) went and told on me (laughs) (Unintelligible) that Navy B-12 unit. My dad thought we were home free, you know, I flunked two of those other exams by then. So, he wasn’t too happy with me. I didn’t fair too well there for a few months. I say, well, that’s just the way it is. I can’t believe it myself, I don’t. So, I got started, I took my grad school at Sul Ross, they had a training unit there. So I was ready to go into primary flight

training and go through another physical, they flunked me out again.

(Unintelligible)

RB: What was the problem with the knee?

RR: Oh, I tell you now, you said you aren't going to believe you. It hurt a little, slow a little and (unintelligible) a little. Doctors in those days weren't prepared like they are today. (Unintelligible) got very excited about it. (Unintelligible) all right, but when they really began to give you a close examination, I guess I wasn't doing that well. They wouldn't take me. So, then I went to the Marine Corp. I (unintelligible), "You're 18 years old?" "Yep." "Why aren't you in the service?" I says, "Well, I'm trying to get in the service." (Laughs). They didn't like that. Then, we went to (unintelligible). I thought, well, I guess I'll wind up in the Army. My time came and they wanted to know, I was eighteen and a half by then, why I hadn't been drafted before and I explained all this to them and they said, "We don't want you." So, I didn't get in the service. I got my basic training and my flight, basic flight training ready to go. Start my flight training and that's how far as I go.

RB: Was it because of the knee?

RR: Yeah. This knee today, it's been replaced twice. Total replacement.

(Unintelligible)

RB: And they never, you never figured out why, since you that young whatever, maybe you bruised it or hurt it or something?

RR: No, they never did come up with a solution. But I, it's been operated on about four times. (Unintelligible)

RB: (Unintelligible)

RR: One of them was exactly right over, there's a guy here, Dr. Alvaro, recommend him to anybody.

RB: (Unintelligible)

RR: Uh, Hernandez.

RB: Alvaro Hernandez.

RR: He's real good. I like to (unintelligible) because I limp a little. About six to eight months ago. He's operated on every member of our family for something or



another. And I've known him a long time. Sat down and he said, "What's the problem, Ray?" I told him. He says, "Can you straighten that out?" I say, "Sure," "Do you have any pain?" I said no. It's just weak, I think. (Unintelligible) something we can do it to make it a little better. He says, "How old are you?" I said, "Seventy-nine." He says, "Goodbye." Somebody else said, "Ray, you should go to another doctor." I said, "I was pleased, I know him real well, I know how good he is and how honest he is. I just don't have any hankering to go to another doctor." Well, that's a, that's a story that doesn't what you want what you need.

RB: Well, so they wouldn't take you in the military? You stayed home?

RR: Let me see a minute. I stayed home about a year and during that time, I, you can tell I was athletically inclined (unintelligible). We (unintelligible). This is a fantastic story, I could write you a book on this one, but I'll shorten it a lot. There's a rich rancher...

RB: Is that the man the field is named for down there?

RR: Exactly. He's dead now, but he was wealthy, wealthy, wealthy. He built Copeland Field is which the nicest minor league ballpark in the United States.

RB: That's what I heard. In Alpine, right?

RR: In Alpine. My name is in a gold plaque they had on the wall, our team, not just me when I was on the team, my name was it. And I was kind of proud of that. I played for two years and I had to quit. But there's been several major leaguers come through this little organization down there. Hit players nobody wanted to play. One thing about it, of course, (unintelligible) money running out of his ears. He paid you good.

RB: How much?

RR: Six hundred a month with all the expenses away from home.

RB: This would be (unintelligible) baseball season?

RR: Yeah. Well, he'd bring guys in or he'd have people who scouted for him, so to speak. He'd bring, you know, (unintelligible) Sul Ross, he'd pay all their expenses and come springtime, they was his, you know.

RB: Where did he make his money, do you...? Rancher?

- RR: No, his, he owned, his estate, I guess, still owns (unintelligible). Entire property from Alpine to...
- RB: What was that? The name again?
- RR: Entire, I said, the entire property from Alpine on the right of the road to (unintelligible). Right through the Davis Mountains.
- RB: I thought you mentioned a name, I didn't catch the name.
- RR: It was Copeland, so Harry Copeland. Everybody like him. And he had a peculiar, he was well-thought of and well-liked in that town. He had a peculiar characteristic about him. He and his wife didn't see eye to eye. They didn't divorce, but they didn't live together. And she, she just lived the life of a writer 'cause he (unintelligible). Traveled all the time. Nobody really (unintelligible) because he never even looked at another woman that was married. He had his girlfriend, but she was divorced. Anytime anybody in that town needed anything, Harry Copeland would take care of it. I remember, the war was just about over and they built a new VFW, it was a small town, it wasn't a huge thing, but a new VFW hall for the guys coming back from overseas for them to dance and drink and raise hell and that's was what they were doing. They made so much noise that the neighbors began to complain and the whole Copeland (unintelligible) gave it to them all his life. And I remember, our pep squad girls in high school was getting, put together a little plan to work and make some money to buy some pep squad uniforms. He found out about it, just bought it, and he's that way about everything. Very charitable person. He never wanted any praise or nothing, just leave me alone. Anything he needed anybody, call Herbert to take care of it. And, great man in so many ways. I respected him after I got grown and you could see these problems develop in marriages and so forth, I always respected the fact that he never bothered nobody, took his, only the likes and dislikes as far as a woman was concerned, (unintelligible) Garden was her name.
- RB: It's interesting that the Army, the military wouldn't accept you because of the knee, but you could still play.
- RR: Oh, yeah, I played ball. I put together...
- RB: What position did you play?

RR: Well, I used to, I pitched a little, but I wasn't a very good pitcher, but I used to play shortstop. Later when that knee got a little worse, I played first base. Whole (unintelligible) hitter. Even with that darn old knee, I could hit that ball.

RB: Really? (Laughs) Did you travel around much?

RR: Yeah, we traveled some, not, not extensively, but we'd go to different towns. We went into Mexico twice, no wait, I'm wrong, we did, but not with Copeland. I was just, gotten the (unintelligible) talked to my dad and tried to get my dad, which of course was no problem, not let me in the patrol so he could keep me on his team. (Laughs) But, yeah, I got along real good with Copeland. I said, "Well, I don't think I can make a career out of it and maybe I can on this other...so I've got to look out for Ray Reaves, you know." So I said, "No, I really love to play, you've been really nice to me." No problems. He said, "I'm doing what I think would be best for me in the long run." Because I said, "You know, it's short lived thing." He's put through some good major league, developing major league players through his organization. Had a catcher one time, he was a baseball coach at Texas A & M. (Unintelligible) Two or three years. I really liked him, he was a fun guy. One time, he got off from (unintelligible) out here to play on the weekend and left his baseball shoes. Well, mine fit him and I let him play, so I loaned him my shoes. (Laughs) We (unintelligible) when things like that happened. But he was not a loser, he built this nice stadium and all. It was (unintelligible) some jerk would come in from somewhere else and they'd give up (unintelligible) and yellin' against the Alpine Cowboys. (Unintelligible) go get him. (Laughs) (Unintelligible) he said, "If you can't yell for our team, we don't need you, you can go." (Laughs) Get out of here. Well, not a lot, but a few people. Because of that, but you get bind and you need a hit real bad and our (unintelligible) he'd tell the pitches, "Twenty-five dollars for the next strike-out!" (Unintelligible) Need a base hit, you know, pretty bad. "Twenty-five dollars for a base hit" and went (unintelligible). He'd pay just like that.

RB: How much for a home run? (Laughs)

RR: I don't know. (Laughs) I hit a few of them, but he never did, I guess it wasn't as tight. He was paying us six hundred a month, which was a lot of money in those days.

RB: Sounds like it.

RR: It was a great fun. Then when I got to (unintelligible), I put a together a ballteam myself.

RB: How did you get in to the border patrol?

RR: Well, it's a strange coincidence. My life's full of funny things. Different. Uh, there were these people I was delivering milk to, I got along with everybody and everything. Good people, good to me. One day, he said, "Ray, you know (unintelligible)?" He says, "What if I gave you a choice?" I said, "What do you mean?" "Hey, the boat goes higher (unintelligible) right now, you'd make it good." He said, "Pay good. You'd like the work. You'd do well. Why don't you go over there and talk to them." I said, "Okay." So I went down there and talk to them and they hired, just like that. (Unintelligible) what they call a temporary appointment, I didn't have a permanent...

RB: In Alpine?

RR: Yeah, the headquarters over there. I used to get 'em milk to some of those guys. The chief, you know. I never thought I'd be one of them. That's fine.

RB: Did you have to go to any training schools?

RR: Oh, yeah, yeah. It was in El Paso at that time.

RB: So, first it was temporary, but how did it become permanent?

RR: In, that was '45 when I went in, March 1, '45. They gave the first exam in '48 for a permanent position. I didn't feel bad at all that I was treated at that time because I felt that a guy that would go into the military, go overseas certainly had the preference. I had no problem with that and I just thought, maybe I can squeeze in there somewhere. And they, and they, they were getting them hiring back when they come back from overseas. It was in the patrol, and they left, they'd leave the patrol and go overseas, go into the service. And, uh, that's what happened, when we got in '49, I got (unintelligible) and I had no points. If you've to service, you'd get five points on your exam, or if you'd been disabled in anyway, you'd get ten.

And those guys coming back, I made pretty good grade, though, I (unintelligible). So, they turned a bunch of us loose. I was turned down in '49 and with it, (unintelligible) we don't know what we make, they'd take you back later. Well, I went to work (unintelligible) in San Angelo. Let's see, what was my first job. It's kind of (unintelligible) in a minute.

RB: Oh, that's okay, it's tying in already.

RR: I, uh, well, I'm not sure I can give you the right sequence.

RB: You didn't go back to work with your dad?

RR: No, no, I, uh, went to work, well, when I was in patrol, right here it comes back, I was transferred one time, well, I started in Cypress, then I was over there three months and I'll tell you why. (Unintelligible) and I had a good time down there.

RB: Okay.

RR: The first exam they gave, I said, I didn't get any points like the rest of them. (unintelligible) I made 88, and they told me at the time, they said, "Well, that's not a bad grade. You'll probably reach you some of these times on the register." And they did, they call me back and I had to go through probation again, go through the training school again, I didn't have any problems, I could do that with my eyes closed. But for a (unintelligible) a lot of those things were a stranger to him, Spanish and immigration law, why, it's hard.

RB: Did you have to study the immigration law? Were you already familiar with it?

RR: Well, that's funny. It goes back to when I came in, come in and watch the first (unintelligible) '45, (unintelligible), I didn't have a car, they'd take me down there. From Alpine to headquarters. They said, "It's two officers stationed in Sanderson and your gonna work with a (unintelligible) named Jack Williams. He's an old man, he's gonna retire pretty quick. We'd rather you did work with him, so that's the way we gonna set up." Okay, do the best I can. I look back on that and I thought, what a mistake they made sending a young, like 21 years old, inexperienced, raw kid into a situation where there's a lot of controversy between the two men.

END OF SIDE, TAPE ONE

RR: (Unintelligible) if you worked with that man, which I didn't. I liked him, got along just fine. The other guy was kind of a party guy. He was (unintelligible). And, I'm a teetaller, my wife is, too. We never drank anything, we never partied. Never partied. This guy, every once in a while, his wife (unintelligible) One time, he and another guy went to (unintelligible) Del Rio and partied for a day or two. Drank, (unintelligible). We told me where he was going, he said, "(Unintelligible) don't tell anybody unless the boss in Alpine calls, tell him where I'm at, that's the only one." So I tried to get along. I didn't tell a soul, (Unintelligible). Didn't tell anybody. (unintelligible) I used to deliver milk to these (unintelligible) Alpine. And he and I, older guy, we got to be good friends. He's the one that told me, "That's a good job, maybe if you..." and when I got off, he said, "Boy, am I glad for you." "Oh, I appreciate that." He said, "I want to help you all I can," I says, "Here" and he gave me twenty-five typewritten page, pages of law, universal law. And I didn't have a car and I wanted the job real bad, as you can see, didn't have nothing. When he gave me that, I sat and studied and I studied and my days off, I studied. It wasn't two, three months 'till I could quote that whole twenty-five pages. And that's a lot of law.

RB: Sounds like a great deal.

RR: So this guy, he turned in a bad report in on him, that I wouldn't party with him. (Unintelligible). He told them I wasn't studying. So the first time I was in headquarters, this chief called me up and he said, "What's this I hear about you not studying?" I said, "Oh, I'm studying." He says, "You studying?" I said, "Yes, sir." "How much do you study everyday?" And I told him. I didn't tell him about that outline that I have. I said, "I study on my days off. I don't have anywhere to go. I don't have a vehicle, so I nothing to do but study. So, I study all day on my days off." I said, "If we don't 'have too long a day, I study at night." I said "Sometimes we were gone fifteen, sixteen hours. I don't study that night, but most of the time, I study two or three hours a day, plus my days off." He (Unintelligible), "That's quite a bit of studying, ain't it?" I said, "Yes, sir, I've been working hard." And he says, "Well, I'll tell you what I'm gonna do." He says, "You're gonna work with several trainees," that's what they call you

(unintelligible), “over the (unintelligible),” and that’s the whole different centers that composed the Alpine station, and he said, “Some of the exams are coming up and I need down and review them anyway to see how they’re doing.” He said, “I’ll be down here in a few days and give you a test and I can tell whether you’ve been studying.” I said, “Fine.” I wasn’t afraid of these daggone tests, I knew he couldn’t give me a test I couldn’t pass. So, he gave me this test and I finished and he called me back, he graded it, called me back in. He says, “What do you think you made?” I said, “Oh, I didn’t miss too much.” I wouldn’t commit myself. He said, “No, you did, you missed two points.” He says, “I gave you, you haven’t even been in there two months, I gave you the hardest immigration law exam that I could give you. We gave our boys for their final (unintelligible) it was ten and a half (unintelligible) you make a grade like that, I’m amazed.” He said, “Don’t worry about anything, I’ll take care of it. Good luck to you.” Took off, one of the first times I was in headquarters, they said, (unintelligible) I guess (unintelligible) (laughs). And he said, “Well, we’ve discovered you’ve done a remarkable job so far and we’re very proud of you and we want you to press for you to Presidio. How long do you think it would take you to get ready?” I said, “Well, it’ll take me about two hours to get back to (unintelligible), about an hour for me to get my stuff ready, and another two hours to get back. (Laughs)” “I didn’t mean it like that,” he said, “Days or whatever it takes. Don’t rush. Whenever you’re ready, let us know and we’ll move you.” It wasn’t more than a few days ‘till I was in Presidio (unintelligible). I like the work.

RB: What was it that you did?

RR: Oh, we’d go out, well, actually we got out in those days, we came out three or four, four, five days south of the (unintelligible). Trails that illegals used to come into that area.

RB: So, that was all you were looking for was just illegals?

RR: Well, we were authorized under the law to take any action on any customs violations. Smuggled merchandise (unintelligible). We did a lot of that and, of course, our still (unintelligible). I wanted to make a good grade, I want to make a (unintelligible) so I could, my supervisor, someone where I can get a shot at a

permanent job. I just felt that all the way along. I didn't see how they can turn me down when I studied hard and knew as much as I knew. I didn't have any trouble with Spanish (unintelligible) Alpine.

RB: I was going to ask you, did you know Spanish? Were you fluent in it?

RR: I was pretty good, not real fluent at that time. But I, all my friends were Mexican-American guys. We were on ball teams together and I picked up a lot of stuff from them, so I (unintelligible). That was fun. And, a lot of real fun. But I knew some Spanish when I came in and, of course, they teach you Spanish, that's part of your training, training school. It's a rough goal (unintelligible) Spanish and I had my law. Then there's first aid and naturalization and (unintelligible). There were a number of courses that you were pretty well rounded out when you get to the year end because at the end of six months, and I don't think they've changed this, even that far back, I don't think they've changed this today even. At the end of six months, well, they might give or take a few days, but generally that's how they phrase it, they'll give you a major exam in both law and Spanish. They call you before a reviewing board and give you this long Spanish, well, naturally, I had to tell them I didn't know very much Spanish, but I never had any trouble with it. I went through that and learned a lot. I can quote you a lot of law (laughs) without telling what that mean or how to use it, I couldn't tell them. But I can sure tell them what the books say.

RB: So you were in Presidio in what year, do you remember?

RR: Yeah, I went to Presidio in '45, the first time, and coming along, I was back the second time. I stayed 'till '48 and up there in Presidio, there's a place, a little town called Ruidoso that's like New Mexico. Very small, they had a post office, mostly just for farmers and ranchers in that area. Most people, most of those people Mexican-American guys. I got along with them, I was raised with them. (Unintelligible) We had a, we called it a camp, but actually it was a Quonset (unintelligible) hut. We'd be assigned up there with a partner for about a week at a time, every once in a while, it'll come your turn. Most of the (unintelligible) (Laughs). When I started, I couldn't (unintelligible) (laughs) not good, but I could make out. About that time, they opened up a lot of new land up in Pecos. Just



thousands of acres. They discovered that that was a good place to raise cotton. A lot of water.

RB: Water from underground?

RR: Yeah, they drilled about two hundred fifty. They had, boy (unintelligible) with gas pumps everywhere. So one day I was talking to those farmers, I asked him about gas supply. "Where do you guys get all that gas for these pumps?" "Oh, we've got a big contract with," I think if I remember right, it was a company called the (unintelligible). "We've got a big contract with them. They furnish this (unintelligible)." I said, "How long is that contract good for?" He said, "Forty years." I said, "Oh, that (unintelligible) It's automatic." "Oh, no, we got to do them all over again." I said, "Man, the investment everybody's making in this thing. That's not very good business in my book. They should be like you guys put this thing together. You should have had in the contract that this automatically renewed all our, at least, (unintelligible) price low. You didn't do that, did you?" "No." By george, I was right. Been out there a few years, they raised the price of that gas, natural gas, so much that these homes out (unintelligible) twenty, thirty miles from town to Pecos, nice places. A lot of money invested in all that cultivation and getting the ground ready for cotton. Big, big operation. Thousands of them were just, (unintelligible) from Barstow down to Amarillo. (Unintelligible) about forty miles. And sure enough, the property just doubled. Their new contract (unintelligible)...

RB: Price?

RR: Both of them. It's real hard to follow that area now if you knew what it was like a few years back. It was green and everybody was busy working and lots of workers, lots of them, (unintelligible). If you ever had a cantaloupe, ever tasted Pecos cantaloupe?

RB: Oh, yeah.

RR: It's good, they had that industry going, too, along with all that cotton. Uh, I'm an old country boy at heart and one time, I worked on the police department. I had a good partner, we (unintelligible) (Laughs). (Unintelligible) One time, we caught a (unintelligible) during the night in the summer. There's another two place we

would work in their car, we wouldn't work in ours, we'd prowl all night. One of us would sit right by the telephone. We didn't have radios that would work in those days. So, one night, I said, and one of the other guys was a big old guy, but he had one bad eye. (unintelligible), I never forget 'er. The guy, the size and all, he was afraid of his shadow. (Laughs) You couldn't believe he worked in a job like that. So, I said, "We'll have some fun (unintelligible)." So this is the way that I had that blanket and an old, big old straw hat, you know, so I told him, "Hey, I'll give you a couple of bucks. Throw me your blanket there. Your hat hiding in the back seat and I'll give it back to you in a little bit." "Okay." So, I took that old hat and he (unintelligible) a bicycle that's how come I and I got on this bike and turned on the light. Started down the street. He was (unintelligible) where he's supposed to be, you know, him and his partner, and I rode by and honked that air horn a couple of times. (Unintelligible) (Laughs). (Unintelligible) He couldn't (Unintelligible). We had a lot of fun. One night, we got two or three and went into a restaurant. So we surrounded the place. I guess it was bigger than (unintelligible). There was a (unintelligible) and there was a stucco wall. I'll never forget this crazy (unintelligible) and I told him my partner, "Let's see, let's see how it goes with (unintelligible), something like this," I said, "Watch this." So I go over this ladder and (unintelligible) no too far from the ladder and I shoved it against that stucco wall-bang, bang, bang-(laughs) (unintelligible). I don't think he stopped for two blocks. (Laughs) I can remember (unintelligible) going in the business. Ah, his partner and my partner would be off at four o'clock in the morning, then they would tell the other guy, his partner and myself would be partners from four o'clock 'til eight. (Unintelligible) got together, (Unintelligible) and I, one morning at four o'clock, I can't remember if it was a call.

RB: Morning or afternoon?

RR: Morning. Real early in the morning. We'd work at midnight (unintelligible). We're there, whether we got a call or somebody stop and told them, anyway, so there's a car go into the (unintelligible) station up there on the edge of Pecos, with dust, dirt all over it. Been stored somewhere, almost (Unintelligible) I said, "Well, how long has that been?" Just two, three minutes ago, can't be far, he was gassing

it up. So I told my partner, “(Unintelligible), let’s go.” So, didn’t have a freeway in those days, highway. So we went up the gas station to ask him which way he went. (Unintelligible) He said, “(Unintelligible) to El Paso.” So we took Highway 80 and we’ve been on the (unintelligible) ‘bout ten, fifteen miles and two daylight come into view, in front of us. So, (unintelligible) about that time, (Unintelligible) was driving. About that time, I felt this guy begin to (unintelligible) begin to slow down. I glanced over there, he let it up, he was scared of his shadow, that man was, he had no business doing that work at all. (Unintelligible) I didn’t a thing (Unintelligible) what’s he doing? So, directly, I said, “Something wrong with the car (Unintelligible)?” “No, no, look at that guy’s, pulling away from us.” (Laughs) (Unintelligible)

RB: (Unintelligible) He didn’t want to catch them. Do you remember his name?

RR: Oh, (unintelligible) no, I don’t remember the guy who stole, allegedly stole the car.

RB: No, I mean, (unintelligible)’s name? You just don’t...

RR: (Unintelligible).

RB: Okay.

RR: (Laughs) So, I said, “Well look, (unintelligible), we aren’t going to catch him this way,” I says, “Why don’t you pull over and let me drive and I’ll catch him.” And he did and we caught him. In the meantime, I reached out under the dash and pulled a big old spotlight, unbuckled my pistol and said, “I’m ready. Will you?” (Laughs) All scared (Unintelligible) all right. Should have been...

RB: How much longer was he in the Border Patrol?

RR: Well, he wasn’t in the patrol, you see, he was police.

RB: Oh, okay.

RR: Now I was working city police at that time. That was the time, the period time that I was waiting on the exam to be announced and I had to make a living. I had a good job when I came back and I hesitated a little bit. They had a board of directors on this, what they call the Trans Pecos Cotton Association and they ran the whole thing, had an office, couple of secretaries, this big operation, (unintelligible) several thousand (unintelligible).

RB: Was this the Alpine police department?

RR: No, the Pecos.

RB: Pecos, okay.

RR: Police Department. Then I went to go work for this cotton association and that was job right down my alley, you know. Well, the other was, too, I had a lot of fun. I had a good partner was always pulling something on somebody. (Laughs) He's a gentle type individual.

RB: How did you hear about the Braceros? The first time you ever heard?

RR: Well, I guess, well, when I was in Pecos. (Unintelligible) running everywhere when I was transferred up there. We tied into that situation trying to bring it under control and it began to hurt the farmers, of course, they needed the cotton pickers. (Unintelligible) Let's see, I think that's all I can remember, I think somebody raised a few watermelon, but mostly cotton, just thousands of acres, good cotton. They were making a mint. I got to talking to one of these board of directors one time, he and I were big buddies, I started off with the money people were making in this. I said, "If I had the money, I'd buy another lot because I don't have the time and I keep my job with you guys. Maybe thirty, maybe fifty acres somewhere and I make some of this money, too, I (unintelligible) some cotton." He said, "Ray," he was president or vice-president of the bank there, "Anytime you want to do that, just let me know and I'll raise the money for you (unintelligible)." He was, he was a farmer himself, so he knew the business. I said, "Well, I never (unintelligible) cotton before." He told me, "Don't mind (unintelligible). I'll guide you and you can do that, I'd like to see you make some money." So I was all kind of setting in it, bought me a pick-up this company had, I call it a company. My job was, of course, taking care of the Braceros. If you was a farmer and you needed forty for a month, why I'd get you forty (Unintelligible) what we call I100 loan. Well, it was (unintelligible) in your billfold, small card with your picture on it. But it was proof that you were an agricultural worker...

RB: And not an illegal. Do you remember what year this was?

RR: Well, must have been, well, when I went up to Pecos in '48, that program had not been (unintelligible), so it must have been '50, '51. I'm guessing now, I could be off.

RB: So you were still working in the Border Patrol?

RR: Yeah, I was in. I was called back in '50. Just about a month before my year was up and I didn't bother my sick leave, couldn't use it anyway I wasn't sick. But, um, when I was called back, they let me keep accumulating sick leave when I went back in the second time. So, I wound up when I retired with thirty-six hundred hours of sick leave. In those days, they didn't pay you for it, they don't today, I don't think. But, used to your (unintelligible), but they passed a regulation, this was before I retired, that they take that sick leave, I had forty year service and a year and a half of sick leave came on, I get credit for forty-one and a half years and add it to your time.

RB: Well, that's better than losing it.

RR: Oh, yeah. I got a check on day for \$14,000 after I retired. My wife come home, she was still teaching, "Look what I got in the mail the other day." (Laughs) She says, "What's that for?" I said, "I don't know." "What do you mean you don't know?" I said, "(unintelligible). (Unintelligible)." "So what you gonna do with it? You better send that back, so you don't get in trouble." "I'm not gonna get in trouble, they (unintelligible)." She says, "Well, what you gonna do?" I says, "I'm gonna put it in the bank. We'll see what happens. We'll get a letter." Sure enough, a couple of weeks, here comes a letter of explanation. (Unintelligible). So, it worked real good. And, it's a custom, and I'm sure they still do this, like if I know that I'm gonna retire (unintelligible) this year and say we're in January of this year, I won't use any of my vacation time and that's twenty-six days because when you retire, if you've got accumulated vacation, you get paid for it. So I got another check for, that was the first one of them, this was \$12,000 and something. So I come out when I retired with two checks, \$26,000.

RB: Pretty good.

RR: Yeah, pretty good for an old poor boy. (Laughs)

RB: So you were, like a, you were bringing the Braceros to the farms?

RR: Well, (unintelligible) the association, Trans Pecos Cotton Association, was set up in, (unintelligible), they had this scattered on up and down the country.

RB: Did they come to a certain place? The Braceros?

RR: Yes, they had a center and like, if here's the farmer and you wanted a fifty, (unintelligible) say October or November for cotton, start picking, and you come into my office, place your order, and I'll have your people ready for you.

RB: So you would go and pick them up at the...?

RR: I didn't bring them, but I didn't have to, they would bring them down on buses.

RB: So you personally didn't, like, pick them out? Somebody...?

RR: No, yeah. The problem is that the first ranchers more than farmers complain about (unintelligible). We're having to take people we don't know whether they can pick peanuts or what, you know. They would say, "Well, that's just the way it is. If they don't know, bring them back in and we'll try to get you somebody else. Maybe you want to train them a little. Work with them a bit and keep more of them." That worked real well. We didn't have any trouble. But (unintelligible) getting into this program and the center (unintelligible) big screening centers, one in Monterrey, one in Chihuahua, and one in Hermosillo, when they drew up this international trading that started the Bracero program.

RB: These were the formalized...?

RR: That was the beginning step for a person who wanted to become a Bracero. You report to one of these centers and we who worked in those centers would get them before they were a few days about how many are needed. And then we'd process them and then ship them up to processing center. Now, here, you (unintelligible) this place. It's the sherrif's training posse.

RB: At the Rio Vista?

RR: That's it. That used to be an old training Braceros.

RB: So they would come from Chihuahua, Hermosillo, Monterrey to one of these and there's like three? Or at least (unintelligible)

RR: Right. They'd (unintelligible) the process. Now down there, I got sent down there three times. You need to view these people because the guy that made (unintelligible), well, he (unintelligible) a farm hand, but he wanted to get into the

states, so he'd try to propose himself, present themselves to be a Bracero. And we would check their fingerprints, you know...

RB: So how did you, you ended up at one of these centers in Mexico?

RR: Oh, yeah.

RB: How did that happen?

RR: Well, I was a Border Patrolman and they staffed them all with Border Patrolman. A few big centers.

RB: So, these are in Mexico, but they are run by...

RR: Mexico?

RB: The US government? Both together?

RR: Yeah, together. They'd, I guess they were (unintelligible) first step, of course, that's just a more legal term thing (unintelligible).

RB: Which one were you? You were at the...?

RR: Chihuahua.

RB: How did you get there? Did you...?

RR: Oh, drove.

RB: Drove? You drove there?

RR: They pay your mileage. (Unintelligible)

RB: I see. You're still being paid by the Border Patrol, right?

RR: Oh, yeah.

RB: What did you do?

RR: I, let's see, there's probably four to six of us and we all had a little desk, so to speak. We'd interview them to try and determine their background, if they would make a suitable agricultural worker here in the states. They'd try to fool you and all. They'd falsify these little Mexican documents and change pictures.

RB: You'd ask for documents?

RR: Oh, yeah.

RB: Like proof of age or something?

RR: (Unintelligible)

RB: Was there a certain age requirement?

RR: I don't think so. I don't think the age had anything to do with it as far as that does.

RB: So it was just sort of an identity?

RR: Yeah, exactly. These guys, tired, they didn't know where it was they were going. Like a (unintelligible), he'd know how to pick cotton. You know, (unintelligible) want to be a Bracero, a farmworker. And you'd talk to them a few minutes, first thing you know that you find out he wasn't a farmworker. (Unintelligible) see these prints, well, those were the ones that really worked in agriculture, you couldn't, on fingerprints, you could not, they'd tear, wear all the ridges off 'em.

RB: Calluses and...yeah.

RR: So we'd have these guys with fingers 'bout like mine are now.

RB: So you would check their hand?

RR: Yeah, check their hand. And, of course, talk to 'em. It's kind of a fun job. Once in awhile you'd run into some old, we used to when I first, the very first time I went down there, we fingerprinted everybody. And their hands were so bad that you wouldn't get any legible prints hardly ever, percentage-wise. Finally, canceled that out.

RB: Why were the fingerprinting done?

RR: Oh, try and identify them. Then they shipped up to an area, an office where (unintelligible).

RB: Oh, I see.

RR: Try to identify any criminals.

RB: So you would just check their papers, talk to them about...

RR: (Unintelligible)

RB: You didn't ask them any other questions? You didn't check like for medical conditions or anything? That was done somewhere else?

RR: We had a doctor that if we had any reason, we could refer to the doctor. Mostly, it was an interrogation type thing.

RB: Did you have many of them show up? Lots of them show up?

RR: Oh, yes. (Unintelligible), no jobs, still (unintelligible) today (unintelligible). They'd do anything in the world to get into the country. And that was a way to get in, the easiest way to get in in those days.

RB: Where did you stay when you were there? In a hotel?



RR: In a nice hotel. We were (unintelligible). (Laughs)

RB: But you don't remember where it was that your office was in Chihuahua? An address or anything in Chihuahua?

RR: To be honest with you, no. I think I could take you to it, but I can't tell you a number or anything.

RB: Okay, I'm just curious.

RR: Yeah.

RB: So, how many, you would work everyday, six days a week?

RR: Well, every once in awhile, you know, you'd get orders from up here all the time, you'd get those orders, (unintelligible) time, you know, like you needed a thousand, well you could get through with them maybe four or five days and if you didn't get anymore, then you'd be, you'd have a little extra time there.

RB: So you could do a couple hundred or so a day.

RR: No, let me think. You can't do that many and do a halfway decent job. But we'd play tricks on one another. I know one time, there's an old boy had arthritis, we still printing them in those days. They'd line up to your desk, you know, and get to where you just reach around and get them. One of them looked back, you know, pulling on these prints. Well, they set this one up on me. (Laughs). 'Course, they was all watching, I didn't know if they'd do it all over. So, I reached there, got this old boy with his arthritis, (unintelligible) and a lot of them would be nervous, you know, and they'd be tightened up and you'd (Unintelligible) "Oh, no, no, andale. Andale, no va a pase si no (unintelligible) la mano." Okay. So, I talked to this old boy two or three times, he had this (unintelligible). And I already put him up there and I press (laughs) and everybody got the (unintelligible). They thought it was really funny. I didn't think it was funny.

RB: I bet he didn't either.

RR: No, I won't twist him, I won't hurt him, but I wasn't getting the job done at all.

RB: So, they would be behind you?

RR: (Unintelligible)

RB: (Unintelligible)

RR: (Unintelligible)

RB: So you would fingerprint them and what, they would come around to the front of the desk and that's where you would talk to them?

RR: Yeah.

RB: Okay. Did you have a typist? They were probably Mexican workers, right?

RR: (Unintelligible)

RB: How long were you there at that center?

RR: Well, look, like if they sent somebody from Chihuahua tomorrow and we had to go to Juarez down there for say two thousand, then it'll keep you several days before you could get that many.

END OF SIDE B, TAPE ONE

RR: And once you got caught up, you've got these others to fill (unintelligible) got this guy in charge, one of our people in charge of that part of it. You caught up and orders weren't coming in and all, they'd send you back home. They had that prerogative. It was alright, didn't have no problem with it.

RB: I'd just assume you that maybe you would stay there for several weeks.

RR: Yeah, we did, we stayed there...

RB: Sometimes...

RR: Most time, I stayed, one time I stayed about six months. But the reverse also happens. You get down there and get to work and boy, the orders come in begin to stack up and you get way behind this, send some more people down there. More agents, more border patrol agents down there. You might start out with four or six and you might end up with ten or twelve.

RB: Oh, I see.

RR: For awhile to caught up and things...

RB: Do you remember which months of the year were, was it when it was heavier, do you remember?

RR: Oh, a little bit before the fall. Cotton picking time. Now of course I keep bringing this cotton picking thing up, their centers, they sent these Braceros, we supplied

Colorado, course New Mexico, Texas, the western part of Texas, Nebraska with workers. Now other centers, like at Hermosillo, they'd supply California. Man, that's how big agriculture, er...

RB: And Arizona, too? I don't remember if you mentioned Arizona.

RR: No, I didn't.

RB: What about any in Oregon or Washington?

RR: Oh, yeah. They'd come through out there.

RB: From Hermosillo.

RR: Yeah.

RB: And Monterrey? They would supply what the rest of Texas?

RR: South Texas, yeah. And, you know, they would use these up into Minnesota...

RB: Right.

RR: Couple of hundred up there and cherry picking season. Harvest a different project.

RB: Would they Braceros be told where they would be going?

RR: No.

RB: They could just end up...

RR: We didn't tell them. We didn't know, you know, we was kept a supply of them for this center, in Rio Vista. And, people in it all the time. The worse happens, you know. Suppose you get a guy and they give you, fix up his I100 for six months and his six months is up. There's two options, they can be extended, this I100 with a card and, of course, as an immigration officer in the border patrol, if they got it and it's valid, don't bother 'em. Just check it. And, but suppose they were gone for six months and that's all he wants to do. He's ready to go home. (Unintelligible) they'll pay for it, bus them back to Rio Vista, process them for departure before he goes.

RB: (Unintelligible)

RR: It's a revolving wheel type thing. I got very familiar with that before I retired. This is one of the most interesting assignments that I had.

RB: You mean the one in Chihuahua at the...?

RR: No, I was getting ready to bring it up.

RB: Oh, okay, so you were in Chihuahua for how many years? Do you remember, on and on?

RR: Probably ten, but just off and on.

RB: This would be what, do you remember what years? From what years to...?

RR: I'm trying to think of the first time I went down there. It was all new to me and interesting. Oh, probably, (unintelligible) probably in the 60's is when I spent most of my time. I know that's right, now the exact year I can't tell you because I transferred to ah, I was down in the port when I got sent down there several times.

RB: Which port is that?

RR: (Unintelligible) as an inspector down there. I did a lot of the legal work for about twelve years.

RB: Where was that? Which city?

RR: Santa Fe Bridge.

RB: Oh, this one here. Oh, okay.

RR: Here in town. We've been here since '54.

RB: I see.

RR: 'Course I've been retired about sixteen years. Makes you realize how old you are.

RB: That would be what, about '87?

RR: Me?

RB: When you retired?

RR: I'm approaching eighty in about two months.

RB: But you retired from the Border Patrol in about '87?

RR: No, in '84.

RB: '84 okay.

RR: They had a big party for you and it was real nice. They give you a bunch of gifts and tell you a bunch of things about how good you are and they're all a bunch of liars. (Laughs)

RB: (Laughs) After the, after you were...? After you weren't at the Chihuahua center anymore?

RR: I didn't, never stayed down there longer than three, four months.

RB: Right, but off and on you were there, then you would come back here to El Paso at the port of entry.

RR: (Unintelligible).

RB: There was still just, was there just the one bridge at the time?

RR: No, we had Ysleta. I remember that.

RB: That's right.

RR: But ah, I had some weird experiences. Oh, here's one I wanted to tell you, I brought up earlier that I didn't get to tell. I think the phone took care of that. Actually, this old boy was a shirt tail relative of ours that I'm getting ready to tell you about. Now the (Unintelligible) is JB Kirkland. Nice guy, used to be a pharmacist. I think he passed away just recently. Moved to Austin when he retired. He was president of the Trans Pecos Cotton Association there awhile. He knew his way around down in Austin.

RB: Do you remember his name?

RR: JB Kirkland. He was a great guy and a very knowledgeable person. Good guy to work for. But one time, which was really not legal, but everybody did it, uh, those farmers, of course, would have a nice home in Pecos. They had lawns and what not. Every once in awhile, the lawn would need mowing and they would bring in one of those Braceros in and have him do the yard work. And old JB brought in an old boy one time to his home. His wife was home. She knew he was going to bring a boy in to do the yard work that day. So he brought this old boy in and told his wife, you know, I've got John or Juan or whoever it was. So he'll peck on the door when he needs to go to the bathroom, so you let him, ok. Old JB went back to the farm out away from Pecos away. Well this old boy worked awhile. He pecked on the door and she let him in and showed him where the bathroom was, so he goes to the bathroom, closes the door. And he stays and he stays and he stays and she got worried about him, but she didn't go in, she waited. So finally he came out and went on back to the yard to go to work. She's so concerned about his long stay, she went into the bathroom to see what he had done. He didn't know what the commode was for and he climbed up into the bathtub and took a crap. (Laughs)

RB: Oh, no. He didn't know.

RR: (Laughs) Old JB used to tell that story. I said, "You're a poor trainer, you are. You didn't even got (unintelligible)." But (unintelligible) nothing modern in his life, probably never saw one before.

RB: Probably used to the outhouses.

RR: Yeah, right. Right. A lot of little things like that that happened over the years that was funny.

RB: I'm curious. If we could go back to the, to being in that processing center in Chihuahua. Say, if I was, if I was in the line and I would come up and I would say I want to be, what would you ask this person specifically?

RR: Well, he's got an identity document that the Mexican immigration service issues you. When I looked at it and I'd check the name and...

RB: They would have to begin with the Mexican immigration first?

RR: Yeah, they got the...

RB: And you would check the name, I'm sorry, go ahead.

RR: No, it's alright. No, no, no problem. So then I'd gradually get into this business about your previous experience as an agricultural workers. Doesn't have to be a cotton picker, but agricultural worker. Then if you had any doubts, you'd look at their fingers and hands. Some of those boys' hands were tender like mine. They're not agricultural workers.

RB: So, but how would you try, what kind of questions would you ask?

RR: Where you live, how long have you lived there, where's your family, what kind of work did you used to do, what are you doing now, why aren't you working, you don't have a job now, why? How long do you intend to stay if you're accepted and pass? And, does your family know you're up here? Does your family know that you're going into the states, but you don't know where? Those kinds of things, just to see what they would say. And sometimes they'd come forth with some answers that would snow you. They're confused and...but most of the time, they're so eager, they'd overplay their hand. But I never, never did bother me, I tried to do what was right by both ends in the service. So that's what they. You couldn't just walk in there with a blanket no on your face. But if we found

somebody that would not fit the bill, oh, another thing you would do, very important, was go dig into their criminal background. If they had much of a criminal background, we'd turn them down.

RB: That information would come from the Mexican authorities, I would assume.

RR: We would have to dig it out of them.

RB: Oh, really.

RR: Yeah, (unintelligible).

RB: Was that difficult to get that information?

RR: Oh, yeah. It was. They got onto the fact that that was one of the reasons they'd been turned down and they'd lie about it and uh, you just keep digging, nudge a little here, nudge a little there. If they'd ever been convicted, I'm not saying we were that good, but could, a lot of times we could tell.

RB: How long would it take if you, say if you suspected somebody wasn't quite telling the truth?

RR: Oh, I'd stay with them a little longer, twenty, thirty minutes.

RB: Oh really?

RR: Yeah.

RB: So the decision then was usually, like, I mean, you wouldn't keep somebody till the next day?

RR: No.

RB: Or anything, it was just fairly quickly? More or less.

RR: No, no. Yeah, we had plenty to chose from.

RB: I see.

RR: I'm sure that some got through and it probably somebody out there using somebody else's identity that they memorized.

RB: And you have never been rejected and would come back?

RR: Yeah. They were pretty shocked. Some of the centers had seven to eight thousand, you know, people waiting to be interviewed. Processed. They'd put them on a bus, I think they used the train some, mostly the bus and bus them to Juarez. And, they'd bring them right to the court and they'd have to come through American immigration and they had a little identity document to show you.

RB: They would walk over?

RR: Yeah. And there'd be buses on this side that take them to Rio Vista.

RB: Oh, I see.

RR: Yeah, just load them up. Just a relay type thing. Then, of course, you could bribe those bus drivers. We would hear about it every once in awhile, some old boy get that far and maybe never intended to come into the states, he was playing the circle, you know. He'd pay the bus driver and they'd let him off over in Mexico before he could (unintelligible)

RB: So he just wanted to come to the border?

RR: Yeah.

RB: And maybe then try to get over as an illegal?

RR: Yeah.

RB: You think so?

RR: Another thing is, I'm sure you've heard...

RB: Hold on. This is the second part of the interview with Mr. Ray Reaves on Wednesday, February 19, 2003 for the Bracero Oral History Project. The interviewer is Richard Baquera. Okay, so we were, I'm sorry, I forgot where we were talking about, oh, yes, they would bring them over and sometimes they would bribe a driver just to drop them off in Juarez.

RR: Yeah, right.

RB: A bus driver.

RR: 'Cause they (unintelligible) come through here, you know.

RB: Right. (Unintelligible)

RR: (Unintelligible) poor get on the...

RB: They'd count them, I would assume, and make sure that many got them to the Rio Vista. Were you ever at the Rio Vista center?

RR: I've been there, but I never worked there.

RB: Oh, okay.

RR: I know how they processed them and what they did. I was always, it was a busy place, coming and going, these farmers from all over the states that I mentioned,



and I may have left some of them out, I'm not sure. But, you like, if you had cherry picking season in Michigan, we'd send people to Michigan.

RB: How would they get them there? Would they put them on a bus?

RR: Yes.

RB: A train?

RR: Yeah, put them on a bus. If there was a big number, they'd furnish the buses, but usually they'd put them on a bus with directions on how to get them and all. They wouldn't just turn them loose. But some of them, see, that's one of the weaknesses of the program is departure back, departure back to Mexico. Boy, do I know it. When, if, those guys all got back. A lot of them were smart enough that while they were here as a Bracero, they'd marry some US citizen and that gives them a legal maneuver to start their documents delivery. My position in those kinds of cases have always been legal. If this is legal, fine with me. If it's not legal, it's not fine with me. I'll get 'em.

RB: So there was no way to know, I mean, if somebody was in Michigan and they're six months or whatever was up, they could just stay there and...

RR: Disappear.

RB: They could?

RR: Yeah. And I'm sure that there's been a large number that have. Now, your files would show, they're all kept in our offices here as far as this area is concerned. The files would reflect that Juan Montoya was in Grand Rapids, Michigan or something, but that still doesn't solve anything because the only way you'd know is where you'd go up to Michigan where this boy supposed to be.

RB: Now the rancher that they worked for would never say, okay here's...

RR: They didn't care. Now a rancher was a little bit different than a farmer. A farmer always had access to a lot of people, so, eh, they kept books on them and that sort of thing and they (unintelligible) misunderstandings over pay and this sort of thing. Now the ranchers, their first said this program's no good. I run into someone I knew down there in Marfa. He said, "We have to take people that never saw a horse before and probably used it more than a (unintelligible)." And that's true in to a certain extent. I say, "Well all you got to do is train them well

and when their time runs out, you can get extended.” (Unintelligible) That could be done without bringing them back in. Again, like if you were in Colorado and your time was about up on your I100, that can be done (unintelligible). Extend their I100. And those people that were very smart would have them go back and face what they were facing, no jobs, their families needy. I can see their angle. I never, I never resented helping legally doing anything. It was those illegals I’d get. You’d get a criminal every once in a while in the review process. And, by just in conversation you’d discussing (unintelligible).

RB: Okay.

RR: They call one time and this was towards the end of my career and every big problem up there had to get resolved in a hurry. And they had brought in eight hundred patients that had come in illegally and put them in federal penitentiary because there was no other place to put them.

RB: Okay.

RR: Instead of a program (unintelligible) because they’re entitled under the law in regards to (unintelligible) I set up the machinery and all that and told them I was ready for a judge and he was (unintelligible). They had a lot of trouble in this program trying to get it (unintelligible). And as you know, a lot of those Cubans that Atlanta and other places. Atlanta was the chief problem area and they used to call me one day and told me what it was about. “You’ve done a real good job and we’re real impressed and we need you in the (unintelligible). See if you can straighten out that mess. (Unintelligible) We’ve just had one big problem after another. Would you do it?” “Sure, I’ll try.” And things went real good. I had about seventy employees down there. And I wound up being down there, could come back home every once in awhile for a few days, but ‘bout three years. In charge of it. It was a blast, I enjoyed that program quite a lot.

RB: Quite a difference from the other.

RR: Yeah, we had a federal judge down there, didn’t like immigration service, anybody in it. Had a US attorney that was watching every time I sneezed. Our regional office in Dallas was doing the same thing. The central office in Washington doing the same thing.

RB: You were in Atlanta, right you said?

RR: I was responsible for those people and my guys would, see our service had never encountered a problem just like that before. So the (unintelligible) didn't cover it, so you made your regulations as you went. They explained all that to me and I said, "Okay. As soon as you guys back me, I needed backing." "Oh, we'll take care of that." Okay, go. So, I'd pass them regulations as we'd go and these guys working on, we got along real good. "Ray, you'll get in trouble." "No, I'm not gonna get in trouble. I know what I'm doing." "Are you sure? You shouldn't do that." "No," I said, "Hold on, let's see how it goes." Because all they could do is correct me. That was it. I said, "If they don't like the way I'm running this program, all they got to do is say so and I'll be back in Texas tomorrow."  
(Laughs)

RB: Sure.

RR: It was a blast. A lot of fun running the program. Made a lot of friends, guys I never saw and never knew before. (Unintelligible)

RB: How do you, overall, the Bracero program? Did you think it was something that was necessary? Something that was needed?

RR: Well, at that time, definitely because we had so many people of our people in the service gone and no, hardly no, not enough was the best way to put it, farmworkers were available. So definitely (unintelligible) Today, I wouldn't support this strong as I used to in those days because our economy is bad. People looking for jobs and people will tell you, oh, American's won't (unintelligible) do that stoop labor, they would if they're hungry. They have to, they will. And we're almost at that point, I guess.

RB: Almost (unintelligible).

RR: So, I think it, my opinion can change a little depending on the conditions of the country.

RB: So you think that was, the major, the most important thing about it, it was necessary.

RR: Yeah.

RB: You mentioned before that one of the weaknesses was that it was difficult to keep track of them afterwards. You think that's the major weakness than the other?

RR: Definitely was.

RB: Thing you would have liked to change?

RR: Yeah, I'd change the...

RB: Anything else you would have liked to have changed about it?

RR: All those areas you could improve on if you just take a certain area of the processing and speed it up probably.

RB: Okay.

RR: Which really is insignificant. We always had plenty of manpower for whatever the country's (unintelligible).

RB: One thing I'm curious, too, you mentioned how the Braceros you all approved in Chihuahua would be sent to Juarez. What about from Hermosillo? Where would they go?

RR: Into California.

RB: Into...through San Diego, through...?

RR: Yeah. Through the port.

RB: In San Diego.

RR: Hermosillo, I guess they'd probably go through, see that's south of...

RB: Maybe in Arizona?

RR: Yeah, they might have come out of there, I don't remember.

RB: And do you know, say the one down in Monterrey? Would they have come in through...?

RR: McAllen area.

RB: McAllen, okay.

RR: Hidalgo (unintelligible). I never worked in the one in Monterrey or the one in...

RB: Hermosillo.

RR: Just this one.

RB: So the fact that you ended up at the center in Chihuahua, they asked you, or I'm sure because of your experience, you knew Spanish, you and so it was no accident that you...?

RR: No.

RB: No? No choice out there.

RR: No. I was fair to them, but they had to measure up or I wouldn't give them anything. This one old boy, I used to sit on our hiring board when we used to get new applicants for the job, certain procedure...

RB: The Border Patrol?

RR: Border Patrol, yeah. This certain procedure they'd go through and they have to go through this board. Who would, that's part of the hiring process. We would interview the candidate and ask him a bunch of questions, try to test his judgment and all that sort of thing. I enjoyed that. You really delve into a guy's thinking process in an interview like that.

RB: A kind of job like that, I'd think you'd have to.

RR: That was fun. One old boy one time. I just kind of had him sized up before we got very far along. We got three members of these panels and I guess we were in Atlanta and he was a sergeant on a police force somewhere in Alabama. You could tell he was Mr. Somebody, just the way he acted and talked. So I thought, well, we'll see about that. So I begin the (unintelligible) here and there. He looks at me and he says, "I hope someday that you settin' on this side of the table and I'm settin' over there." I said, "Son, that will never be."

RB: (Laughs) You got to him, huh?

RR: Yeah, I got to him and I wanted to see if you could.

RB: You sure could.

RR: That's what those hiring boards are all about.

RB: Does somebody like that, would you pass somebody like that?

RR: No. I turned this guy down, the other two, this is a strange story. The other two board members, nobody ever gets offended by (unintelligible) like that. "So, Ray, we think of your experiences as a police officer, he'd make us a hand. We think we ought to vote for him." I said, "Sure, if you feel that way, I'd do that. I don't feel that way and I'm not gonna vote for him. But don't let my opinion sway you 'cause yours is not gonna sway me." (laughs) They would laugh. Here's how good natured (unintelligible). They hired that guy and you can guess where they

stationed him. Las Cruces. He ended up there two weeks until people begin asking headquarters, “What a (unintelligible) causing all kinds of trouble. When did we hire him?” (Laughs)

RB: They should have listened to you, huh?

RR: Yeah.

RB: What do you think of the Border Patrol today? How is it changed?

RR: Oh, it’s changed a lot. The guys tell me, “Ray, you better be glad you’re out.” (Laughs) But uh, when they (unintelligible).

RB: No, I’m not.

RR: Yeah, and Congress was just finishing...

RB: Oh, you mean that Homeland Security?

RR: Right, right. We used to be, of course, all one service. Immigration and Border Patrol and we were considered enforcement division and immigration was considered administrative division. They just got bogged down and it should have been taken care of ten, fifteen years ago. I’m told that some of those, a lot of these Philadelphia (unintelligible), Chicago, and some of these big office have just stacks of applications where people would apply for this or apply for that and they have to be interviewed and approved and this, that, and the other. They would go wait there six, eight, maybe another year (Unintelligible). That shouldn’t be that away, we should have better service than that. I was kind of glad, I was far from (unintelligible) provided, not just some political pawnee don’t put him ahead of it, provided they get some qualified people that doing (unintelligible)

RB: (unintelligible).

RR: That was my comment on the (unintelligible). I don’t think I’d go for it because we haven’t done a real good job as for service. See, the enforcement division’s done a better job than some of these others.

RB: Do you think that it’s gotten, the job, well, I would think it’s more difficult these days with having to deal with people dying out in the desert, people getting in railroad cars and...you never had, or did you?

RR: Oh, yeah, but not as profound as it is today. I think, we would, see I was in charge of our smuggling program here for eight years. We’d catch these coyotes we’d

call it, we'd catch these coyotes in so many different ways, trying to smuggle in illegals into the country back off the border. And it was a cat and mouse game you could say. It was a lot of fun. And it was probably (unintelligible). That's the weak part of the whole program. Not necessarily the Bracero, but the (unintelligible), you might handle ten, fifteen hundred of illegals in a month or more. All of them are just (unintelligible) Bracero type, well, coming to look for a job and I really don't blame them. I really do. And then the next guy would be, with a knife (unintelligible).

RB: I was going to ask you if you ever had any, um, dangerous experiences let's say.

RR: Quite a few. One time I jumped, in a really isolated area, I had a good partner but I had assigned him, I was in charge, I assigned him on down the river and I was about two hundred yards off the river. And I told him, I said, "I'm gonna raid that house at eight o'clock. Get yourself ready. Let's don't lose any." This house was a puzzle and I was gonna try to find out what were the pieces were. Because it was in a field where there was no cultivation of any kind and yet activity galore. And in those days, they were smuggling (unintelligible). Did you ever hear of that?

RB: No.

RR: I'll explain it to you in a minute. They had smuggled an assort, I raided this house. And as soon as I walked in, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a stack of rifles and I knew I was in trouble by myself. Man, I whipped out my ol', we all had a gun, and I told them in Spanish, "Don't anybody move. You are, you're dead. Kill everyone." And that was the way I plucked my way out. I got them all four of them, by myself. And been some other instances like that. You just got to be alert.

RB: Right.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE TWO

RB: What were they doing there? Did you ever...?

RR: (unintelligible) wax. What the wax is, it's a very valuable product. It grows on a plant, grows about yea high.

RB: That's about what, a couple of feet?

RR: Yeah. Only grows in hot area regions and it stems like the stems in a (unintelligible). No flowers, no nothing, just stems. You take that wax and pull it, the whole plant, and they take them into these, what we call them, pilas, p-i-l-a-s. They were barrels cut and (unintelligible) a pit. They put fire into this pit. Fill those barrels with those sulfuric acid, not fill them, but put sulfuric acid in the water at a certain portion you need. Then you put this weed in there and it took the wax off the weed. When it got hot and you put the plant and use it for fire, firewood because the wax would solidify. I've seen shipping out of the Presidio by the carload, train carload. It goes back east to St. Louis and back into (unintelligible). They make plastics out of it.

RB: Oh, okay.

RR: So, (unintelligible).

RB: Did you say it was condelia wax?

RR: Yeah.

RB: I've never heard of that.

RR: Yeah it's big, it's a big project down in Presidio area.

RB: Why couldn't they just import it legally?

RR: I (unintelligible).

RB: Oh, okay. (laughs)

RR: Excuse me. (Unintelligible). Any merchandiser, anything that is brought across the Atlanta border, or a border, that hasn't been brought through customs is illegal contraband. So, Mexican customs wouldn't let that illegally brought in, but US customs would. So what would happen after, first it was a wow (unintelligible). (Unintelligible). Later it kind of readjusted to where you if you could get it through, get in on the American side and take it directly to the nearest port and declare it, it'd be legal. But you had to smuggle it in and wait for the Mexicans to do it. Last time I knew, it was still that way. So you had it a going battle all the time.

RB: How valuable was it, do you know?

RR: Pretty valuable. I can't tell you (unintelligible)

RB: Obviously enough to where they could...



RR: Oh, yeah. (Unintelligible).

RB: It's just hard to...

RR: They killed a guy one time. We were, my partner, was (unintelligible). Brought in Presidio one night (unintelligible) a Jewish fella. He owned a big furniture warehouse type, a furniture store. And I didn't know he was involved in it, but I sure did the next, that morning somebody called us and said, "You better get on down here, there's a problem." So they found him and they'd taken him down into the basement. (Unintelligible) tied him to a chair and beat him to death. And we got to look around and try to figure out the motive. And we found it, in those tiny flakes of candelaria wax out the back door, horse footprints, hoofprints. They brought along a horse back there. I guess they got (unintelligible).

RB: Hmm, I never heard of that wax. Interesting.

RR: It's still, still in existence, but it only, it only grow in the hot, like Arizona, (unintelligible). We got a lot (unintelligible).

RB: Well, you have your notes. I wonder if we talked about 'em.

RR: Yeah, I think we did, we should of covered.

RB: If you want to go ahead and look them over.

RR: Okay. (Unintelligible) send us, especially the younger people, I don't think that age had anything to do with, the Border Patrol when I first went in, they'd send us over to what they call detail. Like if I was stationed in Presidio and they needed some help, they were getting flooded at Fabens, which happened, or out in California, which happened. And I enjoyed those trips. You would be gone sixty or ninety days and (unintelligible) always come out for a day or two.

RB: Your wife?

RR: Yeah. I'd try to find us a place to live. I'd go with the gang first, and afterward, settle in somewhere when she come out. I (unintelligible) the guy, he's a lawyer now, he'd thought there would be. (Unintelligible) to Chihuahua one time? And everywhere I go, it seemed like it was a different experience. He got a digestive problem, he coughed up his food, you know, and so we took him to a doctor. I carted out to this center where I was working, people who lived there where a good doctor, and they said there's a good German doctor. (Unintelligible) And,

um, I think that's what he diagnosed him. He said, "My nurse will be out to your cabin and give him a shot," or something, "Here are the pills he's supposed to take." They're about the size of a quarter. Oh, God, he's about two years old. And I said, "And he's supposed to swallow that?" "Yeah." And I said, "Let's put all this on hold and I'll call you if I need you." (Unintelligible) So I told her, she better take him to the (unintelligible) states. We don't know what they're doing, it's too dangerous to play with. And she brought him to a doctor here, brought her the pills, and they were the ones that he got were alright. But those are things you, (unintelligible)

RB: Yeah. You probably were safer maybe, you felt better about doing that.

RR: Oh, definitely. But she's a, one time, they sent us with a bunch of equipment out to California. I had a lot of fun on that assignment. They (unintelligible) jeeps and some trucks out there. So I told her, "I'll call you when we get where we're going and I'll find us a place to live." So I check into el centro and I (unintelligible) and I was, they said, "We need you down at Colexico." Right four, fifteen miles and it was right on the line. I said, "Okay. I'll go down there and report." I walked in down there and the radio operator said, "Are you Mr. Reaves?" I said, "Yeah. How do you know?" "There's a call for you. Pick up the phone." It was her, she's already there. She was in el centro, trying to find me.

RB: (Laughs) That was quick work.

RR: Yeah. Well, she took another patrol agent's wife to Pecos and left her there that's where she wanted to go. Then they had to go there (unintelligible) over to (unintelligible). She was driving faster than we were. (unintelligible) it took her just a day. She made it from Pecos to out there in about (unintelligible).

RB: That's pretty good.

RR: Darn right. (Unintelligible) we used to laugh about it. 'Course, he's a great big guy now, he's six four, big man. But (unintelligible). When she said it...

RB: I think they call it like an ottoman?

RR: Yeah, exactly. She set that (unintelligible) in the seat beside her, that's where he wanted, and he would sit right by his mother wherever we went. If I was in the car, he'd get in the backseat. If I wasn't, he'd be right by his mother. We used to

laugh at that. He's just a little old (unintelligible). (Unintelligible) A lot of experiences, a lot of fun.

RB: Sounds like it. Well, I was going to say, it sounds like you enjoyed most of it.

RR: Oh, yeah, I had a blast.

RB: Was there anything that you could, other than maybe the danger?

RR: Oh, I've been in a few scrapes, you know. I'm sure you don't want to regard this one or not, I'll brief you otherwise I could talk all about dark on this one. You know where our museum is?

RB: Yeah, over here at the...

RR: Over on Canyon Hill and Sue Turner was very active and instrumental in establishing the museum. They had a cabin up in Cloudcroft and they, there's two stories and every once in awhile, they'd invite two or three couples up there.

RB: You mean this is a story you were telling me a while ago about Mr. (unintelligible)?

RR: That's it.

RB: I'm curious, do you think the Border Patrol these days, their image with the public, you think it's a correct one, is it wrong? Some people see that the Border Patrol maybe in a, not in a very good light. What do you think?

RR: Well, it's probably because somewhere down the line they've had an encounter with a border patrol with some reason or another and they didn't like the outcome of it or maybe they were patrolling once (unintelligible) them up. Considered today, the public expects things that you can't do for them. That's (unintelligible). That upsets some people. I know when I was working in port. 'Course with all those problems down there, still do. This (unintelligible). The law states that a NATO office just has to identify himself only and then you can admit him, pass him. Anybody else has got to have their documents, passport. What they call an I94, a permit form. Well, he showed up with his car and his family and his wife and I believe it was two children. Nobody brought their passports. I couldn't admit him, I couldn't admit them. So (unintelligible). We have to see if these documents (unintelligible). He didn't like that.

RB: (Laughs)

RR: I think he was a Dutchman, I'm not sure. He started cursing. I said, "Look, you're not going to curse me, I don't know what you're saying, but I know you're cursing," I said, "You're gonna get your butt thrown in jail in a few minutes if you don't hush," I said, "I treat you nice, I continue to treat you nicely, don't you (unintelligible)."

RB: (Laughs)

RR: (Unintelligible) or not. (laughs). I would get talked to like that.

RB: So when you retired, what were you, were you just a...?

RR: I was assistant chief. When I was at the port and I was down there fourteen years, I had a job that I really liked and I had a good boss. The guy in charge of the port, he was an Irishman (unintelligible). He liked to enforce the law. And if you would get on his bad side, just be lazy, if you worked he liked you. And I used to set up all of our cases, take all of our sworn statements all that (unintelligible). These immigration judges got to know me pretty well and every once in awhile this lawyer, we defending a case, they'd call me as a witness, you know, the judge would say when I walked in, "Mr. Reaves, Mr. so-and-so here doubts your ability to translate this interview you had with his client in Spanish." And he said, "Would you mind telling the court how you acquired your knowledge of Spanish?" I did. I (unintelligible) when finally I come in here, transferred in here in '54 from Presidio, I talked to him in the front office down there and talked them into letting me stay on the board of (unintelligible) so I could go to night school and a hundred hours. I wanted to finish (unintelligible). And I finally got it, but, boy was it tough. And she did a couple of history courses and she did all of them my, took 'em out of Texas Tech.

RB: Oh, so you have a degree?

RR: Yeah, I got one. Mine...

RB: Bachelor's?

RR: Yeah.

RB: Okay, well, good.

RR: I got it in languages. And so that old judge, he knew what was coming. He had problems keeping his face straight. So he'd start off, "Now Mr. Reaves would you

tell the court..." (Laughs) "About your knowledge in Spanish?" "Well, I got a BS in Spanish..." "You do?" (Unintelligible). I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "Do you use it every..." "Yeah, use it everyday." "How many years have you been speaking Spanish?" Well this old defense attorney (laughs) (unintelligible)

RB: That's the end of that question.

RR: Yeah, that take care of it.

RB: Well, is there anything else?

RR: Well, I haven't told you a lot of wild things yet. Let's see. I was gonna tell you about these details we call it. You get sent to California. I got sent to Fabens one time from Presidio, that was a fun job. I'll tell you what, something that happened one time, just a minute. I was down the Lower Valley at Ramondville, Kingsville, King Ranch there for awhile. Oh, here's something kind of funny. They'd get these Braceros on these farms like down in Pecos. Several thousand of them. And in that group you'd get some toughies and some bellyachers and somebody wouldn't work. And they had kind of a mini-strike going on in that farm. They had several hundred workers in the area. They call this big meeting and they were really bashing the service and bashing the contract, all of them were doing it on contract. Putting their little (unintelligible) in Spanish. So we thought it was gonna turn into a riot. So they called the sherrif's office and the Texas Rangers were sitting there. I knew them pretty well (unintelligible), "I'll take care of that." There was a Mexican vice-consul on his farm agitating them, you know, telling them how they'd been mistreated and all that baloney. (Unintelligible) went out there and got that man, the consul, and threw him jail. (Laughs)

RB: That was the end of that.

RR: That was the end of that. No more trouble.

RB: Did you ever, did you ever see the contract? How much were they usually paid?

RR: Minimum wage for and then some of them was flat rate. (unintelligible) they were doing it in those days, maybe they pay more than they did in those days. Like you picked tomatoes, you got a pail or a container and they weigh it and they paid by the pound.

RB: The cotton was weighed, paid by the pound as well.

RR: Right.

RB: Okay.

RR: Here and there, I know, no doubt, dishonesty going on on both sides.

RB: I see.

RR: But we weren't involved. One thing we were involved in was any demonstrations or problems (unintelligible)

RB: What would happen if, say if you had someone who, I don't know, assaulted another Bracero? Who would...?

RR: The sherrif.

RB: The local sherrif would...?

RR: In instances where something like that has happened, right at first, the (unintelligible) they'd pop him, you know, give him a pretty good (unintelligible). Then it turns out that (unintelligible) all over this country, these people and you and I as taxpayers would have to pay the bill. So they resorted, and nobody put this together, but it's just a matter of practice, they resorted to giving them suspended sentences and turn them over to immigration, then (unintelligible) That was the best way. You stuck them in jail for a long time because, just like you said, (unintelligible).

RB: Then they'd probably let them loose and...

RR: I can tell you a deal that can make your hair curl. I told you about that deal (unintelligible). We have these hearings 'cause they're entitled to a hearing a year. We start out with twenty-three hundred of those (unintelligible) because old Castro just made a monkey out of old (unintelligible) Carter. Carter (unintelligible). First thing he did was clean out his prisons.

RB: Prisons, I remember that.

RR: We still got them. Probably don't know this. There is a criteria that they have to meet at these hearings before you can make a decision to release them. And there's a bunch of those who haven't made that criteria yet because they've have so much trouble, torn up, set fire to, you know.

RB: So you mean they're still in the prison?

RR: Yeah, they sprinkled all over the United States. A few here, a few there. In federal prisons. They're still there, that's (unintelligible). Now that should be resolved instead of hitting the taxpayers. And what is it going to accomplish? Nothing. That's the attorney general's 'cause I, actually it was working out of his office because he was in charge of (unintelligible). I never was in agreement with them. There should be a better disposal made of that type of individual. I used to say, like (Unintelligible). Let's load up a bus of a bunch of these monkeys, these toughies and take them down to old Carter's house and (unintelligible)." (Laughs)

RB: (Laughs) Well you think they could have put them on a plane and send them back to Cuba or something.

RR: We had the means sometimes while I was down there. We gonna take two plans and (unintelligible). I wanted to go, I thought that'd be quite a thing, quite an experience. Have them all selected, had the planes ready to go and everything and old Castro canceled it.

RB: Of course, he wouldn't want to.

RR: No.

RB: Well, is there anything else you'd like...?

RR: No, I think that just about done it.

RB: (Laughs). I wanted to give you a chance to...

RR: Yeah, let me just run some items, but I think we covered them all. Trying to review here, just a second. I commented that the Bracero program helped local economies where they were, they have, they spent a lot of money they worked and earned, sent a lot of it to Mexico, of course, helped their economy. To their families down there. Caused some law enforcement problems 'cause they'd get drunk (unintelligible). I contend that they have taken jobs that locals and local peoples wanted and needed, more so today than...

RB: Before.

RR: And a, I don't this has been a big problem, but diseases from Mexico. I know there's been some of that, but not big.

RB: So you think they should have screened them a little better maybe when they came over?

RR: Yeah. Like, describe what the screening process is, I didn't involve to it.

RB: Right.

RR: Neither did anybody else. Like if they had syph or something else. You never know it talking to them. And I personally don't want to handle it. (Laughs)

RB: (laughs).

RR: Then I mentioned intermarriage with US citizens. You can't blame them, that's legal. So, but there was a lot of that. We've got an investigative arm in the service that investigates problems within the country. And there's been a lot of (unintelligible) marriages. Supposen' you have a daughter that was twenty years old and I'm a Bracero and I'm twenty-two. I'm looking for some way to stay in the states when my contract expired, that I100 expired. Well I get my eye on her, first thing you know, where I wondered if you're married to an American citizen, your chances of staying are pretty good. And any changes arranged in your papers are good. So, I married your daughter and a week later, I say, ah, I'm going to California. And you do. Well, if you can prove if the marriage, as an investigator for the service, was by far just for the purpose of getting your papers, then you die, yeah, you can do it.

RB: Is that difficult to prove?

RR: Yeah, it's difficult, not that easy because you (unintelligible) that started. Now a woman by nature would be probably would be a little abusive and extravagant with their language. I remember doing to be (unintelligible) and (unintelligible) know where you are. You get this old boy (unintelligible) So, it's not easy. We left that up to immigration judges, that's their business. I spoke about the fact that we always encountered workers that presented themselves to us in those screening process to be agricultural workers when they're not or hadn't been. I mentioned a few agitators, a few Communists that we would encounter. They sent to these big cities and some of them had a little moxie (unintelligible) Indianapolis because (unintelligible) peoples up there. And they're (unintelligible) and next thing you know, they disappeared. This country's full of illegals and the one thing that bothers me (unintelligible) right now. Because when I worked at port I used to come home and complain to her and this was twenty years ago (unintelligible).



“Oh, it’s too lax. It’s too lax.” The only time you get in trouble is when you stopped somebody.

RB: So almost by accident that you kept someone.

RR: Or you don’t stamp their document like they asked you to be. Next thing you know, they’ve got you on the cover, “Why not? What do you see wrong with that?” You get into a lot more trouble trying to enforce the law in those days than most people (unintelligible) they do now. But I am really confident in saying we’ve got a lot of terrorists in this country. (Unintelligible).

RB: I think what happened a year ago September kind of proves it.

RR: Exactly. And those, see how those immigrations bungled all of that?

RB: Oh, yes.

RR: (Unintelligible) Gosh, that’s awful. Our service should do better than that. If we got people that can’t do their job, get rid of them, get somebody else. I’m a believer in doing it right.

RB: Sure. Because you’ve got responsibility, not just to yourself but to...

RR: People. Be courteous, be nice (unintelligible). One time I ever got in trouble that way. It worked out with a Catholic priest. (Unintelligible) I was working down at the port. One Sunday afternoon, here he comes. Car had a picture on the (unintelligible) last name. So I was very polite, I asked him to step out. He goes (unintelligible). “Well, we need to go down to the office and (unintelligible).” He was steamed up already. And I was (unintelligible) to look at, wouldn’t have made a difference anyway. We started going downstairs in the old building and he reached over and tried to tear my badge off. I shoved him. Boy, when that got all the way up on his side. They had a big investigation about mistreatment of property. Well, the old boy I was working with was a Mexican American guy from customs named Chavez. And that kid was all over the guy doing the investigations. Of course, they cleared (unintelligible). He said, “Ray, if you ever get in trouble, you get Mr. Chavez to be with you. Man, he’d fix you up great.” I said, “Well, that’s good. (Unintelligible) We weren’t trying to pin anything on him, we were just trying to establish the fact.” We didn’t have to go very far after

we talked to him. He stood there (unintelligible). I said, "I didn't mistreat the old guy. He mistreated me."

RB: He was under investigation for bigamy? Is that...and he was a priest?

RR: Right. (Unintelligible)

RB: Okay.

RR: I don't know what happened in that case. I should have checked it. I knew what his name was, Father Acosta, never forget it.

RB: He was from here in El Paso?

RR: And then one time, I coached Little League here for fourteen years and one of our players had a, well his family was gonna have a wedding out here in this Catholic Church in Smelertown. So we, he said, "Can you come?" "Yeah, we'll be there." So we came, a rooster (unintelligible). It was the same guy, Father Acosta was manning the services. And he recognized me, he stopped the service, and asked that boy handle on him for money. He wasn't forgetting old (unintelligible).

RB: You haven't forgotten him either. Well, good. Anything?

RR: No, that's it, I guess.

RB: And, this is concluding the interview with Mr. Reaves.

END OF SIDE B, TAPE TWO

END OF INTERVIEW