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Interview no. 1583

Julius Lowenberg

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Julius Lowenberg

Interviewer: Richard Baquera

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: March 19, 2003

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Transcript No.: 1583

Transcriber: Vanessa Macias

Julius Lowenberg was born in El Paso, Texas, on April 15, 1934; he graduated from Cathedral High School; sometime later, he began working for the Public Health Office at the Stanton Bridge in El Paso, and at *Rio Vista*, a bracero processing center in Socorro, Texas; after several years with the Public Health Office, he went back to school and received his degree from Texas Western. Mr. Lowenberg briefly describes his family; after graduating from high school, he worked for the South Pacific Railroad as a machinist apprentice; he later came to work for the Public Health Office at the Stanton Bridge in El Paso, and at *Rio Vista*, a bracero processing center in Socorro, Texas; despite the fact that he had little training, his primary duties involved taking x-rays of the braceros as they were coming into the United States; he describes what he did for each location, what a typical work day was like, and the medical examinations and the delousing process the braceros endured; in addition, he briefly mentions that he himself witnessed prostitution at *Rio Vista*; Mr. Lowenberg goes on to talk about his brother-in-law who owned a farm and often hired braceros; he describes what he saw there and makes general observations about the treatment of braceros.

Length of Interview 62 minutes

Length of Transcript 30 pages

Name of the Interviewee: Julius Lowenberg
Date of Interview: March 19, 2003
Name of the Interviewer: Richard Baquera

Okay, this is an interview taken on Wednesday morning, March 19, 2003, at the home of Julius Lowenberg on 222 Frontera Lane in El Paso—

JL: Hermosa.

RB: Hermosa. What did I say? Frontera.

JL: Frontera.

RB: I'm sorry. Hermosa, I mean, yes. The interviewer is Richard Baquera. This interview is for the Bracero Oral History Project. So if you would please just start off with your name?

JL: Julius Lowenberg.

RB: Your birthday?

JL: Birthday April 15, 1934.

RB: Were you born here?

JL: In El Paso, Texas.

RB: In El Paso.

JL: I have lived here all my life.

RB: Family?

JL: Married Irene Villalobos. Had six children, thirteen grandchildren.

RB: How about brothers and sisters?

JL: One brother, Carlos, who is a football coach in El Paso.

RB: Oh, okay, I've heard of him. Certainly.

JL: I went to St. Patrick's Day School, Cathedral High School, and Texas Western. I was a high school football coach for about twenty years. I left that and became a remodeling contractor, that's what I do now.

RB: So, at when was it that you were involved in the?

JL: Ah, we were just talking about that. I guess it was 1954, [19]55, right under that because I started the, I started the College of Mines, Texas Western in 1956. I left the Public Health Service, I went to, that's when I went to school. My wife went to work so I could go to school.

RB: After you went to Cathedral High School and after high school, you?

JL: We were married, worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad. First things first, my first job, then I went to work for Southern Pacific Railroad as a machinist apprentice. Then on the diesels, when they went to the diesels from the steam, the Southern Pacific was shut down here in El Paso really, _____(?). I was off for a little while, I got the job at Public Health Service right here on the bridges down here, downtown.

RB: How was it that you, what were the, how was it that you got there?

JL: Well, applied. That was it. I don't know, I don't remember what qualifications, I remember I took a civil service test.

RB: An exam.

JL: And, um, I remember the Public Health Service merged later on, we were completely separate entity on the bridge. I think, they were the ones that you could probably do some research on. I think they were the ones that merged into the customs. They became the customs inspector.

RB: Oh, sure, later on. What was it that you did?

JL: We did, we, uh, I checked, I got to work in the X-ray. Why they picked me? I don't know. There were two or three of us that would put on the X-ray machines. We would X-ray anybody that was coming to get a Green Card, any kind of card, to come over to the United States from Mexico. There was mainly for TB.

RB: I see. This was at the—

JL: At the bridge.

RB: At the downtown bridge? Which now the Paso del Norte, is it?

JL: Let's see. Which is the one coming? The one on—

RB: Santa Fe?

JL: Chamizal wasn't there, of course, so I guess it was Santa Fe Bridge.

RB: Santa Fe Bridge. Okay, and how long did you do that?

JL: I guess I did that for approximately two years, but during that time was when the Bracero Program, when the summertime came, when they started bringing the braceros in. They would take us, some of us to Rio Vista.

RB: To Rio Vista.

JL: And we'd work all kinds of shifts because it would depend on when the braceros came in. We would sometimes, some of us would lead them there on the train, they just to bring them in trains. Very, very—

RB: This would be to Juárez?

JL: To Juárez. They would bring them across here and then we would take them in buses. But, they were pretty bad shape coming across because they were in cattle cars. They weren't, weren't, not even third class, they were actual cattle cars.

RB: It's a seven hour trip, isn't it?

JL: Oh, yeah. Or it would depend on where they came from. I remember one time we had a bunch of them came in, we had never seen, they were all from Yucatán. They were all short, and they all had all white, have you seen that?

RB: Yes. The *peón*.

JL: Different sombreros. Not the same, a little rounder. So they must have come, you can imagine those poor people. The first thing they would do, they would spray 'em for lice.

RB: With what, do you remember?

JL: I don't remember. It was white powder. Used to take their clothes off and spray them almost everywhere. Then they'd take them back and—

RB: This would be at the bridge here?

JL: At the bridge, uh-huh.

RB: Then from there they would be taken?

JL: Taken to, over to Rio Vista where they were showered. They would take a shower, probably the first shower they'd had in quite a long time.

RB: When they, what was the reason they would send you to the Rio Vista? Was it because they needed—

JL: They were taking them to Rio Vista where they would have the doctors and this particularly doctor who I remember very well, Dr Gun. At the time, I was the only one that could speak Spanish. That's why they set the doctor that you mentioned, I don't remember. The only reason I know I was the only one, because I was the one that had to give the braceros the bad news that we were sending them back, if we sent them back. What we would do though, we would

give them, I guess the doctor, a quick examine, the main thing was that X-ray. We just brought them in and out, stood them up, X-rayed them. We had little flow chart, X-rays were small, and we would flip, anytime we would see anything out of the ordinary, we would put them out here to the doctors. They'd look at it, we found, you know, of course a lot of TB was there at that time. But we found, I remember, knives, the guy had a nice imbedded bullets, all kinds of things the guy didn't even know he had the bullet in him, he didn't know he even had the knife in him. (Unintelligible). They just broke it off.

RB: There is a particular place there at Rio Vista, right? Where a particular hut or is it, or building where this was done?

JL: Yes, it was like a infirmary, I guess, or a little hospital, not hospital, but where medical, the X-rays machines there. They had their bunks, they were all over the place where we would, we'd get them in at times, two and three and four thousand coming here at a time. We just X-rayed. I remember, I remember so vividly that they had to take their shirts off and then you had them stand like this against the X-ray machine, they stood up.

RB: The X-ray machine, how would you describe that?

JL: It was just, I guess—

RB: Arms in their way, side—

JL: You know, they would side like this, and their chest against with their chin,

RB: Right.

JL: To throw this, see? We would have to push it a little bit because some of them wouldn't understand, forward, forward. I remember getting through a shift and your hands were just black, I mean, black with the poor guys hadn't, and then you'd go to their wash and they'd get alcohol, you were—

RB: Was there ever any, did they understand what was going to be done to them?

JL: Yes.

RB: They didn't have any resistance?

JL: Oh, no, they were just. When we had to tell the guy that they he had to go back home. God, you'd just see the poor guys almost crying, they almost got us crying

because that was their livelihood. They sent all that money, there was a lot of money going back to Mexico at that time.

RB: How many other people were there doing the same thing?

JL: Oh, gosh, it was probably, I'm trying to think of the guy, Jesse, Tony, Mr. Gun, probably about eight or nine of us. In that department. There's the cooks, the guards, and the, I don't quite remember, I wasn't ever—

RB: Was there a name for your particular, was it just?

JL: Public Health Service. The United States Public Health Service.

RB: So, were you considered city, county, federal?

JL: Federal.

RB: You were federal.

JL: It was all federal.

RB: So, can I ask what your salary was?

JL: I don't remember, but I do remember, I don't remember the salary. I do remember that we \$9 a day per deum(?). That was, we were, I was sent twice to, with another gentlemen that I can't remember, I can picture him, but I can't remember his name. He was, had been there longer than I'd had. We flew to Bethesda on medical, Bethesda Army Base, Bethesda Medical Base—

RB: There is a major hospital there.

JL: Major hospital there in Maryland. They had these, I don't know if you remember, how old you are, but I remember in the high schools, in the schools then, down here we used to have the X-ray buses who'd come in and visit the schools TB for TBing, to X-ray the students in schools. When were there, we picked them up twice. Two, 1935 GMC X-ray buses and drove them here. They were Navy, they were from a Naval base up there, and drove them back to El Paso. Then we drove them down to McAllen. At one time, they had all the braceros for whatever reason you might look into that, they had to back into Mexico and come back, just step into Mexico because I guess their time was up. They had a certain permit to come here and work. I don't remember that, but so we'd send them, we took 'em all back. Then we had to go through the process again. We took the portable X-ray machines down to McAllen and X-rayed them there as they just come across

the bridge. We didn't have a facility there for them. Then I remember we'd get \$9 a day per deum and we really made out on the trips, coming back from Bethesda, we would stay at truck stops, so it was free. It was \$0.50 for your bunk, for the showers. So we made out pretty good at that time. My wife had to keep the salary, it was all hers. I don't remember, I'm guessing it was around, somewhere around \$100 a week. Maybe not that much, maybe not that much.

RB: But it sounds like you had long work shifts.

JL: Oh, yeah. We were working by the hour. It was, I mean, you worked whether, whatever. It was just a job, you had to, it was very, very interesting. I got to talk, of course, I got to talk to a lot of them because I was the one that had to do—

RB: And you were the one that knew the Spanish.

JL: The Spanish. Of course, it was at that time at least I could communicate with them.

RB: Other than TB, tuberculosis, did you remember and the—

JL: Any kind of, if you saw anything I guess the doctor's would see any. Guys I remember, a couple of guys, albinos. I remember some albinos coming up and they had glasses and they were sent back.

RB: Bad eyesight?

JL: Bad eyesight. Any kind of skin if they, of course, we had them stripped down to the waist, so the doctor's could see because they passed by the doctor's and just coming to us.

RB: I've heard that sometimes, I guess you wouldn't be involved in, if they had a venereal disease of some kind?

JL: No, no, we weren't—

RB: That would be ____ (?) I guess.

JL: The medical doctor's would checking on that. We just did strictly the X-rays.

RB: The X-ray. So you were like the X-ray technician?

JL: Yeah, the X-ray technician. Like I said, they sent us down to and we did it twice. We went down and we got two more X-ray machines, two more buses and brought them back. I think we went to the town, Brownsville, we went to Brownsville.

RB: So you weren't always here at the?

JL: No, we spent about two weeks, almost two deals down there, just getting them out and we had people, they'd send us down there because we drove the buses. I guess we had the license or whatever that was back in those days. Kept the other guys here because they did the same thing here. Of course, they had their facility here to X-ray, they needed the buses here. But down there, they didn't have the facilities. I don't remember, I couldn't tell you if at that time we processed all of them here and then they went down to McAllen, went down to Brownsville, went to wherever, California, went to wherever you know they went to pick the crops. I don't, I don't remember that.

RB: My understanding is that they used another place in California that would, where braceros from say the other side of the Sierra would be. And then I think in Monterrey, there is a processing there, so maybe there was another one. I believe there was three.

JL: Three of 'em.

RB: I think there was three. From people I've talked to already. But, I was just wondering, when you talked to the braceros themselves, you mentioned Yucatán, I would assume a lot of them came from Chihuahua, what other, do you remember other states, other areas?

JL: Oh, no, I think I just remember that just stood out to us because they were all, when they got off those buses they were all dressed identical to them. Very different. Very short, very dark. *Indios*, you know, I mean they were the true Indians, I guess.

RB: A different kind of person from—

JL: Their Spanish was, I mean, you could hardly understand it. Different, completely different, more of a dialect, I guess.

RB: I'm sure most of them would, did you ever ask them why they had come, they would say the money?

JL: Oh, yeah. They'd come for work.

RB: Any other reasons they would ever?

JL: I think it was just, and I don't, you know, at that time, it was probably, there was probably, records of it that I'd imagine most of them came, worked, and went back. Didn't come and sneak around. Take the money back to their families because that's how they, well, that's how they survived. They make, according, they didn't make good money, I'm sure, but good money compared to what they were getting down there. I remember my brother, brother-in-law, _____(?) brother, had a farm down in, down by Fabens, Rancho Verde, and they had the braceros there and they had the houses for them, they had their little store. Most farmers that had good sized farms had a little, little store, sell hats and Levi's and food stuff.

RB: Do you remember his name?

JL: My brother? Yeah, Manny Villalobos.

RB: Villalobos, okay.

JL: He's still right there, the house is right there, the stuff is still there. Of course, it's not used anymore, they don't use it anymore.

RB: I was wondering about, so, did you have any regular hours in like your typical day?

JL: We had a regular, I think we worked from 7 to 3:30 was our, you know, was like—

RB: You lived here in El Paso?

JL: We lived in El Paso.

RB: Then you would, what, drive out there?

JL: Drive out there.

RB: To the Rio Vista?

JL: Yeah, and if there was a shift at the bridge. The bridge we worked a regular shift, we didn't, the but once we service out there, we just worked until we were through with that group that had come in. But sometimes we'd be working at three o'clock in the afternoon or two o'clock in the afternoon, we'd get a shift of a thousand of them come in, then you knew I had to tell her why I forget supper (Laughs).

RB: They would come in on buses, right?

JL: Yes sir.

RB: Then they would be, did you all after let's say your lunch break, did you bring lunch with you, or did you eat?

JL: No, no, we bring our lunches.

RB: There was never an opportunity to eat in the same, 'cause I know there was a place that the braceros eat.

JL: We never, I don't ever remember, just all of us brought our lunches. Even the doctors, even the doctors bring their lunches here. Why? I don't know, I don't remember what we fed them, but what they were fed because we just never, never, I guess we just, as you say, lived in our own little world right here, because we were so busy, when we were there, we were working because we had braceros there.

RB: I see. So when they would come in, you'd be at your little body machine or let's say by your station, right? And then they would—

JL: Bring them on in and shoot them through with an X-ray check 'em and then they went and showered. Because I remember that now, they had your hands were just completely dirty, dirty, dirty and smell, yeah. When those poor guys got off those boxcars, those cattle cars, poor guys, they ____ (?).

RB: I know, I talk to a woman who was, she was a clerk-typist which I think, I believe would have been across the compound from where you all were. She said she almost fainted one the first time she was there. They would line up in front of her and she said it was horrible. She said it's not, it wasn't necessarily there fault—

JL: No, it wasn't.

RB: They just didn't have a chance to—

JL: Literally, we would open, sometimes, open those boxcars and let them to come out, God, I mean, they were, how they survived, how they survived coming up. A lot of people used to criticize us over here, how we treated the braceros. Like I used to tell them, the way they were treated when bring them over here. You oughta get the pictures taken over there.

RB: That's what I was wondering, did anybody hear or talk to the consulate or somebody in Mexico to tell them, you know, this is, these people how they're being—

JL: I imagine they did, but you know, we were so far down the food chain that our opinions didn't count for anything. The braceros, they were not, they were treated, I mean, great here. They really were. I never saw the abuse. I'm sure that in the farms and stuff, God only knows what happened over there. I know that Manny's, we went down to Manny's and many years after that the Bracero Program was still here when I was going to college and the guys had their little stores there, they had their, they were treated well, I mean, as well as little houses. Some of them even had their families come up. Some of the ones that were closer here Chihuahua. I remember Manny's some of his braceros would have—

RB: Would it be difficult for them to?

JL: I, I don't remember, I just remember wives being there. Kids, little kids, running around.

RB: I was just wondering what the process would have been with the—

JL: They probably came across illegally.

RB: Oh, okay.

JL: The wives' and all that, probably somebody that's, that was close to Chihuahua area.

RB: They were able to do that.

JL: And then I remember he had a foreman. The foreman had a little bit nicer house and he had his wife and kids here, so I guess they did every once in a while.

RB: Do you remember because I've been told also that they would be given a car, maybe, blankets, maybe even a small stove, do you remember?

JL: You mean, at where they were working.

RB: At the farm itself.

JL: Yeah, they had like barracks, you know, just like, Manny's were adobe. And you'll still see some when you drive around, this area here in the farms, some of the bigger farms you'll still see the old, where you can just see those. They'd put three, four, five guys in a room with a stove and cots or little beds. Like I said,

some of them had a grocery store there that the guys would go to and buy their groceries. Beans, rice, and tortillas, I'm sure was a—

RB: I spoke to a lady the other day who worked as, she was like a payroll clerk at a ranch, farm down there. She corrected me, I kept saying ranch.

JL: It's a farm.

RB: Farm down there. She, they called it a commissary, is what she said, they had a commissary.

JL: Exactly.

RB: For them. Back at the Rio Vista, though, how long did you do this, do you remember, the X-ray? I think you maybe mentioned a couple of years.

JL: Couple of years. I think it was two seasons. Two seasons.

RB: A season would be from?

JL: They would start coming it was already, I'm gonna say, it was summertime because it was hot, so probably, ____ (?) you were here, cotton. Started picking the crops here, I imagine June, July, something. Because I remember going to, I remember we went to get the buses, driving back, they had been sitting there in Bethesda while the ocean, all the dashboard was rusted out. I mean the on floor board. It had holes in it and I remember it was cab over engine. Those ____ (?). It ran long, I mean, you just coming in and no air conditioner, of course.

RB: The humidity?

JL: Yeah, it was tough, it was tough.

RB: How long would it take you to drive back?

JL: Oh, it took us about three or five days. I remember the guy, I remember the guy that was with me, he was like a foreman, *prieto*, *prieto*, I mean he was dark, dark, he almost looked black. And we had to come through, came down Highway 1, down through Georgia and in fact I remember we came into Macon, Georgia, and I've heard all that, this is 1955, so this is before—

RB: Well, sort of at the beginning—

JL: At the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, we were in, we were in D.C. when Eisenhower had the proclamation of—

RB: You mean the troops at—

JL: No, before that, this was before when he declared that, um,

2ND: Can I get you some juice?

RB: No, thank you, I'm okay.

JL: When he proclaimed that—

RB: Let's see.

JL: Segregation, when the schools were to be desegregated. So we were coming back and, of course, I'm *giüero* Lowenberg, and this guy's dark, we got stopped like four or five times. He was leading me at the time. We got stopped, pulled him over, and then I pulled up behind him, so this guy don't have a, they took us into court a couple of times. They'd let me go, didn't touch me. But he had a rough time. We'd go in some of those, some of the truck stops.

RB: What kind of questions would they ask him?

JL: They'd just look at him.

RB: Just because of his color?

JL: His color.

RB: And when they took you to court?

JL: They fined him one time for speeding. We never paid for it, but I mean, still. It was scary, he was scared because all this stop was going on.

RB: I bet it was especially for you 'cause you probably weren't—

JL: El Paso, we didn't have that. We had very few Blacks in El Paso. It was never an issue with us. I went to school with kids that were— Hi, how are you, hi Grace. We went to school with, you know, we just.

2ND: What sis I do with the keys?

JL: They threw over there. It's my wife's sisters.

RB: Oh, okay (Laughs).

JL: So, it was really hairy back in those days. But we survived it. I remember the first time we went, we flew from there and then they had the prop planes, they didn't have the jets. So we flew, first time we flew, the second time we took a train. They put us on a train, I guess it was cheaper. First time we flew, we were getting ready to fly, to taking off and I saw the engine sputter. The guy came back, landed because we had a probably with the engine. He said: "We'll be here

for a while. We're gonna get this engine repaired." I thought it was (Unintelligible) to stay here.

RB: Flying out of here.

JL: We flew outta here once and then we took the train. Took a train all the way there. Now that took us almost a week to get there.

RB: By train? Wow, longer than it would to—

JL: To drive back almost. 'Cause we went a roundabout way, I'm sure.

RB: Do you remember some of the other people, did you ever talk to some of, like, the people that the clerk typists or the guards?

JL: I remember the, I remember the guards, I remember they used to have at night, they had the prostitutes coming out. And then be around—

RB: We're talking about Rio Vista?

JL: Um-hm.

RB: Now that I've never heard before.

JL: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

RB: Because my understanding was it was chain link fence.

JL: It was, yes, yes, but the guys, I mean every once in awhile they'd—

RB: Find a way.

JL: Find a way (laughs).

RB: Where would these women come from?

JL: I guess from the area, from Juárez, I don't know, we never—

RB: See, now the understanding, too, was supposedly these men had no money, or very little money, well they were there at the Rio Vista

JL: Back then, it was—

RB: That's very interesting. I had not heard about that.

JL: Oh, yeah.

RB: See I thought, certainly you've got, see what we've been told also is that these men probably they would be processed and they were sent out to the particular farm where they would be wanted maybe in a day or two.

JL: Yeah, it was fast. Even I don't, and you talk to somebody who was after me 'cause, I don't remember if after the contract was over, they were sent back to

there and then bused to the border. I'm pretty sure that's the way it was done, but you might talk to somebody that was because it was illogical at that time to just twenty, thirty, forty whatever they had back to Rio Vista then heading out taking people, yeah because their supervisor get 'em back to the border.

RB: But they would probably have to account for every man that they had taken.

JL: Right. So I remember that because some of the guys would stay there longer, waiting for other groups to come in before we shipped them out.

RB: Do you remember more or less what percentage of the I think I'm still thinking about the X-rays and the TB, what percentage of the braceros were rejected, I guess you could say?

JL: I'd say probably one, two, three per cent. Not that many. We just had so many, you know, and they wouldn't re do it did seem like a lot because we could take twelve, fifteen a day. But when you were the amount of people who were coming through there were so great that it wasn't, we didn't reject too many of them. And mainly it was because the majority of them was younger, we did have a lot of older and sometimes you'd get some old guys in there. That—

RB: Were they really old or old looking?

JL: Well, well, we couldn't, who knows?

RB: Because that's something else I've heard is that some of them just looked old, but maybe they had a—

JL: Hard life.

RB: Exactly.

JL: It was hard to tell because they had no birth certificates with them or anything like that that I remember. No, I know they didn't.

RB: That was another question I was going to ask you. When they came up to you, did they have any kind of a form, or any?

JL: Not that I remember at all.

RB: There was no way for you to know like a name or an identification?

JL: Well, numbers.

RB: Just a number?

JL: They actually had a number on it and he had to know what that number, he was given a number and that's how they would go get them. They go out to the compound to that number, whatever—

RB: Seven hundred and sixty nine or whatever.

JL: He'd come in and then the doctor would through me to tell him, you know. I remember they brought the guy in with knife because it was so—

RB: Unusual?

JL: Unusual. They wanna know, he didn't remember, well, he said he didn't, but you know. Some guys with bullets, a lot of bullets.

RB: I'm just curious if it was just by number, was never a chance to get 'em mixed up? That you would have?

JL: See, I don't unless they were given at the bridge. I know they didn't bring birth certificates. You know, because they would loose all those, that would not even be. They might have been given a card at the bridge.

RB: From my understanding—

JL: Maybe on that, where they were from, I—

RB: There was the processing center in Chihuahua, they would talk to them and then they would be given some kind of form. Then there was also more fingerprinting and forms done there at the Rio Vista. That would be after you all, so—

JL: I didn't. Clerics did the typing, take care of all that.

RB: It's just interesting that you, it sounds like there might have been—

JL: Because the only way we could, we could. 'Cause we could tell, we had the X-ray and we had that flip deal, and there was a number, you know, we couldn't, when you're X-rayed, you're just, I didn't put the number, I don't remember how we did that. But it was just the way, we could not have gone through that many people, getting their names on there, where they born, how old—

RB: Fast as you, you were expected to do it very quickly.

JL: Yeah.

RB: Did any of them ever say, you know, could you do another one?

JL: Oh yeah. They would beg you. And we would, we'd go back.

End of side A; Side B begins

Tape 1/1

JL: Because there was a possibility, like you said, of being mixed up, being a different guy. That was very, that could have been, could have happened. The doctors were real good about that. They would always ask: "Okay, take another X-ray and have them bring it to me." Because those guys, you know, were fighting for their lives.

RB: Sure, kind of desperate.

JL: Yeah. Everybody worked there, I can remember, even Dr. Gun was a real, I just remember that man so well because he was just a, he'd think he was a big guy and he was Anglo and some would think he was, you know, wouldn't give a damn, but he was very, very compassionate person.

RB: Considering. Now I remember you mentioned there were maybe eight or other people there. Does that include the doctor? Do you remember any other names?

JL: The only doctor, see I just remember one doctor. It's funny that, I remember we had another doctor the other doctor downtown, there was a doctor there, because every time, the same thing we would do down here at the bridge, you were coming across, we would X-ray you and send you back. Then tomorrow, we didn't because we had to process the, process the X-rays so we would send you back. Now there you did come in, they had birth certificates, they had 'cause you had Green Card or whatever. So there we would, I mean, there they would come back the next day and we would then yes or no and fill out other forms and then they continued to drive that other route they went through, there I remember, But we had the permanent machines down there. We had permanent machines there.

RB: We saw the hut the other days. It was like one of those Quonset huts, is that right? Wasn't it really warm.

JL: Very hot.

RB: What were you thinking?

JL: Very hot. No air conditioning.

RB: It didn't work? I mean I don't know about an X-ray machine, but you would think that would also build up certain amount of heat.

- JL: Oh, tremendous amount of heat. And then what happened is that after the program, after we got them all back, then we had a guy that was an X-ray technician, a true X-ray. We were called X-ray technician, but all we did was take that little picture, we didn't know what, but he was an X-ray technician and they put me to work for him, with him and he went all over with repairing X-ray machines, getting them ready for the coming year, go down the bridge. So we were repairing. I remember going around at Brownsville, McAllen, at the bridges there and then, here we would repair the ones at the bridge. We had the big tubes, the big X-ray. The real, not like we had today.
- RB: So I'm curious that also you mentioned that you were called an X-ray technician, but you really, so what kind of experience did you have?
- JL: None. That's why, they just taught us what to do. It was very simple. We only did one thing. We X-rayed were TB, we didn't do any other kind of X-rays, so it was a very simple use. "*Las manos en lado, pon las manos en el lado.*" We had a saying and then we, we, "*Pon la cabeza*" God, it come to me and it was like what repeated it every—
- RB: For everyone.
- JL: For everyone, and you did, you just had to go like this and then push the shoulders, you know, up against—
- RB: Against the machine.
- JL: And then you behind a curtain, a curtain.
- RB: You mentioned that when they would show, I presumed that they showed you, "This is what an X-ray with TB looks like."
- JL: The doctor would tell me: "Here are the lungs. You see anything spots in there, anything that's unusual." I guess what he did before was showed us a healthy lung, you know this is what you should, anything that looks a little bit. So that's what we do, we start flipping it, pulling them out. Then they had to come back and find back where we had numbers, back in the—
- RB: I'm sorry, it's just, I was, it seems kind of, well not unusual, but to put you in a, seems like a lot responsibility on a position to where—

JL: We had no training, as I said, the only training we had, they showed us how to use the X-ray machine, which was very simple to do. And then they, they showed us a lung that had some kind of defected, you know?

RB: What it looked like.

JL: What it looked like, your're right, your actually, you know, there you didn't think that, thank God we had a job, that's alright. But, it was, your're right. How many that we missed that had something? I mean, we were going through them, we'd flip them so fast that after awhile you thought that you pretty good, you know, the longer you were there, the more you thought—

RB: Sure, you didn't even think about it.

JL: So, how many we missed.

RB: Did you know, was there any, what was the treatment for tuberculosis at the time?

JL: Send them back home. I don't know, we didn't miss, I mean they were sent back immediately.

RB: My mother talks about how she was raised in the Lower Valley and a couple of her sisters developed, they told them they had like and that the owner of the farm where they were brought in a lot of cod liver oil, I think she said it was, *aceite de bacalao*, which I think is cod liver oil.

JL: Cod liver oil.

RB: And she said they just gave them teaspoon, tablespoon after tablespoon full and then sometime later they took them back, X-rayed them and it was gone. So I was wondering if you had heard of something?

JL: No, but El Paso was an area where people came with TB. In fact, not mistaken, a hospital, what was the name of it?

RB: The one that closed recently?

JL: Yeah, that was, that was a TB—

RB: I had an operation there, I can't think of the name either.

JL: Up in the hill.

RB: Yeah. I want to say it starts with an 'S'.

JL: Southwest.

RB: Southwestern.

JL: Southwestern.

RB: Southwestern General. I know that there were several—

JL: Hospitals here that were dedicated strictly to TB.

RB: Because of the heat.

JL: Yes, back in the [19]20's and stuff like that.

RB: That's what got me to wondering about, but I guess basically there were so many of these men that there was many to take their place and you just—

JL: Yeah, there was no, we didn't have the capabilities there to treat them for anything. The only thing you could do was send them back, tell them to go see a doctor, but their chances of them doing that were—

RB: Not much (both talking at the same time).

JL: They lived down in farms and ranches. But, God, they were hard working people. They really were. I remember going to Manny's, well, I'll tell you, we got rid of the program and then I started coaching up at Canutillo. My brother-in-law, Manny, had a tomato crop and he had a contract with a canner up here with—

RB: Malpaso.

JL: Malpaso. And everybody, he went downtown looking for people to pick. Guys lined up at the unemployment here, but you tell to go pick—

RB: Tomatoes.

JL: So I took the football team. We picked his crop until—

RB: Did they really? Good for them.

JL: Yeah.

RB: I've done it myself.

JL: We picked the tomatoes. Those kids got sicker than a dog because as they were picking, they were eating those hot tomatoes, you know, they are so good, boy, I had to remember that (Laughs).

RB: Plus you get the green stuff all over you.

JL: Yeah, yeah.

RB: I have done that.

JL: I understand, am I correct that there is a bill or they're looking for passing another bill to let them, to start that program over again?

RB: I'm not sure, I haven't heard of that myself.

JL: I heard something the other day.

RB: Maybe you've heard of, this is going on in Mexico, they're having meetings of ex-braceros?

JL: Wanting to, to?

RB: About some kind of money.

JL: Money that's owed to them.

RB: Yes, do you know anything about it?

JL: I read that also, but I don't remember if it was, if they are claiming that the farmers kept some of it, or that the government, I don't know, I don't know the whole deal on that.

RB: My understanding is that it's partly that it was supposedly deducted, sort of like a social security, and that some of it the Mexican government kept, or something like that, and that's what they're, but I spoke to a lady the other day, she was the one who was a female clerk. She said they never took anything that they earned, she would pay, except she would deduct whatever money they had spent in their commissary. She said that they never took out anything, she said it was always to the penny. As least as far as she knew, they were never shortchanged or anything else.

JL: It might have been again on the tax that the Mexican, when they were going back in, they had to pay—

RB: It could be. 'Cause you know—

JL: (Laughs) They always get their claws somehow.

RB: Find ways, find ways of doing that. You mentioned once that, I know you said there was a couple of three seasons where you did that, then you left the Public Health Service, is that right?

JL: Um-hum, when I went to university. Took out to Texas College, Texas Western. And the I got my degree.

RB: In what field?

JL: Physical education and history. I got my first job at Canutillo High School in [19]60 as head football coach. It was, not a runner, but there I worked almost the

majority of the kids that I had they all were farm kids. They were all, 'cause I saw that the _____(?) through the farm. So I understood it pretty, I started to get along so well, I guess because, too, as coach I gotta drive the tractor (Unintelligible) we gotta do this or that.

RB: So you understood?

JL: Understood what was going on.

RB: How did your teams do?

JL: We were some of the best in the county.

RB: Really? Good.

JL: We had some great, great teams. I lasted 12 years, I think. Fabens was in our district and Clint and—

RB: That took a lot of driving.

JL: I know. Dell City was our farthest. We had to go to that city. But I always been around that farming, and she was raised in San Eli, my wife was raised in San Elizario. She left there when she was fifteen.

RB: Have you ever been back to Rio Vista?

JL: No, I never have. I don't even think I could find it.

RB: Oh (Laughs).

JL: Where is it?

RB: It's not very difficult now with the freeway there.

JL: That's probably what would throw me because I used to go down the north little highway.

RB: Alameda and North Loop. Yeah, you probably wouldn't recognize it anymore because there are just so many things around it.

JL: So they built another area. Before that it was out there by itself, I mean.

RB: Now did you ever, I'm curious the buildings that were there, did you ever ask were these here before? Or were they ever, were they constructed just for that?

JL: I think it was something else before that. Wasn't it the? If I'm not mistaken, is it that where they had the German prisoners?

RB: In World War II, that's what I understand that it was a German and Italian prisoner of war camp. Also, what I understand that before that it like the county

poor home, orphanage for the poor kids, or something like that. Because my mother, she was raised a few miles away from there and she was telling me that they called it, I think, *El Rancho de los Huérfanos*, or something like that. But then across, there's another older building, well another large building, now it's across the street from the Rio Vista, which I also understand was the County Poor Home, but you don't. Did you ever have any? I understand there was a building there with a Mexican consul or vice consul. Did you all ever have any dealings with—

JL: There in the Counsel?

RB: Yes, at the Rio Vista.

JL: No, I never had any dealings with them. We wouldn't have—

RB: Not at all?

JL: No, not that I remember. I'm sure there must have been something there for them to, get help or. You know, now my memory starts, now that you mentioned that, I think that is where we took the men that we were rejecting. And then I think they made arrangements to send them back because, yeah, that would be the only way. Yeah, and I don't remember if he was a Mexican counsel, but I do remember we took him to a place where they, after we got that whole group and they would take them—

RB: Some kind of a Mexican official.

JL: Mexican official, you know, to take him back.

RB: Because a, my understanding—

JL: If they would have sent them back on their own, they would have disappeared.

RB: That's true. My understanding was that there was an official there and he would talk to them and tell them that he was there take any complaints, any problems or whatever and I was just wondering if you had ever had any—

JL: I just remember now that you, I remember something about that. I don't remember any outbreaks or any complaints or any, different time, different, you know, they're just happy to go to work.

RB: I would assume so. Yeah. Gosh, I can't think of anything else. You look back on your experiences at Public Health officer, positive, negative?

JL: Positive. I had a lot of fun, I had a lot of enjoyed my work, got to travel for, I was nineteen years old, twenty years old, you know, never been out of El Paso. Went to, I had a state basketball meeting in San Antonio when I was at Cathedral, but other than, you know, we got to go to Washington, D.C. Man, I was, you know, I was nineteen years old, walking around in my head like I was down at the alley, so, met some, we were coming across, we went to Columbus the other day. Palomas, over to Palomas to get some medication and eat over there. And we were coming back and I was telling remembering that if I would have retired thirty years ago, I would have become a custom, I remember when they went, see we didn't wear uniforms now, we did, but the guys that were on the bridge wore the white shirts and blue pants and they were the United States Public Health Service. They did what the customs guys do now. Anything, so they were on the bridge and they became, I'm pretty sure that's what evolved into the US customs. They combined them, you know, whatever, whatever it was.

RB: Is that one of the reasons why you left? Because—

JL: No, I wanted to go to school. I wanted to be a coach. No, I had that in my, my coach at a great school, St. Patrick's, and I wanted to be a coach and the only way I could be a coach, I had to get a degree.

RB: Do you remember, I understand this reminded of something else as well, that fellow employees had ranks of pay, GS something, do you remember what you were?

JL: We were at the bottom of the pile. I guess we were GS-3, GS-4's, something like that.

RB: They start at one, right?

JL: Yeah, I think so. I think we were probably a two or three maybe because—

RB: I see.

JL: But. The guys up there were always wishing, God, GS-11 was before you became GS-12 or whatever, that's, you're really up at the head of the. But GS-11 were the guys who had been there. It was a good job, it was a good job. It was, it was tiring on the front, those guys, even down there and sometimes it would get real boring for us at the bridge because you'd have times where there were

nobody coming in to apply for, so you just sat around. I remember another thing, God, we used to see, you probably heard the stories on, you know the liquor that they confiscate from, you know, people that were coming across if they confiscated liquor, it was confiscated.

RB: The ones that don't pay a tax?

JL: Don't pay a tax or they bringing too much.

RB: Too much, yes?

JL: Do you know what happens to it?

RB: No, I don't (Laughs).

JL: No?

RB: No idea.

JL: They take it out to the back, there was a place back there in the back, they would just break all of the bottles out there. Throw them and break them. Of course, after probably some of the big shots got their—

RB: Their cut? (Laughs).

JL: Their cut.

RB: From the best?

JL: From the kept from the best. But they used to break the bottles back there in the back.

RB: Such a waste.

JL: Such a waste, huh? You've seen like they—

RB: But I guess how else you can ensure that there isn't some kind of corruption?

JL: I had a one of my one of my partners, Joe, he goes to Juárez a lot, and he had a pair of turtle boots, I mean, beat up, just, I mean, he was coming to cross the bridge, he didn't know anything about it. They took them away from him. He came across barefoot. Turtle care. You had to prove that you got them at a turtle ranch, a turtle farm.

RB: Even if they were all beat up?

JL: They were, you wouldn't—

RB: How would somebody have noticed?

JL: They just notice. Some guy was really, really doing his job.

RB: I guess you could say that. Probably some, you think they are so old and beat up.

JL: They were old and beat up. I wouldn't worn them.

RB: There was something else, I thought you said you used to drive down there?
Down, was it Alameda? What was the city like at the time?

JL: Well, we probably had, now that I'm thinking back, well Alameda was the main thoroughfare. I used to come down, trying to think how I would make that. We used to live on Arizona Street. God, from Montana, I don't think Paisano was built yet. It was just being built.

RB: It was like the mid-[19]50's, I think.

JL: Yeah.

RB: To late [19]50's?

JL: Yeah, yeah. So it might have been in the process. So we'd probably go to Texas and then we'd go down, (unintelligible) and then there was Cotton Street to Texas Street and then to Alameda.

RB: To Alameda.

JL: Yeah, that's the way we'd go. Or North Loop.

RB: One or the other?

JL: One or the other. That's all that was there.

RB: No, presumably Alameda, Alameda means tree lined. Was it?

JL: Oh, yeah. I remember going down there to visit Irene when she was in San Eli and had them all the way, took me almost all day to get there. Alameda was just the cottonwood trees, then you took the road Socorro and San Eli Road. That was, it was like this.

RB: Really, ____ (?)?

JL: Yeah, and then this street here. The same thing, back in the old days, in Country Club—

RB: Would be Doniphan?

JL: No, Emery. It was straight I mean, it was like this, like you were going through a tunnel. And Country Club, big old cottonwoods that were there.

RB: Same thing?

JL: Going down through Alameda, you're right.

RB: Kind of like going through Stahman's Nursery sometimes.

JL: Yeah (Laughs).

RB: The pecan groves over there?

JL: Yeah, the pecan.

RB: Well, I wondered because people say that's the way it used to be. Do you remember seeing orchards, fruit orchards down there? Grape? No? Must have been too late by that time then. How long would it take you to drive down there?

JL: Oh, probably, I used to leave at 6 in the morning. We would always get down early, probably half an hour, forty-five minutes, yeah, forty five minutes. By then I had a [19]39 Chevy and it was a hot rod, so I was a little faster.

RB: (Laughs) Just a couple other questions I've been asking people. You've, since you were born and raised here and assumed you lived your entire life, how has the weather changed? Is it warmer now?

JL: I think, for some reason we got a lot more humidity than we had in the past. I don't remember humidity in the past and now we get ten, twelve days of very uncomfortable weather here.

RB: For us (Laughs).

JL: Yeah, sure. Oh, yeah, you go to Chicago and you go to San Antonio and Austin.

RB: Or Austin, yes.

JL: And Dallas, just forget it. But I think it's got more humid and rain has been the same, probably less rain than we did back then, I don't...

RB: What about cold days? Is it cold?

JL: I think we were colder back then, I can't remember some. I remember a lot of snows back then when I was a kid, a lot of snow. And maybe I just thought it was a lot of snow when I was a kid, but I remember playing in the snow a lot when I was a little boy. Now, you know, we're lucky if we get a dusting—

RB: Every other year?

JL: Every other year. But El Paso was just, like I said, we had what, a hundred thousand people back then? Maybe?

RB: This would be the mid-[19]50's you can remember? And now of course—

JL: Put out of snow. When you go out, of course you go out past Loretto Academy and there was nothing, there's absolutely—

RB: Just Fort Bliss and—

JL: Yeah and there was nothing. And up here on the West side, the only thing on the West side was at that time was the Country Club and this area right here. There was nothing.

RB: Up above the river, basically up above the river plain where is now.

JL: Up by where the Coronado area, that's all, that's all desert. Complete desert.

RB: Well, anything else you'd like to?

JL: Anything else you need to, you know, hoped I helped you a little bit.

RB: Oh, yes definitely, I always like to ask if there's anything else that you wanted to, that you can remember.

JL: Oh, no, I don't think.

RB: Do you think this is a good idea to get people's recollections about the—

JL: Sure, it's, we're so— El Paso's made a big mistake in its history. We have not preserved a lot of the things that we should have preserved. The old courthouse. We worked at that old courthouse was a little corny, what did it cost to have made that a museum? We tear it down to put a little park with a little guy with a boot on his hand. And, were moved, my *comadre*, she lives, she moved to Rhode Island and now she's coming back, she's with the service, and now she's back every six months, she stays here six months, goes back during the summer over there because it's so cold. And we were driving around town trying to just thinking where did all these things go? Just torn down and we don't, we have to preserve, we have parking lots, we make—

RB: Yeah, fast food restaurants (Laughs).

JL: Downtown was not revitalized, but look what we've done to it.

RB: There isn't much there.

JL: There isn't much there. It's sad because it was such a vibrant downtown at one time. I remember the the Plaza theater was here, the Alamo theater was here, the Wigwan theater was here, the Alcazar was down here, the Colón was over there. All those, right downtown. You'd go to pick the movies and the, what's the name

of it? Some grand, Crawford theater had, I mean Crawford theater had three stories, three balconies and the blacks were up on top. That's where the blacks were.

RB: That's the only place they could. So is that what you all did basically for entertainment?

JL: Yeah. We went downtown and around the plaza. The Alligator Plaza.

RB: Where the restaurants were?

JL: Yeah, there used to warn us, well, they weren't restaurants really, the drugstores. When we were kids it was called, Warner's Drug. The soda fountain and they had the hamburgers and you'd sit there in the little. But there wasn't many restaurants. Of if there was, we didn't have any money to go them, so we didn't know where they were.

RB: And they still had the alligators?

JL: Oh, yeah. The real ones, oh yeah.

RB: What do you think of the idea of bringing them back?

JL: I think it'd be great if people would—

RB: Leave them alone.

JL: Leave them alone, that's what happens. A bunch of drugs down there and a bunch of, they were abusing them. I think that was part of our, that's a part of our heritage.

RB: Part of the problem.

JL: It was like when they changed the, Saint Coronal Parade of Thanksgiving. That was what you did New Year's Day.

RB: Yes, yep. I remember—

JL: It was a family, in fact this lady, this *comadre*, was it? She lived on 2019 Montana, still remember, that's where you got up to watch the parade. Right on up.

RB: Yeah. Why did they change, do you remember?

JL: I guess, because of all the, I'm assuming it was because all the, just so many ballgames, you know during and people—

RB: Prefer to stay home and watch the other parades. That does seem like—

JL: Bringing about before that, the only ballgame played on there that I remember was in the [19]50's, was the Rose Bowl and the Cotton Bowl. Then we had the Sun Bowl was played right after the parade and then you went to the game.

RB: Plus, the fact that, there wasn't that much TV.

JL: Oh, no, no.

RB: The competition from other—

JL: We didn't have any TV yet. We didn't have any 'til, it was just started. We didn't have it, I mean, my mother bought the first, she said she did, I don't know, she bought the first Edison. Bought the first TV set and we would sit there, we were already married, so this was [19]52, [19]53, she'd gone to New York, to see her sister, of course, they had TV over there, TV was there, she came back talking about this. We thought she was sort of goofy. "Drinking too much mom." So she bought the TV and we turned it here and all we saw was the patterns. We'd sit there and watch these patterns. And finally they had Six Gun Play House, was the first TV show they showed, the Westerns.

RB: Do you remember what channel it was?

JL: Oh, no.

RB: Because I believe, I'm not sure, KTSM was the first one here.

JL: I think it would be like, and then—

RB: What is now channel 4. The second one. Well, in that case, I guess that's—

JL: Well, thank you.

RB: Thank you.

JL: I hoped we helped you and I hope—

RB: Definitely you did because I don't know if we have very many people who worked in the public, in the medical side of the bracero thing. So, this is one reason why I wanted to get your recollections.

JL: I'll be, I wonder when this doctor worked there? Do you know how long it lasted?

RB: I believe it was the early [19]60's.

JL: Okay, so, it went that far.

RB: Yeah.

JL: So it could have been a lot of other—

RB: Other people, yeah. Okay. Well, this is the end of the interview.

End of side B

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End of interview

DRAFT