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Interview no. 1585

Cecilia Concha Estela

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Cecilia Concha Estela

Interviewer: Myrna Parra-Mantilla

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: July 24, 2003

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Transcript No: 1585

Transcriber: Myrna Avalos

Cecilia E. Concha was born in El Paso, Texas, in October of 1925; she was the second generation in her family to be born in the United States; in 1896, her grandfather immigrated into the United States through El Paso, Texas; her mother was born in Ysleta, Texas, and her father was born in Guanajuato México. Ms. Concha recalls what it was like growing up during the 1930s; her mother would shop in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, in order to avoid the rationing of food; she recounts her memories of World War II, while she was a high school student at St. Joseph's Academy from 1941 to 1945; in addition, she describes the discrimination immigrants in El Paso, Texas, faced; she also details her employment opportunities during and after the war; her grandfather, Trinidad Concha, served as an assistant director to Porfirio Diaz, before arriving in El Paso, in 1896; he formed a musical group that crossed the river to welcome and serenade the Maderistas in 1911.

Name of Interviewee: Cecilia Estela Concha

Date of Interview: July 22, 2003

Name of Interviewer: Myrna Parra

Today is July 22, 2003 this is an interview with Mrs. Cecilia Estela Concha directed by Myrna Parra for the Oral History Institute at the University of Texas at El Paso.

MP: Okay, um, so you were saying that your dad had all the equipment but he never...

CC: He went out, bought the equipment that little ceramic bowl, I don't know what it was made of. I remember seeing beer bottles but I never saw him making it but I think he did and it didn't last very long. I don't think it was a success.

MP: And now I'm going to jump to the big crash, the Depression. How was the life before, how do you realize that it was a depression, you were like, noticed that that there's less food in your table or your clothes?

CC: The crash was in 1920, if you know that, I was four years old so I cannot go back that far. (She laughs).

MP: Yeah, I know you were a little baby.

CC: A little girl, but in the 1930's that's when it was felt, in this area, as far as I can remember. Yeah, my parents were back here from California and I remember, yeah, there weren't a lot of toys at Christmas time. We each got one toy. Ours were made by my dad, he was a carpenter and I remember he made me a little desk, one time, for Christmas. He made and this was for all the girls, a little table and chairs and I don't remember what my brothers got. There were a lot of girls in between my older bother and the mixed brother. So he was, I guess, the baby. I noticed that, as far as food, Myrna, there was yes less but we could shop in Juarez. We had that advantage. My mother bought all the meat in the Chinese meat

markets in Juarez, when we had the meat market. She would buy beans there. I remember vegetables. We used to help her. Rice, I think she bought the rice over there.

MP: And could bring a lot of...

CC: You know, she'd take us all and we each had a bag. We each had a bag to bring back.

MP: But I mean like today that you were not allowed to bring avocado or fruits.

CC: I remember vegetables. Avocados could never bring back, unless they took the seed out. I don't remember vegetables but I remember the staples, sugar. She would buy sugar. I think she bought rice, I'm not sure, but the meat I remember. So, we ate well, the (mumbles). Eggs, she got here, they were very inexpensive but there was....we had no fancy clothes, I mean, we couldn't say "Mother I want a new dress." Hey, you know. So the, the material things were scarce, or I mean, we didn't get a new dress ever time. My dad worked for contractors. Construction was, I don't think it hurt because he always had a job. The only time that my dad had a problem getting a job was when the war started because all construction came down because everything was going for the war effort. So, he had no more construction work to go to, he was a carpenter, but going back to those 1930's, the 1930's, yeah, not having toys, cause I was a child, and that's what I remember, not having fancy clothes. Food, we didn't lack for food, we always had food. I don't know, my mother made it go. *Asia caldos y sopa de arroz*, we had a lot of *sopa de arroz*, potatoes. We ate potatoes. So, I don't, I don't, remember saying, well what I remember is I could go and say "Dad could you give me some money for an ice cream." We didn't do that, we knew that he couldn't give us any or wouldn't give us any. We just didn't ask for it, like kids today.

MP: Yeah, that is why I'm telling you because the kids today, they ask for money to buy a lot of things.

CC: We didn't, we knew better.

CC: We were aware that money was to be used for food, clothing when we needed it, never had to go bare foot, thank God, and my parents, my mother, was, she was the one who kept the books at home. She stretched that money; we all went to parochial schools. How she was able to do that, I have no idea, all of us. First we went to....right across the street estaba un asidlo, de Madre del Sagrado Corazón Y de los Pobres. We went there, I'm sure she paid something, so we went there. They prepared me, all of us, for our first communion and from there we went on to the parochial school at Saint Ignatius School down in south El Paso. We lived in south El Paso. So, it seemed like everybody around us was in the same situation, some worse than we were because these people were resent immigrants and they didn't have good jobs. I guess they worked in the fields, I don't know where they worked. I know some of them were working for the railroad. Some worked for the railroad and they were in the same situation we were. My dad being a carpenter and having worked for construction companies was fortunate that he was able to save a little money. His father had built the big house, my grandparent's home, back in 1909. My dad was still single so he helped him and then my dad bought a little land next to, a little house, very old house that was next to it, and a lot next to it. So, he built their home. We had a home that my father owned. We didn't have to rent. We didn't have to go to presidios. It was a small house. We were a little crowded cause there was so many of us but at least we had that and other people had to live in presidios and it was hard.

MP: And about these cards, the ID cards?

CC: Oh, yes, they came in the 1930's. Again, that was a thing during the Depression. The United States didn't want additional burden. They had too many people to take care of.

CC: They didn't want to have immigrants. They said, "Well you go back where you came from, we cannot support you too." So, how the word got out I cannot tell you because I was nine years old so I don't remember. I remember when my mother took us to a photographer and he took passport pictures of all of us. Well there were, lets see, George and I and Concha and Alicia and Willie, six of us, six kids, and my mother. I never saw my dad with an ID card. I don't know what happened to him, whether he, he was not a citizen yet, how he could....maybe he didn't go to Juarez at that time. I don't know how long it lasted. So, they probably said "You will have to have ID cards, all of you." All Hispanics.

MP: Otherwise, go back to....

CC: Otherwise, go back to Mexico. "We cannot keep you here." We were American citizens so there goes my mother to the bridge and I remember we stayed the whole day there playing outside and then we'd come back in. She must have brought us some food because I think we were there all day long and she was bilingual. She was able to defend herself. She says, "My children were born here, they're U.S. citizens." "Oh, yeah, but they are Hispanic." And blah, blah, blah, whatever they told her, I don't know. We still have to have an ID card. A passport, they would say a passport and then as I got older, I said, "This is not a passport, it's an ID card." As you can see on the back, it says you carry this with you. I don't think that we carried it with us all the time but since we went to Juarez almost on a weekly basis, either to shop or see our aunts and uncles, cousins that we had in Juarez we did carry it with us because you were required to show it on your way back otherwise they wouldn't let you in. My sister says it was not a passport. Had there been a little guerrita next to me and say, we were together, we'd go to Juarez and we'd be coming back. Would she have been asked to prove her citizenship? But I was, I had to show my card.

CC: That went on, I don't think, too long because I don't remember in my early teens having to use it again. When did the United States recover from the Depression? It started in 1929; it hit us in the 1930's, that's when we felt it and by 1940, I think things were beginning to be much better.

MP: Yes.

CC: I'm guessing at the years.

MP: So do you remember if you had any immigrant friends that they had to leave here?

CC: I knew of them. I did not know personally. I said, "What happened to so and so?" They were in school, yeah, by that time we were in parochial school, "Oh, they went back to Juarez." But I didn't know why, now I know why they went back. They were having a hard time and then in addition to that having to prove that they were not citizens, los echaron.

MP: So they do have, in the time that they were living here in the U.S., they don't have any problems about education, jobs?

CC: The problems were economical, economic problems. Like, ah, I'm trying to think if I had any friends, maybe that's why I don't remember any families. I had friends at school who had to go back, who were not born here, I'd say ninety percent of those, even though we were all Hispanic were born here. I'm trying to think....the rest who could not go parochial school were going to Alamos Schools, which is still there. That little school goes back one-hundred years. They were going to Alamo which was a popular school. By hearsay I don't remember any that I knew personally who were sent back but my friends would tell me "Ya, ya se fueron a Juarez" and that was it. They did not know why or what or when. Now the parents here probably, hopefully, will run into some who went through that and eventually went back legally and the reason that....they were not here illegally. They were here because there were no problems coming over like there are now of course.

MP: And also, um, around the first interview that you did, that, um, there were banks here that were going down and that your dad had some money saved here in one of those banks.

CC: When my parents married in 1923 they, maybe he wasn't working or something happened. He had been sick. He had pneumonia and maybe something happened with the construction companies that he worked with that they decided to move to California. My brother, my oldest brother, the first one, was born there. He had to have some savings that he had in a bank here in El Paso and they decided well... oh, he had a sister in California already. Well maybe life in California might be a little easier, whatever, so he did and I think their plans were to stay there in California but his brother who was here said, "There's something going on with the banks" but this was in nineteen, yeah, no this was before the crash but he hear rumors, something going on with the banks. This was 1925, early 1925. I was born in October of 1925 so when they moved back here my mother was already carrying me. She was pregnant with me. So, this was before the crash of 1929. My dad panicked, oh, I better go see about my savings, came back and decided because then the crash came and my mother was pregnant again. They decided not to go back to California and decided to stay here in El Paso. So, he was afraid he'd lose. I don't think he lost it cause he would of talked about losing it but what he did was put it under the mattress. He thought it be safer than the bank.

MP: The piggy bank.

CC: The piggy bank exactly.

MP: Now lets move to the second war.

CC: The forties.

MP: Yeah, the forties. Can you tell me something about how was the life here before?

CC: Very normal, Myrna, for me and my age. I was in my teens now. How old was I in 1941. I was, I'd say, I graduated from grammar school in

1941. I was in, in the eighth grade when it started, 1941, and life was very normal. There was no, nothing going on, people were going to school, people were going to work. I don't remember any immigration problems either. There was something, has nothing to do with politics but, when we had a lot of Mexican families come over here to church because when they closed the churches in Mexico....the, maybe that's when they started sending their kids to school here.

MP: Why did they close?

CC: Under the reign of Calles, when was that? Do you know your Mexican history? I don't know much about Mexican history.

MP: La Guerra de Los Cristianos.

CC: Yeah, father Pron and all that. They closed all the churches in Juarez so all the (mumbles) and I think also that may have been the time when a lot of people moved to El Paso. They could have come because of persecution, they wanted them to learn to have a Catholic education, and they couldn't get it. So, se vienen para acá because we had some kids in school, in the parochial school, who were from Juarez and they must have had a little more money to be able to pay the tuition and I think that, that probably brought another wave of immigrants to the United States. Whatever that year was, you could maybe fit it in on what's going on. Okay, so back to the forties, so when the war started things were very normal but then construction companies, that my dad use to work for, started folding because there were no construction going on, everything was for the war effort, for the war effort. So, there's my dad, you know, "Another citizen, I don't have a job." Now that was a little hard for us, or maybe, it was because I was older and I could see it.

CC: I remember "Oh, there's gonna be a party." I went into high school in 1941. There was going to be a party at school and I went to St. Josephs Academy, which was run by the sisters of Loreto, "there's going to be a party and I need a pretty dress and I need some shoes" and that when I

remember more because my dad says "We don't have any money for fancy clothes. I cannot give you any. I lost my job. I don't have work. I'm trying to become a citizen." He was going to school, night school, so he could get ready for his citizenship. So, he said "You go ask my sister." Who lived two doors down. Oh, the only way we subsisted during those years, which to me were harder than the Depression years in the 1930's, my dad had some little apartments that he rented, at three dollars a month and he made it. I think the little front house rented for maybe eight dollars and all the others were three dollars a month. Those people who lived there were, um, like what you call welfare now and the government was paying their rent. So, my dad had to go to some downtown office and collect the money that they paid for the rent of those people and we made it with that. So, it was hard, even though I had gotten a scholarship. So, my first year at Loreto was being paid by a scholarship but I had a uniform so I wasn't spending a lot of money but I wanted....there was gonna be a party, so, he said "You go ask my sister to give you some money." My aunt had the corner house, which had been my grandparent's home, they were gone, and so she lived there by herself. She also had some tenants in the back, which belonged to all that family and, ah, so my dad would get a little something from her for, for those. También no habían sido muchos. So, I go, "Tia, tiene, esto, y esto." "ándale, pues cuanto necesitas?" She gave me some money, I don't know, probably ten bucks and I'd buy shoes and a dress.

MP: Wow, that was a lot of money.

CC: So, that to me, was harder right I'd say 1939, 1940 and 1941 but then my father got his citizenship and then he was employed at Fort Bliss, civil service. So, that made it a little better.

MP: What kind of jobs the immigrants use to have because I read in your interview that they're were just a few, few Mexicans. They have very good jobs, like managers, they're just few of them.

CC: And the reason they would get, Myrna, was that they came with money. If you don't have no capital, how could you start a business? My dad had his skill, which he had learned here, cause remember he came as a young boy. He and my grandfather was able to keep on with his music and build a house and have a nice house. It's just playing music because see there's a lot of, I brought some copies for you, stories about his....starting the Maginty band and then he had to group, like a little chamber music group, he'd play a little Suarez and different homes of wealthy families. So, he was alright.

MP: What kind of music?

CC: Mostly classical. You'll read something I made copies for you from a book and, ah, so, he was doing alright but then my dad married. He married late because he was helping him, my grandfather. So, I went over to tia, oh, I told you that, Nina and she gave me some money for my pretty dress, a party dress and my shoes, ah, then, those were kind of just. My dad was lucky enough to apprentice with the company. He knew of....you hear, are you familiar with that name Trost the architect in El Paso, from way back?

MP: No.

CC: He built a lot of home in El Paso, a lot of building. They say "Oh, that's a Trost home, that's a Trust home."

CC: So, he worked with these contractors who, what's the other guys name, I can't remember now. Names, me and names we have problems.

CC: So, he learned his trade as a carpenter from a young boy. He started in his carpenter shop with his contractor. As a young boy, he learned the trade really, really well and he became a very good carpenter. He use to point out things for me here in El Paso. He'd say, well I worked in that building, at the Union Depot, he says "Well, I worked there, as a very young boy" and then sometimes we'd go meet somebody coming in on the train and we'd be sitting there, he says, "Mira, ves todos esos,"

spindles in English, no se en español, ornaditos. He says "Ves todos esos que ay alla riba, I made all of those." "You did dad?" "Yeah I made in the shop and then I would bring them over and the carpenters", upper than he, um, "they installed them, but I made them" he says. He was just proud of it. He's a young boy and, um, my dad it's jus something funny, a little anecdote. My dad learned from these carpenters, in the shop. They were Anglo. They were not Hispanic. You could not be a carpenter, I mean, a real carpenter, a cabinetmaker.

MP: Why not?

CC: Because, only, only Anglos. They were the ones who had the big, good jobs. Did you ever find a secretary in a bank that was Hispanic? Na ah, and I'll come to that later, that happened to me. So, only Anglos were in control of the good jobs. These were the carpenters making real good money. My dad came in as, um, a gofer, you might say. They would send him to buy the nails, bring them in, an errand boy and that's how he started. He had gone to school at Sacred Heart School, Sacred Heart Church. We use to have a parochial school. That's where he went to school but he didn't go to high school. He went to work. I guess my grandfather said, "I need to convince him, it's too much of a family, you need to go out and start working, learn a trade." That's the way he would put it and my dad became an excellent cabinet maker.

CC: He could make fine stuff but he learned as a young boy in the shop and what I'm getting at, that he learned English more with those guys than he did in school because he says "Todas las monjitas me ensañaban todo el español." So, when he started working, all these guys were Anglo from east Texas, and my father, this is the funny thing, he spoke English with a Texan drawl (she laughs). He did not speak English with a Mexican accent. He spoke it with, así como hablan los Tejanos, that's the way my dad spoke it (she laughs) that's funny. He was bilingual because he had that accent, the Texan accent. My dad learned that from the workers, that

he learned from and he was very appreciative of having learned from very good cabinetmakers. So, he started moving up. So, when he applied for civil service job. "What's your trade?" "Well I'm a carpenter." "Oh, yeah, we need carpenters, we need carpenters." Así lo ocuparon and before he knew it, he was a supervisor.

MP: Wow, really?

CC: So, the end of the war, my dad was doing very well. My brother had gone into the service. My other brother was too young. So, that's how he learned the trade by actually going into a contractors shop and having the big boys, who already knew, show him how and he learned. He worked at the lodge in Ruidoso in Cloudcroft. He worked there. He built a lot of the things. He says "Yo los hice, yo los hice." So, that's how people would come. If they had no trade and ya se venian grandes, you know, they were adults. They would go into the....my friends had, their fathers worked in the railroad. I don't know what they did at the railroad. Where else did they work? Their mothers had to go work and they were maids because they say they didn't speak, ah, a lot of English. My mother was fortunate, but since she was a citizen before she married, she was a cashier at the Popular.

CC: The Popular was not discriminatory, since they were Jewish and they had gone through the same thing, a lot of their employees were Hispanic. I'd say ninety percent. They were very good about that. I tried to get a job....my mother, my mother had one year of high school. Had she tried to get into a bank, I don't even know why he even let her in the door to be working there and that went on for many years, even when I started, was trying to get a job.

MP: So there was a lot of Jews here?

CC: Yes, yes. Ask, ask, um, esta...

MP: Susan?

CC: Susan, she'll tell you. Es de los shorts. She ran into me at the library and wants that recording. When, I always say this, when were growing up we didn't know it, but now that I looked back, we lived in a ghetto. I didn't have any, I didn't have Anglo friends. We lived in the second ward on Virginia Street. What's there now, there's a school on Virginia Street, we lived right across the street, 600 block of south Virginia, which is called second ward but that was a very nice neighborhood. We didn't have any gangs or you'd see an occasional guy that was a marijuano and say "Ay, ay viene el marijuano."

MP: They had drugs at that time?

CC: Oh, yes, marijuana? But, not as much as it is now. You could see the guys and my mother would say "Now, you watch out with those, son marijuanos" and so, how did we know? They'd walk like they were walking on air and then we'd see them and we'd cross the street. They never bothered us. They were in their own little world. They were high but they were in their own little world. Yes, you would see them occasionally in south El Paso. There were no Anglos in south El Paso. I think we had two colored families. I know, I don't think there were any Anglos but there were nice families in South El Paso.

MP: So that's why you say that you were living like in a ghetto or something?

CC: We were living; I didn't have any Anglo friends until I went to high school and when we were out, of course we'd get out of the ghetto every weekend to go see a Shirley Temple movie and we'd run into....we had a sister, my mothers sister, lived on north Cotton by that hospital that use to be South Western General Hospital on Cotton and Richardson. There's a hospital right there on the corner, a small hospital. They lived right across the street and we'd go visit them and we would see some Anglo families but I didn't know any. I didn't know any Anglos until I went to high school but there was discrimination, yes.

MP: What about during school of Loreto?

CC: I went to St. Josephs. St Josephs was a branch. St. Josephs Academy was like the down town of Loreto. Loreto had a lot of rich girls, yes, a lot of wealthy Anglo and very wealthy Mexicans but they opened up down town school because Loreto is pretty much a prep school. You go to Loreto, you know you're gonna go to college. Well our dream was, get a job right after high school. So, we went to St. Josephs and the courses there were not as oriented for pre-college but they were oriented for, what they called, commercial courses. We had typing, short hand, bookkeeping, in addition to History, English and all the other things but we were not geared into, "Oh, you girls are gonna go to college." The sisters knew that we were from middle, lower middle, middle class and we wanted good jobs and they trained us very well. All St. Joseph's girls and I'm not bragging but it's a fact, St. Josephs graduates had very good jobs when they graduated, not professionals. We were not professionals but we had good paying jobs cause there were a lot available when I graduated from St. Josephs in 1945, right at the end of the war. The boys were still in the service. So, I had no problem finding a job and even though I had a scholarship for Loreto Heights in Denver.

CC: They gave me a scholarship. I couldn't use it because my parents couldn't afford to send me. I was a second child from a big family. Well, my mother was still having babies. The last one was born in 1943, I think. So, I said, "Well, mother I have a scholarship to go to Loreto Heights." "Well let's see, let's sit down." She was the one that made all the decisions, my dad was there too and "Well you need transportation, number one. Let's send you by train to Denver." "You'll need clothes for that kind of weather." "Are they paying you the room and board?" "No it's just the tuition." "Well, how much is your room and board?" Then, I think it was like six-hundred dollars. "We can't afford it." My mother was a very practical woman. She said, "We can't, I still have other seven kids to, to support" and we were all going to parochial schools. My brother had

gone to Cathedral, yeah, but he was already in the service. All my brothers went to Cathedral except the youngest. He went to (mumbles) high school, which closed. So, I could not, I said "She's right." "Well maybe I can work" and my mother said, "Well you're being very realistic but if you feel you can earn like a thousand dollars this summer, you can go." A thousand dollars in 1945, in three months, no way, not good but then I liked the money that I was earning. My first job was, um, in a little jewelry store. I didn't stay there very long. Then I went to the White House. I worked at the White House. A systemographer for the buyers and I liked the little money coming in. I liked to buy clothes. I'm not gonna go to college (she laughs). Esas una cosa que dejo yo, tontera por no haberlo echo, but I did, anyways. I did go to night school here, anyways. So, those were the tribulations that of going to school and I did not experience any discrimination at St. Josephs, which I might have at Loreto. My two younger sisters went to Loreto and by that time, there were a lot of Hispanic girls going to Loreto.

CC: The economical situation was better. Habíamos muchos Mexicanos at that day because most of us were Hispanic, downtown. It was on where the freeway goes on north El Paso Street, that's where St. Josephs was. It's not there anymore. So, there was one discrimination that I had. Now if you can locate my dad's tape, which was made I don't know when, he talks a lot about discrimination that he encountered because with the contractors that he was working for, when they traveled to Ruidoso or Cloudcroft, wherever they went to build, hotels or wherever. They couldn't find a restaurant that would serve him. My brother, Jorge who died, was at the Cathedral football team and they traveled to San Antonio They couldn't find a restaurant that would serve him. My brother, Jorge who died, was at the Cathedral football team and they traveled to San Antonio, on the time to play the San Antonio kids, and going there by bus, the coach, was Anglo, would get off the bus, go inside and buy inside and buy

sandwiches for them to eat on the bus because they were Hispanic.

You've heard that, "No Mexicans or dogs allowed." They could not go into a restaurant to buy a meal, traveling from here to San Antonio. I'm sure that's in his interview, esta, Joshua Benavides.

MP: It probably is.

CC: Yeah, probably is. So, my dad went through it, my brother did, I did then the two sister who followed me and every family did too because I was going to the same....they went to El Paso High, though. My sister Concha went to El Paso High and there were a lot of Jewish boys there. I mean, because they lived in campus. They had the money to start their business. Well maybe Mr. Shardston didn't had a whole bunch of millions but he was able to start a little clothing store, which evolved into the Popular store and the jeweler.

MP: So you didn't have any problems with them?

CC: I pretty much ignored it. I didn't run into much except when I worked at the little jewelry store. I was kind of the clerk and stand up for the owner. He was Italian. It was here on San Francisco street and that was kind of just getting my feet wet because I didn't want to be in the jewelry store for the rest of my life. I wanted a better job. Then I went to the wine house and I was a very good steno and I was a steno for the buyers but I wanted a secretarial job to the general manager because he kept losing his secretaries, older women, I know of course and he'd hire another one and I said "Well I'm sitting here. He knows I do good work." So I went to my supervisor and I said "How come Mr. Miller doesn't consider my taking over as his secretary?" "Well, because you're young." He said. Porque era Mexicana. So kept hiring all these Anglo who never stayed very long and I said "Out with him, I'm gonna look for another job" and surprise, surprise there was an ad in the paper for a steno at the telephone company. I said "Telephone company? They hire Hispanics?" So I went. Oh, I had tried to get with the city and, ah, ya la tenían escogida la

chamaca que tomo el test, Anglo, Anglo. I could tell that they didn't want them. I tried El Paso Natural Gas that was before your time. That was the big company here in El Paso. To work for El Paso Natural Gas, Electric Company, City or County, it was hard to get in, if you were Hispanic.

MP: Oh, really?

CC: Oh, El Paso Natural, I wanted to get in because I knew that they had a lot of benefits. Good paying jobs well they didn't no more give me the time of day. "We're not taking applications." I knew they were. That were the excuses they gave you. "We're not taking applications at this time." Okay, so then I went to the cell phone company. They never asked me, they never said no. They just gave me a test right then and there and hired me, right like that. They needed a steno and from there I kept climbing. Took me twenty years to make management but I did it.

MP: Wow, that's great.

CC: Telephone company, they started hiring....there was a man, you've probably heard his name, Clifas Calleros, very active back then and he was the one who would go around and place Hispanic girls in these companies that would not touch them. He was able to do it because he was very vocal and known in the community. He said, "Why are you not hiring?" I don't know if he was with LULAC at the time. I don't know when LULAC started. I was never in LULAC so I don't know from then on they started hiring Hispanics, but I was like the second one.

MP: Oh, really?

CC: They did have some Hispanics but they had them in the department where the public didn't see them, the county department and they never had any contact with the public or the customers. Ay, los tenían escondidos.

MP: From the Anglos?

CC: Right, so I moved into a department where I was the second Hispanic. That department had contact with the outside, with the costumers. One

thing they did, they interviewed me by telephone. They wanted to see how my telephone voice was (she laughs). That was the only thing I said "Do you do this to everybody or just me?" But they did, they never said why or anything. I said, "Well I know why you....you wanted to see how I sound on the telephone." It funny, but it was a good company to work for.

MP: Tell me a little bit about the WWII. I heard that you were in school when they....

CC: Yes I graduated in 1945.

MP: Tell me a little bit of that.

CC: Okay, all the boys were gone, of course their at war, so when we had our junior prom in school.

CC: We didn't have any boys to invite to our prom. They were all gone and the ones who were behind were too young. I remember I had a friend, he's still a friend, but he was my age or maybe a year younger. He says, "Chavalas" You know we wanted seniors. We didn't want sophomores in our prom and so that was for a girl that age. That was a big problem. There's no boys to invite to our prom. "Who's going to take us to our prom?" The war, there was scarcity of shoes, leather. There was Juarez, we could buy shoes in Juarez.

MP: So Juarez was the place that solved all your problems, I think, no, food, shoes.

CC: Yeah, I guess so, I guess so. Oh, then we started seeing all these boys, the soldiers down town cause we'd go to the movies. The movies, we only had the theatres down town. There was one in five point and they'd come down town and look at the girls. We'd be coming out of school, you know we're seniors and some of them really did marry some of these soldiers that were here, after they graduated. My mother didn't like for us to...."Mother, va haber un baile." What they use to call U.S. soles, remember those places where the soldiers went and they....there was one

that was run by the Catholic Church which was nice, up on North Cotton Street, I don't know what's there now. Ay ondee esta ese International Hotel, that close to or whatever. Por ahí estaba un U.S. Sole and I said "Mama it's run by the Catholic Church and they are good boys." She says "Yeah, but we don't know who they are." I could never go to a US Sole dance. I could never go to a USO dance. There was another place, San Jose Hall. That was also run by a group of men who belonged to an organization that belonged to the Catholic Church. That was only a couple of blocks from my house. My dad says, "You don't know who they are, where they are?"

CC: Anyone that we started dating, "Y de que familia son?" (she laughs) Again, but my dad had that Mexican way of "Who are you gonna go out with" He's not gonna let you by with a stranger, at least with me and my little sister. One of my sisters married an Anglo, but anyway, they were strict. The families were very strict about their girls getting mixed up with the soldiers who were coming through here. They were stationed at Fort Bliss and who know who they were, coming from other places. The culture was so different.

MP: What about the immigrants, the boys?

CC: The boys, let me see....a lot of them went into the service because they felt that was a good way of making money and they....

MP: I'm thinking for their citizenship no?

CC: Did they become citizens automatically? I don't think I had that in the back of my head, that if they joined the service they could become citizens. I know some did, some did. Of course, a lot of them were going to Cathedral from Juarez. So, we knew, and a lot of girls were going to St. Josephs from Juarez, so there was this commuting like you do know for UTEP....UTEP that's another, no había Mexicanos. Los poquitos que habían asían un grupito. Get some interviews who, you're not gonna get from Mary Carmen cause she went away. There are some ladies that you

can interview. They tell me about it because they were friends of mine. They came here and they couldn't mix, they wouldn't or couldn't or didn't want to because with the Anglos, they had their sororities. These girls were never approached to join a sorority or a fraternity for the boys. Very, very segregated, UTEP was, the College of Minds and then it became Texas Western. When Texas Western went in there were more.

MP: More Mexicans?

CC: My brother coming back from the war, it was more open because all the GI's were coming back and they wanted to go to school and that's how my brother got his college education. "I have the GI Bill, I'm gonna go to college." Of course, he had gone right after he graduated from high school but there was discrimination here, yeah, yeah, up into recent times.

MP: And now?

CC: Hasta que entro Natalicia.

MP: Oh, really, wow!

CC: And I remember when she came in, we were at a dinner, at a luncheon somewhere and she was at the head table. There I went to say hello to, to the guy who was....I knew him, I had gone to school with his wife, Abraham Chavez symphony director that we had before this one. He was up there and I went to say hello to him and she was next to him and I said, "Dr. Natalicia, you're the best thing that ever happened to UTEP." She went like that, because I knew the other presidents. I was working for the CEO at the telephone company at the time and these presents, Templeton, Williams, and Monroe. I can name them all but they were all the board of directors at the telephone company and they would go for the monthly meeting. I had dealing with them. I had to talk to them, y todo, very personable men but they couldn't care more about....UTEP for them was a stepping stone for something better and of course they all move up to better universities. So then, the last one, Monroe, when he left, Natalicia

was already on campus. She was a dean or assistant vice or whatever she was and the region said "Why not her" first woman president of the university and from then on the university is what it is now because of Natalicio. I know there are people who don't care for her but if it weren't for her, UTEP would not be what it is now, 80% Hispanic, when as before in my time it was probably like 4%.

CC: Well in the first place a lot of us Hispanic, they would marry and the boys were coming back from the war and they were married and starting a family so they were not going to college, a few of them did, two of my friends who graduated from St. Josephs came and both of them became teachers. One of them became a principal. So, um, UTEP also had discrimination.

MP: So you were telling me about these immigrants....

CC: Oh, yea, I didn't really know any of them or nothing. I knew some were going to Cathedral. The discrimination, not in my school, porque todos éramos Mexicanos. Cathedral, a lot of Hispanics there. Did they run into discrimination? I don't know, I don't know. Did I see any discrimination? They probably had the same discrimination that I had, maybe looking for a good job and not given the opportunity to apply for it and show that we were capable of doing that job while your Hispanic not realizing, hey, can you do the job. "No, you're Hispanic and you have to be dealing with Anglo customers, we don't want that." See that was discrimination, I went through it and I'm sure some of them did too. Immigrants? No, they weren't any moving in.

MP: There was a law right?

CC: About immigrants, not coming in? I'm thinking, I'm thinking.

MP: Yeah, I think I heard something about this in your first interview.

CC: That was before the Bracero Program because the Bracero Program I think started in the late 1960.

MP: Starting in the 1940's, 1945.

CC: You know what, they maybe just came through here and they moved up northern, to the northern states. When I became aware of the Bracero Program was in the 1960's maybe late 1950's because my brother was one of the processors, interviewers, whatever. But who did our field work? Your right, who did it?

MP: Yeah, there were braceros because they were here because of the war.

CC: That's right all the boys were gone.

MP: And the girls that stayed here, a lot of them were working in industries and....

CC: Sowing factories.

MP: Yeah and automobile factories and military bases also. Yeah and the braceros came here because....

CC: I know of one girl, one woman who married a boy who had come in the Bracero Program but the Bracero Program there were a lot of them who came in not because they were agricultural workers but because they wanted an easy way in. They found out they were not agricultural workers. They didn't know how to work a field (she laughs). They were soon discovered and I guess they send them back or maybe some of them just sneaked in at that time. I don't....I'm thinking.

MP: That's fine. Tell me about this issue about the girls taking the boys jobs. The tough jobs.

CC: There were no factories in El Paso, let me see.

MP: Fort Bliss?

CC: I know they were hiring a lot of girls at Fort Bliss but the one reason I stayed away from that because I knew it was temporary. I knew when the boys came back we were out and I said "No" I gotta have a job where I could stay but they were hiring a lot of and Hispanics, a lot of Hispanic girls were working at Fort Bliss.

MP: Tell me a little bit about those letters that you received from your brother.

CC: I don't know where that was located. My sister Alice tells me that Mrs. Ramirez was doing that here and I said, "I thought they did that somewhere where the letters first came in?" She said, "No they came to El Paso." She was sitting there cutting letters.

CC: How would she know what to cut out? Well anything that had pertaining to a battle, snip it off. My older brother was in the Navy, we'd get his letter, and my mother would....and they were all torn up. She would try to read between the lines and after he came up, they asked him "What were you telling us that they cut out?" He said, "Well about a battle." The dead people that he saw.

MP: Kamikazes?

CC: The kamikazes that would come on his ship and they cut them out. So, we didn't know about kamikazes until he came home and told us about it. Some of it is in his interview. Yeah, all his letter....they had what they call the, como le decían, they had a name for it. It was a piece of paper that could be folded up and you would fold it this way and then this way and then seal it, just one page. The address and then the letter was inside, victory mail, or something like that. I forget the name of it. We would get those from him my mother would just wait and wait for a letter from him. Sometimes we'd go weeks without getting any letters from him but they were censored. I did not know where they were censored and who trained the censors. That I don't know. I found out just recently that they did it here in El Paso because she worked for the post office. She'll probably tell you more.

MP: The building was in down town?

CC: Yeah, it's still there. The big building on Mills and Stanton is still there. But how did they know what to cut out? I guess they were told, anything about a battle or where they are, that was another thing. They couldn't say, my brother couldn't say we were approaching whatever island.

MP: Also, somebody told me, another person that I interviewed, he said that there was a lot of Chinese stores, Japanese stores.

CC: All south Oregon Street was owned by the Chinese.

MP: In Juarez? American soldiers used to go there to drink or something so the Japanese kind of took a look at that.

CC: I can imagine that was going on.

MP: That is probably why they had the office of censorship.

CC: Yeah, they didn't want the word spread. There were a lot of posters that you would see down town and there would be Uncle Sam going like this, shhhh, be careful what you say and then there was another one. You know, they depicted what could happen and what you should not be discussing or what could we discuss if we don't know what was going on but we knew we seen the news reels and the movies we read in the news paper. I think that was the reason for that tight censorship like there is now, you know, with the security that they have.

MP: So what happened when the boys came back?

CC: A lot of them went back to school, my brother did, went back to school. Many of them who could not have afforded to go before the war. See there was one good thing, it really helped the economy of El Paso. Jobs were opening again, they went to school, and they became professionals. A lot of lawyers that we know in the family and it was an opening for them to educate themselves. So that generation, a lot of them, went to college and got their degrees. That was one wave of Hispanics into UTEP. Then it was College of Minds and then it became Texas Western. That was the first wave.

MP: What about immigrants?

CC: Immigrants after the war?

MP: I suppose that they took the jobs when the boys left but once the boys came back....

CC: I'm trying to think what they could of done. Who would of hired them for one thing? I don't know. I can't think of any. We didn't have a lot of industry here. The clothing manufactures, maybe there.

CC: They were hiring but they kind of started after the war. Like from Farah and all those other clothing manufactures that have since gone caput. They were starting, they started up after the war. So in that industry....because we didn't have, there was a railroad.

MP: The land.

CC: Oh, who was doing the agriculture? That's a good question. This boy who was able to stay here and married a friend of mine. He was in agriculture. I don't know.

MP: And what about during the war there were a lot immigrants coming in or they stopped?

CC: Did I see any? During the war, we still had those girls coming to St. Josephs, to school but they were commuters. Immigrants? I don't know.

MP: There are a lot of things that I would like to ask you. I heard that when the war finished you had a parade or something like that.

CC: Oh, we had parades all the time. Every fourth of July we had a parade.

MP: A big party?

CC: Oh, yeah. We came downtown that evening when they....lets see what ended first the Japanese or the European?

MP: It was the European first.

CC: Okay. Oh there was a big parade. Where was I working at the time? The Mills building? I went to work at the telephone company after the war. Anyway, you could see all these streamers flying out of the windows from these tall buildings. Everybody got in their car. They were driving all over town, like cruising. There was a lot cruising all that evening, celebrating the end of the war for both theatres. There was a lot of joy, happiness, churches had special masses and they were ringing the bells too.

MP: Do you have any other experience in your head that you want to say to finish the interview?

CC: No, except that I am very happy that this has started because there's not a better place than the border to have this immigration issue than right here in EL Paso because this was, I call this the Alice Island of the South West. This is where most people came in. I'm sure a lot of them came in through Narelo and those areas and I'm sure they have a lot of stories to tell but I think that El Paso was the like the doors burst open for immigration. The revolution had a lot to do with it. The revolutions, plural, in Mexico had a lot to do with it. You hear old timers what they had to go through during Villas time, especially here in Chihuahua. Even before then, in Maderos time, my father met him when he came to Juarez, Madero. He was having problems. They established like a Red Cross unit here in El Paso to take care of the wounded and one of my dad's sisters worked there. In fact, I have a picture of her. That came from a newspaper, it's not mine. How did I get it? I think my brother, *salio en el Diario*, or something and, um, I'll show it to you later, anyways, so they played over here and Tinidads music was played at that time of Maderos. Where was I headed for this? Bring me back on track.

MP: Because there was a lot of people...

CC: Did I think that? This is the best thing that happen and this a museum that really needs to be here on the border and what better place than the University.

MP: You have a lot of friends that immigrants here but not only Mexicans also Chinese....

CC: Chinese but mostly Mexicans of course but they have come, the ones that I have met now, they come with a degree. They come with an education and they went to get better like this. I was talking about, I said well how about Mexico? She said "*Si me pagan el dolar.*" See they get use to the dollar. They don't want to go back to Mexico.

- CC: This fine degree that she has, educated, and I have relatives in Guanajuato now who are sending their daughters to Europe. I said, "We have a great University here in El Paso." "No because we want them to be in a University where they here no Spanish, or they'll never learn English." So, where are they, England. Tienien el dinero. But my goodness, why can't they come here and save money? No, aya, of course her father es el diputado. He will not be in office too long anyway but, ah, they are now coming. I see them coming now for a good education, students that I see around here. I have two, three work-studies at UTEP at the Museum and they tell me why their coming over here. They want a good education in an American institute because they see a better future for them, to really learn in English. Did you come with a degree?
- MP: Form Chihuahua.
- CC: But you want to expand your experience? Now their coming more for that, for education.
- MP: Yeah because its near from our house and also to have a better education and to have a better view of what's going on in the rest of the world.
- CC: And you can get it here without having to go to a more expense....because further in you go, the more expensive its going to be. You're a graduate student?
- MP: Yes, I am. Well thank you for coming here.
- CC: Your welcome.
- MP: It was very interesting to hear you experiences.