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Interview no. 1606

Joe Chemali Jr.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Joe Chemali Jr.

Interviewer: Anais Acosta

Project: Farah Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, TX

Date of Interview: May 21, 2010

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No.: 1606

Transcriber / Summary: Patrick Driscoll

Joe Chemali Jr. was born in Colorado City, TX on August 30, 1926; grandfather was Andrew Farah, brother of Farah Company founder Mansour Farah; family was of Lebanese ancestry, described as patriotic Americans; He grew up in Marfa, TX; Mr. Chemali was in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Mr. Chemali describes his first work as a foreman at a cotton warehouse in Alpine, TX; He recalls making deliveries to El Paso and how this eventually resulted him working for Willie Farah in 1950; He explains decision to work for Farah, company was rapidly expanding; states Farah had all employees start at the bottom to train them and make them understand the mechanics of the business, soon was a line manager and then a plant manager; recalls relationship between Farah employees and managers as excellent and like a family, working conditions were great; outlines his typical day at Farah, described Willie Farah's work ethic and innovative manufacturing techniques that he refused to patent for fear of competitors imitation them. He describes the products that the company produced when he began working for Farah, jeans, slacks, and children apparel; recalls the quality of Farah jeans, equipment such as ovens to treat the pants that were superior to competitors. Describes Willie Farah's business savvy; he explains the business decision making process and structure for Farah; recalls his work in supervising plants, mentions he didn't work in the office that much; recounts the 1975 Farah boycott and strike due to accusations of sweatshop labor, his efforts to negotiate with the Roman Catholic Bishop of El Paso in order to prevent their support of it; outlines reasons that the Catholic Church initially supported the boycott, states that employees helped end the boycott by not supporting votes for union election; gives his opinion on how the boycott affected Farah's business; explains why he chose to leave Farah when Willie Farah stopped running the business; He recalls starting his own businesses, work in quality control for plants throughout Latin America. Mr. Chemali closes by explaining what made Farah special and enjoyable to work for, every day the company and employees accomplished tasks and operations, generosity of Willie Farah towards employees.

Length of interview 52 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a