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Interview no. 1659

Anonymous

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Dr. Monica Perales

Project: Smelertown Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: April 2, 2002

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Transcript No.: 1659

Transcriber / Summary: Vanessa Pantoja

He was born in the El Paso settlement called Smelertown. His father had begun work at the ASARCO plant after arriving in the early 1900's. He was raised by his mother and grandmother. Growing up in Smelertown, he remembers being very poor and rummaging through trash for goods. He recalls being discriminated against for being Mexican once he began working at ASARCO. Everything was segregated and higher paying jobs were only given to whites. He remembers a large sense of community among Mexican workers, from cooking to bars and stores. ASARCO had a company store which sold items at high prices, the proceeds would go back to ASARCO. There were many forms of mistreatment at ASARCO from being paid less for being Mexican to being intimidated for speaking out. He even spoke about the Mexican labor union. This union was able to help the workers move up in the company, holidays off, vacation, insurance, and overall better working conditions. Due to the union, he was able to get a better job and work as a switchman at the locomotive yard. Not all conditions improved, whites still segregated themselves and workers were still exposed to harmful conditions. He fully credits the union for making ASARCO a better place to work. Mexicans became less afraid of speaking up. He did mention that the red scare affected the workers union because some members were communist. After Smelertown, families began to scatter around the El Paso area, many of them went into the military. He left Smelertown in 1952. Overall, he says his experience from Smelertown is filled with memories some good and some bad. He even sees some of his former neighbors from time to time around the El Paso area.

Length of interview 87 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a