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Interview no. 1712

Jaime Archuleta

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Jaime Archuleta

Interviewer: Alejandro Garcia

Project: Asarco

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: April 5, 2019

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No.: 1712

Transcriber: Andrea Santos

Summary of Interview:

Jaime Archuleta was born in the lower valley in El Paso (Ysleta), but he grew up in Sunland Park, New Mexico. His mom used to stay home and take care of them, while his dad worked as a carpenter all over the southwest.

Jaime started working at Asarco in 1993 when he was about 38 years old. He wanted to work in Asarco because he left a job in Arizona where he worked on a copper smelter so his experiences helped him to get into Asarco. When he first started there he worked as a maintenance mechanic. He worked there for six years and was one of the last guys to work there. Since he got laid off the company gave him a year of college.

Jaime started as a mechanic when he first entered Asarco and he said that his job was necessary for the company, because if a little pump started to fail it could lead to the whole plant shutting down so he had a huge responsibility. During his time at Asarco he lived in Sunland Park and his work was 10 min. away from his home. Sometimes they called him on the weekends to go fix something and he got paid the extra hours. Jaime mentioned that everyone that worked at Asarco had to change cloths to work and then shower once your shift was over for you to be able to go home clean.

The whole Asarco plant was divided in sections. One of the sections was in charge of cleaning the substances and had to get rid of the impurities of the metal. Due to the long process of the separations of the impurities they were left of with a lot of waste and most of that waste was gas and sulfur which was the smoke and waste that got out thru the big chimney that said Asarco. That was when all the complains started because it started contaminating the air and soil not only in Sunland Park, but also in El Paso and Juárez.

Now a day every factory that emits sulfuric needs to capture it to have less contamination and to decrease the soil and air contamination. What they do next is that they put it in tanks and sell it to other companies that use sulfuric acid to create something else. Overall this is a dangerous process, but Jaime says that if you wear all your right equipment and are respectful to the job you are doing you will be okay. Never the less you can't be too confident, because accidents do happen and he has witness some of his peers get in accident. Over all there are many safety procedures, but some workers don't follow them so they get hurt.

Asarco had many lawsuits for emitting certain gasses when they weren't supposed to. They also had many complains regarding the unsafely work that they had to do. Also people have got very bad injured and that also caused more lawsuits. This led to Asarco creating new rules, such as having separate lunchrooms, not allowing employees to have beards and having all employees take a shower after their shift was over to not bring the contamination home. Jaime said that when he first started working in that type of environment they didn't have that much safety procedures, but he said that throughout the year they started to adopt new safety procedures that were for the better.

Jaime was very lucky to left Asarco with a great health and all of his fingers he mentioned. Some of his coworkers got cancer and other illnesses after leaving Asarco due to the hazard substances that they were exposed to. He said that if you weren't prepared to get dirty then that wasn't the job for you. Jaime also mentioned that fatalities did happen for example many men got killed during their work, because they didn't follow the protocols.

Overall Jaime's experiences in Asarco were great, he was conscious of the hazard that was working there because he saw many accidents. Jaime was not in favor of the contamination that Asarco created because many of his friends got cancer and other illnesses after years of working there. Asarco closing was good for the environment says Jaime.

Length of interview 1:29:59

Length of Transcript n/a