



## THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Leticia and Miguel Hernandez, The Sausage Shop  
Interviewer: Meredith E. Abarca  
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Leticia, better known as Lety, and her husband, Miguel Hernandez acquired The Sausage Shop, located at 3903 Tompkins Street, El Paso, Texas in January 2007, but had been part of its history and operation much earlier. Joe Hryszko, the original owner of The Sausage Shop, was Lety's sister's father-in-law. Therefore, before becoming the owner, Lety and her children would help Joe make sausages in his house garage and sell them in the shop on weekends. Joe (Joseph) Hryszko was born in Harrison, New Jersey, and joined the US Army at age 17 or 18. He attended boot camp in El Paso and fell in love with the city, the culture and the people. Over his career, he was stationed at Ft. Bliss several times over his career and from early on knew this is where he would retire. Joe was the first generation from his family to make El Paso his home along with his wife Clarita and four children. He lived approximately 50 years in El Paso, TX, until his passing, August 6, 2010.

Joe learned the art of sausage making while in Germany during his last tour in the early 70s. He chose to live in a Germany community as opposed to living on a military base, thereby exposing his children to the culture. He became good friends with a neighbor who made homemade sausage. Since Joe had the only house with a basement, soon it became the headquarters for sausage making. He honed his skills by watching and learning how to make a variety of German sausages alongside his neighbor/friend. The dream to start the business in sausage making was a result of El Paso having a deficit of good German food and sausages. He also missed eating one of his favorite foods, Polish Sausage. Joe started reading cookbooks, specifically "Great Sausage Recipes & Meat Curing", by Ryttek Kutas and began experimenting, making different varieties of sausage at home. A one-man show, Joe made sausages and schnitzel. His favorites were of course, Bratwurst; Polska Kielbasa (Polish); the breakfast patties and Green Chili Asadero. The Southwest inspired Green Chili Asadero, Jalapeno and Habanero were his own creations. The shop's original location remains the same: 3909 Tompkins. Initially the building belonged to Bob Morris, who was owner of the Lion's Den. He was a friend of Joe's and offered him the space to run his business. Don Haskins was a frequent customer and, more importantly, a friend.

The Sausage Shop remains a family business. They acquired it once Miguel was about to retire from the Socorro School District. Lety and Miguel also have had their family members, sons, grandchildren, niece and nephew working, especially during summers when they're on vacation. While still working as a Special Education Instructor, Lety often had Special Ed students' work be part of traditional sausage making. For a year before the official transfer of ownership, Joe taught Miguel all there is to know about making sausage. The Hernandez continue making many of the sausages Joe made, but have added their own creations: Pico de Gallo; Roasted Garlic/Jalapeno; Jalapeno Cheddar; Bacon Brat; Bacon, Cheddar Brats and a Habanero Cheese Dip. They, on a number of occasions, have (and will) prepare special family recipes, for example, South African Boerewors, Chistorra, Argentine Chorizo, and Pinklewurst, a request made once by members of the German Army stationed at Ft. Bliss.

At the inception of the business, all purchases were cash only; however, since 2007, debit/credit and SNAP cards are now accepted. Joe was very happy about that. In honor of Joe, a mural has been painted on a side wall of The Sausage Shop. The tradition of The Sausage Shop as a family owned business continues, and the Hernandez hope one of their own children will carry on with such tradition. If not, they will sell it to someone who shares Joe's passion for quality homemade traditional sausages that include many of the unique flavors of the U.S. Southwest loved by the El Paso and Juarez community.

Length of interview: 41:33 minutes

Length of Transcript   n/a