



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Elisa Licona Southern
Interviewer: Meredith E. Abarca
Project: Texas Food Voices of El Paso Private Kitchens
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Elisa Licona Southern, a native of El Paso who simply “loves El Chuco,” is the oldest daughter of a mix ethnic/cultural couple, Dorothy Long from Missouri and Guillermo Raymundo Licona from El Paso. In this interview, Elisa recalls how her mother and later her husband, Todd Southern, became “third spacers” within the Mexican culture. A “third spacer,” according to Elisa’s well known scholars and activists siblings, Adela C. Licona (Associate Professor Emeritus) and Mayo (Miguel Mario) Licona (Professor Emeritus), is “a person that takes on the culture of somebody else. They [her mother and husband] ‘are’ Mexican because they have the heart and spirit to embrace someone else’s culture as their own.” Her southeast Missouri mom learned from Elisa’s grandmother, Mema, how to cook a number of Mexican dishes: rice, *sopas*, beans with *manteca* and a roasted red chile, among other things. Elisa’s life from childhood to adulthood has been centered in two key geographical and cultural locations: El Paso and Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico, particularly the *Hacienda Corralitos*. This experience has led her to appreciate the uniqueness of northern Mexican foods: meat based, *Menonita* cheese, long-green chiles, *recaudo* as the based for most Mexican food. Restaurants have always been important sites of family gatherings in Elisa’s life, in part because her father sold restaurant equipment. Not only did she grow up eating at Chicos Tacos, but its founder Joe Mora was a good friend of her father and even became godfather to one of Elisa’s siblings. Pete Lopez from Pete’s Meats on Alabama Street was also a close family friend. She vividly remembers Charlie Mansour from the Moon Grocery Store on Brown Street. How could she forget Luis Estabillo, owner of Casa del Sol in Juarez? Not only did her father sell him restaurant equipment, but she had her wedding reception there. She also has a family connection with Raúl Gonzalez from Rulis’ International Kitchen, one of Elisa’s favorite places to eat. Raúl through family connections and Elisa through friendship connections have links to the Múzquiz family; the Múzquiz are related to Melshor Múzquiz, the president of the Republic of Mexico in 1832. In Casas Grandes, as a young girl, Elisa met another young girl and they have maintained a life-long friendship: Zarela Martinez, an El Paso food legend. Her son, Mario Southern has become a restaurateur and with his business partner, Rayon McNellis of El Paso Saddlery, own the Wings Daddy’s food chain and has recently acquired Charcoaler.

As she reflects on her life and the food scene of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, she brings to life places like Ashley's, Gilesie's, La Hacienda, The Mills, Elmer's, Julios Café Corona, Martinos, La Florida and Comedor Virginia. The family tradition of gathering after Sunday mass for pan dulce reminds Elisa of the National Bakery on Stanton Street owned by Lebanese. This leads to recall that her grandmother learned to make a number of Lebanese dishes while living in south El Paso that are now staples in her family such as *vatuque*. Mexican food, Southern food, Midwestern Food, Lebanese food are all just foods connected to family and friends in the Licona Southern household; they share these meals and many stories in what for Elisa is the most significant aspect of all meal: *la sobre mesa*.

Length of interview: 50:42

Length of Transcript n/a