

South Texas Hispanic Farm Labor Communities Oral History Project

Interview with Adolpho Contreras

Interviewee: Adolpho Contreras

Interviewer: Mark Robbins

Bishop, TX, 2013

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MR: So I guess we could start just for the sake of record, if you want to state your name.

AC: Adolpho Contreras. I am 50 years old. Bishop, Texas graduate. I was born here. What else do you need to know?

MR: I guess if you want to start with your background. When did you start working in the fields, or if you want to talk about your family and some of the things that maybe you mentioned... your father...[you] showed me that check that he kept, paid in 1941 for picking cotton. If you want to share any recollections of his story?

AC: I guess, the family came here around 1940 and I was thinking 1943, but then I saw the date on that check. That tells me they were here before then. I had been told 1943, but I remember in 1955 I was 5 years old. Well, almost 5. And there was all this commotion that we were going somewhere, some state to work in the fields. And it was the whole family, you know. And Mr. Alfredo Garza was the, we called them troqueros, the man that owned the truck and he was the boss man. So, we got in back of this, oh I don't know what they call these big trucks – it's not an 18-wheeler, but you know like the grain trucks. Kind of that size, with the box. And all of us were crammed in there, you know. There was, we had one family and it was like 6 of us. And then there was other families. And everyone stayed there, of course, for the ride to Virginia. Virginia State. And we were working in the fields up there. In the tomato fields, asparagus, there was lettuce – I still remember this. I remember the lettuce, riding in the tomatoes. You know, I always used to kid, my parents were the ones who were working. So, my recollection is, we were in the fields, well before that, I have a recollection of staying behind with my dad because he had been sick that day. He had heart problems. Back then, of course, they didn't have the technology. They didn't know what...today he would have probably lived. He was 47 years old. And he told me that if – he asked me if I was hungry and then he put a plate of peas, just peas, in front of me.

And I remember just, ahhh, you know, I don't want peas. But anyway, for some reason, I never got that...

The next recollection I have is going with my sister to drink water. They used to have this big ole cotton hole, they used to...for the workers. And someone came running and said your father fell. And my sister, I remember saying, I'll race you over there or something. We didn't know what was going on. So we went over there and my father was there. He had a massive heart attack. And my mother was there. Next thing I remember my whole family was crying. I was the youngest one. Everyone else knew what was going on. But I find out that the Puerto Rican community that was in that camp where we were staying, and it was just a one-room, little hut, I mean hut. And all the families were crammed. You know, there were different families. There were like, I would say, 20 little houses like this, and each one had a family. They had a main, a main place where people would, where men would take a bath. There wasn't like a bathroom for everybody. And everybody just had different places to sleep in that one bedroom. Bedroom, kitchen and everything, just one room. And they collected money to give us to come back. They brought my father in a train, all the way here to Bishop. I don't know how we got back. I think, you know, we just drove back. Oh, the troquero, Mr. Garza, sent everybody go back. So here we came back, all the way back from Virginia. And, that's what I remember about the work out there. I wasn't really participating in it, you know, toiling in the fields or anything. But I was around there, playing around there as a kid.

MR: Did you have other kids that you recall playing with around where you were living?

AC: A neighbor of mine that lived across the street was also out there and when we get together we talk about the old days in Virginia and about one day maybe going back there. Now that was a long time ago. We probably wouldn't find the place anymore. But we'd like to find the camp now. Maybe there's an airport there now, who knows. You know, and then after that, just living in Bishop there was nothing but the cotton fields around here. And before the cotton fields, of course, we would do the weeding, all the weeds in the fields. But it's like, endless days working in July and August in the hot sun. And you know, unless it wasn't hot, as it is now, it really gets hot. And some people wonder how we made it. I am out there working in the yard in July or August and I am ready to go back inside. But anyway, we worked in the fields, hoping that there was a raincloud. Because if it rained, we were all looking up in the sky, ready to go home.

MR: Do you have any particularly memorable experiences in the fields?

AC: I remember the celebrity there was my sister. My oldest sister, Angelita, because everyone knew her. She was like a star because she could pick cotton so fast. And the men, of course, they didn't really care for that. That a woman would beat them. And her husband was a good cotton picker, but he was always behind and I am sure didn't like that, but he was always behind and there she was. But the time I finished my row, she would have already passed me 2 or 3 times and done hers. She just, she was just... You know, we'd go under the cotton trailers to eat at noon and each family would gather, they'd get a little place and everyone would gather around their moms and distribute the tacos. And we'd all have our lunch, and then after that, of course, she was like the leader. She would say, okay guys, let's go. And when she got up, everybody got up. The other families, too. Let's go, let's go. They didn't want to stay behind. But I remember that,

I remember people from other trucks that were working the fields close by and seeing her, and coming over and talking to her. They wanted to meet her, because she was so fast picking that cotton.

MR: Were you all paid by the pound or paid by the hour?

AC: I remember getting paid, like, man it was... I remember a \$1.35, what was it, a hundred? It was like \$1.35 per hundred pounds. So I would pick like 200 pounds, 250 pounds a day. And I would always get a scolding when I got home because my niece, who was about 4 years younger than I was, she would always pick more than me. She was Angelita's daughter and she was also coming up in the cotton picking business, you know. But you know, it wasn't much money, but back then, of course, we'd go to the movie theatre, which was a block from my house. There was only one American theater there in Bishop, on the west side of the tracks. And there was another Texas theater downtown. But we'd pay a quarter to go in and then cokes were 5 cents and 10 cents for the large coke and popcorn was 10 cents. So, you know, with a dollar, hey you'd be alright. But anyway, yeah, I remember just the hot days and the... it never rained, my friend. It was rough. But, through the eyes of a... when I was picking cotton, I think I started at the age of 11 or 12. And I stopped at the age of 15, maybe, close to 16. And then the machines came in, the cotton picking machines, and they saved us. That phase of it was over, anyway.

And I remember the old timers, they were so mad. They wanted to go out in the fields and burn... they would talk like this, of course they wouldn't do it, "we ought to go burn those cotton machines, they are taking away our jobs." Of course that never happened. But boy, when I think about it it brings back a lot of memories. Where else shall we go?

MR: Did anybody ever struggle from the heat to the point of injury or was there enough water out there? Do you remember any circumstances...?

AC: There was always cold water. They used to buy the block ice and they used to have this canvas, and they would cover it with the canvas and it would keep for a while. And then as it would melt they would get another piece, and they had the ice, the picker, which could break chunks and put it in the water. And once in a while, around noontime, this little cart came by. This lady was selling cokes and orange drinks and so forth, and, you know, it used to be the whole the taste was so strong and when you are all dehydrated out there, you just open up the glass and bottle and just drink it, man, it was so darn good.

But, no, I don't remember any injuries. I remember. I remember possibly a heat stroke my brother-in-law had, but one of the reasons I guess he got that is he went to work and he had been drinking all day Sunday and he was a little dry. And then he got, he went into the cotton fields, and boy his eyes were sunken and he looked really... I still remember the look on his face when I saw him. I thought, what happened to you? He was bad. They took him home. But there wasn't much of heat strokes or things like that. People could take it, they were used to it. I don't think anyone would want to go pick cotton nowadays, for a whole day, I mean. And the young kids, I remember, they couldn't wait, I couldn't wait, to go out there into the cotton fields. We didn't know what we were getting into. You would start, as a kid you would start first, like I would pick with my sister and my job was to get either a little bucket or just make what we call little piles of

cotton or montancitos, we used to call them. And we'd walk about 30 yards in front and start picking and just make little piles. And my sister would be picking and she'd get there, and of course that was a great help, because she could further her work.

MR: So were you mostly picking around family? Did you also encounter other neighboring families a lot out in the fields?

AC: Right, it was usually the same families, you know, they would stick to the same troqueros, the same boss and in our group, there were like 5 or 6 families, and year after year, we'd still go with the same person. Altogether in town, in Bishop, there were, I guess, 5 troqueros doing the same thing, taking the families out and picking the cotton. And then, of course, some people, I remember going with my brother-in-law and my sister and they wanted me to babysit. So, and he had a whole field by himself and it wasn't a real big field, but for two people, it was a lot of work. So, they had the trailer there and I was under the cotton trailer, and I was just there all day, babysitting under the trailer. And once in a while, I'd get up and see where they were, and almost here! But, in fact, he just called me – he's working at a post office, about to retire now, in San Marcos or Austin – and when you came, he just called me and was just saying hello and how everything was.

MR: So, did you just pick during the summer months or did it ever go into the fall, or did you stop to go to school or have to go to school late?

AC: Well, see that was the money we used to buy our shirts and our pants for school. And this was, like, a cycle. You know, the older kids would get out of school and their parents needed them to make a living. So usually the younger ones were the ones that were going to school. I was the youngest in the family, so I was the only one that graduated. Everyone else had to work. And that was the same with the other families, you know, they knew that one of the kids, and the old man would tell us, son, you know you guys stay in school. They would always tell the same thing, "You stay in school. You don't want to be doing this, you don't want to work this hard." So whenever we saw an older person, it was the same lecture over and over again, "You don't want to be here." You don't, but in a way it was a great lesson. I knew that I didn't want to do labor all my life so I thought I'd do something else, educate myself and do something easier, which I am enjoying now.

MR: Well, certainly I can't imagine being out in July in the kind of heat in South Texas. I'm from Michigan, so I am still trying to get used to this, even without having to work out there much at all.

AC: Well, you know with the climate change, there are some places out there that are getting the hot weather. But we've had it all our lives here.

MR: So, how many people were in your family then? You mentioned you are the youngest.

AC: Yeah, we lost a set of twins, siblings, and one single one. We would have been 9, but you know, 6 of us, it was 6 really. We lost 3. And usually the families were pretty...lot of kids. As you can see there in that picture, that was about a block. And a lot of kids didn't go to that party.

But all those kids were across the street, across the alley, all within a radius of a block. And I know most of them, most of them I know. Some of them I don't remember, but I'd say 75-80% I know. That was in 1960, 1959, somewhere around there. Someone had a party and we didn't even wear shoes, man, we were ready to go barefoot. Someone said, there's a party, we'd just take off. No present or anything. That was right before I started...well, you know, at that age with my sister I was making those little piles of cotton. But yeah, there were a lot of kids out there. Lot of kids.

And people would...we'd go to West Texas, around Alton, Lubbock, somewhere around that area. And then other families would go to other....There was a lot of people migrating for work. And we'd leave and stay out there till the cotton was over, or whatever crop they were following. I had a half-brother that ended up in Oregon, and that holds true for a lot of families that stayed. They stayed wherever they were working, and possibly found another job, and said hey, let's stay here. So that's why you see so many Hispanics all over the U.S. now. They got there because they were out there as migrants and then they decided to stick around, you know, and left Texas. There were a lot of migrants back then, a lot of people moving.

We didn't know any English when I went to kindergarten and then first grade. We learned it there. And that was true for...we used to speak Spanish. I go to the Valley now and the little kids, the 3-4 year olds, they speak perfect Spanish. And I'm amazed. Because here you don't see that. All the kids are speaking English. Over there, being so close to Mexico, their roots are still *puro Mexico* and they speak perfect Spanish. It amazes one from here when they hear them. They say, wow, listen to them speak Spanish.

MR: So in school were you allowed to speak Spanish or did they punish for that?

AC: No, we were punished. Oh, I [inaudible] remember the year. Back then, teachers got away with so much. I think no, oh...Kindergarten was good. When we got to first grade and now being able to speak English, I remember a teacher by the name of Stern. Everybody knew the mean teachers, believe me, everybody said "you gotta watch that teacher, she's mean." Sure enough, there was no warning. If you did something she didn't like, she'd blindside you. It was the ear. She'd pull the ear. I remember, I forget what I was doing, but that was something that we remember. And most of the kids, of course, were learning their English. We were kept in the west end, and 100% was Hispanic on that side. Segregation. And the Anglos were on this side. And there like, maybe 10 Hispanics that got in with the whites and a friend of mine that was a banker was telling me that it was right after...uh, what was Thurman Marshall or who was it?

MR: Thurgood Marshall and *Brown v. Board*?

AC: Something happened during that time, he was telling me, I haven't looked it up, but he said that somehow, someone was smart enough and they went to the school and said we want these kids on this side, and we know they don't have to be over there. So he was telling me, that's how we got over here. And I forget who it was who made trouble and said, okay, you guys can stay here. But the rest of us didn't know better and we stayed in the west side, which wasn't bad, you know, because we were learning, I guess, at our pace. Anyway.

MR: Were the teachers Hispanic or were they white?

AC: Uh, let's see. There was a lady....5%, maybe 3% Hispanic. I remember Mrs. Davila, Mrs. Salazaar. That's it. Over here I don't remember anyone. But I remember Davila and Salazar, as the only Hispanics. So it wasn't very many back then.

MR: Did most of the kids also work in the fields during the summer time, that you went to school with?

AC: A lot of them did. Most of the kids worked and we would really be envious of the ones that didn't because they were the ones whose parents had real good jobs, so they didn't have to do it. So, we'd be I like, God look at that guy, he doesn't have to...I don't know if I used the right word, envious, but we would just be like, "I wish...I [inaudible] bad luck and I wish I didn't have to be out here in the fields." But most of them, yes, they were out there in the fields.

You know, in the families...like we got here to Bishop in, now I realize it was around 1940. Across the alley was my aunt, the next block was my two uncles. They lived across the street from each other. So they all traveled in little packs. And the same is true for other families. They would all move into Bishop and they would all move within the same block, or across the alley, or across the street from each other. That's something that of course, nowadays you don't find. But back then, in those days, everyone was related around the block or somewhere. All these families would have their brothers across the street or something. And that's just the way it was.

MR: So what were your impressions comparing working in West Texas versus in Bishop?

AC: Well, in West Texas I was still young. You know, it was after my father died and we came back from Virginia and my brother took over, my only brother. He was like 15 years older than I was, maybe 20. And so I was still young, working around West Texas. And I did very little working around here, I felt it cause I was out there pulling that sack, so it was a lot harder, of course. I was growing up and all. In fact, I had met my wife outside the Texas Theatre and I remember asking her, well, what are you going to do next week, and she said, well, I am going to go pick cotton. I was going to summer school in Kingsville, and I said, I wasn't picking cotton anymore, but when you fall in love, you're like, well I'll go out there. So I said I'll go out there. And she said fine, I'll be out there with my sisters and brothers and we're going to be picking cotton with so-and-so truck driver. So somehow we talked to the truck driver and he said he'd pick us up, me and a friend of mine who said fine, I'll go with you. So that's where I met her. And of course, then later we got married and so forth. But I was talking to some of the JPs [Justice of the Peace] in one of our training session in San Antonio and they were talking about how they met, and I said, well, let me share this with you. And they were like, "Wow, that's different. In the cotton fields, huh?" And I said yes, in the cotton fields. But it wasn't that bad.

MR: So was that a different boss, a different truck operator that you had to get to know?

AC: Right, I had never gone with him. We talked to him and he said, sure I'll pick you guys, what time. And we told him, well we'll be back from summer school at this time and we should be there by...And there was that old store, that old Gonzales store. And he said, okay, I'll pick

you guys up there a little after lunch. And yes, that was my first experience with Astore Hill, I forget the name, but his name was Astore Hill. But that's who she was picking with, so I went out there and joined her. I had to put up with her little brother always messing things up, but anyway.

MR: So, was it the boss that then negotiated the wage from the farm owners?

AC: Right, you know he would get whatever arrangements they made and then he would be the one that would take his cut and then he'd put the price on how much he was going to pay us. But if I remember correctly, it was like \$1.35 a hundred [pounds]. I remember in later years, before I stopped, it got up to \$2.00, but it was what they call "seconds," where you go back again and whatever is left, or whatever bloomed late, you start picking it. It was a lot harder because you do a lot of walking to get your sack full. But they would pay a little more. But that's the last I remember, \$2.00 per hundred pounds.

MR: Did most of the truck operators have about the same wage, or did people move back and forth a lot?

AC: Yes [most had same wage]. Of course, once in a while you'd hear someone was paying a little more and everyone would want to go there. So the troquero would have to pay a little more to keep you. But yes, there was always...they would try to keep the prices to where that wouldn't happen. But once in a while, you'd hear, well so-and-so is paying 10 cents or 15 cents more, so everyone would be like, well we better go over there. But they'd have to come up and make us stay.

MR: Did they usually take you to the exact same farms every year?

AC: Around here we'd pick...the troqueros already knew the farm owners, so once the cotton was getting ready they'd come, either the owner would come and tell them or they would check with them, "hey, how are things?" But yeah, they'd stick to the same farm owners because I remember picking around the east side of Bishop here and then later we started going with another troquero who happened to be a neighbor, or who lived in the same block, but we didn't stay too long with them. Most of the cotton we picked was with Mr. Fuente and we kept going with him year after year.

MR: Did he usually go out and pick, too, or just come by and pick you up when the day was over?

AC: Okay, in the mornings you would hear a phrase everybody knew that would be repeated many times, many times, and I remember this family that used to live across the street, a block and across the street. And there were like 6 or 7 of them. And they would say, "alla huerta," (?) like go pick somewhere else because they weren't ready. But it was early in the morning and I remember standing up, because you couldn't sit down because you had to ride in the back in the bed of the truck. And we would stand up and it would get cold because, you know, it was early morning and there was the dew. I remember that, you know, hitting us as the trucker went faster we'd just go down because it got too cold. I remember when we left in the afternoons because

we knew it was getting ready for us to leave, I remember we would put our feet, take off our shoes, and be barefoot and put our feet under the dirt and it was so cool, you know. I mean, you felt cool and we'd relax our feet (laughing). That was crazy, but it felt so good. By the afternoon, most of the kids had their shoes off and their feet under the dirt.

You know, you're making me remember a lot of things I hadn't thought about in a long time.

MR: Yeah, I'll be sure to give you a copy of this too, just in case you have family members down the line that, if they can still read a CD at that point, if they want to listen to it. Well, that's really interesting. So, how early did the day start, typically, and when did it end?

AC: I don't remember the time, a central time. When did that start anyway, I don't remember?

MR: You know, in terms of calling it "central time," that's a question I don't know the answer to. I know a lot of occasions the locality would make the decision about when they would switch not time zones, but when they had daylight savings. So it seems to be a confusing thing. So the long story short, I'm not sure I know the answer to that question, but it's a good question.

AC: Well, it was daybreak anyway. I mean, the earlier... If there was light, you could see the cotton. So, the truckers knew that. It was real early, and there they were. You could hear the noises of the truck around the barrios picking up the people. "Alla huerta," okay, you know, be ready because we gotta go. And lunch time, we always had to have someone in the group that would steal the taquitos, the bean taquitos. And of course everybody would accuse a certain person. Anyway, we'd have to keep an eye out, this guy steals tacos. And nobody wanted to be short on their tacos. You know, and the kids, this is something that I will not forget. When we first started going to school and we went to the east side. That was the 4th grade. We went 1-3 and then the 4th grade here. And we were nervous about eating, because we knew we were gonna eat at a cafeteria. And I remember as us kids talking, "God, you know, we're going to have to eat in front of people." We didn't to eat in front of people, we were I guess kept isolated out there in our little barrios, we were kind of nervous about having to eat in front of other people. And I remember the young kids from the ranches out of Bishop that lived in the farms, you know, they were not as well known as all of us here that would play together. And they would bring their tacos. They wouldn't eat at the cafeteria. They'd bring their little sack and then at lunchtime they would hide the taco. The taco was under the table and they would bring it up and bite it and put it back under the table. And then it came to the Anglos, they got a taste of the taquitos and they'd be like, "hey." They would trade. They would trade the plate for 2 or 3 taquitos. So the kids would start eating American food. And I was just talking to someone the other day and I said can you imagine, how it started and how the kids were hiding the tacos. And now, they are everywhere, they are all over the nation! (laughing). But that was the first that I can remember, the tacos being hidden because they were embarrassed. It's come a long way. The taco has come a long way (laughing). There are so many nowadays. You have the carne asada and the beans, they're good.

MR: Oh yeah. I had never encountered tacos this good until I moved here. I had grown up in Michigan and we had them, and I liked them, but not like what I get here. It's really impressive.

AC: My wife and I like to go to a place here in Robstown close to the HEB there on Old 44. Como se llama? Guadalajara. Tortillas are always fresh and if you like chorizo and egg, I don't know if you do, chorizo and egg, a lot of places they don't have the ingredients you need that these people do sometimes. There was a place in Kingsville, Santa Fe, and everybody knew the chorizo ingredients, I mean you could taste them, they were so good. And I tasted the Jalisco, they don't have them, and the other places in Kingsville, they don't have them. They closed down the Santa Fe so that was the last time I had a real good chorizo and egg taco. This place out here, though, like I say, they have a real very tasty taco. My wife loves it out there, so we drive to Robstown just to eat taquitos.

MR: I'll have to try them next time I go out there, it's usually every week or two. So, then usually did you end work when it started to get dark?

AC: Yeah, usually it would have to be right before dark, right before we couldn't see anything else. Everybody started yelling, okay, guys, sun is setting, let's start getting ready. So we start taking...sometimes we'd leave a row halfway or something cause we had to leave. But next morning we'd have to remember where we left off and finish it, you couldn't leave it like that. Of course, someone did, hey would be taken care of anyway. But yeah, it was pretty close to sunset.

MR: Did you ever see the farm owners out there? Did they ever kind of go out and check on things?

AC: I am sure they did, but I can't remember having any encounters with them. Usually we were out working and they'd come talk to the boss man. The boss man, he'd stay. His job was just to help get the sack on the romana, what do you call that? What do you call that thing? To weigh it. It's not a weigh station, but it was three 2-by-4s. Maybe you've seen them, I don't know. They had like a teepee, like a triangle, and they would have this weight, this scale. It was hooked on a wire something. It had a rope. You'd have to know how to do it, you know. You would get the sack, get the rope under the belly, and they'd bring the strap and hook it up. Then you would weigh it and of course take it off and throw it in the trailer and get up there and just empty the thing. And sometimes when it was, you know, when it was full, it was a hard chore. It was hard. And then having to pick when you got close to where you had to take it to weigh, you'd put it across your back, and when you had a lot of pounds man, you could get, depending on the size of the sack, some people could get close to 100 pounds in those things. The more experienced people. We would really work with like 50 pounds, something like that. You know, it wasn't that bad. Every so often you would have to stop in your row and then, what do you call it, a cuadrillo, compress it, so you could put more. So you would shake it down, get it real tight, start picking again, get some more, do it again, just compressing just to get more cotton in that sack to finish the row. Yeah, that's what I say now that I'm talking about this, I'm remembering these things I didn't think about.

MR: Did they pay the same rate when it rained and the cotton would be weighted down a little bit?

AC: I remember some people throwing dirt in there and the boss man saying, “Hey, you better stop doing this.” And they would take off a pound or two pounds off. “Unh-unh, too much dirt, you’re doing that on purpose. If you do that again, I’m going to take more off.” So we had to keep it clean. But no, you know, usually if we knew it was going to rain, we’d all hurry up and weigh our sacks and get out of there, because you’re going to get stuck in the mud. It was nothing but dirt. So if there’s bad weather coming you better get out of there. Otherwise, everyone’s going stay there, you’re gonna go nowhere.

MR: Was it mostly just families from Bishop that were in the fields or did you ever see migrants come from other parts of Texas?

AC: I remember some people from, I mean yeah, there were people coming from other cities that followed the crops, just like we did to West Texas. I remember like three trucks from Houston, all Blacks, and everybody knew that the Blacks were coming. They would go to the Mosales store, I guess on a Friday when everybody got paid. They would all be sitting outside on the concrete base outside the store. And I remember, they’d have those big containers of ice cream and they were just eating that ice cream and it looked so good. I remember the Houston group and other people. But mostly, most of them were locals that would take care of it because there were so many out in the fields.

MR: So one question, I actually was thinking of when we were talking about tacos and the taquitos, who generally made those? Did they do so before, early in the morning, night before?

AC: Right. In my family, my big sister, Angelita, the one I told you about – the fastest cotton picker in the West – she would get up real early and make up a good lunch. I mean she would take a bowl of potato and meat cooked, and I don’t know how she kept it from spoiling. She would take care of that, but in the afternoon my mother would have, of course she was an older lady, would have the dinner ready for all, for everybody. I mean, there was like, I guess like 8 or 10 of us, including my brother-in-laws. And then I remember, one year the Alice group – I have cousins in Alice and my aunt decided she wanted them to work in the fields so she brought them over. I mean we were packed in our three room house with all my cousins, there were like 4 cousins, 5 cousins that came from Alice and they were all scattered on the floor. But they were picking cotton, but they never came back though. That was the one and only year I remember them. But that’s usually the case. The older matriarch would stay and cook the dinner, sometimes she would even cook the breakfast. But she would have the dinner ready for the cotton pickers when they were done – cause they were ready, they wanted to take a bath and eat.

MR: And she picked the fastest too. That’s impressive.

AC: Oh yeah, picking that cotton.

MR: So did she stop picking about the same time as when the mechanical cotton pickers came through?

AC: Right, right. That was the end. So after that she went into the pickles. And they went to around Ricardo, Riviera. They used to have a lot of cucumbers. It was cucumbers. And they

would pick cucumbers out there. I never experienced that. But every morning...and Diana, the little girl that beat me all the time, she was out there with her mother, picking that. Never complaining. She was out there working, picking that cucumbers. She amazed me.

MR: Did she go to school after the picking season?

AC: Well, I can't remember what month it was but it was a school time. And yes, she graduated from college also. So many of us. Yeah, we knew after spending our time in the field we would have to graduate – do something else to better ourselves.

MR: Do you have any other recollections or memories that you would like to share?

AC: That's about what I can remember. One thing, I met with...they asked me to talk to some kindergarten kids. I thought, how am I going to communicate with these kids? What do you tell them? But I didn't want to turn them down. So I went out there, and I thought, oh, I know what I can tell them. In Bishop we used to have – and they are extinct now, in Bishop anyway – the horned frog or horned toad. That was all over here in the Bishop, Alice area. The green-striped lizard that was so fast...it was fast! It has a name, I forget the name of that lizard. That you don't see anymore. They are gone. We still have the tarantulas. The tarantulas are everywhere around my house. I live along a creek and all that area there, at night I am working out or doing something and I see them crawling. But I don't know if you like tarantulas, but they are all over the place.

MR: They are neat looking. I am a little freaked out by them, not being from this area. I see them from time to time in Corpus, but not very frequently, just now and then.

AC: Every time I am out in the garden and I move a stone or something, and there they are! Their holes and their legs just sticking out. And I don't mess with them. Some people kill them, and I tell them they're not going to hurt. It's like a bee sting, it's not going to kill you. Not a tarantula anyway. But it probably scares the heck out of people to get stung by something so...But yeah, I just talked to the kids about how you don't see this anymore. It didn't make much of an impression on them. Their little minds were thinking of something else.

But that's about it.

Something my mind is going to...it had to be in West Texas. We hit a lot of rain. I'm talking about seeing things through a kid's eyes. And I remember the, what is that? Texaco? It had this red horse. With wings.... I remember seeing those all lit up as a kid. And that stayed with me. I thought, oh, look at that. That was somewhere in West Texas. And it was pouring rain. Well, I don't think they get too much or too many tornadoes out there. I don't know, but I do remember some kind of a shelter. The door would open, where we were staying, and there was a water well. We would go to the water well, it had a rope, and we would just get the water from there. That's what we would drink. I guess they had a papelote, a windmill to get the water to the well. We got used to it. I didn't get sick, I don't think.

That's about it.

