

South Texas Hispanic Farm Labor Communities Oral History Project

Interview with Rene Gayton

Interviewee: Rene Gayton

Interviewer: Mark Robbins

Corpus Christi, TX, August 1, 2013

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MR: Okay, that's recording. And just for the record, um, your name and um the date. Today is, I forget.

RG: 1 August

MR: Oh, yes August 1st. Thank you and um

RG: August 1, 2013. My name is Rene, R-E-N-E. Gayton, G-A-Y-T-O-N. My name -- I was brought up as a Hispanic. But the name is a Basque name, in the Northern, Western, Spain, and the Bosques have always been in conflict with the Spanish Government to get independence. I don't know much about that except what I read. But, yeah and I'm--was born and raised in Mission, Texas. I was born in 1940, so in December I'll be 73. My birth, date of birth is December 20, 1940.

MR: Okay

RG: So I'll be 73 in December. And I married, I've been married 47 years. My wife is a girl from Iowa, her folks were in the military and her background, her heritage background is English and German and Swedish and she--I met her in the service when I was in the military. She was a nursing student.

MR: All right.

RG: We have three children; two little girls and a son. And they are all, you know, they're all now with their families. Our youngest is a graduate of Texas A&M University and he has a degree of mathematics and a Master's, an MBA. And he's currently relocating from Sulphur Springs, Texas to come to teach at King High School. This next year

And our second daughter-- middle daughter-- middle child is a graduate of Texas A&M University with a degree in Agriculture Sciences. She also teaches in Pflugerville Elementary School, there in Austin, Texas

Our oldest daughter is a graduate of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi with a masters, from here Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, and a doctorate from the University of Phoenix. And she is a nurse, teaching nurse; in the College of Nursing at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

And my background goes back to Mission, Texas. As a nine year-old little kid learning how to work, working the fields. We worked mostly during the summer. My migrant experience would be coming, up from Mission over to Robstown, which is 20, 25 miles from here.

And we would sleep in barns and chicken shacks and we would come to Corpus Christi on the weekends and spend our time in North Beach. It was a big deal there because, you know, it used to be like a carnival. You know, just like they had the penny arcades and the, all the games and all the attractions that a carnival has. When we spend our weekends on North Beach on Sunday. That was a big deal then but we were probably-- we were working in the fields picking cotton. And, we would get paid so much perfect pound. Depending if the cotton was cleanly picked or picked with the husk and everything. They included the whole thing.

But the work entailed getting up early in the morning from sunup to sundown and work in the fields. Bend over pulling the sack, filling it up on cotton, weighing it going back out doing the same thing and um, you wouldn't get paid much. You might get \$1.75 to \$2.50 per hundred.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: And I was able to-- most of the time pick 500 pounds which was an unusual amount. They called that "quintero"; a 500 pound picker. I called an Olympic -- an Olympic grade. People...they go out in the sun like today

over 100, over 98 out there; we would be working. We didn't know the difference. We were raised poor but we didn't know that we were poor.

And, um, my dad and mom were married forever. And my dad lived until '92. He was a plumber's helper. And never did really -- he was a plumber later but he we would never receive his masters plumbers license because he only went to third grade. So he was never able to pass the exam that they gave in Austin because they gave it in English. Now currently, I think they give the exam in Spanish. So, he might have been able to pass it at the current time if he was to take a test.

My mom was just a housekeeper. She was -- when I say just, it's a lot of the weight because she had eight of us, siblings. She was always washing clothes or cooking; making tortillas and cooking beans. I mean it was a vicious cycle for her with eight kids.

MR: And when she-- when you were out in Robstown, and kind of staying in barns and places like that, did she prepare all those things?

RG: Mom would not pick. She would go with us and she would take care of making lunches and taking -- bringing stuff to the fields for us to eat.

And then from here after we picked all the crop in the area, we would move on the Victoria, Texas. And we used to stay in a place called The Shiner; Shiner Ranch. And I never met those folks afterwards but I remember going on Sundays to the Plaza; the court area in Victoria where all the pickers would, would pick and those were one of my first times to see a black person because they were also picking cotton. In this part of Texas and we were never exposed to black people until then. And then later, of course, when I grew up I ended up actually getting through grade school and junior, high school - two black friends of mine who came into the area, kind of grew up with us and eventually laundry Spanish just as well as we did. And, um, Leonard Caraway and Billy Bob Belfie. And they were just friends of ours. And there were more Hispanics than there were blacks in those days. Now the current blacks are very different.

You know, the population, the mannerism is very different now a days than Billy and Bob -- as Leonard and Billy were. But, um.

MR: So I'm curious,

RG: We, we worked with them.

MR: Yeah.

RG: And -- in Victoria we got to see that.

MR: And did you -- so you met African-Americans workers; black workers, was that at De Leon Plaza, in the main square?

RG: In Victoria,

MR: Yeah, in front of the courthouse?

RG: Well, in front of the courthouse, it's a weird deal because I remember years later when I was working for the Government as the Director of Business, sitting in the county judge's office and looking down on that courthouse, and I was taking care of business for the county judge for some of our agencies' space requirements. I handled space for -- office space, for our agencies. And the county provided us space in their courthouses or in their county buildings. And -- at times also we got to the point that we would lease buildings from private ownerships.

MR: Uh huh

RG: But I dealt a lot with court, in county judges and the county court members; the counsel people, the commissioners. And I dealt with them in different ways in different counties as the director of business. I was headquartered here, but when I went out to the field to take care of business, at times, you know, I would have to take care that kind of business with the county judges.

But it was weird because here I am sitting in an office and years ago I was down there as one of those cotton pickers.

(All laughing)

MR: Wow. Wow. That's -- that's

RG: That's weird isn't it?

MR: Great-full-of circle (Laughter by RG). And so in the square there, um, so when you weren't picking in...

RG: Well, this was just on weekends. That was just to go in and gather goods and take a day off and enjoy the shade and the availability of the space there. And allow us to go to movies and, you know, just for the weekends. But our main task of being out away from our home was to pick the cotton that was available or had to be picked. And then from Victoria, if we picked up all the crop early enough that we couldn't go back to school in Mission, in the Valley, return, then we go on from Victoria to Bay City, to pick cotton there. And a progression, like a migrant.

MR: Yeah

RG: Like a tour. You know, we would go work there. And there is probably the, where we slept in the worse places; chicken coops, that we had to fix and make them adaptable to be able to survive in these conditions. But we never,

MR: Yeah

RG: We never had any objection. Because we don't know the difference. Just like a poor person doesn't know the difference that he's -- you understand, that he's poor. And, I've never known, I never knew, didn't know the difference of having an indoor bathroom.

MR: Uh huh

RG: Our bathrooms were outside. You know, a hole in the ground in an outhouse. You know, where people that live in the city like this, even though they don't have -- they may have - be in the same economic situation that I was in as a child. The city doesn't provide, doesn't allow because of the codes, doesn't allow an outhouse out back. They have to have some kind of English toilet. That's just what it is. Which was invented by a guy, an English guy, you know, "John Crapper."

(Laughter)

RG: You probably know that already, or did you know that? You did know that?

MR: I like that one, yeah.

RG: You don't know that one?

MR: I've heard that one. Yeah, yeah it still makes me chuckle, it doesn't get old. So when you were migrating around, to those, primarily those three locations, where you with all of your brothers and sisters? Did you all kind of work in the fields together?

RG: Well, my older brothers by then were already in the military.

MR: Okay

RG: Um, they were older brothers, but I hate to say this but some of my brothers they didn't work as hard as I did.

MR: Okay

RG: My uncle would say, "no, this skinny little kid he picks cotton." These other guys sleep under the truck. And to kind of an analogy, I think my brothers continued sleeping under the truck and I was out there working. In real life, it was the same way because I was the first one to, to complete my college studies. And be able to, um do better than my parents, you know, I didn't set the world on fire, but I graduated from high school in 1960.

And in 1960, when I went to college, on an athletic scholarship, I was on the only Hispanic in the whole college.

MR: Oh wow

RG: In 1960. Not in 2013.

MR: Yeah.

(Laughter)

RG: And so, um, but in those days, Hispanics weren't allowed in certain restaurants. In certain country clubs; certain places. Certain private establishments but because my name is Rene Gayton, and not Joe Rodriguez,

MR: Uh huh

RG: They did not understand, maybe they didn't know that I was Hispanic so I played along with the golf team. In all the country clubs that we were scheduled to go play and compete. This -- it's kind of interesting because if it was otherwise, I may not have been allowed to participate in tournaments because of the prejudice.

And--but I remember my first year, my first year of college, I got back from home and I dad didn't want me to go to college. He didn't understand it. He wanted me to go to work. What the kind of work can you do if you're just a college graduate? You're gonna have good grades, you know, they're not going to hire you, but for a \$1 an hour somewhere in those days because your Hispanic. Another is, you look at alternatives and you say I want to do more than just be a plumber, pick cotton or work somewhere when -- I want to see something different.

And, um, another factor in my life is that I was never a Catholic. So when I would go on to church as a child, we would sing the hymns in Spanish and all the hymns are by syllables. So you learn how to read Spanish, eventually you learn how to write it. Of course, you learn how to speak it. You know, and so that was just a thing that evolves not realizing that is evolving within you, that you're learning that. That you're learning a lot more basic skills in life, you know, as you - to go to church and, you see, strive, and you end up learning courtesy and obedience and tenacity and perseverance and things like that. In life that life gives you and sometimes you don't realize that you're learning that

MR: Uh huh

RG: And you're learning not to quit. You learn to see a difference, how come that guy lives over there on that side of town and I live over here? You know what I mean

MR: Yeah

RG: But the game of golf, if a little kid shoots 69 you can't just sit him on the bench, like in the game of baseball, football. I mean, I've experienced the quarterback in our football team. He was the quarterback because his dad was the member of the educational board, the board of education.

MR: Uh huh

RG: Where my friend was a better quarterback, but a friend of mine, his dad used to be a mechanic or something else, but because this man's son or the man was the member of the Board of Education, his son was the quarterback.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: You had to see this.

MR: Yeah.

RG: But in the game of golf, they can't ignore a kid who shoots 69, 70 and even par.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: You can't just say, well, he's Mexican. So he can't make the team

MR: Yeah.

RG: You know what I mean. (Laughter)

MR: Yeah.

RG: It's weird. And I laugh about it, it's just weird. I mean I don't, I'm not, I don't have any hard feelings about that sort of thing because it existed. It will be - it's a sorry situation when it does, when it happens.

MR: So, when you were -- on the topic of education there, given that you had to move from Robstown to Victoria to Mission, at what point were you able to go to school? Did you have to show up to school kind of later in the semester?

RG: Sometimes – no, most of the time, because my dad, even though he later on wanted me to graduate and get a job, he was pretty adamant about us being in school on time.

MR: Uh huh

RG: So we might miss a week or so at beginning of the school year. But most of the time we were there to start. There back in these days was September 1st.

MR: Okay.

RG: That's when school started, and so the whole the crew - my uncle was the trucker. So he was -- he would bring us all back. And they had the same kind of philosophy. And if he wanted people to come continue working somewhere else, he would go back out and out in town that they were, they were working, he'd go back over there. But we would bring us back, you know, in his truck. But most of the time everybody came back, um, but they were a lot of families I know that, from the areas that I mentioned, they would go on to Lubbock, Texas. They used to call it Lubbocka instead of Lubbock, they used to slang, Texas -- Tejano slang. You know, they would go, and pick cotton over there and then, there's where they really ran into the prejudice.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: You know, the different signs and things of that nature that the Mexicans are not allowed here, and whatever. But my experience was not in that far, I mean, I know kids that would come back in October and November to school, and by then they lost a lot. So the value of education and the parents determines the success that kids used to have.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: And the same thing today, it's unbelievable to me, that in 2013, there's still people that don't value education. The way even my dad did.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: It's just unbelievable. And I see the worst now because I'm thinking the rate of the wars and all those kinds of things is just ---

MR: Yeah.

RG: And then just the people don't value education -- the thing its going on to continue ---

(Laughter). We won't go into politics here. Because, you know, everybody wants to be the same.

MR: Yeah.

RG: But we can't be the same. Just like I picked more cotton than my brothers. Picked more cotton than someone else. I succeeded different than they did. You can't help that. We can't all be the same. You know, it's impossible because you're also going to have your poor. Poor in spirit, poor in wealth and poor in blessings, because that's just the way it turns out...

MR: Yeah, oh. Well, um

RG: We would come back

MR: Sure, sure, sure. No, this is all very, very interesting and relevant information to me and um, I'm curious too, since you'd been to a few different places, how did it come about where you'd stay? I don't know if you would remember that as a kid.

RG: Well, the um, the owner of the farm

MR: Okay

RG: You know, the Gringo

MR: Yeah

RG: The owner of the, the uh, the land, the agriculturalist or whatever you want to call him, would have a place for us. In Robstown, there was barn that we slept at. It's been torn down since, I was able to take my kids when they were teenagers, take them over and show them that place. It was right there off Lincoln Street near the railroads in Robstown. And they tore that

down, but we slept there. Okay. In Victoria I was never really able, really make an effort to find out where Mr. Shiner had his ranch but I had heard there was a ranch there when I, when I worked in my career, my government job took me to places all over this part of the area. I had a region that I was responsible for. From Port La Vaca to Victoria, Hallettsville --you know, Gonzales and at one time when I was divisional director in San Antonio, I had everything from Port La Vaca all the way to Del Rio. I had an area of 80 buildings; I was in charge of the leasing and taking care of the buildings, doing that work, facility management. And I, handle the leases, the contracts. I didn't have a lessee, the Austin people did, but I was the regional person, the project manager man – when we built a building I was there to review and to make sure that things were made to -- made to compliance. But as far as going back to the--- thing the owner of the location would determine where we slept. He told us, “well, you’re going to sleep here,” and Mr. Shiner always had a group of rooms and places like that he fixed up for us. He was always nice, you know. I'm not sure what ever happened to him. He was; it was one of the nicer places.

MR: Did, um, do you have a lot of interaction with the farm owners, like Mr. Shiner--?

RG: No, like I said I was just a kid, I was 13, 14, and 15. The one time I know in Bay City there was a young kid who - family member of the owner- he and I became good friends. I don't know what ever happened to those folks because, you know, I've always been kind of an extrovert, and um, just and I guess he, maybe he was the only child I don't know. But I was the one working in the fields and he, he was the one at home. We ride horses once in a while together after the day was over. We worked late into the day. It's funny because I remember one night coming back home in Mission, we had just fished picking cotton. It was late at night and, um, my dad said that someone had come by looking for me. And this was after baseball season, for little league or pony league was over. Even though I still worked, I was still participating in sports late in the afternoon. We'd run out there and participate in this and that. And, of course, the person looking for me was the coach for the All Star team.

He was looking for me so I could go practice with the All Star group because I had been picked. And my dad took to the park. That was the only

time I was ever given a ride to the park by my dad. He didn't stick around to see what was going on. You know, you just have to just -- you grow up.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: Those kinds of things. But then, that's the standard normal thing. I never was angry about that. I just know that it happened. Now that, I'm at my age, I understand, well I don't know, he never saw me play baseball. And I was an All Star player. He never saw me play football and I lettered on the football team. He never knew anything about my golf. He knew something but he didn't really understand that.

My golf experience came as a caddy, working at the golf course. The first year that I played golf, I went on a scholarship. Like I said earlier, he wanted me to go to work so, but anyhow, it was wasn't going to cost him any money. That's why I think it would have been his main concern because he didn't have. But he made \$35 bucks a week. You know, and, um, I came back the first year and he asked how, how did college go? I said, well, I picked up 31 semester hours. 31 semester hours in a year. He didn't understand any of that, okay. And he said, what about that golf stuff? I said, well our varsity won the national championship. And again, it didn't dawn on him, and so he asked me we, well, do they pay for that?

(Laughter)

RG: If my kid had been part of national championship team, I'd be out there (inaudible) buying shirts. You know, it's weird, but you go through this but you're not, you don't get angry over it. You just, you have a mixed feeling and it's a bitter sweet feeling. That, um, you know what happened; it could have been better. And you wonder, man, I did okay but I could have done better, had had some support.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: My wife tells me I was born 20 years too early. Because I played good enough to be in the national level, but, of course I was more concerned about getting an education, having a career. And, for every, I guess for every success out in the golf world maybe a thousand that don't make it.

(Laughter)

RG: I'd have been looking for work or something.

MR: Right. Right. Well, I, I did notice in the, um, yeah there are college age people on the PGA tour and one that won the John Deere recently, was he 19 or 20, or something?

RG: He dropped out of Texas

MR: Yeah, yeah. I didn't realize that. Yeah, so you never know.

RG: Yeah, but the work itself, was hard work. You, um, you tear up your hands because if you ever looked at a boll of cotton before, when it's green and when it opens, it opens, it's got those stickers on the ends. Cotton is now exposed. So in order to pick it clean, you go in and have to pick it from, the, um, what would you call that? A boll.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: Or if you're picking it up dirty, you pick up the whole thing. They don't pay as much because it's going to weigh a lot more.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: But, um, you tear up your hands, you wear gloves and a special sack, you would put a wire on mouth of the sack and the sacks come in eight footers but then we add four more feet to make it a 12-footer. So that we put more stuff in there we wouldn't have to come in every, so many hours unload. We'd just be able to put more stuff, cotton and carry it sometimes to the truck and get back. You know, here you are carrying 75 to 100 pounds of cotton to the truck in the heat. We didn't have any fat on us, it was all muscle. You either did it or didn't do it. It just the way it is.

MR: Did you recall anybody kind of getting injured or too sore from it to be able to work at any point or just kind of power through?

RG: Not really.

MR: Yeah. Um,

RG: We were still kids. I mean. I didn't pick cotton after the age of 17.

MR: Okay

RG: Because, um. I worked in the summers somewhere else. And of course, when you're a senior in high school, you know, graduated, Mission High School in 1960 and it was either a blessing in disguise that I got a scholarship because I played golf for four years. I lettered four years, went to the state finals three out of four years. You know, to play in the state finals...And um my golf coach never thought about helping me get a scholarship.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: My counselors did. Provide counselling. They'd counsel the kids. The doctor's kid...he doesn't need counseling, the doctor already knows where he's going to send him. You know, in other words, there was a lot of questions in how they did those things. I mean, even now, I have my doubts about counselors because they don't counsel them right; with the kids in high school. They try to teach them, when with you ask them questions, they don't know anything lots of times. That's totally strange; in this part of the country, anyway. But, um, we had some new coaches coming in and they were looking for my brother to come and get to know him, so he could work with them during the summer. Because my brother ran the 100 yard dash in 10.1, I think. World class, I mean in my eyes. But he was picking cotton; he was up here in Bishop. With an aunt. And so they picked him up to work with them and he'd work with them and so they asked me if I wanted to help out with the summer program, which is blowing the whistle, taking kids to the gym and so I was totally [inaudible]. Acquainted, rather, with the gym and the high school and then, you know, small town 3A school. And so yeah, I told them yeah I'm real familiar with all of that because I played football and this and that. Well, when I was working with these coaches for the six weeks, the first week these guys, the coaches went to play some golf. And I said, "oh you're playing golf." "Yeah, in the afternoons." "So when y'all go next time, do you mind if I go?" He said, "oh, you play golf?" I said, "Yeah. I was on the golf team." So I went with them and after the first day one of the coaches came up and he says, "you know, when we come out here, we golf. But you play golf. It's a big difference."

MR: Uh huh.

RG: So yeah, I did this. So I played a few more times with them, the remainder of the period of the program. Before the end of the program, unbeknownst to me, he had sent a letter to the athletic director, one of the universities – Lamar, in Beaumont. And I already had - and the athletic director sent me my letter with it actually told me - asked me to go try out for the golf team. And a train ticket. So that's how my golf career in college started from a guy who didn't know me.

(Laughter)

RG: The name is Gene Sharp.

MR: All right.

RG: Coach Gene Sharp. Nice guy.

MR: Yeah.

RG: I never got to, to say thank you to him. Even in the later years. I was never able to contact him. But he's passed on. But my, my experience in the cotton patch is bitter sweet. You know, it's, um, you're working and people ask you, "Hey, what did you do this summer, man?" I was out there working. "Well, I went to camp."

MR: Yeah.

RG: You know. I have a grandson, who, four weeks, three weeks ago, was on his way to France. His mom and dad saying for three weeks, and I told him "Philip," Philip is his name. "You're the same age I was when I was picking cotton; here you're going to France." I was picking cotton....big difference in generations, isn't it?

MR: Yeah. When you were in Robstown, another question that occurred to me, on the fields you worked on, were they picked only by the individuals you're staying with...?

RG: Right

MR: Or were there other migrants that stayed at other places?

RG: Well, the owner of the land, whose crop was being picked, would contract with a trucker.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: And they would decide how much was a rate per pound, per hundred or, and we would be assigned to pick the crop in certain fields.

MR: Okay.

RG: If he had other fields somewhere else in the area, he would more likely contract with some other trucker who had a group of pickers. My uncle would bring us and some other families to come up and pick.

MR: Yeah.

RG: We wouldn't just bring anybody. He would someone who was gonna work. There's no sense in bringing a family that's not going to work. You know what I mean?

MR: Yeah.

RG: In other words, if--I'm not gonna spend my time bringing you if you're not going to pick cotton. It's like me picking a team. I am not going pick you on my team if you're not going to be a good player. So, so that was what was determined. So he has certain families. And other truckers would do the same. And they would be picking different fields throughout the whole area. Chapman Ranch, [inaudible], we used to call it. They still call it Champaigno because it's a slang; Tex-Mex slang.

And there was a lot of homes built there. Several years ago you could have driven out there and be seen all these little houses on the park. You know how they, they've done away all those. But that's where those, old cotton pickers from Chapman Ranch used to sleep. It was late; they had a lot of area to pick.

MR: Yeah, yeah.

RG: In those days. Now they pick the cotton with machines. And, um, of course cotton is kind of crop that you can't plant it in the same field, the same year after year. You've got to switch it.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: Because the cotton itself has so much minerals or whatever. It, it, sucks the minerals or whatever in the land. So they switch agricultural crops when they, when they plant these crops... Now, nowadays, they there's a lot of sorghum out there.

MR: Yeah.

RG: Less cotton, more sorghum. Because they have more artificial, the fibers that mix up with cotton; it's not just a cotton world.

MR: Did you recall - and maybe this is the wrong timeframe - but did you recall any discussion from either pickers or even the farm owners or managers that - about kind of the influence of technology and, any anxieties over how that might displace work or was that not really point of discussion?

RG: No, no we never got involved with that because

MR: Okay

RG: Um, mostly because of the education level of people

MR: Okay

RG: They were just to do one, to do one task. If there were machines being considered for picking, you know, it was something that came long later.

MR: Okay

RG: Much, much later then when I was a kid.

MR: Another question occurred to me - Robstown, do you recall the Robstown migrant labor camp there at all, or interacting with anybody from that camp or spending...?

RG: I remember, um, a, the Bracero Camp. They used to bring Braceros from across to pick cotton. Because in certain camps, certain parts of country like in Eagle Pass, Texas, which is up the river towards Del Rio. They had Bracero camps. They had Bracero camps in, in the valley. Braceros were the people from Mexico being brought in, to do, to do the crops. And, um, how they were contracted, how they were given assignments to work, how they were distributed in the fields, I'm not aware of.

MR: Okay

RG: You know, it was something as a kid you don't--we were never told that. The only analogy or sample that I have of the Bracero camps, is, years and years ago, maybe a century ago, almost a century, when the King Ranch was being developed, all this land that certain land owners have, they actually acquired it in different means, different ways. Purchase, stolen, fraud or whatever from the people that were here originally

MR: Uh huh.

RG: You know, I don't know exactly how it happened. But I know that many times they, um, Mexican person, owner or landowner would sell the land and on his way to the bank he'd get killed.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: Taking his money and then he already lost his land. I mean it's just crazy some of the stuff they did. I am not, um, saying that's what happened with the King Ranch.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: But, um, the King Ranch at one time had some, some kind of program, too that they went to Mexico. To little towns where the town were in need of jobs. And they offered them work and schools and offered them to bring them to Texas so they could work the King Ranch.

And you go back in history; the King Ranch had their own schools. Had their own cabins for the people that lived on the King Ranch. So they were in a sense the Braceros program, but they were not there to pick

cotton in the King Ranch. Those Mexicans were there to, to take care of cattle, clear the King Ranch and it's the same essence of work - they were brought, so they could work and the Bracero Camps were the same way. Of course, what happens, the people, workers ended up staying in the country, you know.

It's like today when you travel, if you travel -- my experience in traveling everywhere from Michigan to Minnesota all the way to the West. Utah, Wyoming, California, you see Hispanics working everywhere. Not just Mexicans, they're Latinos, Hispanic. People from all the southern states or countries of South America and some Cubans. And, they're all working different jobs. Now, you don't see too many blacks working. You don't see very many whites working. Because those jobs are beneath them. Yet the Government is saying, "well these guys are taking over our jobs." Well, if you go and clean up and throw everybody across that fence, I don't know what's going to happen to this country. It's just like in Alabama basically. This is off the record, of course.

MR: You want me to go off the record?

RG: No, no, no. Not off the record. Not pertinent to,

MR: Yeah

RG: To, the, um, cotton pickers, or whatever, the migrant work program. But, Alabama wanted to get rid of all Hispanics. Well, they did, they moved out. And all the farms, the people that owned the farms said, "Hey, whose going to [inaudible] our work? [inaudible] So they hired local guys. They came in at 9 and left at 2.

(Laughter)

RG: This is not working out.

MR: I guess. You reap what you sew. Yeah I read something like that

RG: It's weird.

MR: It's very interesting.

RG: So anyhow

MR: Yeah.

RG: Maybe I'm saying too much.

MR: (laughter). No, no, no. I think it's an interesting lesson and, um, so what, what would you say were the most -- you mentioned some of the things already, but the most difficult and maybe the most enjoyable aspects of your memory in working the fields either here or in Victoria?

RG: I was just a child. So I was told to go pick cotton and I did.

MR: Yeah.

RG: I obeyed my mom and dad. I didn't, wasn't crazy about it but it was work that, um, you just took with a grain of salt. It was something that you did it. And not with a grain of salt but it was something you expect, you accepted, because it was a way of life. You never questioned it until maybe now kids won't even go out there. They're too independent. Too free thinkers. The word is slacked, all these machines and, you know the computer and iPads and all that. That's informed people and that's what happening in the rest of the world, in Europe (inaudible). The young kids are finding out, say, "hey, wait a minute all these rulers are giving us the wrong information here, about whatever... So, in a way, in life these people with information, to get (inaudible) so independent that you have, that, too opinionated to do what your told to do by your elders. You know. So are the parents now a days, it's crazy. No, I wouldn't have wanted to sue my parents because they told me go pick cotton. It is just part of, you know, we all did it. And it's honest work. You didn't get paid much but, um, we get up early in the morning.

I remember my dad waking me up and telling me, "hey son, come on wake up, the truck is coming. The truck is coming." That truck was never late. (Laughter) When I married my wife, and we had kids, as I joke I would ask the kids, "go tell mom the truck is coming." (Laughter) She'd be asleep. Like on weekends, you know, getting ready to go out to breakfast or cook breakfast together because I believe, I was pretty strict with my kids. You have to, I wasn't abusive, I was strict so they could follow and learn how to do chores around the house. Kids don't do that too much anymore.

Apparently, it's work to do that; to get the kids to do that. So parents don't even want to work doing that. So they let it fly, fly. And then eventually it comes back to bite you in the butt because these kids never learned discipline; never learned to obey their parents. You know, I'm just asking you to rinse the dishes. Do the wash, cut the grass. I'm not asking you to go pick cotton. You know, even though could take you out to the patch. (Laughter). So you'd really learn what work is, you know.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: I'd threaten them that way once in a while, but, no, we did because it was part of our culture. And we didn't know the difference.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: If I had known that I could have slept -- where am I going to go? There's no other way. My parents went to third grade. They had a third grade education. And, um, to us, you know, we didn't -- we were just kids.

MR: Yeah

RG: Just like, you expect kids to know a lot more today because of the electronic - and all the information that's out there. But you'd be surprised how very little they know. It's right there. Me, it wasn't in front of me because I raised without indoor plumbing. I was raised without a telephone. I was raised without a television. We played outside, that's all we did.

MR: Did you ever have time to play outside since I know I worked from sunup I mean sundown?

RG: Well, there was long days...

MR: Did you, um...?

RG: Well, I participated in sports, played baseball after coming from work.

MR: Okay

RG: Coming from work, I would still go out there.

MR: Okay

RG: And, it wasn't -- and when the cotton patch -- before the cotton season started, we would, we would participate, we would play, participate in little league. But, um, my, my (inaudible) experience is limited. Compare to other people that that went all the way from South Texas to Lubbock to Oregon to other places. They were just unbelievable to me, how can we be gone so long? Those guys were (inaudible) by their elders. But their elders didn't understand, they needed education. That's why we have a difference in diversity of understanding and education now. You know, and um, how a person handles his money is, is a big factor in how he succeeds. You know, I want to handle my money a different way than maybe the guy across the street or even though he makes good money doesn't know how to handle it because, managing, because he doesn't understand, he hasn't been exposed to finance [?]. You know, money managers, some people that you meet and he didn't have that exposure. He's too busy maybe just, maybe whatever -- in order to invest, you have to make sacrifices.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: You have to limit what you can do at home. We say yeah, we can go on all these trips and buy all this stuff but we're not investing, we're not saving any.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: Maybe, that's the problem nowadays with some families.

MR: Yeah. I think it is.

RG: They don't sacrifice. They want -- if they can't say no to their kids. I'm, you know

MR: Yeah.

RG: Of course, in my case my dad, only, like I said, made so much a week. We was just -- with eight kids.

MR: Wow. That's --

RG: It's tough.

MR: Yeah. I can only imagine.

RG: Yeah.

MR: And, and so you were working in the summertime, six days out of the week, and then you mentioned...?

RG: Most of the time it was five days out of week.

MR: Five days and

RG: Uh huh.

MR: You mentioned going to North Beach

RG: Maybe, and, um, Saturday mornings we would work.

MR: Okay

RG: We were on the road.

MR: Okay

RG: Saturday mornings for me was the time that, my mom would say, all you pick on Saturday morning is yours.

MR: Oh, wow.

RG: In other words, if I pick 200 pounds on Saturday morning because I really hustled, what I picked, what I was paid for that would be mine. The thing is, she still [would] give us a little allowance but that was something I could count on. It all depends on the families. Because you have to reward one way or another.

I know friends of mine that they never did this. They never learned discipline. They never learned hard work. They never went -- understood that. Man. You're going to high school; it's free education, take advantage of it. Even today, go to the high school, listen to the language. (Laughter)

MR: You know

RG: Something's going on here in America. You got it made and you don't even know it.

MR: It's, it's -- on that the language is interesting. I know it's kind of neither here nor there but if you flip open a book of Texas laws in 1925, I was just kind of cruising through, and there's one on there, of course, the telephone was relatively, you know, not quite as omnipresent as today, but there was a law against swearing on the telephone. And I thought, oh my gosh, if you put that out in the school hallway today, whoever is collecting that fine would be rich with all the -- but, yeah, I just thought that was funny, given, given what you mentioned there. But, yeah, so that's interesting that on Saturday mornings that was sort of the allowance time.

Then you mentioned, going to North Beach for the carnival at least while you were in Robstown. Did a lot of other farm worker families go there?

RG: Oh, yeah. I mean the place would be full. Anybody, anybody that has some history in that -- Murphy Givens. I think he would, he would have a lot more information, on, on going to the beach. It was a drawbridge

MR: Yeah

RG: Instead of the Harbor Bridge, we have now. It was a drawbridge. We had to wait in lines and all the trucks and all the little Picaninnies and all the Mexicans, little kids (inaudible), you know, whatever families went. It was amazing. It was just like a bunch of bees, you know. They were just trying situate themselves and take advantage of the cool water and that kind of thing.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: We didn't have AC. We didn't know the difference of being hot. I mean we slept on the truck in the evenings and it was full of cotton and in the mornings the trucker would take the cotton to the gin and bring another trailer. And he would take a trailer, that's what we slept on. They'd hook up his trailers to his trucks, and we just take the trailer and leave there and

come back and um - an empty trailer on the field so we can fill it back up with cotton. And, um, but it was on the weekends mostly.

MR: Yeah.

RG: That was kind of our time

MR: Yeah. And, um, so a lot of, migrant workers then went, that's interesting. Um, just out of curiosity, do you remember like the swimming pool? I've seen pictures of it, the swimming pool they had there out at beach and there was like a "crazy house" and

RG: Well, they had the penny arcades, they had the, you know, the merry-go-round and they had the, what is that thing? The -- of course the games. Of course, everybody picked a spot on the beach, you know. And, um, I don't remember any, any pool, out on the beach.

MR: Okay. That might have been before...

RG: That could have been, could have been before, or could have been - young; too young, to see this. But see, what happened with me is that, is my -- as I got older, from the time I was 15, I wouldn't come -- my mom wouldn't come with us anymore. I would come with an aunt and uncle. And neighbors who were going, coming up here and pick and I would come with them as a 15 year-old. And save my money that way. You know, um, they would feed me and I would pay them a certain amount for taking care of me for the week. My laundry and things I would have to do myself. So it's a lot of things that you learn that you know that--you don't know that you're learning.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: You know, but -- and then you see. You see a person can, can look at something and not see. You can look at somebody the way they live but not see how they live. And I was always, I always had the insight of being able to see that and wonder, how come they're doing that and I can't? You know, I always questioned, not questioning in a rebellious way, just being inquisitive about it.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: And so, I don't know, my wife tells me that, you know, I just have a knack for that. But, you know, I raised my kids to kind of be the same way. And I have friends who didn't. I have friends that went to prison that -- you know, that died there. Because, I was -- just walking through the crosswalk sometime and they went one way and I went another way -- we just had our different paradigms in our lives.

MR: Yeah.

RG: It's a -- the actual work in the fields; we never used any sun --

MR: Yeah

RG: Sunscreen, anything like that because it was not available. We used long shirts, long sleeve shirts. Can you imagine how hot it would be?

MR: I can only imagine

RG: You know. And you're on your knees. And you buy these things--knee--knee guards. And those cases, they are made out of leather. And, if you have ever seen one of those, they're pretty rugged. And to wear-out one of those in the summer, that's a lot kneeling. Because when we would get on our knees -- and the row of cotton, the plant of cotton is just a certain height, then you get on your knees and do that -- pick two rows. You pick one row as you go and by the time you got -- you pick here and the truck is over there, you pick two rows, you could fill up that sack by the time you get there. But if you got over there and came back to fill it then then you got carry that sack back over to the scale. The truck, they have a weigh, so, you have to drag that dumb thing, and pulling it. And, um, pick cotton and just throw it in. You don't have to open that that mouth of that sack because it's got a wire on it, we put that in there. And that, I would do. Other people wouldn't do that, but I did, because it would allow me to be able to do things faster.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: Sometimes, you know, since I talked to you, I thought about some of these things I did. I used to do

MR: Yeah

RG: I never - I guess I never forget them. But it was hard work. You use denim, you use jeans, and, um, wear out a pair of pants, all torn up, and now they sell those pants at Abercrombie & Fitch for \$80.

MR: Right.

RG: Because everybody wants to wear something like that.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: What kind of mentality does that?

MR: I never understood that.

RG: -- never understood that.

MR: Yeah. I, I don't understand that either.

RG: It's just a difference in, wow, people

MR: Did you -- you mentioned tearing up your hands, did you ever wear gloves or did that --

RG: Definitely. Yeah, wore gloves and um -- they were cheap gloves, of course. Because they didn't any (inaudible) and sometimes what, in order to be more efficient with those gloves, you took a chance of -- you cut the tips off. So you can be able to handle the cotton boll, to pull it out of the, um, that pod that it was growing in, so.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: And then, of course when you picked it all dirty, you wouldn't do that to your hands. And, um, so that was -- like I said, you can take the whole boll and throw it in there. They would weigh it, they would have to, um, and um, it was a process of -- when you first pick -- sometimes you had a field and you went and picked the cotton clean.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: Okay, and then a second crop came along, then that's when you picked the dirt; picked the whole husk thing. Sometimes that would -- depending on what the farmer wanted, how he wanted it picked, they get it taken care of.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: And, um, have you ever seen a cotton boll plant?

MR: I have, yeah, yeah. I've never picked. Um, so, but, yeah.

RG: It's a green bulb that grows. When it opens, the cotton, the cotton itself has a bunch of seeds.

MR: Yeah.

RG: It has to be ginned. Well, now they do all kinds of, products, byproducts from the seeds - get oil out of it. I'm not exactly sure, but, um, the bulb when it opens, those little ends stick out like stickers. They're strong, tear up your hand. Um, but we'll sleep in, in barns. Always set up a shower where we could shower. We improvised.

MR: Yeah.

RG: You know.

MR: Did you develop a lot of relationships or friendships with other families?

RG: Yes, we did. But it was just, um, causal and we were - kind of just always take it, take it for granted that (inaudible) people that we knew, um, we were working. It's not like we were at camp.

MR: Yeah.

RG: You know. And, um, at night what we would do for entertainment, we would play bingo. And not the kind of bingo that you're used to, the Mexican Bingo with the cards. Have you ever heard of that one?

MR: No, no. Tell me about that.

RG: Oh, really? Oh, yeah, what it is, is a, it's a deck of cards that has different figures on it, like a parrot, to a drum, to a plant, to an umbrella, and you know, and then the card itself would have all these pictures, all these different icons. As we call them now. And as you drew the cards, you know -- well, I got this, this, of course, you had to have a row and that kind of thing. That's how we entertained ourselves. And what we would do is throw pennies in the pot. You got the big (inaudible), got the whole pot.

MR: Alright.

RG: And, flip the cards over again and, you know, and that's the kind of bingo games we'd played at night. Not poker or gamble in that way. It was kind of a family thing. It was pennies; still there was always a chance of the element of risk; the element of, you know, just something. Um, it's rare when people do things just for fun. In my case, I never played, for instance, when I played golf in high school and college, most of the time we had little bet on the side, for money. I never played for fun until I got older. Maybe ten, fifteen years ago; ten years ago. I never knew how to play for fun. When I played really good golf, for instance, I was playing for big money. I didn't care if you lost (inaudible), you know, it's your business.

MR: (Laughter).

RG: That kind of thing. (Laughter). Yeah, but that's just golf. But in the risk -- that's what we played at work when we would all get together; "Hey, let's, you know, and so," and then we call it a night and go to sleep and the next morning get up early and go to work

MR: So when - you mentioned that you picked until you were 17 - when did you?

RG: 16, 16

MR: 16, 17 around - when did you start migrating to these places in the summer and picking in the fields?

RG: Just about, a maybe a week or two after the, after high school was over. After school was over for the school year.

MR: Oh, yeah. And what, what age -- yeah

RG: Oh, me, I was 10, 10, when my mom... Now, my dad would always stay behind because he had a full time -- a job. But he would send us out to supplement the income.

MR: Okay. What were your first impressions, if you recall them, like the first time that you went out there and kind of learned how to do it?

RG: Well, it's funny, because I know some friends of mine that I was telling that I was going to meet with you regarding this, and they would say, "Yeah, I don't remember, I wanted to go with everybody else in the neighborhood. They were going to do this and I wanted to go too." And then mom and dad says, "no, you don't -- you don't know what you're getting into when you go work... You just don't want, you know -- all you want to is eat your sandwich and come home. You're not going to do that, these people are going to go work." He was the, you know, people that were better off that way.

One of the biggest things though that - impressions or that -- we, we never knew that we were poor. We just knew that -- what we did. Only until you find a different class of, of people. And, um, exposed to that do you realize that you're - number 1 you may be poor, number 2 you might be wearing used clothes that have holes in them. You know, all the prejudices come along with, with getting exposed to different areas, different (inaudible). But those kinds of things never bothered us. And, um, even school. Our elementary education was funny when I went to school, I didn't know any Spanish. I had to go to beginning class, beginning grade. So when I graduated from high school, I was 19 years old. I wasn't dumb, but I was not, I didn't have the advantage. This is what really; just -- blows my mind now. They got it made, don't even know it; these kids. And I'm the kind of guy that I'll walk up to a group of kids and say, "how y'all doing? So where are you going to be in ten years?" (Laughter). "Who are you, you know?" Hey, because I'm -- I have an idea what it's all about. I'm not saying I'm trying an impression. No, I'm really, trying to wake them up.

MR: Yeah, yeah.

RG: Because, some, some are (inaudible).

MR: Yeah, can only help, um, to be thinking about those things at that age.

RG: What would you like to be? You know, that kind of thing.

MR: Yeah.

RG: Never thought about that. Well, yeah, I mean are you taking advantage of your education, because you're getting it free. A lot of people don't understand, you know. So they go to school and all it is just a fashion show.

MR: Yeah. And I-- you know, a lot at Del Mar...sort of, later in life, um, individuals who will tell me at that stage they hadn't really realized what education meant and then 10, 15 years sometimes more years later are coming back, and then I think there's also something about paying for it even its taxpayers supported as well, but also paying tuition. So many of my students care so much about their education and will tell me that they hadn't quite realized that when, you know, the age that would have been ideal...

RG: I talk to my kids now.

MR: Yeah.

RG: I get involved with, trying to them out with - one way or the other. One of the things that I tell them, I said, "do you realize the difference between a college graduate and a high school graduate?" I said now a days, you hear very few people don't graduate from high school but they're out; kids that have problems. And a lot of it has come from their parents because the schools aren't meant to teach you discipline and, and -- you learn that at home.

MR: Uh huh.

RG: You learn or don't learn that at home, then you got two strikes against you. But you take a college kid who's got kids that graduate from college, and on the norm makes 20 to 25 thousand a year more than the guy who didn't; on the norm. I'm not saying, just because as you graduated from

college you're gonna have a career. You got to work at it. You just don't fall of a truck and become successful.

MR: Right.

RG: You know, on the norm, okay, 20,000 a year, work for 25 years, that's half a million dollars.

MR: Yeah.

RG: I mean, so what can one person do with half a million dollars more than, than the other guy who doesn't have it? No. 1, educate your kids, if you believe in that. You live better, better home, better way of life. So why can't, you know, my case, in my case, why can't I do it -- like my buddies did. And it's amazing, because some of my friends would have the advantage; Anglo friends. They didn't do as well as I did. And I started way down here. Why? Maybe they had the same ideas of kids now a days, they're given too much. Their entitled to something. Nobody is entitled to anything. Deserve has nothing to do anything with life. You don't deserve anything (inaudible)... You know, it's just amazing. That's - that has nothing to do with migrant work stuff.

MR: Well, do you have any other things that you would like to share in regards to, um...

RG: No, I've taken enough of your time, I think.

MR: Oh, no. This is a privilege for me and for those that will benefit from it as well - learning from it. But, yeah, if there any, any other things you want to share or, or I can stop the recording here.

RG: Right now I can't think of anything.

MR: Okay. Well, great. I really appreciate. I'll stop that right there.