

South Texas Hispanic Farm Labor Communities Oral History Project

Interview with Sulema Longoria, Tomas Longoria and Robert Villarreal

Principle interviewees: Sulema Longoria, Tomas Longoria and Robert Villarreal

Interviewers: Mark Robbins and Christine Robbins

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MR: Um, if you wouldn't mind just stating your names first to make sure we don't get that wrong.

TL: Tomas Longoria

SL: Sulema Longoria

RV: And Robert Villarreal

MR: Well, thank you.

CR: And today is April 28, 2013 and we're in Rivera, Texas

MR: Well, I guess we can start off, we were just chatting before starting off, um, um, started of on -- when did y'all move to Rivera? Or were y'all born here?

TL: I was born (inaudible) Here, all my life. I was a year when they brought me

over here.

SL: Yeah, he was from here. I was born and raised in Kingsville. And um, we met each other at the movies, the movie theater. The La Carpa, it used to be a tent

CR: Oh, (laughter)

SL: It showed Spanish movies. That's where we met; got married; we live - - for about three-months we lived here with his parents and then we moved to Kingsville. We lived there about eight years

TL: Eight years

SL: More or less. And then when his dad -- on his dad's first birthday, that's when we moved down here because he found a job at a service station, here. He used to work at a farm (Spanish phrase), planting

SL: Yeah, but you started -- well, you know, when we first got married - - tell them where you worked and how much you earned.

TL: With WB Brown, here in Rivera.

SL: He would tend to pigs; he had a pig farm.

MR: Oh, pig farm.

TL: And I got paid \$5 a day and I work seven days so I can get \$35 a week

MR: Oh, my. Wow.

TL: Just married. 18, 18 years

SL: 18 years-old. We were 18. Anyway he was getting \$35 a day -- a week here. And then we moved to Kingsville he started working at a farm. I don't even remember the name.

TL: Mr. White from Bishop

SL: Mr. White from Bishop, okay. And he would ride tractors and you know plow and planted, you know farm work. But then we were doing better because he was getting paid \$45 a week; ten more dollars.

CR: That's good (laughter)

MR: Yeah.

SL: After that, he started working at a service station which belong to Mr. Rimmers. Mr. Rimmers, right there at Angle Road and 14th.

CR: Okay.

SL: He worked there for many, many, many years. And then after that I don't

know if he shut it down or -- how come you were -- came over here?

TL: Then I was working with, with Sign-o-graph.

SL: Was that before you moved down here? No, you move down here and then you went to work for Sign-o-graph and then Led, no Sign-o-graph in Kingsville. Anyway, he finally decided, he wanted I guess to come home, back home or whatever. Anyway it's been – Tomas, what 44? Okay, we've moved down 43 years ago, come August. No, come 44 years come August.

We moved down here and he kept working at a service station, saving his tips and you know whatever. Start buying lumber; his older brother, who's now passed on, built the house for us, little by little. Stud by stud. Little bit at time and everything.

CR: Did he live nearby, your brother?

TL: Yes, ma'am.

SL: He lived about three streets down

CR: Okay. Where was your house when you were growing up, here?

SL: First where you lived over there

TL: No. (Speaking in Spanish)

SL: Yeah, but you were raised over there in the Rancho (speaking Spanish) where you were raised over there? And then you guys moved to Rivera. They lived out in country and then they moved to the, to the city in Rivera. (Laughter)

CR: To the city (Laughter)

SL: Yeah, but you guys grew up

TL: Yeah, in the dairy

SL: It was a dairy farm,

CR: Okay

SL: That's where they grew up. And that's where y'all started to go -- pick cotton and stuff

TL: Yeah, Um-hum. Picking cotton, chopping cotton, and picking cucumbers, all of that stuff.

MR: So when you were picking cotton, did you have to tend to dairy farm at the same time?

TL: No. Well, I was living there and they used to pick us up there, you know. So the truck would go by there and, "let's go" and we go and that's it.

RV: Your father worked at a dairy

TL: Yeah, yeah.

CR: Who was the person who would come in the truck? One of the people from whatever farm that need help? Or

SL: (Speaking in Spanish) the people that you were gonna go work for

TL: Yeah, well, it was, it was Barrera, we called it El Gato; Barrera; Holberto Bosquez or Don Pancho Ramirez

RV: They were truckers. They had their own (talking simultaneously)

SL: They were also workers

RV: And they would pick up a bunch of people to go and take them wherever they were going to pick up that day. There were people from different houses and ranches

CR: Okay

RV: So they had their own trucks and

SL: Yeah because they were different farmers that, that raised, you know, all of those vegetables and cotton and whatever. And then they would get one man,

you now, that had a vehicle, whatever, to pick up some more hands to go work at the fields.

CR: If you were that trucker and you went around and picked people up, did you get paid more or did you get anything for picking people up like that?

CR: No

RV: It depends, it depends on the situation because, um, if you did it like you brought a bunch of families, say from the Valley, to pick cotton here, then the trucker would get a contract with the farmer and then they would get a little by the for bringing the hands. But if you were just local, they wouldn't. So it could be either way. If not paid or paid depending on whether the trucker got the contract or not.

SL: Yes. And locals were like family, you know. "Hey, Mr. So-and-so needs field hands or whatever, are you willing to go help him or whatever?" "Yeah sure," "I'll pick you" you know, that's how they helped each other. That's the way --

RV: And this was -- what in the 50's when you did this

TL: Um-hum

CR: Do you remember how much you got paid each day?

TL: Well, I got paid by the pounds.

CR: Okay

TL: A \$1.50 for a hundred pounds.

CR: Okay

TL: And here I used to pick up 300 pounds first, so that's \$3, \$4.50 a day

MR: Wow

TL: And I started growing up a little bit more, maybe I started getting better, you know, pick up more cotton, so I picked up to 600 pounds here in Rivera.

CR: Um-hum

TL: So I said a little bit more. And then we went to West Texas and (indicates something in Spanish) we go out there and we don't pick the cotton,

RV: Pulled it.

TL: We bring the whole nine yards

CR: Okay

TL: The shell and the cotton

RV: When you took -- do you mind if I --

TL: No, yes, yes

SL: Yeah, no, no, no.

RV: Um, when somebody is, when the cotton was open and there was a lot of cotton, you would just pick it up. That's picking. But then when you're pulling it, you take the shell with it, that's what he's talking about. You get a whole bunch --

CR: Okay

RV: -- and um, I don't know if they did there or not but they used to a spray, once it was ripe, they used to spray it so the leaves would fall off

TL: Yup

RV: And you would just grab it

CR: Oh

TL: That's what we used to do

SL: So they would be dry. They were so dry this would just (makes a noise), take everything.

TL: I used to pick out there a thousand pounds.

CR: Wow.

MR: Wow.

CR: So did you like that better.

TL: Sure

SL: It was better because it was just

MR: Did they pay you the same amount?

TL: The same amount; \$1.50. How much is that a thousand pounds; \$10

RV: \$15. \$15

MR: Much more than, yeah

RV: A day, that's pretty good. There's one other thing that they did that they, they had what they called (speaking in Spanish) and that means the first time they picked, the first hand, called it. And that's when they had a lot of it. And the second time it ripened, there wouldn't be as much, so they would pay a little more. So they may pay \$1.50 for the first hand and maybe \$2.00 or \$2.50 for

the second

TL: Maybe \$2.50

RV: So they did that, um, for the second hand

SL: A lot of people didn't want to go and work the second hand because it took forever

RV: No, no because it's more heavier to pick up a hundred pounds with the second hand because there's not much cotton

CR: I see.

RV: So, that's why they had to pay more. Not only that but we'd leave; right Tomas,

TL: Um-hum

RV: You picked the first hand then you'd leave and then go where there's more cotton. So you had to pay more to keep the hands here. Working to pick up the second hand crop.

SL: And that what he was telling - - when I started asking him about where he went and whatever, he hold me that he must have been about eight, maybe nine, when they started.

Once the crop was done here, that's when he started - - they, he and his two more brothers would go with their father. And he said he went out there and he remembers going to El Campo, and then there was another little bitty town that was next to El Campo and they went to Lubbock, Lamesa, Lebanon and Hopkins [sic] New Mexico. And um, he said that they always lived in old sheds. There were always small old sheds. And all of us would be in there in that little shed.

CR: Um-hum

SL: Get up about 6 in the morning

TL: 6, 6:30

SL: 6, 6:30. The shed was -- the shack was actually right there next to the fields. So they'd get up early in the morning, wash up, eat breakfast or whatever and just take off; go work the fields until that crop was over and done with, no?

RV: You started -- as soon as there was light enough to pick

TL: Yeah

RV: And then you went until it was dark, getting dark

TL: The earlier you get in the morning, it would be better because the cotton was kind of damp a little bit

RV: The dew

CR: Oh

TL: Dew, yea and --

SL: And it weighed a little bit more (laughter)

TL: We was going to weigh the first (inaudible, talking simultaneously). It was the best.

RV: There's actually a song about it called, La Primera

CR: Oh yeah

TL: Yeah, that's true

RV: There's several songs about cotton picking.

CR: Um-hum

(Talking simultaneously)

SL: 1940's, yeah. (Talking in Spanish). Remembering the 40's, 1940's and 50's

RV: (Inaudible, talking simultaneously). Talking about, about the first one is the best because --

TL: It's true.

SL: And then I, and then I asked him, okay all those little towns or wherever you were in, did you ever go out or do anything? Or what did you do? You went to movies -- well, there were

TL: We went to the Plaza

SL: Yeah. Monday through Friday, (Spanish word) you would work and then Saturday and Sunday you were off

TL: Monday through Friday, yeah.

SL: (talking in Spanish)

TL: Go to the movies, well, La Plaza. They call the Plaza - - what do you call the Plaza

RV: The center of town (Inaudible, talking simultaneously)

TL: We go out there, get you snow cone, a coke

CR: Um-hum

TL: A nickle for a coke

SL: Everything cost a nickle back then. Ten cents to go to the movies.

CR: Okay

RV: And the popcorn

SL: Everything was a nickle. (Laughter). You know growing up my - - me and my sister, we would get \$.25 cents on Saturdays. \$.25 cents for my sister and \$.25 cents for me. We would go to the movies two times and have a nickle left over for -- we would go to La Carpa, which was a movie, Spanish movie theater.

CR: Where was that?

SL: That was on Alice

RV: 11th or 12th

SL: 11th

RV: 11th

CR: Okay

SL: No.

RV: I don't know, it's somewhere

TL: 14th

SL: 13th.

RV: 13th. (Inaudible, talking simultaneously)

SL: It's a block away from 14th. Yeah. And I believe it's still there (talking simultaneously)

RV: Yeah, it's more like a –

SL: It used to be a dance hall

RV: -- construction

SL: Yeah they took the tent down (talking simultaneously)

RV: It used to be a real tent, but not anymore.

SL: Well, we would go -- Saturday nights, we would go to La Carpa and watch Spanish movies. We would have \$.15 cents left over we kept that. Sunday we

would go to Realto matinee, English movies, another \$.10 and we still had the nickle.

And, we would share or if we would met somebody, okay, I'll buy the popcorn, you buy the soda. (Inaudible talking and laughing over each other). And we -- you know we had enough with \$.25 cents, it would last Saturday and Sunday and something to eat or drink

CR: Um-hum

SL: Ain't that something. What do you buy for \$.25 right now? Nothing

CR: Nothing.

SL: Not even a piece of bubble gum

CR: You got it (laughter)

SL: Not even a piece of gum.

CR: You're right

SL: But, but we did. Anyway, um, what else did I ask you? Entertainment and oh, about how long you guy would stay or over there when you left. It all depended on the crop and

TL: Three weeks, four weeks. A month.

CR: Okay

SL: In certain places

TL: And then you go further up.

CR: Usually three weeks in that same place?

TL: Yeah

CR: Okay

TL: Move to somebody else

CR: Were you traveling just with your brothers and father or other families from here?

SL: Other families

TL: Other families, too. And we traveled with our mama too. One year, the whole family went up there. My oldest brother -- we were six brothers all together. And four sisters. The oldest (talking simultaneously). Got married she stayed here. But the other three were small. They didn't need much. I had a smaller brother, that fella has to be awake [sic] every morning so we can get 600 pounds. You don't get it, you get it...(inaudible)(laughter talking simultaneously).

SL: He was telling me, also, the other day when we were going through this, he says, "we went in this old truck you know all packed like sardines, you know slowly because the truck was put-putting along the highway or whatever. But the last time we went when we came back, man we were so proud." Because they had bought -- (asking a question in Spanish)

TL: 1950 Chevrolet

SL: 1950 Chevrolet. (Sound of excitement and laughter) they drove back home

TL: Paid \$150 for it

SL: \$150 (Laughter)

TL: But that was a good car. I told my wife, no license. Anybody got no license, no insurance but you got a car.

SL: No seat belts or anything. You know, years back it was like you own a car, you own a car. Drive it anywhere then (inaudible, laughter and talking simultaneously) as long as it runs

MR: All the ways from West Texas. It must be a good car, huh?

TL: They were good cars, I'll tell you that much. They were good cars.

SL: They were.

TL: I still remember all that stuff, you know. No insurance, no license.

SL: He said that he remembers that on Saturdays, I don't know if it was every Saturdays but, on some Saturdays when you were at the Plaza or whatever you know the little town, his dad would always look for goats. He buy a goat come and butcher it and you know skin it and everything. Put on the in a pot or barbeque it and whatever and ready to have a party with that goat.

You know, it's like things were so simple back then. You know, grab you a chicken and cut out their head and put it in a pot (laughter and talking simultaneously)

MR: So did you make deals with local farmers to have a goat every week or two?

TL: No, they used to --

SL: They would have them there

L: -- they sell it to you.

MR: Okay

SL: The vendors --

TL: I mean, you see a lot of people getting goats. That's all we eat, before.

CR: Um-hum. What would you eat during the week while you were picking?

TL: Eggs, potatoes, beans

SL: Papas, beans

RV: Tortillas

TL: Tortillas, yeah number one. If you had your mama there, you had tortillas, if not, you had bread.

CR: Um-hum

TL: Sometimes my dad made tortillas but not very often.

CR: Um-hum

MR: Did they make them before you went out in the morning and take them out or would you all stop to prepare them?

TL: No. Tortillas?

MR: Um-hum

TL: We usually make them -- my momma used to make it no matter what time,

mornings or afternoons. Not daytime, the mornings or afternoons.

SL: They were stacked about that big. Well, she had ten kids, I mean

MR: Yeah

CR: Yeah

SL: I mean

CR: Did she pick cotton as well or did?

TL: No.

CR: She took care of everybody. Did your sisters pick?

TL: No.

CR: No?

TL: No, too little. (Inaudible talking simultaneously). They don't know nothing about that. They didn't have to pick like we did. There was one same (inaudible) (laughter)

SL: But you know about watermelon picking. Oh, you didn't get to go --

TL: No

SL: -- okay your dad did. Cause there is another thing they would do like in the summers. Go pick watermelons here around here (talking simultaneously)

CR: Are there watermelons here, now?

TL: There is

SL: Few

TL: Just a few. But before --

RV: Argood still

TL: I think, Argood

RV: Johnny Argood. He's usually the one that has

SL: There used to be a place that -- well, had that packing

RV: Oh, there was a packing shed where the train would go by. They would have cucumbers, tomatoes (talking simultaneously). They also -- Naylor's also. They taking cucumbers, and tomatoes, and watermelons and you name it

SL: All of those vegetables. Watermelons, I mean in the summer all of the young

kids during the summer, young boys that's all they would do during -- all summer long. And there were tons of trailers cause just about everybody here, you know, would grow watermelons. So they were always look for school kids to go pick the, and pick and pack them in the trailer.

RV: Good training for football

CR: Yeah (laughter)

SL: Yeah, his dad -- well, I wasn't sure by the time he grew yeah, they were gone. But his dad, every summer, for years since he was about 11 or 12, no about 12, I think started going. And they would go early in the morning and come back at night. Because at night it would get cooler and they could work a little bit better with the lights of the vehicles and stuff. And poor thing he would be like

CR: Was that paid by the hour or was that by weight?

SL: I think by the hour

TL: By the hour

CR: Okay

SL: By then, they would get paid by the hour

TL: \$3.00 an hour

CR: Um-hum

SL: And even then, even 30 years ago for a school boy, \$3.00 an hour was good.

CR: Yeah.

SL: Because

CR: Yeah

SL: And they weren't very many jobs except that.

CR: Um-hum

SL: And even when his dad was growing up, here, that's about the only thing. You know around the, the ranches or farming whatever that was about the only thing. Now, at least they have Dairy Queen, Burger King whatever (inaudible talking simultaneously)

SL: Yes, huh-uh

RV: Dairy Queen, Burger King, man

TL: But I hate to go to that stuff cause it's too high. They charge too much.

RV: They charge a lot

SL: Burger, \$1.25 (inaudible talking simultaneously)

RV: Burger Kings is okay for some things.

CR: What's different now that - - there they don't have the watermelons, cucumbers, what why don't people raise those -- grow those anymore?

TL: I really don't know

SL: The weather it seems is the one that messed everything up.

RV: Well, yeah when you have draughts it's very difficult, but the - - in fact there is not even as much cotton anymore. But around here, there's some. They went to grains primarily.

SL: You know what I think happen, Bob? Now, this is my personal - -

TL: When they brought the machines --

SL: Yes

TL: All went down

SL: Especially for the cotton

RV: Yeah, well, yeah

SL: The machines starting taking away a lot of jobs from people. You know the ones that picked by hand. Plus as the kids, the workers got younger and smarter, they didn't want to work the fields. Like it's too hot and they don't pay enough and, and then there wasn't enough put out and you know the owners of the packing sheds were getting on in years also and I'm sure that their kids didn't want to take over. To me, it was like all of a sudden

RV: One of the things was that the parents didn't need the money so much. Our parents needed the money, I mean, whatever. My father worked at a dairy, he got, I don't know, in the 40's he got like \$55 a month or something like that and so we would go pick cotton to, to buy -- probably you guys too, buy the shoes; a pair of shoes, three blue jeans, few shirts, all the things, underwear and so forth . And that would be for the year. And, um, the girls; some dresses, some shoes and other things.

But they used to make a lot of it at home. The dress, and shirts they made at home.

SL: \$.50 a yard, \$.25 a yard, material --

RV: Yeah or, (inaudible talking simultaneously) even before that, they used to sell the flour

SL: Oh, yeah the flour sacks (talking simultaneously)

RV: In 25 pound bags. And they used to have colorful -- so the woman would make -- and my sisters dresses and so far shirts. Most of the dresses they made from the sacks.

SL: Yes

TL: The feed they used for the cows, you know, those (Spanish word) sacks, you know, you they were kind of white or kind of -- some color. They made the linins for the house, they were (talking simultaneously)

CR: Quilts and sheets

SL: They would sew them together because they would be like what, 25 pound bags or

TL: Hundred.

RV: Hundred

SL: Okay. (Inaudible talking simultaneously)

RV: A few 50 for the flour but most of the time 25. But for the feed it was a hundred, a hundred

TL: Yeah, a hundred.

RV: And then you had this white cloth

SL: And the women would wash them, you know take them apart because they would have the seam and then piece together and you would have linen for the bed, make pillow cases. And then after a while the flour, mostly, they were white or once in a while but all of a sudden we had all kinds of prints. Oh my God, put them together and get some bloomers and slips and and, oh my God, I mean it was weird.

RV: Every home had at least one, um, what do you call those things, machines? Sewing machines. Singer mostly

SL: Yes, that's what they were, Singer, the peddle. I have two of those. Well, I don't have them, my girls have them, but one belong to my mom and another belong to my grandmother. And they work. They still work

RV: Still work, yeah, they were good.

MR: At what point did children start learning how to make their own dresses and how to use the sewing machine?

SL: Well, let me tell you, I did not learn to sew until I was in my 30's. (Laughter)

RV: It depended on the family. Some of them learned when they were under ten

and some learned later.

SL: Because, most of us or some of us had mothers that were really good at sewing, you know, and cutting out patterns and whatever.

RV: So, it depended on whether the mother decided to teach them or do it for them

SL: See, my mother wasn't really a big dress maker, per say. She was more of a knitter; she would crochet and all of those things. And every once in a while you know she would cut out whatever little skirt or whatever with the elastic or whatever.

But the beginning of every school year, she would buy us our material and we take it to Mrs. Susie, her name. She was was short and heavy set. She was the best dress maker. She lived about three houses down from us. And every year we would get, we get three, we would either get three dresses, or one dress, two skirts and couple of blouses. You know, we would pick our dresses skirt or and we would pick the material and take it to her and she would measure us and we (talking on top of each other in Spanish).

And, um, but my mother was more crochet, knitting, needlework, more into that then the actual sewing. I did not learn how to sew, although I took homemaking classes in high school, it just like, didn't, like, really, it wasn't in me to learn

RV: It depends on which generation you are talking about because my sisters were basically around your age, a little more less, they learned to sew but they

didn't really do that much. But my parent's generations did, then your parents.

SL: Yes, but back then it was a must. Now, when we were already in our teens or whatever we already had the store bought and stuff like that

RV: So my sisters' generation when we were growing up, when they were little girls and up to about teenagers, it was made at home. But after when we had a little more money and they started to buy their clothes. Like Sulema and so they ended up not -- but when we were growing up, they would get their little dresses from the flour sacks and all the things.

Um, I have one interesting story, in World War II, between World War II and Korea they had, you know, they have this naval base over here, and they used to (inaudible)-- still training them and they used to practice shooting and they have this jet with oh, maybe 200 yard, hundred yard tail and it was silk and it was tied with a rope to one airplane and the other would come and shoot at it for target practice. And we lived in a dairy down here -- what about five miles from here -- and one day they, we saw one and they shut it off and it landed in pasture where my father work, man we go out there and we got lots of silk. There was a bonanza of silk dresses and skirts. (Laughter).

SL: I bet nobody in your neighborhood had...

RV: No, we were the only ones.

MR: That's funny.

RV: You had to make use of whatever you had around. I think that was back in '46 or '47.

CR: Did you go to school when you were growing up or

TL: Well, I just I think I went eight grade.

CR: Um-hum

TL: I dropped out. I knew it all.

RV: You knew it all at that time? (laughter)

TL: I got married when I was 18.

CR: Um-hum

TL: And I am still married to my same wife. 53. It's going to be 53.

CR: 53 years

RV: 53 of married, yeah.

TL: And she still fights like a little (inaudible laughing)

RV: Don't say it too loud, she'll hear you.

TL: We got four kids; three daughters and a son.

CR: Four kids, three daughters and a son.

TL: My son lives here. And he lives with his dad. His mama (inaudible)

CR: Um-hum

MR and CR: Thank you very much. Thank you (responding to being offered food).

SL: Yes, ma'am.

MR: So when you were going to school, did you have to go to school later in the year because of picking season?

TL: Yes, something like that.

RV: Again, it depends on the family and it depends where you are from. The reason I'm bringing another thing up is because I used to work for the Texas Education Agency. And I was involved with the migrant program and so there was overall -- and a lot of, here, the families would take off and those that would worked cotton, say in the Valley, they could go a little earlier. But if they work in other times they might leave in April and miss some school. But from around here it was mostly coming back late, in late September or October, so they

would miss some school.

SL: That's what I was going to tell them, that's what dad had said. Because they would always go pick him up before school was out from the summer and they would always come back in November or December you know it also already a couple of, three-months

RV: All the work was done over there

SL: So they were always behind. They were always behind. And even so, you know, he and and his brothers were, are and were very smart people, men. They could built houses, his older brother could built houses, and electricians you know stuff like that, he can also read and built his, you know, several small rooms and whatever, and I know (talking in Spanish)

RV: Oh, okay.

SL: If they had had some schooling or whatever, they could have, they could have been architects or whatever. But see that's where the education comes in. I keep telling everybody get your education.

And you know that his dad where the um, the (speaking in Spanish) you know where the pizzeria used to be and now it's a House of Worship or whatever. As soon as you get out of Rivera

RV: Two miles (talking simultaneously)

CR: Okay

SL: That used to be all wooded area; wooded area. His dad cleared all of that land, it used to be called La Gata because supposedly they had plan on make a subdivision of homes out there (talking simultaneously) many many years. Fifty some years ago. But he alone would dig up mesquite trees, cactus -- he cleared all of this land by himself with a (speaking in Spanish) hoe --

RV: Grubbing hoe

SL: -- grubbing hoe. Grubbing hoe and shooters

TL: He not only did that, he did part of it at the beach. Cleared that (the talking simultaneously) and then they work on anything. They cleared it real nice like a big bulldozer went through there you know and (inaudible laughing) and they planted some cotton. (Inaudible)

CR: Wow.

TL: I can't remember that much but my dad used to tell us

SL: But all this clearing you know actually -- and I keep telling Lena maybe she doesn't know where it's at. They used to have one of those little hand held video cameras but with the ones with the big reels. And they took pictures of my father-in-law working there and they should have them (inaudible talking simultaneously) those are about 45 years-old.

MR: Yeah

CR: That's neat.

SL: It is. It is. All of those are memories. My sister is the one who has them and the last time I asked her she said, "Oh, I don't know where I have them in storage." And it's like hum.

CR: Yeah

SL: And I'm really interested and I want to get of hold of any and everything that happened way back then for our kids. And she's not

RV: Y'all preliminary interested in the cotton picking?

CR: Any kind of, any kind of farm or ranch basically. But then also what that meant for people, how they were, their family, who did what going to school all of that.

SL: Because it also helps the young kids realize how easy they have nowadays. They don't realize. Although some of us still are scares as far as money is concern, you know, we can't really splurge. But they have it so much easier now. They have so much easier now and years back it's like right now most of the kids don't even want to walk to or from school.

I remember when I was going on high school, which is Henrietta, you know

where -- the old Henrietta King, Kleberg, okay. You used to attend that high school and we would live across the 14th Street, east of 14th Street close to Colton Elementary. In the mornings I had to be ready by a quarter after seven so I could -- my dad could drop me off on his way to work. If I wasn't ready by then I had to walk from there all the way across town to school. Every afternoon I had to walk back. And you're talk across town because the old Henrietta walked all across town, across all the different neighborhoods that we had, across 14th Street and two blocks down. It was far. And nothing happened to us. I mean we were fine. And nowadays it's like, I don't want to walk, come pick me up.

MR: What, what do you think was the hardest part of the work? What was the thing that just was the most difficult working in the fields?

TL: I loved it. Nothing was wrong. And I think all my brothers loved it. Good.

RV: We -- my (inaudible) and we had (inaudible) there was only one brother, remember Rudy, right, my brother Rudy, but he had a problem, because - - and we would be picking -- we usually start picking here and then went onto Edroy and Odom and around there. And ended up in Central Texas; Cuero and El Campo you know those, Bloomington, but we didn't go as far as they did because my father made us come back -- we had to be back when school started -- and I wanted to go to Lubbock and the west, the west, because I wanted to pick a thousand pounds, because around here.

SL: Competition, competition

RV: Yup

CR: Was there competition about that.

SL: Oh, yes there is was always a competition between brothers, friends and

RV: Go ahead finish whatever you had prepare there and then I can come

SL: No, no. I already mentioned most of the stuff.

RV: There's, um, see, I didn't know up until right now, how he viewed the cotton picking which is basically the same way I viewed it. For me and my father and the others it was a challenge, an opportunity to do and - - see, the more you pick (talking simultaneously)

SL: Is that I would feel proud of ever pound that I picked because he felt that he was helping out his father. That's the main thing, I'm helping out my dad. With all of this hard work that I'm doing. That was main things that all of these guys had, the pride of helping out their dad.

RV: And then you want to be the best one. It doesn't matter what kind of work you do. Like, my mother's side of family came from cowboys, vaqueros. And there thing was they wanted to be best rider, the best roper, the best of everything. I mean this was pride in being a vaquero.

Cotton picking also, so, the best I did in this area on the pulling, which was you couldn't do it -- I don't know of anybody who ever picked a thousand pounds,

that's a lot of cotton. Can't do it. The most I picked was 550 maybe, picked. Pulled, I did about 800 but I wanted to do a thousand. I was given my father (vamos...speaking in Spanish and laughter) -- and he said no.

You see, that was one of my unfulfilled dreams to be a thousand pounder. So I never achieved that, but in the fields there was -- I'm going to tell you how my father did it. And I imagine that they were very similar. He had it all mapped out how many weeks were going to be gone, and we were gone shorter than they were because we just went to Central Texas and back. So he had an amount of money go for summer and then amount per week and the goal would be set so much Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

And then I don't know about you guys but we only picked (talking simultaneously) Friday noon cause you were beat. You know, and so we would have to have other goal met by Friday at noon. My father used incentives, he always psyched me out. And our brothers, sisters. So he would say, okay, everybody would quit picking but the Villarreal would pick in the afternoon on Friday because he would tell us whatever you pick --

TL: Is yours.

RV: -- in the afternoon is yours to keep. So that's where we got our money for the ice cream, for the hamburgers, for the movies, for whatever were gonna do.

TL: How much were the hamburgers cost? \$.15 (talking simultaneously)

RV: So we and we wouldn't pick the whole afternoon. Maybe one round or two. Well, one day we got together and we decided to trick my father, we had a good

week. So we knew that by Friday, we were going to reach our goal before Friday at noon. So in the morning we took it easy. We reached the goal but we didn't pick real hard so that we wouldn't get too tired. And then as soon as after we ate and went back man we are just picked like gangbusters so all this extra money we earned...he said, no, no you guys (talking simultaneously)

SL: Give me back part of that money

RV: (inaudible) my father

SL: Yes. Oh my God.

RV: So we didn't work. He caught us at it.

TL: I remember we were going to school here you know. All these Anglo guys, I am going to say it...gringos. I mean, we know each other

SL: It's common.

TL: Now, we all old, we're still the same. Lunch time I take my little paper sack and had two tacos; beans --

SL: Potato and egg

TL: Potato and egg, that's all. Cold like a son of a gun. And these guys got

SL: Sandwich. Ham sandwich

TL: They got ham, they got lettuce, tomatoes. Man, beautiful; one apple, one orange. Man, we ain't got nothing like that. I told the guy, "Vato" he looked at me. I'll give you my two sandwich --

SL: My two tacos

TL: -- for, for one of your tacos. Okay, let me try some of that. So I gave them the taco and I got his two sandwiches and I still got a taco left. I ate the sandwich. Man, they were good. (Laughter). Real good. I was starving with beans (laughter)

SL: And he enjoyed the taco, too. Because (laughing and talking simultaneously)

RV: There was a lot of that trading.

TL: That was kind of funny but

SL: But these guys worked, worked hard all of their lives. All of their lives since they were little. And normally, I guess, this generation, well, our generation but I didn't. I would go pick cotton but it was like just to go and see what it was all about, you know, because they really didn't push me. They were pushed to go work. They had to go and pick cotton

RV: Serious business they had to go out and earn the money for the (talking

simultaneously)

SL: It was their job to help the family out and they had to. They had to go pick cotton here and there was watermelon to pick, there was any kind of crop that was being picked or whatever. They had to go out there and do it and then let's follow the crop wherever they were are at. You know, so for them it was a must, it was a, you have to.

CR: All of, all of your friends from growing up, did they also picked to. All of the --

TL: Yeah

RV: Most of them. I remember (talking simultaneously laughter)

SL: Beto would always be mad at his boys because they were the laziest cotton pickers (laughter) they did not want to pick.

RV: And there were some people who couldn't pick very much. My in-laws, the Amaya's, my mother-in-law, she wanted to take so they would learn and so you know, Gloria Figueroa, and Hope. Gloria used to tell me about -- and actually that's where I met her. I was 11 and they was nine, my first wife, and she -- they had just moved from San Benito over here.

And their mother took them (talking in Spanish) -- no, this was a pickup that Suarez had. My aunt used to go with them. But anyway, so they went, but see they had -- they were kind of higher up, I guess, from us. Because we had our tacos and the Amaya's brought sandwiches, was it Spam, not ham but Spam.

And all of that. And I asked Gloria, my wife, how much did you pick? I could barely pick a hundred. It cost us more (talking simultaneously laughter) and they only went a few times because it didn't work out.

SL: Yeah, but they did, probably had a little bit more money than most of us.

RV: Yeah, they did. When I was growing up, you know, my preteen and teens there were the homes that were kind of the best were Raynaldo Ruiz and Amaya's and a couple of others. So I thought they were rich. But they really weren't but he was a -- my father-in-law was a carpenter so he we worked mostly at Williamson's Millwork. But they weren't very good at picking (laughter)

SL: Well, let me tell you, not very many people were good at picking.

RV: No. A lot of them just --

SL: There were those, there were those that that made the thousand dollars, thousand pounds and the ones that wanted (laughter)

RV: Yeah, they weren't that many but, but you know.

TL: I knew -- you know Kenny Suarez

RV: Yes

TL: And West Texas, a thousand pound lady.

RV: Yup

SL: She was a good picker.

TL: She carried her sack like I did right there

RV: In the picture

TL: You don't need no man to go help her.

SL: But you know what years back also -- speaking of that -- whether, I mean you were competing but whether you measured up however many pound this one would pick or whatever, the thing about it is you never gave up

RV: No, no

SL: You knew it was your guys' responsibility to help out your dad and, you know, what I'm going to give it my best and that's what you did. And that's what everybody did.

RV: Yeah. It was -- I started picking again like when I six. And I went to my aunt's, Los Morales. In fact one of them is still alive she's going to be 91, I guess. Anyway they used to take me to pick. I was very proud because I think my first week I made like \$10.00 (laughter) or something like that

SL: But, I know that Tita is going to turn 91 in October because she's 20 years older than us. Is she the oldest one right now on the west side, I wonder.

RV: I don't know.

SL: We don't have very many

RV: She may be the oldest. I hadn't thought about that

TL: There's Sofia Garza

RV: Sofia Garza, how old is she?

TL: She's in the

RV: In a nursing home

SL: May be she's 90. But I think Tita is older than her

RV: Could be.

SL: Wow

RV: We could -- go ahead

CR: Most of the families here on the west side have they lived here for many,

many years?

SL: Most of them

RV: Most of them, not all of them, but

SL: Well, I know that most of the families that live here right now are, have at least, what, four generations?; at least. Maybe five.

RV: There's a lot of years.

SL: And then, the renters, farmers or whatever like the Yaklin's, and the Hubb's, all them (talking simultaneously)

RV: They started coming, they started coming because this town was established in 1907. It was not, the plan, the layout was not registered with the court until 1912 but we just had a 100 year thing in 2007. And we had -- what is it an hour and a half -- a documentary on the history of Riviera, which is might be a good thing to get a hold of

CR: That would be neat

RV: Um, Bale, I guess should have some of those

SL: Bale, yeah Mr. Bale should have that

RV: And so -- and what happened was is the King Ranch had all this land. And they decided when the railroads came through which was around 1907 through here -- in fact most of these towns were created because of the railroad - Sinton, and Kingsville, and Ricardo, and Riviera, and Sarita and, so forth.

When they put down that line in the early 1900's and the King Ranch sold a lot of land in this area to the developers so they could establish agriculture so --

MR: Um-hum

RV: -- this is when they, when all these farmers started coming in here. Before that it was all cattle. Before 2000, I mean 1907, 1905 around there. Because Kingsville was established in 1904, I think. So, um, they, there the farmers that Sulema is talking about, okay.

The original Kanton (?) family came, there was a guy named Theodore Koch, K-o-c-h. And he was a developer and reason is, the town is named Riviera, it's a French word not a Spanish one, over there by the water is because he want to create a, a tourist place like the French Riviera (laughter) and they built a railroad track from here to the water. And they had hotels and everything else, but they didn't have insurance. There was a hurricane in 1907, 1917 and then another one that kind of messed them up some and then in 1919 there was another one and that cleared them away

CR: Oh

RV: Yeah, so, but this was coming -- if you want me to I can kind of give you a

brief summary (inaudible, interrupted by other speaker)

CR: Thank you

SL: I knew I had seen it not too long ago.

RV: (Asking a question in Spanish)

SL: The story of Riviera,

RV: Oh, yeah

CR: Okay, wow.

RV: Um, if you want me to, I can kind of summarize my end of the --

CR: That would be great

RV: -- about you want to look at those first, that will be okay?

CR: Oh, we can look at them afterwards. That would be great

RV: Okay. That's, that's a good little brochure. Um, like I said, I started picking at six like Tomas and I went with my tias. And then when I was, and I went several years because, um the next one in line was my sister. There were eight in my family; four guys and four girls. And I went for about five, six years with them and then my sister start going.

So when my brothers, the twins, were old enough to pick, then we started going, and I had um, - - there was some aunts and uncles related to my mother that farmed in Edroy they they worked on the farm there, and so we used to stay there and they had, they had, like Sulema was saying, they had places for the cotton pickers to go to.

They had about five or six little homes. There were two rooms in each little shack. And so we used to go, the whole family would be in one room. And so that's when the whole family started going and we go we start packing here and then next step we would go to Edroy stay there and then pick around the area; Sinton, Taft, Odom, you know the whole area there. And we did for about four five years and the next time we went further and went to Cuero and El Campo and Bloomington and the area.

But like I said my father wouldn't take us out west of that, but there are several things that he'll remember when I start talking about this stuff, um, they used to sell - - the cotton sacks had just a plain strap and they used to sell eight, ten, and 12 feet was the longest if I remember correctly. Well, if you're a good cotton picker that doesn't work. So you - - what we do is - - you would have the front end where you put the thing across your - - and the end would be sowed up.

So we cut it, add two feet to it, and then put a little string so we could tie the other end. And so that was so that we could, when we went to take the cotton out, you can come out with both hands. Then the thing that was worthless, if you were going to drag more than a hundred pounds, and in a 14, in fact you could drag up to 130, you don't remember? Okay, it was more than a hundred pounds. That thing he's got in here man, that's at least 115, 120 maybe more [looking at a picture]. It depends on how tightly you packed it.

So that thing would cut into you, you couldn't use it like so they would prepare -- my mother and the ladies, they would all prepare a wider one with some padding in the middle and sew it up and then they have, they put like a button here and button in here and then you would have a little hook that you hook on the (talking simultaneously)

TL: (Speaking in Spanish)

SL: One of the little pairs from the cotton plants, you know the green ones. You put it in there to hold it

RV: Hold it. And then, then the thing was that if you were a good cotton picker you didn't want to be having this thing and the, putting the cotton back and having to open it every time and put your (talking simultaneously) -- so we would have a wire around it and it kept it open. You could just throw it in there

CR: Oh

RV: So there, okay, so there were

SL: (Speaking in Spanish)

RV: To more efficient, you could pick more than -- waste time opening...

TL: You won't be --

CR: And almost everybody did that?

SL: Yes. Yes

RV: Not almost everybody but almost, just about.

SL: The smart ones that didn't want to have a lot of trouble, you know, and you had to open it to put the cotton in there, and you had to open it. They made a seem, put a wire around it and it would stay open (talking simultaneously)

RV: The ones that picked under hundred did not have a sack (laughter) I don't know. But the other thing, I don't know how he did it and his brothers and the other people – about the same - - but in terms of, picking cotton is pretty hard work. And your're looking at anywhere from 97 to 103 or something temperature in July, late June, July, August around there. So it was hotter than heck.

And so now, when I used to pick we used to get up when it was still real dark, we had a little breakfast. My mother would get up like at four and start cooking and then we'd have our -- some of us they would stop at 10 o'clock in the morning and have their taco and others would eat it at six when we went. But we started picking at six and around noon stop to eat and most of the pickers got under the truck or under the trailer and rested for about an hour

SL: (Inaudible) when they went they had lunch at noon, either my mom would take those little large buckets, you know how they use - - I think they still do (talking simultaneously) buckets full of tacos, full of tacos, you know, wrapped in a dish towel whatever. A great big old jar of Kool-Aid. He said that Kool-Aid was that hot son of a gun (inaudible talking simultaneously) it tasted good and it went

down good after working in the hot sun. "Come on it's lunch time," man we got under the truck. The tacos were fine because they were warm but so was the Kool-Aid. And you know, those were hard times. Can you imagine being out there dragging a hundred pounds in 90 or however? --

RV: Yeah, you start off okay but then once you got to be 50 pounds and you're dragging this long way and come back. And I'm going to talk about some of the strategies that I used and I saw other people use and they probably did too. Although we never picked together I don't remember --

TL: No

RV: We never picked together. Now what I would do is um -- and again there were a couple of ways that you could do it. You can team up with somebody and you could take three rows; he take one you take one and both pick from the middle. Or you could just take one or some people wanted to take two by themselves

TL: I used to take two

RV: You take two. I usually liked to take one because I would just go straight. Now, but of course if you're dragging over a hundred -- once you get to 80, 90, 100 pounds it's, it's just, you have to pull it. And I was about 115 pound, young guy. The most I ever weighed in high school was 125, so I was tall and thin I was like 5'9" then. I'm 5'5" now, but and, and tall and thin...

SL: It's hard to carry a bag over the (talking simultaneously)

RV: I was not as strong as these guys were and some of the other guys. So you end up there and you're tired and you're hurting and once you get to around Wednesday, Thursday you're really tired and so you had to figure out a way to keep yourself going. So what I would do is I would lower my head and look ahead and, let's say I see a weed or something I said, "Okay, I'm not going to get my head up until I get there." So I would just go, go, go and then I get there and then I, now. So I said little goals. Cause if you look at the end of the thing, it's way over there, well, you get discouraged. So I would set little goals, and then you know like, 15 feet and something

SL: But even so - - and then we ask ourselves, or, most of the men, you know, our ages right now, my bones you know are so brittle, I hurt and this, that, the other. Well, can you imagine for years and years and years, and for a whole day being leaned over like this and carrying this sack --

RV: And that's a lot of hours (talking simultaneously) 12 or 13 hours a day

SL: Sometimes you could kneel (talking simultaneously)

RV: You also put on these, because the ground was hot, put the knee pads

CR: What were the knee pad made out of?

TL: Leather

CR: Okay. Leather

RV: If you bought them, it would be leather. If you had homemade you can may them out of anything (talking simultaneously)

TL: At that time, I got me new ones.

RV: You did? You were doing all right (laughter)

TL: Progressing it

RV: Well, if you did it out of cloth it wouldn't last too long but if you had leather it was fine (talking simultaneously)

CR: Yeah and then you would knee -- you would kneel, crawl, okay.

SL: Because that would help your back also because it would be you know (talking simultaneously)

RV: It would be kind of more straight. You wouldn't be leaning over. But the problem was I didn't want to do that too much because it would slow me down. You don't pick as fast if you're on your knees. So you try if you're trying -- especially and this story I want to tell you is, it's competitive and we complete against each other and sometimes we have one family against another to see who would pick the most and (inaudible laughter).

But, um, I had two tias, they were married to my uncles, Morales who lived

in um over there in Edroy, and they were really great pickers. They were talking, she was talking about, or you were talking about Tino Suarez

TL: Um-hum

RV: These ladies were really good. So it was my goal -- of course they were married and in their late 20's or something and they're strong and I could never beat them. (laughter) I tried, I tried. If I picked 500, they picked 550 (laughter) it was, it was kind of frustrating (talking simultaneously, laughing) 16, 17, 18 year-old it was kind of --

CR: Did they pick together or separate?

RV: As a group, you know you go in

CR: Okay, I don't know if they partnered

RV: Sometimes they did but most of the time they did it by themselves. You really -- unless, if you want to take it easy, your partner (inaudible talking simultaneously) but if you really want to pick you go by yourself

SL: There was some that would also take -- I mean if the rows were very, very long because (inaudible)

RV: Yeah, yeah, right.

SL: And I remember when I used to go pick also, that there would be – let's say two ladies or two young girls that, or whatever and say, “man this, these rows are really long, why don't we take one among the two of us. And one would get started first and walk all the length of the row and this one would start from here. So that one would start picking from over there and this one from here and they would meet half way

RV: They had to bring the cotton (talking simultaneously)

SL: It did help a little bit on the back

RV: If, if because if you went for the long rows if you went all the way and then back (inaudible talking simultaneously) you had to drag it all the way, 150 pounds or something. But some of the people would just do what she said or also walk over there and come this way so that the heavy pulling would be right before you go weight it.

CR: Um-hum

RV: So

CR: Um-hum

RV: All kinds of strategies

SL: They used to have, also, great big old wooden barrels with the water -- for

the water

RV: Oh, yeah

SL: And the had dippers or you know you had your own cup or whatever

RV: We had -- we kind of were lucky in a way because we had an uncle, Pancho Morales, he usually had a pickup and he loaned it to us for the summer. So we put up the side-walls on it and put a tarp over it and, um, then um -- parents-parents and I usually would be in front with maybe mother having a baby at the time whoever it was -- whether it was Celia or Raul.

And in the back, we also had a smaller barrel and then we had the gas stove to cook and of course the clothes bundles and the food and everything. And my mother wouldn't pick, she, she suffered all her life from kind of

SL: Arthritis

RV: Arthritis. Kind of strong arthritis. And so she would just cook and she would go to the fields sometimes and just --

SL: Just to take some water or whatever

RV: Yeah, if we were going far, we'd just drive over there and she would come in the truck with us. But I started driving on the highway at 11 and I drove till I was 19 before a got a license. (Laughter)

SL: Way back then it wasn't as strict as it is right now

RV: No, no.

CR: Yeah

SL: But the boys started get wilder and wilder and the girls even (talking simultaneously) --

TL: Now you get on the highway, and highway patrol here, another one over there, and then good damn [laughing].

RV: They kind of have their quota they have to meet but

SL: Yes (laughter)

RV: Kind of the -- there was also -- we went only one time to pick in the Valley. And that was a terrible experience. I don't know if you went to the Valley

TL: I went to the Valley one time.

RV: And that's enough, right

TL: Yes, sir.

SL: Why

TL: The cotton was so high, I couldn't see on top of the

RV: How old were you at the time?

SL: That was good because you could hide or do whatever you want to do
[laughing]

TL: Maybe eight or nine

RV: Eight or nine, yeah. There were several things that were wrong with it; one, the plants were huge compared to here and certain compared to West Texas, which was a little cotton, but because they irrigated over there and so -- I mean there was a lot of cotton to pick. But I was, but I was very frustrated because number one, you got these big plants. I like to hop, put my legs over the thing and pick like this over the row. But you couldn't do that with those plants you had to pick from the side and then --

SL: You come out at the end bow-legged by the time you (inaudible, laughing)

RV: Well, one of the worst things about it was that where they irrigated you would have the place, the row where the plants were, and then you have some dirt and it goes down. Usually it's kind of like this and then like this. Well, in there, there would be a little dip because where the water ran, and so you would be slipping into it, it was not very good for picking. I don't know if you remember

that part, but that I didn't like. So we had a terrible experience.

And then the twins got sick, Rudy and Raul got sick, and then my father got sick, it was like (laughter)

TL: Only you yourself, huh?

RV: Yeah. I was -- one day I was the only one picking. And, um (inaudible talking simultaneously). I was about 12 or 13 and so my father decided well, you know this cost much more to --

CR: Um-hum

RV: So they decided to come. And I don't know if it was the first or second week, and so it was like -- I think it was the second week, on a Wednesday, he decided, well, let's just go home. So we went to the guy, the farmer, he wouldn't pay us. You have to stay here until the end of the week. And, um we hadn't been paid for the first week and for the half week we had. My father said, 'Well, we have enough money for gas so let's go home.' So, the three sick people I drove. We started out there in the evening, I guess, it was kind of like 11 before we got home. And then they said they would send the money to us. Well, we got less than half the money by the time it got to us

SL: I believe it

RV: It was a bad experience all around.

CR: Yeah.

SL: And there were some truckers, you know whoever the contractors they had, that did the hiring for the different ranchers, farmers or whatever, they were cheaters.

RV: Oh, yeah

SL: They cheat people. Oh well, you had this, that and the other, and you owe me for this and, and you couldn't argue with them. So it was bad.

RV: It was some of that

TL: Especially when they had those Braceros they bring from Mexico (talking simultaneously)

RV: They were really treated badly

CR: The Braceros were

RV: Yeah

SL: They were treated bad because

TL: People from here, Mexicanos. Mean son of a (inaudible)

RV: Mostly the truckers because, they were ones who got the contracts. You see, they had these big flatbed trucks you could get 15 to 20 people in there

CR: Yeah

RV: So maybe they go from the Valley and they go to Robstown to pick. They have a contract with the guy and then the farmer would pay the trucker, and the trucker would pay the workers. Sometimes he short changed them or he charged them for other things. Which is what she is talking about, and so a lot of the workers got short-changed.

CR: Did you work with any Braceros?

TL: No. I work next to them but I was not with them.

RV: They were in the same field

CR: They were in the same field

RV: Oh, I have -- it was not my story but this was kind of bad. When I was in Austin, what I'm thinking. We had this lady, she was a - - Becky Pedrosas. I'll never forget her name. And we got to talking about this, her family had picked cotton and this (inaudible) big college, extension of Antioch College out of Ohio and I was the assistant director for it. And so we were talking about experiences, you know, different things, picking cotton and she said, "Oh, we had a real bad [inaudible] at one time." She said, "We were picking cotton and there was this

black family picking a few rows down and we had this dog and they had name him "nigger"

SL: Oh, my gosh

RV: So, this was like in the 50's something like that and they had name the dog nigger. And so the dog ran towards where the black people were. And of course they would call "doggy, doggy." There couldn't call... (inaudible, laughing)

SL: "Come here Nigger." Oh my God. And that was -- I mean and it still, that's a very touchy subject. A very touchy subject and I don't blame them, because its ugly. But it's like everybody else calling us beaners or you Mexican's but, hey, they loved our greasy tacos. (Laughter) Don't they? No, but it (inaudible laughter) it is ugly trying to put people down, name calling

RV: Another, I always thought, I don't know about you, or, you for that matter, but you have those rubber things you call sling shots. Actually sling shots is the one David used to killed Goliath, but anyway

SL: They called them nigger-shooters

RV: But we didn't know - - I didn't know until I was an adult that it was an English word. I thought it was a Spanish word. You know we go cut a fork from the tree and put some rubber on it and use them - - Negasuras (Spanish word, spelling?) Negasuras, that it came from nigger. I didn't know that. Did you know that?

SL: Yes, Um-hum. The whites would call them nigger-shooters

RV: Yes, I know, that but we didn't know that

RV: Now, you got to remember

SL: But the Mexicanos you know how we turned around and Spanglish
(inaudible talking simultaneously)Negasura, Negasura, Negasura

RV: But see, Sulema, what happens is that, see I never knew any black's until I was an adult. And I had never heard -- the idea, the word I was familiar with I thought it was Spanish, Negasura. I don't know, you probably did the same thing

CR: Yeah.

RV: So we called it that. And then it was not until later that I found out what the really story. Because, you know, Riviera used to have a, I don't know what they call it a ordinance or what, back in the 30's, 40's I don't know whatever, that no black could stay in the town at sundown.

SL: All them German's were the ones that

RV: Yeah. I guess they were the once that did that

SL: Well, I did -- actually you know we didn't have -- we didn't live in the black, close to a black neighborhood or whatever but we did go because my father

would go to their barbershops when I was young. And then we would (talking simultaneously) Andrews -- and their cleaners. You know, we didn't have very many dry cleaning things but we did have our Sunday best. And every once in a while we take them and Andrews had a cleaners.

So, you know, we would go into the black neighborhood and I see a few of them and waive at them, "hey how are you doing," and blah,blah,blah. My dad had a lot of black friends, a lot. He -- everybody knew him, everybody in town knew my dad. But I didn't really get close to, or met or knew anybody until I got into high school (talking simultaneously) it was an integrated school (talking simultaneously)

RV: I didn't see one until, I mean because he lived on the dairy, because we didn't have a vehicle. And we used to go to town once a month to Kingsville, and usually just downtown. And um, and the owners -- Gene one time I had pick up Gene whatever -- so I never really saw, in fact I never played with or associated with Anglos either, it was just Mexicanos. But we were isolated at the ranch. I think you guys knew the people here from when you were young. I didn't, I didn't know a single Anglo or Black

SL: And the, the ones that (talking simultaneously)

RV: -- high school were the Angelos

SL: And the ones he knew or grew up with were Patrones. the Patrones or (talking simultaneously) or this crop or whatever so basically that was the

RV: The only ones that I made contact they were little, whenever the owner of the dairy, where my father worked, was named Turkot, and he, they had a little boy and a little girl at that time and I used to baby sit at that time, and one of them was a baby and other one was four or five years. So they let me baby sit when I was 12 or 13. Of course they didn't really talk much. I didn't know any English words at all when I went to school

SL: It was all Spanish, nobody spoke English. Although we did understand it, well but not until we were six. We started school at six

CR: The school, was it -- was there a school here in town or were there two schools, one for Hispanics --

SL: Two schools

CR: -- and one for the whites

SL: Once upon a time (talking simultaneously) -- La Esquelita,

RV: It was over here (talking simultaneously) on this block, across the street

CR: Oh, yeah

TL: The last house

CR: Oh, okay

RV: Yeah, where the last house is. There's

TL: Barrera (inaudible)

RV: Yeah, there's this street and there's another that dead ends, it's in that section

CR: Is there anything, is it still standing?

SL: It was called the Ward School

RV: Actually it's still standing but not there. (Talking simultaneously) I don't know where they built it but (talking simultaneously) -- yeah, Um-hum. It was a Ward School here and then in the late 40's, around there, there was a lawsuit by Hispanics and they integrated it. And so they took the building, so when the kids from this side of town started going to elementary over there they moved and it became the cafeteria for a good number of years. And then, the school gave it to the church, Catholic Church, for a dollar and I think it was -- who's the father for Theresa (inaudible)?

TL: Theresa Turkot (unsure of spelling of last name)

RV: Theresa Crawford -- Turkot

TL: It was Theresa --

RV: Yeah, her father paid for the move. (Talking simultaneously) -- of Jack, okay. She was my student at high school, so her father paid to be moved over there. And it did serve as a community center for the church, whatever they called it (inaudible) for a lot of years. And then a few years ago, three or four something like that, it needed too much repairs to qualify for insurance on the electrical and I don't know what else. So they're giving it to us; to the community -- so, um, a lot of the people -- they had a reunion what about four, five, six years ago, I don't know, the young people -- well, you were there, no? Did you go to that school?

TL: Yes

RV: Yeah. Um, the people -- there was over hundred people that came to reunion, no.

TL: Oh yeah, a lot of people

RV: Yeah, and um, so they have, the thing has some sentimental value, so the church is giving it to us. And we formed a non-profit, just a few weeks ago, a month ago. And now we incorporated and we're going to be moving it in the next ten days

SL: Moving what, Bob

RV: The church hall

SL: Oh, really, where

RV: To, you know, I think where the Quintanillas lived, across from your uncle's, Longoria

SL: Oh. Tio Valentine

RV: You know where the Morales block where the Morales and Quintanillas were. It's actually where the lot where the Quintanillas lived that we're moving it there. So

SL: Is that where the library where you want...

RV: No, actually it's kind of funny because it was what -- about three years ago they gave it to my library, non-profit, but then some lady put up a big stink and they took it back, so they didn't give it to us. And now the church, I don't know what they call it, the Bishop, or whoever from Corpus decided they either tear it down or give it away. So I said, "Don't tear it down, it has a lot of sentimental value for all these people"

So we have, we have gathered a bunch of -- we had some people that had donated money and we picked up a \$1,000, I guess, the first time it went around, but so we were -- what we're gonna be doing is moving it. And a guy is loaning us the money to move it because the guy is going to charge \$5,500. But that school -- what used to be a school is now going to be -- we're going to fix it up and have a community center.

CR: That's great

MR: Very nice

SL: Very good. Very good

RV: So we're going looking for you guys to become members

SL: I don't want to become a member of anything anymore, I'm burnt out. You know, I move over down here 44 years ago and I came in and man I was gonna make a change. I was like those new superintendents that come into the schools, I was going to make change here in Riviera. I want to do this, that and the other and whatever. We did -- we, Bob and I, have always been involved -- we're Riviera's activists (laughter). That's what they call me, activist. So yeah, I don't get involved. My back and stuff, you know, really doesn't let me get around much.

CR: Um-hum

SL: But, we had planned to build our own well on this side of the community. That was, how many years ago was that, Bob?

RV: 1971

SL: The King Ranch donated (talking simultaneously) where the park is right now

RV: Yeah, we had a community organization

CR: Yeah

RV: I called it Riviera Social Club or Riviera Association or something, and we had a lot of stuff, we went to the commissioner. The streets weren't paved on this side, there was no street lights, we didn't have a place for the kids to play(talking simultaneously)

SL: The water pressure. If you were take a bath and you open the water over here it was, "Hey" (laughter)

RV: "Turn it off so I can take a bath!"

SL: I know so it was like, why don't we get the whole community together, big family within so much from whatever and whatever get that water well and we can maintain it. Our month bill will go to that and whatever. It fizzled out. But

RV: The well, they blocked it politically. Congressman blocked it

SL: Bob, and we turned it around and donated it to the county for the park

RV: Well, the park thing was actually was -- well, first we, the first thing we got done was the streets. They paved the streets as an organization. They paved the street and then they started putting the street lights. And we were in an

ongoing situation for about three or four years with the water system.

But one of things we asked, was, if King Ranch -- and they couldn't give it to us because we were not incorporated so they had to give it to the county. But legally, they need to give it and they felt more comfortable. So it was for this side of town but it went under the ownership of the county which they're supposed to keep it up and all that. And incidentally it's named after -- what your cousin?

SL: Well, they haven't, they haven't - - it's going to have his name but (talking simultaneously, taking in Spanish) -- but they haven't made the official

RV: Well, they had the opening to fix it. And that's when they put the sign there

SL: It was his nephew that was killed in Vietnam in 1969

RV: Yeah

SL: 1969. '68, '69. And he was only army soldier from Riviera that was killed (talking simultaneously)

RV: A number that were wounded but he was the only one that was killed

SL: He was the only fatality

RV: And I (talking simultaneously)

SL: So we got after, you know we started the ball rolling years ago, years ago

and it's finally, hopefully coming to it. And there going to name it after him, Gomesindo De La Rosa (spelling?).

RV: What they, I think what they need is a dedication ceremony or something but they actually named it already. But it's a dedication type they there're going to have

SL: That's what they haven't had and we're coming up the dedication, the dedication

RV: In fact -- and they take forever because the Flores Park thing - - and we had to push it from the Hispanic Chamber because they had named it Flores Park forever in Kingsville, and finally we got a plaque dedicating it to them and they were also killed, the one in World War I -- World War II and the other one in Korea, I think. Two Flores brothers from up there. But anyway that's basically a little bit of the history.

SL: Okay, we got a little of track here. They wanted to know about the agriculture

CR: That's good to know

MR: That's great

SL: I got to show you the; it's all torn, it's older than old

RV: Oh, that school

MR: Is that 1954, I see?

RV: Hey, I'm supposed to be in there. I was a junior I think

SL: I think you were in junior high

RV: No, I was junior in high school. You may have been -- I don't know where Tomas was

SL: Still in Ward School. You were already ready to graduate and he was still in grade school. (Laughter)

RV: Yeah, but I'm a lot older than he is

SL: All of these students were the Ward School

CR: Oh, look at that, yes

MR: Okay

SL: And all of those are already in their 70's.

RV: Oh, really? You had those, ah, wonderful. I think I need to make a copy of it

CR: It's just their last names. No first names, just last names

RV: Really? They don't put their first names (talking simultaneously, talking in Spanish) Before you go to another page

CR: These guys have their first names

TL: That's me

SL: Yup

CR: See

SL: Tomas Longoria there, Tomas is in third or fourth. Third.

RV: I didn't know that they had put the Ward School in the annuals.

SL: That's him

TL: Um-hum

MR: All right

CR: Look at that, that's great (laughter)

SL: That was fourth grade.

TL: Look at that old bastard (laughter)

RV: I didn't realize that

SL: You know my kid said "my you're so mean," [laughter] because we're always you know it's our age and our 53rd anniversary is coming up and we're always nagging at each other. And the kids said mom, "Why did you and dad ever get married if you're always picking at each other." "Well, let me tell you girl, when I met your dad, I fell in love with his curls." Because he had, I mean curly like Elvis Presley. (Laughter). That what I fell in love with, his curls, his beautiful hair. Now, he has no hair so I fell out of love. (Laughter)

RV: I was a freshman here. That's, um, me here

CR: Oh, it's great. Look at that.

RV: Most something

TL: Most something (laughter)

RV: Most popular or something, is that what it says

CR: Class favorite.

RV: Class favorite, okay. 53, that's a long time ago

TL: (Speaking in Spanish)

RV: That's when you got married

TL: Um-hum

RV: Not even 53. You're going to be 53

TL: Yeah, 53

RV: 53 years, yeah

SL: (Speaking in Spanish)

RV: It does.

CR: The Ward School, was it all, all grades together?

RV: Just elementary, I don't know if (talking simultaneously)

SL: I think a teacher or two teachers taught (talking over each over)

RV: I think initially it was like first through sixth or eighth. Eventually it was lower.
And then they - -

CR: Okay

RV: I didn't realize it was still open in '53

CR: It looks like it just was one teacher and then the students. Interesting...

RV: It's only one picture

SL: I want to say that they used to say (talking simultaneously) she had had different groups (talking simultaneously) different age, different grade levels. So she would have four five of one level and so many of these. One would be reading and, you know. I want to say that's the way they did it. He doesn't remember. Like I said, half of the time he wasn't in school (laughter)

RV: (Speaking in Spanish)

TL: Amaya

RV: Amaya, my sister-in-law, I think.

TL: (Speaking in Spanish)

SL: Which sister-in-law

RV: Estella

SL: (Inaudible) wife (laughter)

RV: Hey, my first wife.

SL: Okay, there you go

RV: The only one from here. This is first grade. Some of these kids - - oh, I see. Some of them were going over there and some here. I thought that was Gloria, but that's Jimenez

SL: Christine, I don't know if you will be interested in that big one?

CR: That's very interesting

SL: If you're interested, you can take it with you read it, and make copies, whatever and mail it

CR: And mail it back? That would be great, thank you very much.

MR: Appreciate that

CR: Thank you, that would be wonderful. That would be great.

SL: It was, because it was mailed

RV: Perry

CR: Is this the best address

SL: That's our box address

RV: Oh man, he would hate this. He didn't like to be called this (taking in Spanish). He's in bad shape. That's a long time ago.

SL: Long, long time ago

TL: Too long

SL: That's when we used to go to the best dances and everything

CR: Where were the dances?

MR: Is it alright if I shut of the recorder here?

TL: Yeah

MR: Okay, thank you so much