

Institute of Oral History

Interviews

University of Texas at El Paso

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Interview no. 259

Manuel T. Estrada

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Manuel T. Estrada
INTERVIEWER: Danny Estrada
PROJECT: Class Project
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TAPE NO.: 259
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 259
TRANSCRIBER: Danny Estrada
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

(Civil Service Employee) Born in El Paso, Texas in 1928;
former resident of the Second Ward; currently employed at White
Sands Missile Range.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; life in South El Paso during the 1930s.

30 minutes
8 pages

Interview with Manuel T. Estrada.

DE: What is your name?

ME: Manny T. Estrada.

DE: Where were you born?

ME: In El Paso, Texas.

DE: What were your parents' names?

ME: Romulda Blanco Sifuentes and Vicente Estrada.

DE: Do you remember where your mother was born?

ME: Somewhere in Mexico, I think it was Chalchiguites (sic).

DE: What about your dad?

ME: I don't know.

DE: How was it that your mom came to the United States?

ME: I think she came down during the Revolution, around the '20s, across the bridge.

DE: Did she have to pay to come in?

ME: No, she just walked across the river; at least that's what she told me.

DE: What did your mother do when she came? What was her job?

ME: I don't know. Actually she was just a housewife, and did odds and ends, and stuff like that.

DE: What do you remember about your childhood?

ME: Oh, a lot of things.

DE: Such as?

ME: You mean, that stand out?

DE: Yes, something you remember.

ME: Well, I know I used to get up at 3:00 in the morning, go out and deliver papers. Then when we moved to Ochoa Street, I saw this guy get hit with a big old brick [that] busted his skull. That sort of made a big impression, and a few other things--like somebody got hit with an ax; you know, something

that keeps with you for a long time and makes a big impression on you.

And I remember a lot of work we'd do when we were kids, a whole bunch of things. But it would be a long story.

DE: Could you explain the living conditions in which you lived?

ME: Oh, we didn't have nothing. I remember we used to live in two rooms most of the time. We used to have an old wooden stove, we used to chop wood for it. And we had a table, a couple of chairs, a bed, and something to put our clothes in.

DE: Where did you get the wood?

ME: We bought it for about a nickle a pail, or something like that, a gunny sack. We used to go about three or four blocks to buy some every day. We used to cook everything in the wooden stove; it would keep us warm in the winter and hot in the summer.

DE: What school did you attend?

ME: I started at Alamo Elementary. From there I went to Bowie Jr. High. At that time they had just started it. Then I went to Bowie High School, which was on Seventh and Cotton, then they made the new school. I got out of there in 1946. After that I went into the Service, got back, and went to El Paso Technical Institute.

DE: How were you treated in the schools?

ME: In grammar, it was kind of rough, I guess; like every other school I guess it was pretty good. They taught us the fundamentals and they didn't have anything extraordinary. If you were slow, you were slow, and that was it; there were no special classes. When I was a kid, I used to be pretty good in Math. I remember an incident: We used to have those Math quizzes where they send us up to the board. This guy was kind of slow in Math, and he used to stand next to me and copy what I wrote on the board, 'cause

it was a speed test at the same time. And the teacher sort of sneaked up and grabbed him by the hair and told him, "Don't copy Manny's," and hit his head against the blackboard. Usually that's how they kept you from copying. I guess to keep you in line /they'd/ paddle you and this and that when you went too far out of line. I don't think we had as many problems as we have today on discipline.

DE: Did the education help you through the times? As of now, has the education you got helped you?

ME: Well, it has helped me. I guess I always wanted to learn something, 'cause I didn't want to stay in that place where I lived very long.

DE: This education that you got, were the teachers Anglos, Mexicans, or of what ethnic background were they?

ME: Well, I think about 90 percent were Anglos. I can only remember about two or three of them. There was one very good teacher, she was part Mexican. Her mother was Mexican and her father was Anglo. She was real good. She still is, in fact. She's a good teacher. But most of them were Anglos. Maybe one out of ten, or less than that (two that I can remember) were Mexican; not Mexican, but of Mexican descent.

DE: When you were a little kid, did your parents or mother ever vote?

ME: No, they didn't know too much. They never got involved in politics. In fact, I don't think they had any time to get into politics. Life was /rough/; we were too poor to spend time, you know, getting involved.

DE: To bother with politics.

ME: That's right. Nobody actually got involved with it.

DE: How old were you when you started dating?

ME: I started dating maybe when I started high school--about 14, 15 years old. /I didn't date/ too much; I couldn't afford it and at that time you had to

have at least something to pick her up, to do something, make an impression on the girl.

DE: Why did you have to make an impression?

ME: Oh, I don't know. Maybe because most of us thought that we lived on the lower part of the town or something like that. We just had an inferiority complex, I guess.

DE: How old were you when you got married?

ME: 25, I think.

DE: Why did you take so long?

ME: I don't think that's too long. I wanted to find out a lot of things, enjoy life; and maybe, I figured I had to have a career, a good job, before I even got married. If I would have married when I was younger, I know I wouldn't have anything to support my kids and they would be as bad off as I was when I was a kid--not have enough money and stuff like that. I wanted to have a good job.

DE: Where exactly were you born?

ME: In South El Paso, around the 600 block of Ochoa.

DE: What was the date of your birth?

ME: June 3, 1928, around 12:00, on a Sunday.

DE: What were the jobs you held?

ME: Well, I delivered papers from one end of town to another when I was seven or eight. Me and another kid held that for about three or four years maybe, until I was about 11 or 12. Then we started helping here and there, at the City Market, unloading vegetables and stuff like that. After that when I was about 13, I started working as a busboy at the Hotel Paso del Norte until I was 15. When I was a Junior in high school, I started working at A.B. Dick until I was a Senior. After that, I got out of high school

and I went into the Service.

After I got out of the Service, I worked for M&M Refrigeration, winding up electric motors. I learned the trade pretty good, I think. Of course, It didn't pay much. I then started in refrigeration, selling refrigeration and heating appliances and all that kind of stuff. Later on I got out of there because I figured there was no chance of advancement in that place, 'cause at that time they just hired Anglo salesmen. Me and the boss got into a hassle because my name wasn't "Jones," so I got "dismissed," as he called it, because I didn't go with the organization. Then I started working with electric motors, going back to the old job of winding motors and armature. In the meantime, I made applications all around and finally got a job at White Sands.

DE: How long have you been working there?

ME: I've been working there 20 years and I've got two years in the Service, which also counts toward retirement. That's 22 and a half years.

DE: Did World War II have an impact on you and your life?

ME: Well, World War II, I spent part of it in there--actually, after it was just about over! It wasn't really declared over, though. But I did learn a lot of stuff; it made me grow up. I got all my inferiorities wiped out. I had a little bit more confidence in myself when I got back from the Service. I learned my job. I spoke a little better English than when I went in, because I practiced a little more. Of course, I had a lot more confidence when I got out than when I went in. It made a man out of me. The Service helped not only me, I think it helped quite a bit of people. Then I got opportunities that I didn't have before.

DE: How many children do you have?

ME: I have two boys and two girls.

DE: Was it rough raising the children?

ME: Well, it wasn't rough because most of the time the wife took care of them pretty good. I helped her out, tried to as much as I could. I brought them up just right; I thought I did, anyway.

DE: How old are you now?

ME: I'm 48.

DE: What do you do in your spare time?

ME: Oh, I don't think I have too much spare time. I try to make a little spare time once in a while, but usually I work around the house, do odds and ends; fix leaky faucets, torn screens, busted windows, etc., etc.

DE: Do you vote in elections?

ME: Yes, I try to vote in most of the elections. I try to inform myself who's running for what, what they are doing, what they've done, what they haven't done, what they have promised, and if they have kept them or not.

DE: What is your opinion of the word "Chicano?"

ME: Well, I think a Chicano is usually a Latin American, most of the people that are born and raised here from Mexican descent. Well, not only Mexican descent, but Latin descent; let's put it that way.

DE: What do you associate or think when you hear the term "la raza?"

ME: Oh, when I hear "la raza," that means most of my own people, Latin Americans.

DE: Where do you live now?

ME: I live here in El Paso at 1525 Nueces Way.

DE: Do you ever want to move from this house?

ME: Well, that's a matter of opinion. I actually don't, but the wife does.

DE: Would you consider moving?

ME: Not if I can help it.

DE: If you had one dream come true, what would you want it to be?

ME: See my kids grow up to make me feel proud of them, I guess, see that they don't go through the same life that I went through and have a nice life.

Let everybody care for their mother and father, I guess. Mostly make somebody out of themselves.

DE: While you were growing up, was there any prejudice or did you feel any prejudice besides the incident you said, in which you were selling and your name wasn't "Jones?" Was there any other prejudices or discrimination?

ME: Oh, yeah, during my time when I was a kid and everything. Most of the time you would go and apply for a job (especially when I got out of the Service, I guess), and they never had any, or they'd say, "Come back later," "We'll call you," or this or that. And you could tell that you'd never get hired because you weren't an Anglo, most of us. At the time, I don't think the El Paso Electric Company or the Telephone Company or big companies around here had any Chicanos, as you call them. They didn't have them. But I guess after World War II, after everything started moving around here and there, things started to change. But yet I got out of that rat race, working for White Sands. And White Sands, I guess, has some prejudice.

DE: What are you doing to do after you retire? Do you have any plans?

ME: It will be a while before I can retire. I don't make very many plans. I just want to enjoy life, maybe do little things I always wanted to do but haven't done--relax a little, I guess. Maybe I won't even relax.

DE: Do you think you have accomplished much from where you were originally and where you have gotten to now?

ME: Yes, I think I did, but only through self-determination. Once you're at

a certain place you don't want to stick around that place very long 'cause you suffer through a lot. And the only way you can get out is working hard and educating yourself, have a good education.