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Interview no. 1661

Ruben Escandon

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Ruben Escandon

Interviewer: Dr. Monica Perales

Project: Smelertown Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: March 26, 1998

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Transcript No.: 1661

Transcriber / Summary: Vanessa Pantoja

Ruben Escandon was born and raised in a neighborhood called “La Calavera.” This neighborhood was established before Smelertown. He describes his childhood as being active and a great sense of community. The neighborhood had open spaces with allowed families to have livestock. The interview focuses around lead poisoning from ASARCO. He recalls being tested for lead poisoning, along with his neighborhood. His neighborhood was not affected as much as those who lived closer to the large smoke stack. Escandon describes how lawyers and politics effected the Smelertown. People began to move out of the area to other parts of El Paso. The sense of community followed the families into their new homes. Some people chose to stay in the area. The community began to change with the introduction of the lawsuit. Families who had been established in the area did not want to be involved in any legal action, the newer families were more open to sue ASARCO. Escandon recalls the Solis and De la Rosa family who recieved money from lawsuits. He even discloses how not every family got money from the lawsuit, some just got enough to move out of the neighborhood and lived in housing projects. The conversation shifts from lawsuits to working conditions. Escandon became a plumber because the working conditions were better, he credits OSHA for protecting the workers. When he lived in the area, Escandon recalls dust and smog around. He even recalls some workers eating and drinking outside in the smog. He says there was an awareness of health hazards, but the workers did not think they would get sick. Last, Escandon adds he wishes he could go back and collect the oral histories of those who lived at Smelertown. He does not want that part of history to die out.

Length of interview 45 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a