

7-28-2016

Interview no. 1691

Luis M. Villa

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Luis M. Villa

Interviewer: Yolanda Chávez Leyva

Project: Voices from the Border Project

Location: Jefferson High School in El Paso, TX

Date of Interview: July 28, 2016

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No.: 1691

Transcriber/Summary: /Ana Urías

Summary of Interview: Luis was born in El Paso, Texas. He grew up with his parents in his grandparents' house. His grandfather would grow corn and sweet peas and had fruit trees. He lived there until he was about fourteen years old. His grandmother was raising her brother's daughter, his aunt who was about three years older than Luis. One day her mother scolded his aunt. His grandmother did not like this so she hit and slapped her. Soon after, his father decided for them to move out. They moved into his mother's *comadre's* house because they were moving to California. He had two brothers and two sisters. This was the first time he tasted tap water. His grandparents' house did not have running water, or gas, or anything. Luis and his family lived in the *comadre's* house for a couple of weeks because they came back to El Paso. His father bought a lot on Francis Street and built a house there. Luis became good friends with the son of a man who owned a large house in this area. He would hire them to pick cotton for two cents a pound and would earn about 5 or 6 dollars a week. His father continued to buy lots and expand their house. They grew flowers and fruit trees. Luis would sell the flowers in the cemetery. His father attended Beall School but did not go to high school. He worked at the Phelps Dodge Refining Company. Eventually when he learned to drive, Luis would take his father to work and return to take his mother downtown. He recalls the Mission Theater on Alameda Avenue. His parents would go to the Barrel House and his sibling and he would go to The Hamburger Inn. He talks about where his grandfather and aunts used to reside. He remembers the El Paso Drive-In Theater on Chelsea Street. His father went to a vocational school and grew up on Piedras Street. He worked in Phelps Dodge for forty-one years. His father was born in El Paso. He recalls the first time he rode a bus to visit his aunt near the smelter and when San Jacinto Plaza used to have live alligators. He recalls going to El Paso High School for a year while Jefferson was being built where Burlison Elementary was located. Both his parents were part of the PTA and would speak during meetings supporting the push to build a new high school. He describes what Jefferson and the area around it looked like when it was Burlison School and when it was established as a high school. His father was president of a union. His mother would send Luis with his father to the meetings. Luis would use the *tranvía*, streetcar to get to El Paso High School. He recalls when

the bus lines were expanded into the area and would ride them more often. He graduated from Jefferson in 1948. He used to play in the band and would practice afterschool in the gym for the school tea dances. Eventually they would practice in Lincoln Park. The band had two trumpets, a piano, two saxophones, and drums. This is where he met his wife. Luis used to play the trumpet and the piano. They started the band in high school and continued after graduation. They were invited and hired to play at a *salon* next to Bowie High School every week. He recalls that people from Jefferson started mixing with people from Bowie. The band's original name was The Jeffersonians and then changed to The Teen Timers. He recalls attending UTEP (The University of Texas at El Paso) because his father wanted him to. He experienced discrimination and could not handle going to college so he quit school. He feels that it was common for the teachers to have a negative attitude toward Mexican students because they were all Anglos. He states that when his daughters started going to college it was very different. He has two boys and three girls. Luis continued on playing in the band after he got married but eventually left. Luis moved to Val Verde Street and he started working for Pepsi. He stayed with them for forty-four years. He was a truck driver and would deliver and sell to stores all over El Paso. He talks about his experience working for Pepsi. All his children graduated from Jefferson High School. His advice to young people is for them to study as hard they can. For them to learn, go to college, get a good job, get married, have kids, and teach them the same thing so they will not be hoodlums.

Length of interview 45 minutes

Length of Transcript N/A