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Interview no. 211

Fred Morales

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Fred Morales (1954-)
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 28, 1975
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TAPE NO.: 211
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 211
TRANSCRIBER: Rhonda Hartman
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

VISTA volunteer.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; life in South El Paso, including schools; Anglo/Mexican relations; experiences with the Immigration Service; activities as a VISTA volunteer; gangs in South El Paso.

1 hour.
24 pages.

FRED MORALES

*M: This is an Oral History interview with Mr. Fred M. Morales of 513 W. San Antonio Street, Apartment 8; conducted on Thursday, August the 28th, 1975. Asking the questions is Oscar Martínez.

First of all, Fred, when were you born and where?

*F: I was born July 6, 1954 in Carlsbad, New Mexico. About a week after [I was born], immediately my parents moved to South El Paso. Since then I've lived all my life in South El Paso, up till now.

M: Why did your parents move to South El Paso at that time?

F: Because of more opportunities for jobs at that time.

M: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents' backgrounds--where they were from and what your father did for a living?

F: My father was a truck driver in Carlsbad, New Mexico. My mother has always been an employee of Farah Manufacturing Company. She was born in Marfa, Texas. When it comes to the background of my parents, that's about all that I know of. Since I was young I've lived separate from my parents. I've always lived with my grandmother.

M: Is there any particular reason for that, if I may ask you a personal question like that?

F: Well, the only reason is because I could get along better with my grandmother than my parents.

M: Are your parents living in El Paso?

F: My mother's living here in El Paso. My father resides in Carlsbad.

M: Did you go to school in South El Paso?

*M = Dr. Martínez; F = Fred

F: Yes. I attended Franklin Elementary School in the first grade. Then from there I went to Aoy School. From there I also went to Hart School. From there I went to Bowie Intermediate School and Bowie High School. I graduated. Then I enrolled in the Upward Bound program here at UTEP, and from there I transferred to the University of Colorado. And from there I transferred to the University of México in México City, and then I came back to El Paso. Right now I'm enrolled at UTEP.

M: You've really moved around to different schools. Let's backtrack, then, and go back to elementary school. Why did you move around to so many schools?

F: Well, during my early years [I moved to different schools] primarily because my parents moved to a different area, to the South side. There was a specific rule at that time that the closer you lived to a certain school you had to attend that school. When I entered the university level I had an interest to get out of El Paso. I wanted to know what it was [like] outside of the area. That's why I went to México City and to Colorado. I got to know what it was like in other places. [It was] totally different to what I was used to.

M: What do you remember about your experiences in the elementary school? What stands out in your mind?

F: What I can recall the most is that I used to be involved in athletics. I liked to play sports; I played sports a lot, specifically football and basketball.

M: In elementary school?

F: Right. I can recall a certain experience, when I relate to my earlier years, of a professor who used to be my instructor in a Spanish course. I recall him the most because he swatted me real hard one time for

speaking Spanish in a Spanish class! And that really baffled my mind for so many years.

M: Do you recall what the circumstances were, why he would do that in Spanish class?

F: I guess because I didn't ask for permission first. I recall talking to a student behind me, and he was talking at the present time. I guess I was interrupting the instructing, and for that reason he swatted me.

M: Would you say that he swatted you because you interrupted him and not because you were speaking Spanish?

F: I would say for the two [reasons], because I know that I was whispering real low. I'm sure he didn't hear me. And he had a rule that we couldn't speak English in that classroom; and I wasn't speaking English. When he told me to come after school, I asked him, "Why am I here?" "Because you were speaking Spanish and you were interrupting me."

M: Was there a rule in the school that you couldn't speak Spanish?

F: At that present time, no.

M: Kids didn't get punished for speaking Spanish in or out of the classroom on school grounds?

F: Not at that time. It did happen when I was in Intermediate School.

M: Do you remember ever getting punished for that?

F: Yes, I do--several times.

M: Can you tell me about that?

F: At Bowie Intermediate School they had a no-Spanish-speaking rule. If you were caught speaking Spanish they had several forms of punishment, such as being detained after school for an hour for certain days, being inflicted with physical punishment--being hit with a ruler in the hand, or being swatted or being forced to make push-ups, like I was, in front

of the class. It wasn't only me; everybody got the same treatment. Sometimes, if it got real bad, you had to bring your parents to talk to the Assistant Principal and explain why you were acting with such bad conduct.

M: How did the students feel about that rule? Do you remember?

F: I can recall that there was really an uproar. The students banded together, primarily behind the activists who were really pushing for the elimination of such barriers, who were the Mexican American Youth Association. At that time I wasn't a member; I really did not have the knowledge that they had in regards to the policies that the school had. I was only on the sides at that time; I wasn't involved. But these people and some other students started an awareness to stop this, and it spread; soon it just came to the point where the parents got involved, the social workers from the area got involved, and the students, primarily, got involved. Protests were initiated; they got the Assistant Principals at that time, who were Anglos and who were primarily behind all this, to appear before a Commission on Civil Rights in San Antonio to testify why this was happening. After that, some changes came into place. The Assistant Principals were transferred to other schools, the Principal was promoted to an upper position in the El Paso Independent School District, and they were replaced by Mexican Americans who were more sensitive to the problem. Soon after that the no-Spanish-speaking rule was finally eliminated. Now people could speak Spanish in the hall, the classroom or on campus, where in the past they could not.

M: When was this?

F: This was sometime during '67.

M: Was this when the Chicano Movement was first getting started in El Paso?

F: I would say it was when it was at its peak, when it was getting started. That was one of the reasons that initiated the beginning of the Chicano Movement, plus the many housing problems that could be seen in that area. A lot of people were getting more politicized. A lot of people were getting active in social affairs, in school affairs, in civic affairs. That's how I got involved.

M: You got involved in high school?

F: Right.

M: With MAYA?

F: Yes, MAYA seemed to get the most interest in me, because what they seemed to say in regards to meaning issues seemed very relevant to me. It seemed to apply. At that time, also, publications were starting to come out--Nosotros magazine. I used to read them all the time. I even started to sell them in high school. At one time I can recall where certain professors complained about it to the Principal, and I was called to his office to say why I was there selling the magazines. I told him why and he said I just couldn't do it. He said that any publications not published inside the school are forbidden to be sold, with the exception of only the school newspaper. So I stopped doing it and I went to sell them outside the school grounds.

M: That was OK?

F: Yeah.

M: Do you remember any experiences in the elementary or intermediate schools that were discriminatory in any way because you were a Mexican American student, and did it affect your status as a student? In other words, [were there] any experiences within the classroom or with the administrative authorities within the schools that appeared to you to be discriminatory besides the issue with language?

F: Yes, I do. I forgot to mention that in my second grade my parents moved to Dell City, Texas. At Dell City, Texas, I attended that school; it's quite different from my elementary schools in El Paso because all the schools that I attended were primarily composed of the majority of Mexican Americans. At Dell City it was 50% Anglo and 50% Mexican American. I can recall that my teacher, Mrs. Billingsly, used to scold me and all the Mexican Americans; she used to yell at us more than the Anglo girls and boys. I could see that we were segregated. We were placed behind them; they were always at the front. Instead of being seated in alphabetical order, we were seated by race. I can recall when Easter came around, we were taken to a cotton field to hunt Easter eggs. All the Anglo pupils were in the front and we were in the back. We couldn't hear what the teacher was saying; she was giving clues as to where they could find the Easter eggs. When we went out into the field, we just didn't know where we could find them. As it turned out all the Anglo pupils found the Easter eggs and we didn't. That's one experience that I do recall. Also everywhere--football games, dances--everybody was separated.

M: The Anglo kids and the Mexican kids just didn't mix?

F: No. The Anglo kids had the very strong cowboy influence. I guess their parents taught them or instructed them that it was bad to associate with the Mexicans. And I guess they applied that in school also.

M: Are there any other standard experiences of that type that Mexicans went through as they went through school that you think are interesting to talk about in this interview before we leave that subject?

F: It's been so long that I can't remember anything. I was only about 7 years old at that time.

M: What about gang warfare in those days?

F: We were only kids; it was not really gang warfare. But I do recall that I used to fight very much with a guy named Cody. He used to be

the head of a bunch of Anglo kids. I just didn't like him because he thought he was king. He would push everybody around. That kind of got to me. I just didn't like the way he talked behind everybody's back. He would always be talking bad about the Chicano kids, but when he was in front of a Chicano kid he would be very quiet. But as soon as he was with his friends he would be making all kinds of noises. So the day came when I found out that he was talking bad about me. He thought that he could beat me up. You know how it is when you're little kids. I fought him twice. That's an experience I can recall very well.

M: Did you win?

F: The first time I lost; the second time I won.

M: This was in Dell City?

F: Dell City, Texas.

M: How long were you there?

F: A year. I was a farmworker at that time. I used to work chopping the weeds from the cotton fields primarily, the tomato fields also. The majority of the workers were Mexican Americans; the supervisors were Anglos. The Anglo kids at school were always rich, well-dressed. And we weren't. I always went to school in a T-shirt. The reason I liked the T-shirt is because the temperature was so hot, and I just didn't like the idea of a long-sleeved shirt or anything that would keep me hot. They would always come indressed nice, with ties sometimes, expensive clothes.

M: How did that make you feel?

F: It made me feel real poor.

M: How about the other Chicano kids?

F: The same. We were all in the same situation. We always used to cabuliar the gabacho kids because of the way they dressed, the way

they talked.

M: Was your father a farmworker there?

F: No. My father, as I said, was a truck driver in Carlsbad.

M: Well, how did you get to Dell City?

F: Through my grandparents. Since birth I have not seen my father.

M: How did you start working out in the cotton fields?

F: Well, my grandparents were short of money, and working in the fields was the only way to earn money at that time. That was the only job opportunity available. After Dell City I came back to El Paso and I attended Aoy School.

M: Your grandparents moved back here?

F: Right, to South El Paso. And I also went to the farm labor fields here in the Upper Valley and the Lower Valley, and worked in the cotton [fields].

M: Do you remember how much money you made then?

F: Chopping weeds would run around \$10 a day, starting from 5:30 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon, in those days. I understand it has gone up a little bit now. I used to also pick chiles, I used to pick onions. It all depended on how much I would pick. I would average around \$10 or \$12 a day.

M: When did you start doing that?

F: When I was about 8 years old--1963, '64, here in El Paso.

M: And then you did it in Dell City?

F: Before.

M: You were younger there?

F: Right.

M: There are child labor laws that prohibit kids that age from working all day long like you were doing. Was it common practice for kids that age to be out there doing that?

F: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, it was common for the parents to take all the family to the field. I can even think of some families right now who do it. My neighbors used to do it.

M: Did you go by yourself, or did you go with friends or relatives?

F: Sometimes I would go by myself; sometimes with friends; sometimes with relatives.

M: When you were doing it here in El Paso, how did it work? Did you go some place where the contractor came and took you to the field?

F: Right. Where I would go, since I lived very close by it, was this place on El Paso and Sixth Street. It's right across the bridge coming from Juárez on El Paso Street. Every morning from 4:00 to 5:30 the buses would leave and go to the farm fields. I **would make it a habit** to be there on time around 4:00 every morning and get aboard the buses. I can recall certain names on the buses, like Benavides and Benavides. They were, I think, the contractors who took the farmworkers to the fields. But the majority who were on the buses happened to be people from Juárez or people from South El Paso.

M: Were the people from Juárez "mojados" or did they have a green card?

F: Green carders. I can also recall one evening when certain Mexican aliens were on the buses and the Immigration and Naturalization officials came aboard the buses to inspect to see if anybody was an illegal alien. Somebody behind me got nervous when they saw him, and he got all panicked and decided to get out of the bus through the back door. He got out through the back door and started running. An officer saw him and started running after him. He caught up with him and what I saw was really something. He beat him up completely. I could hear him yelling and yelling for him to stop beating him up. He was beating him up with a club stick, a macana. And finally he stopped. The man was put in a van and detained. I guess he was transported back to México.

M: Did this man provoke the Border Patrolman into doing this from what you could see?

F: Well, he was running from the officer. The officer saw him. But he didn't resist him in any form when he was caught. The officer just wanted to make it look like the illegal alien was really doing all the resisting, and he wasn't. He seemed like a very good man when he was in the bus behind me. We were talking, having a conversation.

M: Were there other instances like that or in the fields that you recall with the Immigration people coming in and raiding?

F: In Dell City and in El Paso I can recall many instances. The majority of my friends were illegal aliens who were in the fields. All the time they were talking about them being afraid of being caught by the Border Patrol. And the Border Patrol always had a routine habit of coming to check the fields. Every time when we could see they were coming they would always run and hide from them. It was a daily routine thing, always going on. Some were lucky and some weren't. The Border Patrol also had air surveys at that time, and sometimes it was real hard for them.

M: Did they ever stop you?

F: Yes. And they still do, simply because I have the same features that a lot of my Mexican friends do. But I always have some identification to provide, and they let me go, with the exception of that one time that I related to you about [what happened] in the Chihuahueta area.

M: Could you tell me about that again so we can get it on tape?

F: Sure. This experience in the Chihuahueta area happened about 3 or 4 years ago, when me and my friends decided to travel to Juárez to get

some tequila bottles. We decided that if we went over the bridge it was going to take a long time to get there and we felt that the shortest route (to Juárez) was going over the river. And there was this bridge (it's still there); it's a railroad bridge, a black bridge. We went across there, me and my other two friends, and we came back with the bottles. We didn't go over the bridge where we had to say if we are an American or not, plus we also had to pay a duty tax for the liquor bottles. We didn't have that much money to pay the tax. Besides, we were under age; we couldn't pass the liquor on this side. So we passed it through the railroad bridge. So we came on this side and we were spotted and we were detained. One of my friends, who was crippled, was really getting harassed by the officer. That really got to me because he couldn't defend himself, so I got in between them. And I said, "How come you're harassing him? He already showed you identification. And I'll show you mine." And he said, "Well, you know you're not supposed to cross through there and you're supposed to pay the tax." And I said, "I know. I know we are guilty of doing that." And he said, "Well, can I see some identification?" I was talking to him in English like I am right now. But still he had this feeling that I was a Mexican alien. I showed my identification and he still didn't believe me, so he tried to grab me. But he was a Border Patrol officer about my size and I said, "Well, I know I can defend myself," so I started wrestling with him--throwing punches and kicks and everything. And I had him on the ground, when all of a sudden he starts yelling for another Border Patrol officer to come to help him. And out of nowhere comes this big guy and he starts hitting me from behind and they put the handcuffs on me and they detained me and called in the police authorities. They took me away to the detention center.

M: Were you drunk, Freddie?

F: Drunk drunk I wasn't.

M: But you had been drinking?

F: A couple of drinks.

M: Did that make a difference in the way you behaved? Would you have done it the same way if you weren't a little bit high?

F: One thing I do know, I'm sure I knew what I was doing. As a matter of fact, I wasn't booked for being drunk; I was booked for assaulting a federal officer. Nobody even knew I had a couple of drinks.

M: What happened when they booked you? They took you to jail?

F: No, to the Juvenile Detention Center. I was released the next day. I just slept there.

M: You say the police officers arrested you. These were first the Border Patrol and then they turned you over to the police?

F: Right.

M: Did anybody have to bail you out or did they just let you go?

F: No. The way it is in the Juvenile Detention Center, which at that time was one of the worst in the nation, the only thing for you to be released was for your parents to go and pick you up, unless you were a hard-core criminal or had been a person who always repeated the same offenses as a juvenile. They would probably not release you for a couple of days or weeks. But at that time, the rooms for detention were really bad. During the daytime you couldn't sleep--they took away the mattresses. When it came to using the toilet facilities you could also use a couple of sheets of paper. There were no recreations or leisure services--no books. It was just bad. It got coverage on a nation-wide special at one time in regards to juvenile detention centers throughout the nation. If you go, it's quite different today than it was before.

M: Did you have any other experiences with the law? Did you get arrested any other time?

F: No. That's about it.

M: What happened in that case? Were you charged? Was that the end of it?

F: That was the end of it. Like I said, I was released the next day. I came back home. As a matter of fact, I saw the Border Patrol officers who had arrested me and who had hit me, and I just smiled at them while they passed by.

M: Did they smile back?

F: No. [Laughter]

M: What did your grandparents say about that? How did they react?

F: Well, I really got scolded. My parents didn't like that idea about me passing liquor to this side, but they didn't like the way I was treated by the Border Patrol. As a matter of fact, when I was wrestling with the officers, my grandfather came out real upset yelling at the officers to let me go, to stop hitting me.

M: This happened right near where you lived?

F: Right in front of my house. It all started in the alley behind my house and we went wrestling for about half a block. It stopped right in front of my house. At that time it got the attention of the whole neighborhood. So they stopped hitting me and they put their handcuffs on me. When nobody was looking (except my two friends) they were really pounding at me.

M: How old were you?

F: 14 or 15.

M: What other experiences do you recall from living in Chihuahuita, in connection with the Border Patrol and wetbacks who cross there all the time?

F: Well, I always liked to go to the river and bathe because I didn't have to pay to go to the other swimming pools, which were far away with the exception of the Frontera Park swimming pool. And there was an experience when people from this side and people from that side would always go in

there and bathe and fights would always erupt. Me embozaron; they came at me with a knife and they wanted my belt, they wanted my shoes--the people from Juárez, the kids. They primarily were kids who liked to sniff glue, and they always liked to go around molesting other people, wanting what they had. This happened twice, with me at the point of a knife. I gave them what I had. Since then, that triggered a lot of ill feelings between both sides and fights started happening. You would see about 100 people from that side and about 50 people from this side throwing rocks at each other.

M: Right across the river?

F: Right. And it would spread to this side also. It would come across to this side, to the presidios. And since then, a lot of people don't go back to the river to bathe. They've also been responsible for a lot of burglaries, a lot of fires, a lot of assaults and a lot of rapes. I guess to counteract their acts, when the people on this side saw them coming, they would assault them also. They would rape the women, that would cross over. It really got bad. The police officers, when they were called in to stop all these acts of violence, would get pelted with rocks also. The Border Patrol too. It has really calmed down quite a bit since then.

M: When was the peak of all these activities?

F: About two years ago.

M: And how long did it last?

F: A couple of months. But occasionally you still find sporadic acts of violence.

M: Is that a main crossing point, there where you live?

F: I would say that that crossing point--of all the México-U.S. boundary

line, in terms of people coming across--would be the main crossing point. More people cross at that point than any other point that I can think of. I've talked to people who have come all the way from South America, from the interior of México; but the majority are usually from Juárez. The reason I'd talk to them is because where I live, from that crossing point, there are some presidios. That's a major place for them to hide from the Border Patrol authorities, especially in the restrooms, on the roofs, under cars, you name it; you'll find them every place. Sometimes I do my best to help them; I'll tell them, "The Border Patrol is hiding here and there. I would recommend that you cross at this point so you won't be caught." And some cases, if I can't get transportation, I'll call a taxi to help them. Or if I have a car, I'll give them a ride.

M: You've given people a ride?

F: Yes I have. A lot of people.

M: Aren't you afraid that you might be arrested for transporting illegal aliens?

F: No, I'm not really afraid because I got used to it; I know all the ways to escape the Border Patrol. I know where they are, I know who I can trust. Well, I know where to pass, where to cross, where to look. I'm not really concerned.

M: You're not concerned?

F: No, not really concerned. I just don't even think about it. My grandfather was caught twice for transporting illegal aliens in the Sierra Blanca area, and he served two jail sentences. The last time he was put on probation. I got a lot of encouragement from him because I really looked up to him; and that's why I guess I started doing it. Plus it was the fun of obtaining money.

M: How much would you charge them for transporting them?

F: Right now, the only thing that I charge is, if I don't have gasoline in my car, I'll ask them for a dollar or two to help me out. I don't charge prices that are high. As a matter of fact, the majority of the cases I don't even charge. I just do it to help them.

M: What about your grandfather, when he was arrested twice? Was he doing that as a coyote?

F: Sort of, because at that time a lot of illegal aliens were arrested and rounded up and transported back to México; and the growers were in desperate need of more cheap labor, if you want to call it. And my [grand]father didn't have any job at that time. That was the only avenue he had, and he took it up.

M: Is your grandfather alive now?

F: He's dead. He died two years ago.

M: What was his main occupation?

F: His main occupation at that time was a bus driver--taking people from El Paso to Dell City to work in the fields, primarily.

M: What about your grandmother?

F: A housewife.

M: She's still alive?

F: She's still alive.

M: Where is this crossing point that you talk about; what's the location?

F: The location is about half a block from the Chihuahuita area. It's adjacent to the river. It's about, maybe, two blocks away from the El Paso-Juárez bridge, to the west. It's also right next to the black railroad bridge.

M: Is it near the place where there's a big park through which the water from here flows into the river?

F: Right. That's the place--where the canal waters flow into the river.

That's it right there.

M: Most of these people who traditionally have crossed through there, do they cross at certain times of the day or night?

F: They cross at every time of the day and night.

M: Knowing that that's a main crossing, why doesn't the Border Patrol have Border Patrolmen stationed right there--from your point of view?

F: They do occasionally have Border Patrolmen stationed there. But through the lack of manpower and so many people crossing, not only at that point but other points, they have to turn their force to other locations which, at the same time, leaves the opportunity for more people to cross at that point. The lack of manpower, I would say, is the prime reason. Also, due to their not being able to work more at the river points, they also move to within the city. For example, some like to station themselves in the railroad yards, some in the alleys--there's specific points where they can watch and see who is crossing. They can just about see from there as well as they can from where they are at the river point.

M: What other jobs have you had, Freddie?

F: Well, I've worked as a tutor here at the University of Texas at El Paso. I've worked as a night watchman. Right now I'm working as a VISTA volunteer. I'm primarily working [to improve] the housing conditions in South El Paso.

M: How long have you been a VISTA volunteer?

F: A year and a half now.

M: Could you tell me about experiences that you've had as a VISTA volunteer in the area where you work?

F: My experience has been primarily in the field of politics. I've always felt that through the realm of politics a lot of the issues and problems can be resolved. In working with the housing crisis and with the City

Tenement Eradication Program going on, I've gotten the opportunity to work with many people from South El Paso and confront politicians. You name it--the City Council, the City Planning and Research Department Program, HEW--all the offices and departments associated with housing.

M: Are you part of the committee to preserve el barrio?

F: Yes, I am. Probably the experience that I will recall the most is the Tent City #2.

M: Did you help in organizing that?

F: Yes, I did.

M: What was your role in that?

F: An organizer.

M: What did you do as an organizer?

F: Well, due to the neglect and the ignorance spread by the politicians, we set up the Tent City to get the attention of the general public that there was a crisis and that it did merit much attention. I organized, with several other activists, a campaign in setting up a Tent City and trying to get exposure through the media, and trying to get attention from the University faculty, from the Chicano faculty. We sat down with many people in meetings; we set up conferences; we set up workshops. We talked with people not only from the local scene, but also from the state and the federal level. After that, we finally got the attention that we deserved. The mayor went to Washington and he was guaranteed that \$1.7 million would be sent to El Paso for construction of future public housing. Also, at the present time, I think they're drawing up a redevelopment plan for South El Paso. Through that, we went before the City Council to get funds for painting murals. We felt that the concept of murals was really embedded in the culture of the

Mexican American, and that he had a lot of talent that we felt should be exposed to the community at large. We did get the funding, and right now we're engaged in painting murals.

M: How much money did you get?

F: I'm not sure about the amount, but it's around several thousand dollars to pay for the cost of the paints, the brushes, and so forth.

M: What motivated you to go into this kind of work--community activity?

F: Well, it all started when I was in Bowie High School when the no-Spanish-speaking rule was in effect, and MAYA came into being. I joined MAYA; I liked what they were doing. Since then, I've become very community service oriented. Working as a VISTA volunteer gives me the opportunity to work in the barrio and help in any way possible--not only with problems that they might have with housing. I've had experience in working with the Assistant Attorney General's office here in town in trying to alleviate consumer complaints, primarily with the Spanish-speaking community. I also have gotten involved with a credit union that was established in the South so I could help people with financial problems--the Credit Union. I'm still working in there. Also, at the present time I'm working with a library committee in establishing a barrio library in the area around Jefferson High School, where Our Lady of the Light Church is located. They have a Centro de la Luz building which houses our library. At the present time we're cataloging the books; we're separating fiction and non-fiction books. We're planning sometime around the 16th of September to publicize our efforts and encourage more people to attend and take out books from the library. We're also starting a Chicano Material file for people to take out.

M: Freddie, of the kids that you grew up with [in South El Paso], what

has become of them? What are they doing now? In comparison to what you're doing, what are they doing?

F: My friends, the majority, have not really made it like I have. I'm still poor, but they're poorer than me. I have a job as a VISTA volunteer, whereas the majority of them are unemployed. They just hang around street corners and hang around in gangs. A lot of them are pushing drugs; a lot of them are always drinking and fighting. Each street corner is against the other. They're just victims of unemployment. They're victims of a drug culture. They just haven't made it like I have. A lot of them have dropped out of school, or [are] "push-outs"-- I like to use that term.

M: What has been the difference between what you've done and what they're doing? Why have you gone on to become involved in the activities that you've been involved with, and on the other hand they are still hanging around on street corners and doing very little? To what do you attribute that difference?

F: The Chicano Movement, because I've always felt that there's a lot of help that needs to be done in that area. A lot of services are needed; a lot of improvement is needed. I also have liked to do something with my life, do something constructive about it, seeing which ways I can give.

M: Where did those motivations come from? Can you identify the origin of those feelings that have led you to do these things?

F: The feelings have all come from within me, but primarily they've been instigated by the Chicano Movement, by MAYA, by my parents.

M: Your parents have influenced you in spite of the fact that you haven't lived with them?

F: Right. Plus my neighbors and my friends.

M: How about your grandparents? Have they had a big influence in your thinking?

F: Yes. My grandparents reared me since I was young. They gave me all kind of guidance. They gave me the direction to start. But I would say they're only one of the many people.

M: Now, I want to go back to your experiences in school and ask you about the gangs in South El Paso. Were they active at that time when you were in school--grammar school and junior high?

F: They were very much active.

M: Were you involved?

F: Not really. I was real young. The ones who were really much involved were the people in their teenage years. Through them, I think the pachuco influence started--their form of dress, their life styles seemed to spread to many parts of the nation. Their concepts of machismo, of being el más chingón, was very much prevalent. Every street corner had its group, its gang. There was always much friction over a girl or maybe over somebody who was pushing bad stuff like drugs, marijuana--for any little reason there would always be a fight. It was common; it was natural at that time. The police were afraid to go in that area. The majority of the people outside that area were afraid. I was afraid even. I would always be witnessing people being hit with beer bottles, people being stabbed, people always being locked up in jail. It was a bad time. I also can recall when the gangs of the South side would always go and fight with the Juárez gangs at the river. And also I can recall when many tourists would be assaulted and what they had would be taken away.

M: You never participated in this?

F: No, I did not. Well, I did participate when I was a little kid. When I would see the rich tourists coming into town and going to Juárez, I would always go and beg for a nickle or a dime for an ice cream. And if my [grand]parents caught me, I would really get spanked.

M: Do you recall the names of those gangs?

F: Yes I do--the Seven Elevens, the Eagles, Trampas, Alley Cats, Crusaders, Cougars, Jokers, Shamrocks.

M: Were these mostly in Chihuahuita?

F. No. The ones around Chihuahuita were the Lucky Charms, the Crusaders, the Cougars, and the Seven Elevens, or something like that. They were probably the fiercest gangs in the whole South side. As a matter of fact, even up to today the Chihuahuita area is isolated from the rest of South El Paso, and it has calmed down a lot. But there's still a lot of the old gang fights and ideas still around.

M: Has it always been isolated, or is that more recent?

F: No, it's always been isolated by the railroad tracks, by the river.

M: There's South El Paso Street, which in itself is a dividing street.

F: Right. As a matter of fact, as I understand it, South El Paso or Second Ward in the past was known as Chihuahuita. That was its name. And I think it came from Chihuahua Street.

M: Do you live near Chihuahua Street?

F: No, I don't right now. I moved about a year ago due to the condemnations of the City Tenement Eradication Program.

M: Did you used to live in a presidio there?

F: Yes, for 8 years.

M: And it was condemned by the city and destroyed?

F: It was condemned, But due to the campaign to preserve the barrio it still stands there and people are still living in it. But half of the

people have moved out. Right now they're awaiting a plan by their realtors for renovation.

M: What kind of life did you lead in that presidio in which you lived? What kind of apartment did you live in? How many people lived in your apartment?

F: It was a two-room apartment, unfurnished, old; and we didn't have any services like water inside or a bathroom inside. All that was outside. It was very crowded, small. No air conditioning or heating was available. No laundry facilities were in the presidio. It was a bad scene.

M: How many lived in that two-room apartment?

F: Five people. In some other apartments you could find up to fifteen people.

M: In two rooms?

F: Right. You would find them sleeping outside or you would find them sleeping all crowded in the building.

M: Do you still find large families?

F: Yes. You can go right now and find them.

M: Is that area still called Chihuahueta?

F: It's primarily known as La Chihuahua [by most people], or Chihuahueta by some.

M: Let me ask you a question regarding some of the other schools that you've attended. You've come to UTEP, and you've gone to the University of Colorado. What other places did you mention?

F: Universidad Ibero-Americana in México City.

M: Why have you been in all these different places?

F: Through federal grants, loans for minorities, through the Upward Bound Program. I didn't have the money to attend. If it weren't for them, I probably wouldn't be in college right now.

M: Are you enrolled at UTEP now?

F: Yes.

M: With the Upward Bound Program?

F: No. I stopped with the Upward Bound Program in the Summer of 1972.
Since then I've been on my own.

M: Are you a part-time student?

F: I was, but I will be a full-time student this semester.

M: And what's your classification right now?

F: Junior.

M: What's your major?

F: Chicano Studies.

M: You need a double major if you're in that. What's the other?

F: Sociology.

M: What do you hope to do eventually?

F: I'm still undecided. There's so many opportunities that I've been looking into, such as being a social worker, an administrator, a librarian, a tutor.

M: I want to thank you very much for taking the time to come over here and providing the Institute with a very, very interesting interview.

F: Thank you.