

4-20-1976

## Interview no. 227

Customs Inspector

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/interviews>

 Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Interview with Customs Inspector by Sarah E. John, 1976, "Interview no. 227," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at DigitalCommons@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UTEP. For more information, please contact [lweber@utep.edu](mailto:lweber@utep.edu).

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: ANONYMOUS

INTERVIEWER: Sarah E. John

PROJECT: Class project

DATE OF INTERVIEW: April 20, 1976

TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 227

TRANSCRIPT NO.: 227

TRANSCRIBER: B. V. Abilez

DATE TRANSCRIBED: April 27, 1976

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in Junction, Texas; current resident of El Paso; military service in the Air Force; has worked for the federal government in several capacities for many years.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Life in Junction, Texas; school years; Anglo/Mexican relations in Junction; experiences in the Air Force; work with the federal government; work experiences while with the Customs Service in San Ysidro, California and El Paso, Texas; attitudes toward the Bicentennial.

1 1/4 hours, 25 pages

This is an Oral History interview with a member of the U. S. Customs Service. The date is April 19, 1976. Interviewing is Sarah John for the Institute of Oral History of the University of Texas at El Paso.

J: Could you tell me when and where you were born, please?

X: I was born in a small community in the south-central part of Texas, [in] a little town called Junction. There are very few Mexican people that lived there, and those of us that did live there lived in el barrio, or so-called "across the tracks," because it was across a bridge, about a couple of miles to the town. There was no public transportation. We had to walk or get a ride from whoever had a car. I might say that we never did have [a car] until after 1948.

J: So the Mexican community was completely separated from the Anglo community there in Junction?

X: Just about 90%. There were a few of us Mexican American people that lived in the town. These people worked for the State Highway Department. Most of the other people had jobs in stores either as clerks or as all-around help that had no specific title, as far as being supervisors or managers.

J: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents' background?

X: Sure. Both my parents came from Mexico. I remember my mother telling me that when they crossed the border, there was no such thing as passports or papers or documents or declaration of U. S. citizenship. All they had

to pay was a nickel. My grandfather had to borrow the nickel because he didn't have that to come across.

J: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

X: Yes. We have five brothers and two sisters. I'm the smallest of the family. Most of my brothers and sisters have left Junction because there's not too much to do there, unless you own a farm or a ranch, and none of us do. Most of them have left for other places like St. Louis, Illinois, New Mexico. I have two brothers who have stayed [in Junction]. One of my brothers has been self-employed ever since he was able to work, and my other brother helps him. My sister married a man that has his own business, so she doesn't work for anyone either. I might say that around 1968 the freeway came through [Junction]. Before that, all the land was real cheap. You could buy the land rather reasonably. After the people found out that the freeway was coming through--and these were Anglo people who worked in the courthouse and had access to papers and surveys that they were doing [and] knew the freeway was coming through--tried to buy all the property there. Fortunately some of the [other people] got wise and wanted to know why the Anglos wanted to buy the property all around there, when in the years before, especially in the Mexican barrio, they had expressed no desire of owning any property because it wasn't really any good; the properties that were for sale [weren't] very big. Later we found out [it] was because the freeway was coming through there.

J: So before that time there wasn't any value to that land?

X: No, not really. It was just land that was there, and all the taxes were

in arrears. People hadn't paid; people had gone to California, Colorado, and other states and left this land there. These people found out and wanted to pay taxes and buy that land, and then sell it back to the state for a good profit.

J: Can you tell me something about growing up in Junction? What was life like then?

X: I'd be glad to. There wasn't much we looked forward to. We had a dump ground which was less than half a mile [away from] our house. We kind of looked forward to people coming to dump there, because we could find all sorts of things. We found comic books; we found wooden boxes from which we made wagons, because we couldn't afford to buy any. One thing that comes to mind was when the local high school got rid of all their excess football equipment, and they threw it out there. All of us went on and tried to put some of it on. If you can imagine--we were trying to put it on backwards; we didn't know anything about it. But we had seen enough that we were interested in getting those items, and we did. We got them all from the dump ground, and we wore them. Our mothers washed the pants and the t-shirts for us, and we wore them and played with them. But this was a way of escape for us, because there wasn't too much to do in Junction. We could go swimming, we could go fishing. I might say that even though some needed a license, none of us ever did [get one]; but I can recall nobody ever got caught or got told anything for not having a license. The other things we did while we were growing up there was maybe go hunt once in a while if we could borrow a rifle from somebody. But there

wasn't too much to do there, especially when we were growing up. We had no ways of entertainment. We stayed on the barrio side and the Anglos, or the folks that lived in the other part of town, had other things. They had parks and they had teams that they had organized, while we had nothing like that. Our parents, or people that could have done something about it, were all busy trying to earn enough money to make a living for their families.

J: The others had more leisure time, and more money.

X: Yes, more money. Plus they had the church and the other activities like the Lions Club that helped them, while we did not. Another thing that comes to mind now that I'm talking about this [is that] we had to walk to school, which was about three miles. There was no public transportation, even though some Anglo kids lived out on a ranch 15, 20, or 30 miles [away] came by bus. This bus was provided by the school. Yet, we lived 3 miles away, and not one bus was provided. It was not until two years before I graduated, which was about 1952, that the buses started to come out to the barrio and pick up the kids and take us to school.

J: Did all of the children go to the same school, or was there a segregated type of a situation?

X: There was [segregation] only in the first grade. We all went to the same building, because there weren't enough [students] to make two [schools]. But we had one room that was designated for the Mexican American children, and one teacher taught first and second grade in that particular room.

After you finished there, you went to the third grade, and there we were mixed. But the first and second grades were all Mexican American children [in one room].

J: Are there any good or bad experiences that stand out in your mind during your grade school years?

X: Well, I remember one time when we were getting our pictures taken. We had just been playing outside. A lady was combing all the children's hair so they could look nice. Since I was the first Mexican American kid there to have my picture taken, when she saw me she said that my hair looked all right. She didn't bother to fix mine. It didn't really make that much of an impression on me until later I found out that she was doing it to all the Mexican American children. She [thought] that the Anglo children needed to be combed or have their dresses straightened out. These children were being attended to while we were not. Other than that, I think that I was treated pretty [well]. I had a teacher in the fifth grade that was also my Sunday School teacher, so she treated me like everybody else. Perhaps she was a little bit harder on me because she wanted me to learn. She really showed an interest in me. I'm thankful to that because she really did show an honest, a sincere interest. I'll always remember that lady. She used to go to our mission, and she used to teach us the Bible and taught us how to read, and brought us things at Christmas which of course we all looked forward to. It wasn't until I got into high school that I could really tell the difference. That was because perhaps the other teachers came out of different states and brought their biases and prejudices

with them. There were a couple of teachers there that helped me, too. I cannot deny this. Once in a while when I go back to Junction I make it a point to look these people up, because I think that they were sincere in helping me. They went out of their way to help me. If it hadn't been for them, I don't think I would have finished school. I wanted to quit several times, because the people that were with me had all the money and I didn't. It was hard to stay in school. First of all, I had to maintain myself; I didn't have anybody else to give me money for my expenses or clothes; I had to buy my own. I had a job [in which] I had to work in the yard for this lady. I used to work every day after I practiced football. After I finished working, I had to walk home, which was about three miles. This I did for five or six days a week. I worked on Saturdays, too. The main thing that stands out while I was in high school [is that] we were playing basketball [one day] and this old guy who was more or less like a bully got a hold of me and said that he wanted to teach me a few things. So after school, we had it out across from the school at a little store. We got called into the principal's office and I got expelled for three days, while he got away scott free; and he was the one that instigated the whole thing. I merely defended myself. But I think that if I hadn't done that, he would have picked on me till I finished [school]. But after that, he had respect for me, even though I was smaller than he was. He never did bother me any more.

J: Was he Anglo?

X: Oh, yes. He was Anglo. He was one of the guys that was running around and [picking on] somebody smaller, or a Mexican American. But I



got expelled and he didn't.

J: Was that unusual, or was it the rule that Mexican Americans got expelled?

X: I think I was the only one that ever got expelled. I think the rest of the guys got reprimanded. The reason I think I got expelled was because I talked back to the principal instead of just saying, "yes, sir." I was still mad, because this guy had instigated the whole thing and he picked on me first; yet I got the worst of the deal. But I can see why; what else could I expect from an Anglo principal.

J: What was the ethnic composition of your school during the time you were in grade school?

X: There were a few of us going to school, up until the fourth grade. After the fifth and sixth grades, you found [very few] people with Mexican surnames. Out of a classroom maybe there were five. After that, it got even worse. As the grades went up, the lower [the number] of kids [that] stayed in school. They dropped out and started working. Most of the people there used to go to seasonal work, so every year they'd go and pick cotton or pick potatoes or onions or turnips or whatever. They went to Weatherford, some people went to Hereford; some went to Colorado and Idaho. When you got up to those places, it takes a while to get back, and those kids just missed out on school. After a while, they just gave up. They got discouraged, and people just let them get out of school.

J: How many Mexican Americans graduated with you from high school?

X: In 1954, there were 42 graduates; and out of that class only two of us

were Mexican Americans--myself and another girl.

J: Why was it easier for you and this girl to stay in school rather than drop out? What was behind you to keep you in school?

X: Like I said before, I almost dropped out of school several times, but my brothers said that as long as they stayed around that I was going to go to school whether I liked it or not. So I had no choice. And believe me, I can never thank them enough for that, because if they hadn't [done that], I know I would have dropped out. I would have stayed right there in Junction like all the rest of the folks that did, making \$50.00 a week, if that. I probably would have married somebody there and had a whole lot of children, and I would have stayed right there with that same bunch of people that I grew up with. I go back there, and I see them doing the same thing. They might be getting \$75.00 or \$80.00 or \$100.00 a week, but they'll always do that. They'll never leave Junction; they'll stay there for the rest of their lives. Of course, these people have realized that they did the wrong thing; [but] they had no guidance like I did. So their children are going to school; they're going to college. Most of these kids are getting scholarships. Things are not like they used to be, because people have gone out and showed these kids that they'd better stay in school if they want a good job, especially nowadays. The girl that stayed in school with me that went to the same church that I did, she wanted to stay in school. She was a studeous type of child, [and she] stayed there and wanted to finish school. But the others dropped out because they wanted to work and they wanted a car, and they wanted money to spend.

And if you went to school, there was just not that [many] jobs available for you to work at.

J: You say that your brothers had more of an influence on you in keeping you in school at that time. Did your parents have any particular influence on you as far as your considering education, or what kind of job they wanted you to have?

X: Mostly my mother was the one that told me that. She pointed out a few things. Some have stayed with me, and they'll stay as long as I live. She said that all I had to do was look around. Some of these people that had dropped out--sure, they had cars and they had money; but that's all they would ever get. They'll never amount to anything, because to get anywhere, you need an education. This is what I learned in Sunday School. I learned how to read; I had a tough time. When I was first going [to school] I had a tough time trying to read and trying to comprehend the English language. It was hard for me.

J: Did you speak Spanish at home?

X: Oh, yes. We spoke nothing but Spanish at home. I might say that while I got in trouble in school for other things, one of them was for speaking Spanish on the school ground. But that didn't bother me. After a while the teachers just gave up, because they knew that we weren't going to quit. We would always get on one part of the school, and the Anglo kids would get on the other side. And the teachers would never come to where we were. They always stayed around the Anglo side, where the kids were playing.

We mostly sat around the trees and shot the breeze; but it was all in Spanish. Once in a while, the teachers that came from other states would come around and see what we were doing; but they never really did bother us. Up to a certain extent, the only thing they did say was that we should try to speak English; that we spoke as good as they did. So they didn't bother us at all.

J: Did you have any Mexican American teachers while you were in school?

X: Gosh, no. They still don't have one today, and that's over 20 years that I finished there. They might have one one of these days, just for tokenism or whatever, but they didn't have one then and I don't think they'll have one for another long while. Like I said, some of these children of the guys that I grew up with are all going to college, but they go away from there because the salaries are better somewhere else. They don't come home to teach at all because they don't want to go back there. But as far as I can remember, there weren't any [teachers who] were black and there weren't any [who were] Mexican American.

J: What was the general relationship between the Anglos and the Mexicans while you were in school?

X: I can tell you from a point of view as far as playing ball, because I did play sports. That's one thing I enjoyed. I was caught in a limbo because I didn't drink and I didn't smoke, and most of the guys that I grew up with all drank and all smoked. Even though I went with them everywhere they went, they still kid me about it. But thank goodness that I

didn't fall into that trap. I played ball. As soon as I put on that uniform, I was part of their team. I remember one year that their fathers and their parents come up to me and in a real Anglo-type fashion patted me on the shoulder and said that [I had done a good job]. I think I scored more than half of the total points scored in one year. But as soon as I took off my uniform, I was just another Mexican kid. I never did get a job like the other guys did in town, that were good players. Some of these people found jobs for the players, but they never did ask me if I wanted a job or if I was looking for one. You'd get discouraged because if you went, they'd tell you they weren't hiring, while you knew that some of these other kids got hired and they didn't even go ask; they were offered the few jobs that existed.

J: So there was very little mixing?

X: There was really no mixing at all. I remember ~~one~~ time the track relay team went up to Fort Stockton, and they wanted us to sleep somewhere else, and the Anglos slept somewhere else. So even when we went together, the people that served the team frowned on us. They wanted us to eat somewhere else. But we never did do it. I'll say this: the coaches sometimes seemed that they were willing to give in. But I guess they didn't, because we ate where the rest of the kids ate.

J: Was there any mixed dating at all?

X: No. No mixed dating, none whatsoever. I will say this, that I never had any trouble in the lower grades [as far as] speaking to girls; or we

even played some games outside [together]. We mixed a little bit. But that was because maybe I went to a church that most of the Mexican Americans did not go to. I was Baptist; [I was] brought up a Baptist, and maybe that had something to do with it. I knew all the rest of the kids were Catholic. While I was growing up, there were about five families that were going to the Baptist mission that we had there in the barrio. We were ridiculed [by] the Catholics, those who wanted to make fun of us. But there was no mixed dating. Not until later did some mixed dating come about.

J: Did you have any jobs while you were in school?

X: No, not to speak of. My father used to work for a lady that had a flower shop, and the reason that he got to work for her was because nobody else would work for this lady. She was just that tough. My father was the only one that could work for her. He was as tough as she [was], and [he] [didn't take any bull from anybody]. He never had any trouble at all. At any rate, when I was just about to finish school, she asked me one day if I would like to work for her at her flower shop. I went to work for her. That lady did trust me enough to give me the keys to the shop, and I used to open the shop every day and used to count the money every/day. She used to order flowers from San Antonio, and the bus would come about 11:30 p. m. I used to meet the bus and unload the flowers. Nothing was ever found missing. She never did accuse me of taking anything, because I never did. When I told her that I was going to the service, she said that she was glad for me, that maybe there I could find something else that was better.

She gave me a bonus. She did trust me enough with the keys. I could have easily taken a lot of things, but I'm thankful to this lady that went to the mission and taught us the difference between being accepted as far as your trustworthiness. I do appreciate her having that much faith and confidence in me. She said that I was the only one that had ever [worked] for her, being a Mexican American, that she has placed that much trust in me.

J: Was this unusual?

X: Sure. She never trusted anyone else to mind her store. You could have taken a whole lot of things, even as small as the store was. She did have quite a bit of inventory, [like] pens, pencils, figurines, and things like that that she had purchased [and that had] cost her money. [But] like I said, she did have that much confidence in me [to know that I wouldn't steal anything].

J: After you left high school, what did you do?

X: Like I said, I was in the process of working for this lady. Then I found out that there wasn't anything to do around Junction, and I didn't want to stay there. I figured that the longer I stayed there, the longer it was going to be for me to get out of there. [The lady I worked for] didn't pay me much. I think it was around \$15.00 or \$20.00 a week. [There] wasn't anything else for me to do, so I decided to join the service. I joined the Air Force. I knew that the Army or the Marines would be a little bit tougher, to be honest with you. And I didn't want to go into [the] Infantry, which was probably where I

would have wound up; so I joined the Air Force. I got sent to Lowery Air Force Base as a ~~radar~~ repairman, which was good for those days. If you [could] learn a trade like that, you could work anywhere. I got stationed here in El Paso. I met my wife here, and got married. I would have gone back to Junction, but there's nothing to do back there unless you want to work in a store for \$50.00 a week, or had a ranch to work. But that takes money.

- J: Were there any experiences that you had in the Air Force that stand out in your mind?
- X: Well, I left Junction [where] the Anglos were prejudiced against us. I went into the service only to find out that all the officers and the top non-commissioned officers were all Anglos. There were very few Mexican American officers; I guess I can remember a handful of [them]. Those that I do remember had very insignificant jobs. By that I mean [that they had] jobs that didn't carry any weight. They were either supply officers or they worked in administration. I'll say this, too: I believe they were brain washed. They never did get down to the level of talking to us off the cuff like some of the officers used to do with the Anglo group, even if we weren't top NCO. Some of the Anglos still carried on a conversation with us while the Mexican American officers really didn't talk to the other Mexican Americans. They kept their distance. The conversations they held [with us] were [usually] job related.
- J: Why do you think that happened? Do you have any personal opinion?



- X: Looking back now, I guess they were trying to do like the old saying goes: "Someone has their eye on you," or looking over your shoulder to see what you're doing. Not that these people really needed anybody to look over them. They could carry out their functions well. As far as not mixing or associating with us, I can see it as the relationship between officers and enlisted men. I think they just thought they were better than us; they graduated from a university. [So] they kept their distance. I really don't know why; I cannot put a finger on it other than they just thought they were better than us because they were officers.
- J: Were there several other enlisted men in the Air Force with you at that time that were Mexican American?
- X: Yes, there were several. When we finished the school that I went to, several of us got stationed here at Biggs Field. About a third of us were Mexican American. There were a lot more in the Air Force than I figured I would meet, at least in that particular field. We had another field which I thought was good: Counter Intelligence. In that field we had only one or two that were Mexican Americans; all the rest were Anglos.
- J: What was your relationship with these other Mexican Americans at that time?
- X: All the enlisted men got along real [well]. Of course, there's always separation among groups. But we got along [fine]. We

had parties, picnics. Of course, there were some that were married, and they stayed with their families. But the majority of us were not married, and we had a real good time.

J: Did you stick more with each other than with the Anglos?

X: Oh, yes. Even at that stage in the game [Mexican Americans and Anglos] got together because we had to in the jobs. But to socialize [during] after duty hours, we never got together with Anglos. I can remember very few times that most of us went together, and most of us went to Juárez anyway. [The Anglos] didn't go there because they felt they would be ripped off; and they would. But being that we spoke Spanish, of course we were able to get along with the people.

J: Were you the object of any discrimination while you were in the Air Force, or did you witness any discrimination of any other Mexican Americans while you were in the Air Force?

X: I can remember just one [incident] that stands out in my mind. That was when I went before the promotion board. To top it off, one of the guys on the promotion board was one of my supervisors. When one of these guys went up for promotion, if your supervisor was on the board, he usually would say, "Well, I'm going to ask you these couple of questions." So you would have available answers. You had an officer that was evaluating the answers, [as far as] how fast you responded to a question. And this guy asked me a question that not only took time to answer, but required thought. You just could not answer that type of question [quickly], you

had to have time. I think he made it especially hard for me, so that I couldn't answer it [in a reasonable amount of time]. Also, [other things that happened that could be considered discriminatory include when] they wanted someone to work on weekends. They usually picked one of us. The Anglos would work at nights and get the weekends [off]. Sometimes we would work on evening shifts, but not very often. They would give it to the Anglos so they would have the weekends free.

J: How long were you in the Air Force?

X: I stayed four years, and I extended two years for the purpose of going to school. But as you would have it, when I extended they said my MOS was needed overseas. Even though I would try to tell these people that I had extended for the purpose of only going to school, they still sent me overseas. All together I stayed five years and 14 days. But while I was overseas, a new ruling came out that said if you didn't have a 14 month retainability, you could get discharged as soon as you got back. I think I had 12 months retainability, so I didn't extend the other two months, and I got out.

J: What did you do after you got out of the Air Force?

X: Well, I didn't have a job, but I knew I couldn't stay in the Air Force. So I just came home and started looking for a job.

J: Here in El Paso?

X: Yes, here in El Paso. I had nowhere to look in [getting a job like the one] I had learned in the service. They still wouldn't hire you here. They would prefer an Anglo to you.

J: What year was this?

X: In 1960. I went to several places to look, and they wouldn't hire me, even though I thought I had met all the criteria that they needed. If there was an Anglo there that had a year of college, or any background familiar to the job, they would hire him instead of me. So I finally wound up being a salesman for a company that was out of Odessa, and I stayed with them for a year. Then I went to work for the city of El Paso as a surveying crew member. I stayed there until 1967. Then I went to work at White Sands for the government. Ever since, I have worked for the government in one capacity or another.

J: What type of job did you have at White Sands?

X: The first job I had there was a guard. I took several tests, and even though I passed them the only job I was called for was the guard job. So I took it. I stayed there 6 and a half months. I qualified for another job, and I got it. But then there were some openings at Fort Bliss as radar repairmen, and I got it. I might say that the [person who interviewed me] for the job at Fort Bliss was an Anglo officer, and he didn't know anything about the system that the position was open for. When he asked me some of the very basic questions about radar, I could answer him, and I could tell that he didn't know anything about it. So he said, "Well, the job is yours," because he couldn't ask me anything else. That was easy, and I got the job and stayed there for about 6 months. [But then] they had a reduction in force, what they call a shift. So, they placed me driving a bus. From there I put in for a position they had as a computer aid, and I got it.

J: This is still at Fort Bliss?

X: Yes, this is all at Fort Bliss. From there I started going to college. I also took the federal entrance exam and I passed it, and got called from the Social Security office. The lady that was in charge there was an Anglo lady and [she was] extremely helpful to me. She is part Indian, so maybe she knew how minorities had been treated. She helped me a lot. I put in a lot at that job, but it did help me quite a bit. From there I transferred to the job I now have.

J: While you were working at the Social Security office you began going to school?

X: Yes. I could only go at night because the job was all day work. So I attended night school. [The lady at work] told me I could put in for a grant that the Social Security had; if you took job related courses they would pay you for it. And so I did.

J: Was it then that you decided to go back to school?

X: No, not really. I wanted to start working, but I looked around and saw that the first thing they asked was how much college you had. When I finished [high] school, if you had a high school education it was okay. But later it became necessary to have a higher education. So when I was at Fort Bliss, I asked the supervisor if I could have the night shift [so that I could] to to school [full time]. He gave me the opportunity of working the evening shift, which was from 4 to 12 pm.

J: So after you worked for Social Security, you began working for Customs?

X: Yes.

J: How did you get into that job?

X: I waited on a lady who had come in to apply for death benefits on her husband's account. Her son had come all the way from New York to help her. He liked the way I handled the case, and when he left he told me that if I ever wanted to work for Customs to give him a call. Not long after that, I started to have problems with my left side, since I sat most of the time and did little or no exercise. This job, I might say, was no easy job. It was a pressure job. You only had a few days to get your applications out of the office.

J: When did you start to work for Customs?

X: I started to work for Customs in March of 1973. I wanted to stay here, but they said that no openings were available. I had to go to San Ysidro, California, which is on the Tijuana border. Later I found out that they did have openings here, but the reason they wanted people in San Ysidro was because they had no Mexican Americans working over there. There had been some problem over there, especially with the Mexican people being treated in a bad way. In a way, I'm glad I went over there, because so many things happened [that made] you learn pretty fast; you had to if you were gong to survive. They have 24 lanes over there where we have about 18. It's quite a difference.

J: How long did you stay in San Ysidro?

X: I stayed there about 9 months. I transferred back here because the climate didn't suit my wife.

J: Were there any interesting experiences that happened while you were working there?

X: Yes. People in Tijuana are more on the defense than here. Several of our officers were shot at; one was dragged about a quarter of a mile before they could stop the car. When they did, this officer's heel had been dragging. He had to have surgery, and just about half of his heel was gone--I mean down to the bone. Another officer got hit in the eye. As a result, he lost his eyesight. Another [officer] got kidnapped. The car crashed not far from the port of entry, and he managed to still hold the Marine that was trying to get away. His knee got banged up, and he had to spend some time in the hospital. People there are more hostile. They seem to have a chip on their shoulder all of the time. People here are more friendly, even after waiting in line for up to two hours. They still manage to give you a smile when they get to the [inspection station]. Also, people [here] are more inclined to tell you the truth; people over there tend to just flat lie to you.

J: When did you come back to El Paso?

X: I came back to El Paso in October of 1973.

J: What experiences have you had while working in El Paso that are interesting? Have you ever been offered a bribe?

X: Yes, and that goes from ladies offering you special favors [if you let them] come over. They will tell you, "You're a Chicano; let me pass. You're not like the gringos." We used to have a rule that people from the interior [of México] who worked for the government or any big industries could just show their credentials and come across. But then when we went over there, we had to go through the same things everyone else did, from showing our birth certificates to car titles, or special permits or letters of permission to take the cars to interior if we didn't have the clear title. So the U. S. stopped this. Courtesy that had been extended to people stopped. So when these people come over, they could first feel you out to see if you would take something, from just having a good time in Juárez to X amount of dollars.

J: What kinds of bribes have you been offered?

X: I have been offered X amount of dollars to special favors from some pretty girls. Some girls give you the cry routine, where they really put on an act for you. When they know they're not going to come across there, sometimes they just curse you out when they leave.

J: Have other officers been offered bribes?

X: Yes. I'm pretty sure that all officers have been bribed at one time or another. I might say that none of us here in El Paso have been arrested because of wrong doing. While I was in Tijuana, two Immigration inspectors and one Customs inspector were caught selling permits for



\$35-\$50 dollars. When they finally caught them, these inspectors had about a quarter of a million dollars in several banks. It took about 2 and a half years of investigative work to get these people. All [of them] got prison terms.

J: Have you ever seen anyone here in El Paso accept a bribe?

X: No. The only person that I know of [that was arrested] was a Customs Patrol Officer that got caught trying to sell cocaine to some undercover agents. The Grand Jury found him guilty. I might add, too, that none of the officers named by this Customs Patrol officer were Mexican American. They were all Anglo. They included the person in charge, pilots, supervisors, and other Customs Patrol officers.

J: How many Mexican American Customs officers are working here in El Paso now?

X: Quite a [few]. There's one Senior Supervisor and three or four supervisors.

J: How are Mexican American Customs officers treated by Anglo Customs personnel?

X: There is still Anglo preference. Those Anglo Inspectors that have come after I did have been given the image of, "This guy really has it," when he actually hasn't done any better than the rest of us. At one time, an Inspector who is now a Senior Grade 11 got emergency leave so that he could go fishing with the Chief Inspector. Some of these inspectors

don't know any Spanish at all, and often have to come for a Mexican American Inspector to translate for them. These inspectors made no effort to learn even a working knowledge of [Spanish]. About 90% of the people that come over speak Spanish, or would rather speak [it]. I don't blame the people; it's their native language, so why should they change?

J: Have you witnessed any mistreatment of Mexican nationals?

X: I have never seen anyone beat up [any] just because the Inspector wanted to. I have seen Immigration Inspectors treat the persons applying for permits really bad, use language that is not professional to use as an inspector.

J: Have any Anglos refused to be inspected by you because you were Mexican American?

X: Yes. But then I just call an Anglo inspector and tell him that they would like to be waited on by an Anglo inspector. This gives this Inspector more work, and usually the Anglo inspector will inspect more rigidly than I would have.

J: Are there any other comments you would like to make before we move to another phase of this interview?

X: I like the work. The people are generally friendly. I enjoy seeing someone I know, [while I'm on the job].

- J: Do you relate to any of the "founding fathers" that we all learned about in school, like Washington, Jefferson, Adams?
- X: No, not at all. I believe that the Spanish did just as good, if not better. [The Indians] introduced the first wheel and several agricultural products as well as fruits to this land. So I don't relate to these figures at all. I do want to make this place a better place to live in, not only for myself but for my children and their children. Most of all, I want to give them an education, if nothing else, because this no one can take away [from them].
- J: Do you feel the role of the Mexican American will be improving over the next few years?
- X: I feel that there is only one place to go and that is forward. I'm glad when I see a professor with a Mexican surname. These are learned men and have much to contribute to our benefit. It represents hard work on their part. Most of all, I can relate to them better than the so-called "founding fathers."
- J: I'd like to thank you for this very interesting and informative interview.
- X: My pleasure.