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Interview no. 245

Escalante Family History

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Family History

INTERVIEWER: Written by Alfredo Escalante, Jr.

PROJECT: Class Project

DATE OF INTERVIEW: December 1, 1975

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

History of the Alfredo Escalante family.

A SHORT HISTORY OF
THE ANCESTORS OF THE
ALFREDO ESCALANTE FAMILY

A Paper

Presented to

Doctor Oscar Martinez of
Department of History of
the University of Texas

at El Paso

An Interview conducted

by

Alfredo Escalante, Jr.

for

~~Mexican~~-American

History 3309

December 1975

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a short history of a Mexican-American family, the Alfredo Escalante, Sr. family. Socioeconomic, political, ethnic, and environmental conditions will be expounded upon. The lives and events of the ancestors, as well as the members of the family will be delved into. The happenings and circumstances which brought these human beings into this part of the world will be discussed.

II. ANCESTRY OF THE ESCALANTE FAMILY

My father, Alfredo Paez Escalante, was born in Ranger, Texas. He was the son of Clemente Escalante and Esther Paez Escalante. They migrated to the United States from México through the EL Paso Port of Entry.

My great-grandfather on my father's side was named Mariano Escalante. He was born and reared in the state of Zacatecas, México. Little is known about his infancy and youth. We do know that he was the owner of a small farm located in the outskirts of San Jose, Zacatecas, México, during his young adulthood.

Mariano Escalante's wife name was Tiburcia Escalante. She had two children, Clemente Escalante, my grandfather, and a daughter, Mariana Escalante. Tiburcia Escalante died when she was twentythree years old.

My great-grandfather, Mariano was an excellent horseman. He joined some insurgents' cavalry during the early part of the

Mexican Revolution which started in 1910, and was killed in action. He lived from 1862 and died in 1912.

My grandfather, Clemente Escalante, was brought up in a farm in the state of Zacatecas. He acquired a grammar school education by attending the village school of San José, Zacatecas. Clemente Escalante lived until 1967 and was 84 years old when he died.

Clemente Escalante was married in 1913 in the town of Sombrerete, Zacatecas, México. He worked for the Stone and Webster Power and Light Company in El Paso and its surrounding territory from 1924 until 1931. He rose to foreman. His duties consisted of directing the work of crews who laid underground concrete pipes interstate.

My great-grandfather, who in turn is the grandfather of my father on his mother's side was a native of Portugal. His name was Vistor Paez and had migrated to México during the 1860's. He settled in Sombrerete, Zacatecas, México and married a local young lady, Dolores García. They established their home in the aforementioned town. Mrs. Dolores García Paez bore 8 sons and 6 daughters.

Little is known about Victor Paez, only to relate that he was the sole owner of a leather tannery and that he was an influential businessman in his hometown. Victor Paez was a member of the local militia and would arm himself to help protect Sombrerete against marauding Indians. The town would turn into a fortress when the Indians attacked. Some of the homes in the

town used to have underground passages connecting each home with the other. The women and children were hidden in these passages in order to keep them from being kidnapped by the very savage Indians. Mr. Paez expired in the early 1900's. He lived from 1848 to 1906.

Mrs. Dolores Paez was left a widow in Sombrerete, México. Her family scattered to the four winds, except four of her young daughters. She never married. Mrs. Paez, together with her 4 daughters migrated to the United States by way of El Paso in 1917, and settled here.

My maternal grandmother was born in Sombrerete, México in 1865 and died in El Paso in 1965. My maternal grandmother's name is Esther Paez Escalante. She stayed next to her mother all her life. Even at the time of my great-grandmother's death, my grandmother was living next door to her mother. She never worked outside her home. However, Esther Escalante kept the family of Clemente Escalante consisting of 3 sons and 3 daughters together as long as she lived. With her wisdom and guidance the family grew up and has contributed in an honest manner to the community in which they happen to live. She is buried in Mt. Carmel cemetery.

My mother, María López Escalante was born in El Paso, Texas. She is the daughter of Manuel López and Julia Montes López. My mother's mother migrated to the United States from Mexico of the El Paso Port of Entry. She, too, settled in El Paso to live.

My great-grandmother on my mother's side was named Ana

Montes. Mrs. Montes migrated to the United States by way of El Paso in 1912. She brought with her 3 daughters and 1 son. Their names are Guadalupe, Josefa, Julia and Cornelio. Guadalupe died in 1924. The others are alive and well today. Mrs. Ana Montes passed away in 1936, here in El Paso, Texas.

Julia Montes viuda de López is the name of my grandmother on my mother's side. She was born in Parral, Chihuahua, México. This is where the maternal side of my family is originally from. Mrs. Julia López resides with her daughter, Mrs. Mary L. Escalante, following the European Extended family system.

Mr. Manuel López is the name of my maternal grandfather. He married Julia Montes in El Paso Texas in 1919. They had a daughter and a son, whose names are Mary and Manuel respectively. Mr. Manuel López died of a heart attack in the early 1920's.

Mrs. Julia López, with the death of her husband went to live in the St. Ignatius Catholic Church area of the Second Ward, also known as South El Paso. From the 1920's and through the early 1940's, the Julia López family lived in that area.

With the death of her husband, Mrs. López went to work as a domestic, and did this the rest of her life, in order to support her son and daughter. However, she managed to send her children through parochial school (St. Ignatius Elementary School). She saw them graduate from here.

My mother, Mrs. Mary Escalante was born in El Paso, Texas in the early 1920's. She grew up in South El Paso and graduated

from the now defunct, St. Joseph's Academy (a branch of Loretto Academy) in 1941. She worked her way through high school and her field of study was the Commercial field. She attained high grades in Stenography, Bookkeeping and Typing.

Mrs. Escalante went to work as a pay-roll clerk immediately after graduation and later became an executive secretary. She has continued to work in this position up to the present time, except for the time that she spent in Washington, D. C. while her husband served in the United States Air Force. This was between 1951 and 1953.

II. CONDITIONS AND EVENTS EXPERIENCED BY THE ESCALANTE FAMILY

Mr. Clemente Escalante and his family left El Paso in the year of 1921 for the town of Ranger, Texas in search of a job. He found work as a laborer in a stone quarry. It was here that my father Alfredo Escalante, Sr. was born in September 19, 1922. Mr. Escalante returned to El Paso in 1923

Socioeconomic Conditions. The earliest recollections that my father has regarding his early childhood, are the conditions and the place that his family lived under during the early 1920's. He states that they lived in a two story white brick building. This tenement house is located at 208 East Seventh Avenue. His family lived in a two room apartment upstairs. There were 3 girls and 2 boys, including my father living there. It was a southwest corner apartment, with one window overlooking the Republic of México.

Mrs. Dolores Paez and her daughters lived next door to my paternal grandfather. However, after a short and severe illness, she passed away in the year of 1927. My father recalls that Mrs. Paez laid in state on top of a table, with 4 big and bright candles burning continuously all night long. My father and his family stood an all night vigil and prayed for Mrs Paez's soul.

Mr. Escalante remembers how all of the family would stay outdoors at night. They would exchange stories of México and their struggle to get into the United States. My father's great thrill was for the week-end to arrive. With a weekly allowance of ten cents, five cents for admission to the local movie house and five cents for an ice cream cone, his inward desires were satisfied.

Jobs for the Mexican-Americans. The only jobs available for the preponderance of the Mexican-Americans in El Paso during the 1920's and 1930's were the unskilled ones. The Mexican-Americans were the laborers, cooks, street cleaners and sanitation workers. In El Paso, one requirement for being a street cleaner was a U. S. citizenship. However, there were a number of Mexican-Americans working as store clerks, and this was a prestigious job.

Socializing in El Paso. Anglos would not socialize with Latin-Americans because it was taboo for them. They would only talk to Latins in places of business. A Latin would never be seen with an Anglo or visa versa. Anglos would never be seen in South El Paso. The only Latins to be seen north of the Railroad

tracks were the housemaids or gardeners.

Poor Latins like my father's family were discriminated from two ends. With the advent of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, many rich Mexican families migrated to El Paso. They settled in Sunset Heights addition. They looked down on the poor Latin-American living in South El Paso. These wealthy Mexicans were the store clerks in downtown El Paso. So what a frustrating experience this poor Mexican-Americans went through : Upper-class Mexican social discrimination and Anglo socioeconomic discrimination!

Socioeconomic Conditions During the 1930's. My paternal grandfather soon lost his job during the winter of 1931. His family had moved to 701 South St. Vrain Street. My father was attending Alamo School from which he graduated in 1936. It was a bitter winter and my paternal grandfather applied for U. S. government relief and received it. Whatever aid they did receive was not enough to support a medium size family.

Mr. Clemente Escalante went into business for himself and became a self-employed, ambulant Mexican bread salesman. This venture carried the Clemente Escalante family through the depression-ridden 1930's. The Escalante children wore tennis shoes during these years and still lived in a two story tenement house. My father played football for recreation in the middle of unpaved East Fifth Avenue. There was very little danger of one being run over by an automobile. Who could afford to own a motor vehicle at these times?

III. HOW MR. A. ESCALANTE MADE IT TO THE MIDDLE CLASS

Mr. A. Escalante, Sr. graduated from Bowie High School in May 1941. Immediately after that, he went to work for the U. S. Civil Service at William Beaumont General Hospital (now called William Beaumont Medical Center). He worked as a Ward Attendant until November, 1942.

My father was drafted into the U. S. Army in December, 1942. He rose to the rank of a non-commissioned officer and was Honorably Discharged in May, 1946. Mr. A. Escalante served as a Medical Technician after having graduated from Lawson General Hospital Medical Department Medical Technician's School. He served overseas in the European Theater of Operations as a Medical Technician and was decorated for participating in several military campaigns. Mr. A. Escalante found many sincere Anglo-Americans and learned that it was in the Armed Services that an individual could be promoted to a higher military position, without one's ethnicity being held against him. He also learned that a person could enhance his economic and thereby his social status by attending institutions of higher learning.

In June, 1947, my father enrolled at New Mexico State University. He majored in Pre-Law and minored in Aerospace Science and in Chemistry and its allied courses. Mr. Escalante was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve. Immediately after that Lt. Escalante took a 90 day tour of active duty with the U. S. Force at Biggs Air Force Base, Texas. All of his tour was spent at Biggs and the period was June to September, 1949.

In September, 1949, Mr A. Escalante enrolled in the University of New Mexico in order to major in Government. He stayed there until he graduated in August 1951 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree.

In September, 1951, Mr. A. Escalante married the former Mary López at St. Ignatius Catholic Church. After having wonderful wedding festivities, the Escalantes commenced a life of wedded bliss. During the fall of 1951, Mr. Escalante was employed by the U. S. Department of Labor at the Bracero Reception Center in El Paso, Texas. He worked as an Assistant Center Manager. His duties called for the accounting of all Braceros entering the United States from México that passed through El Paso.

In December, 1951, Mr. Escalante was recalled into extended active duty with the U. S. Air Force, as a Second Lieutenant. He performed most of his active duty in the Washington, D. C. area. His main duties consisted of conducting investigations in behalf of the Air Force. Here, my father gained self-confidence in regards to performing assigned tasks successfully. In December, 1953, Mr. A. Escalante was Honorably Discharged from the Air Force as a first lieutenant and he returned to El Paso, Texas.

My father took terminal leave from the Air Force and it was during this time that he became actively employed as an Employment Interviewer with the Texas Employment Commission in El Paso. His main duties were the classification of job applicants into their respective occupational endeavors. He also analyzed unemployment insurance claims for accuracy and conciseness. He worked there until August 1955.

Since 1955, and up to the present time my father has been a classroom teacher with the local school systems. He is a teacher of educable mentally retarded students at junior high school level at the present time.

He attended the University of Texas at El Paso from 1954 to 1971. Mr. A. Escalante has a Master of Arts degree in History and has more than 50 credit semester hours above his advanced degree. He also holds a Certificate in Counseling and Guidance from the University of Texas at El Paso.

III. CONCLUSION (MR. ESCALANTE'S OPINION)

Regarding the Chicano Movement. I think that the Chicano movement is a thing that was long overdue. I am against any violence involved. It has been proved that through educating our people we can advance in status both socioeconomically and politically.

Former Discrimination Suffered by the Chicano. It is a well known documented fact that Mexican-Americans were greatly discriminated by the Anglo-American. Many jobs they couldn't hold and they were socially shunned by the Anglos. In many rural areas their education was of inferior quality.

Comparing the Mexican-American of Yesterday and Today. In yesteryears, the Chicanos had their hands tied. They couldn't move in any direction.

Today, the Mexican-American has become more nationalistic and aware of becoming the master of his fate. Nationalistic independence means to the Chicano, control of his political, social, and economic institutions. He no longer accepts the Anglo

system that has formerly controlled him.

Today, public opinion doesn't support oppression of the Mexican-American in the light of Supreme Court decisions against personal oppression. It has also become popular to expose any type of oppression against the Mexican-American all over the United States.

Changes in the Future For the Future of the Chicano. Social, economic, educational and political opportunity has expanded for Mexican-American within the past decade. This will continue to be the case and it will be up to the Chicano to take advantage of all above cited opportunities to the utmost of his ability.