

8-10-1978

Interview no. 707

Jim Paschall

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 Jim Paschall by Susan Waltman-Sanchez, 1978, "Interview no. 707," 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.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Jim Paschall
INTERVIEWER: Susan Waltman-Sanchez
PROJECT: Class project
DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 10, 1978
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 707
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 707

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Jim Pachall was born in Duncan, Oklahoma. He spent 21 years in the military service. He has travelled extensively around the world and throughout the United States. Jim worked for Western Union telegraph in communications and construction. Later he worked for other contractors and eventually formed his own company with several partners. This company became involved with water and sewer distribution systems, commercial sprinkler systems, park and tennis court constructions, the concrete business, etc. In his line of work he was in contact with many Mexican-Americans and mixed in with these were many illegal aliens.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

This interview deals primarily with illegal aliens in the construction industry. It concerns hiring practices, treatment of illegals, wage scales, problems with the Border Patrol, and certain activities of the illegals.

Length of interview: 55 minutes Length of transcript: 31 pages

Jim Paschall
By Susan Waltman-Sanchez
August 10, 1978

W: OK, Jim, where and when were you born?

P: Well, I was born in Duncan, Oklahoma, in 1928.

W: And where did you grow up?

P: Well, I lived there until I was, it must have been 15 years old, and then I started traveling around the country, working various jobs all over the southwest and midwest, until I went into the service when I was seventeen.

W: Would you like to elaborate on where you've lived?

P: Well, I've traveled almost all over the world in the service. Fifteen or twenty different states in the United States. I spent twenty-one years in the service, retired in 1968. During that twenty-one years I had seven tours overseas. I was in Europe three times and the Far East four times. I was stationed in Germany and Austria and France and Japan and Korea and Viet Nam.

W: Do you have any interesting experiences that you could relate about these times? Your experiences with people there, or what you saw?

P: Well, no, I don't think probably any real exciting events. I personally feel that in all these places, I sort of made an effort to get to know the people there. I made a couple of attempts to learn to speak some of the languages. I don't know, I just always sort of relate myself or tie myself to the poor people. When I'd be in the Orient I'd always

try to eat where the working man eats. I don't like to go to the fancy restaurants. For a couple of reasons, I like the food better and I feel like you sort of get a feel for the country better.

W: Did you see these poor people oppressed, mistreated, or. . . ?

P: Oh, yeah, Korea is probably the best example of that.

I went there in 1950, at the beginning of the Korean Conflict, and refugees all over the place, dead bodies laying all over the place, civilians, military, and everything else. This was in 1950. Now I returned there in 1963 and I was around the capital city of Seoul. And what really sort of blew my mind was that there were Mercurys, Cadillacs, Chryslers, chaffeur driven, big businesses, fine hotels. In the heart of the city it looks like a real thriving booming economy, and there's just thousands and thousands and thousands of people who have cardboard shacks that are built just on the sidewalk, just on the street, in islands out on the middle of a river and places like this. In other words, when I worked there the first time there were poor, poor people in a poor, poor country. I went back thriteen, fourteen years later and it looked like a fairly rich country. Not rich compared to the United States standards but a lot richer then it was when I was there the first time. But it seemed like there were probably more poor people at the same time. It looked like the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer.

W: Do you think these rich people were trying not to let the other people get ahead?

P: Well, I probably guess it's like it is in most places. The rich people are just not concerned with the poor peoples' problems, they're concerned with getting rich.

W: These rich were people from the country?

P: Oh, yes, yes.

W: So there was some.

P: Oh, yeah, yeah, probably all the people that had contacts, or the crooks, the gangsters, they all got rich. But I didn't really feel that the government there or the United States government there was as much concerned with the actual plight of the poor people as maybe getting the headlines that the economy is doing this, or the United States helped that. I know the country on a whole was getting better, but I don't feel that those people sleeping on the streets felt like a damn thing was being done for them.

W: Did you see any interaction between the rich people and the poor people, or were they pretty much separated?

P: No, I felt that they were totally separated.

W: Did you see this anywhere else?

P: Well, I saw a lot of sad situations as far as people are concerned. In Europe, right after World War II there were just thousands and thousands of people in what you call "DP" camps, displaced person camps. These were people that the

Germans had in labor camps, and stuff like this from Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Balkan countries, all these countries, and had moved them into Germany to work in the factories. And then at the end of the war, there these people are, waiting to get home, maybe their home destroyed, family scattered all over. You see this. I think in the military you get a ringside seat.

W: And you never saw the poor people who were oppressed rebelling, and try to do something to change their situation?

P: No, I don't think I ever did.

W: Fatalistic attitude.

P: Probably, I don't know; what's the use, you know.

W: Do you have anything else you would like to comment about that?

P: No, I can't think of anything. Just that if I live here now, I see a lot of poverty related problems on the border, I can relate those to similar ones I've seen in various places of the world.

W: They were mostly the people of that country, not illegals going in?

P: Yeah, they were legal residents, native born, local people.

W: Would you like to tell me what kind of jobs you've had?

P: Well, I was a soldier for 21 years, but prior to going into the military I worked in pole line construction, aerial and underground communication systems in the construction.

I also did this in the military.

W: Where was this now? Where did you work at this?

P: Well, before I went into the military I worked for Western Union telegraph, for instance, out of Dallas, Texas, and I worked in Texas, New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Louisiana. I was working on a traveling crew. We would spend anywhere from, say, two weeks to two or three months in one place, and then when we would complete that job we would move to a new city and a new job. So I've done that up until the time I went into the military.

W: That's the construction you were talking about?

P: Yes, communication construction.

W: What did you do? You were saying that you were in the hiring of the people at that time?

P: No, not in that job.

W: That's a different job.

P: Yeah, after I retired from the army I went to work. I retired and bought a home here in El Paso. The communications construction work was the type of work I knew and there was a lot of that going on here at Fort Bliss, so I started working for some of these contractors. I did that for a couple of years, and a local company here in El Paso got a \$250,000 or \$300,000 dollar job out at Fort Bliss and they asked me to be the superintendent of that job, so I did. I took that job and then I started doing other jobs for him.

W: As superintendent what did you have to do?

P: Well, I didn't hire anybody. I fired a lot of them but I didn't hire. I ordered the materials, I estimated the jobs. I did the jobs. We got the jobs and I ordered the materials and I told them what kind of people to hire, and I did hire some specialists, some hick splashers, and people that were in that line of work.

W: That were illegal?

P: No, none of these were illegals. But in the course of my working for this company, the owner of this company, the president or vice president at that time and myself formed our own company to get into that line of work. Because at that particular time, around 1969, 1970, there was a lot of that type contracts going on at Fort Bliss, Holloman Air Force Base, White Sands. And they had no experience in that line of work and I did, so I was valuable to them. They had credit, the equipment, the facilities for a company to do that type of work. So they were necessary for me, so through this type of thing we got together and formed our own company.

About that time this type of work started fading away so we had to go into water and sewer distribution systems. We had to go into commercial sprinkler systems, we had to go into parks, we built Pavo Real Park and Marion Manor park over in the lower valley, and we did tennis courts and picnic tables. You know, when one type of

work fades away you have to adapt and start doing something else. We did a lot of sidewalks. We built a lot of sidewalks. We got into the concrete business and there we hired many more laborers than we did in the communications type work, where you hire skilled workers. But once you got into this laying pipe, and a lot of excavation, a lot of hand type work, there we hired more Mexican American people, and of course mixed in with these people are a lot of illegal aliens.

W: So you had a lot of direct contact with Mexican Americans?

P: Well, I would say yeah, that 80% of our work force was Mexican or Mexican Americans.

W: You were the one that hired these people?

P: Well, I had run the outside. All the jobs I personally ran. Now our office was supposed to hire the people. But you know, if I've got a guy working, like my foreman on this job, let's say Ramon, he's the foreman on this job and we need a couple more men on that particular job, he'll say, "Look, Jim, I know a couple of good pipe layers, do you want me to just bring them out?" And I'll say, "Sure bring them on out tomorrow morning."

W: So then you were doing the hiring?

P: Yeah, in some cases I'd do the hiring. In some cases people would just go into the office and fill in an application, and of course these people that I'd hire, if they came out to work the next morning, I'd just put them to work on

the job. But that afternoon they would go into the office and fill out an application and their withholding tax forms and certain papers you just have to have to deduct their taxes, etc.

W: You were telling me before about some of your hiring practices. Would you like to elaborate on that?

P: Well, I don't know exactly what you mean.

W: You said that you did hire Mexican illegals.

P: Well, I said that. We had a lot of people working that I personally knew were illegal aliens.

W: That didn't matter when you hired them?

P: Well, I don't know if you could really say it didn't matter. Obviously it didn't or we wouldn't have hired them. If you want to look at it, you know, just from one point of view, but in the first place, you have a lot of people working that are illegal aliens that you don't know. They come in, apply for a job. They speak pretty good English, or maybe very good English. They have a Texas Driver's license, a social security card. They have a birth permit. It may be somebody else's but you don't know this. And you find out later that they're illegal aliens. But I know a few guys that worked for us that I personally knew that they were illegal aliens, and they've been picked up by the Border Patrol on one of my jobs and hauled off. I've called up friends of mine that were in the construction business. You know, the next day this

guy would come by, but he'd be afraid to work for us, and he was a good man and a good worker, very reliable. I would call friends of mine that were maybe in a smaller degree in the same business and ask them if they could use a good man. They'd say yeah, so I'd send him and they'd hire him. And they would do us the same way.

W: So a lot of people were hiring them, even if they did know that they were illegals?

P: Yes, well, you know why. You have different, sort of mixed feelings about this. I realize that it's a problem. I don't think it's a problem that I personally can have a lot of influence on from the level that I was at. I look at it, I had a contract to do a certain amount of work. But also, I must do this certain amount of work in a certain amount of time. If I need fourteen pipe layers, I need fourteen pipe layers. And if I say, "OK, well I know Solis here is a quality pipe layer," but I know he's an illegal alien, say half of them were legals and half of them were illegals. If I didn't just hire them and there's no others available, how am I going to complete this job? And if they have a \$500 dollar a day penalty if you don't complete that job, you're going to in the first place. In the second place, I know this man. I know he's a good worker, and I like him. So what do I care. I just give him a job.

W: Did you have any control at all over the hiring of illegals?

P: Well, the only thing I would say is that most of my foremen were Mexican Americans. I would hear griping from them sometimes about the illegals taking a lot of our jobs. I would say, "Well, most of the guys I've personally hired are guys you've brought me. So don't bring any." But that same foreman might have one of his right hand men that would be an illegal that would be a personal friend, a good worker, so. In other words we had said at one time that they should keep all these illegals out of here. But at the same time he would employ one himself. With our company, our foreman could hire guys. If one of them told me that he needed three men, I'd say, "Well, can you get them?" And he'd say, "Yeah, I can get them." So they'd just hire their own men, and then the next day our guy would take them into the office and get the pertinent details.

W: So if they were illegals, they'd just get a legal address or something?

P: Yes, a lot of them.

W: On paper it would look all right?

P: Right, a lot of them give you an El Paso address, give you an El Paso phone number. They've got a social security card. They used to work for one of my competitors. I might know that this man has been working around here for a long time, so on the surface I've got no reason to believe that he is not a legal resident because maybe I've seen him working in El Paso for four or five years.

W: Did you find that the Mexican illegals, because they were afraid, or because they really wanted a job or something, did they work harder than the other people? Were there less problems with them?

P: No, I don't think I could make any distinction there because everybody worked hard or I didn't want them. I worked hard and I expected the people that I was paying then a paycheck to work hard. The only thing I would say is that the guys that I personally know that were illegal than worked for us were first class workers. They were real good workers. You just didn't have any problems, more or less, with them than you do with anybody else. They were just another worker. I would say that they were good as anybody else and as dependable.

And you know, another thing that I just feel I have to say is that everybody says these illegals are working for lower wages. I feel like the maids and a lot of these people are. But in the construction business, from where I see it, if I don't know a guy is an illegal, how can I pay him less than anybody else? I don't know if he's an illegal. And if I do know he's an illegal, and say his pay is \$3.50 an hour, and I paid him \$3.20 an hour. he's just going to go to one of my competitors and make \$3.50 an hour. The way the situation is today, almost all contracts that you get have some degree of federal money in it. If it has United States federal money in it, you

have a rates and wages scale that you must follow.

An operator makes so much an hour. A pipe layer makes so much money an hour. A laborer makes so much money an hour. You send a copy of your payroll. Every payroll goes in to be inspected. A laborer relations officer comes out on the job and interviews all these people. He tells me to leave when he interviews them.

W: Does he know that some are illegal?

P: Well, the labor relations people are not really interested in illegals. They're interested in if I'm paying them as much as I'm supposed to be paying them, if I'm making them give a kickback, if I make them work on Saturdays and don't pay them overtime, and things like this. In the course of this type thing, this is another way that I say that I personally would have no way, even if I had the desire to, which I don't have, that I really would have no way to pay them less money if I wanted to because I would get caught.

W: That goes for almost all construction?

P: Well, I think so. I think if it's organized. If it's a corporation, a legitimate construction company, I think yes, that is true. I know of many incidents where the illegal is just exploited terribly. I know that some of them walk from here to Albuquerque. I know that!

W: Do they have jobs there?

P: No, they're just hunting a job. I did a lot of jobs around White Sands Missile Range and so I made numerous trips up and down the highway there, and I'd see these people walking. I would stop in restaurants, stop and drink in bars and things along the way and talk to them. I've had many other people tell me that the illegals would talk two or three hundred yards off the highway during the daytime so that even if somebody sees them they couldn't catch them. They'd take off through the desert. Then at night they'd try to stop off around these restaurants and these bars in the small towns and they'd come over and ask if you had any work for them to do. These people, some of them tell them no. Some of them have some work to do. Some of them just invent some work, give them a dollar or something to eat. One thing I know of personally is a little town up in New Mexico, I'm not going to say where and I'm not going to say who, but I know a guy up there who is a Mexican American. I've known him and his family for years and they're fairly prominent. They had an illegal alien they kept there and worked for two or three months I understand, and paid him twenty-five cents a day. They gave him his meals and a place to sleep.

W: Hard work.

P: Yeah, hard work. They were in a cattle feed business. He was unloading sacks of feed, bales of hay. So there is a lot

of this thing going on. By the same token, there is a lot of people that hire illegal aliens and know they are illegal aliens, and [people] hire them and don't know they are illegal aliens and pay them the prevailing wage. You know, I think there is a comment about that there is a stereotype of how all Americans see all Mexicans, or how they see all Mexican Americans, or how they see all illegal aliens. I also think there is a stereotype of these people about how all American people see them.

W: How do you think they feel?

P: I think they think that everybody in El Paso wants to hire a maid for twenty dollars a week, and of course I'm not saying that there's not a lot of this going on. There is. But there's also a lot of legitimate business that hire and don't try to hold the wages down. My philosophy always was that if I pay a guy right and I treat him right, he's going to work for me and he's not going to steal my equipment. He'll be a good worker. If I worked for somebody and they paid me \$1.60 an hour, that's how much work they'd get out of me, \$1.60, if they watched me. If they didn't watch me they'd probably get a dollar's worth. That's the way I feel; and I feel that if I feel that way, the other man feels that way too. So, when I'm in the position of an employer, I feel that regardless if I had any feelings for the guy personally or not, it is my benefit to pay him a

living wage and to treat him right, because if I don't, why should he give a damn about my job, about my company? He'll steal my tools, break them on purpose, or anything!

W: Did you have any problems like that on your job?

P: On some jobs we would because, say, you get a job, and it needs 16 or 17, let's say 20 laborers. Sometimes we just go down to Texas Employment Commission and there's a lot of guys standing around there, applying for jobs down there. A lot of times we'd just get laborers that way. Some of these guys would come out and work. The next day you don't have any tools on the job.

W: Did you know if any of those were illegals?

P: Well, no. You just have to assume that if they've applied for a job at the Texas State Employment Commission and they've filled out the paperwork there, they've been accepted. But still, the only thing I can do is to see if they have a social security card, if they can answer the questions that's on our application. Really, I mean, how do you know, how can I know if he's illegal or not? I just have no way of knowing.

W: But you never really had any problems with illegals?

P: No. The only problem I had was with the Border Patrol.

W: You were saying before that the Border Patrol would come. What happens?

P: Well, they would just drive up on your job, and it's pretty easy to tell who the illegal is because he starts running.

As soon as he sees the green wagon coming he takes off running.

W: Where does he go?

P: Well, he just goes anywhere to try to get away from there. He just doesn't want to get caught. If they chase him down and catch him, I guess they take him to the bridge and turn him loose. I do know that a lot of them were back to work the next morning. Some of them, if it's in the morning, they'd be back that afternoon.

W: You said before sometimes the Border Patrol, if they caught them, they'd bring them back to you. . . ?

P: Well, I know of a couple of instances where I was just in the office at that time. Normally I'm out in the field on the job. But a couple of times when I was in the office, the Border Patrol vehicle drove by and had one of our employees. They came in the office and they said, "Do you know this man? Does he work for you people?" And we said, "Well, yeah, he works for us." They said, "Well he's an illegal alien. He can't work here." We said, "Well, we didn't know that." They said, "Well, I'm sure you didn't." Or whatever, he didn't go into that. He just said, "Well listen, we're going to send this man back into Mexico and he says he's got four days pay coming from you people." We say let us look, and we looked at the payroll card, and if he had four days coming, why, then we'd just make out his paycheck right there. The Border Patrol

guy would stand there and wait with the guy until we gave him his check. I talked to some of these guys later and they said that he took them by the bank, let them cash their check, and then took them wherever they take them. I guess they take them to the bridge and send them across, I don't know. But I saw these things personally.

W: But that wouldn't scare the people away?

P: Oh, no. You know, you have to look at the illegal alien. I don't blame him. Change my position with his and I'm coming across that bridge. That's all there is to it. The thing I think about most of, with the illegal aliens, is that here's a man that wants to work. If he'll take a chance on going to jail coming across that bridge, if he'll walk from here to Albuquerque, or here to Las Cruces or somewhere, that man just wants to work. He doesn't want to steal. If he wanted to steal he'd just come across the bridge and steal something. He wants a job. What's wrong with that? I don't see anything wrong with a person wanting a job. So, one side of your mind is saying, "Well, it's hurting a lot of American people if a lot of illegals have their jobs." Then on the other hand you say that it's not this man's fault he doesn't have a job. He's got a wife and kids and he wants to take care of his family. He wants a job. You can't help but have a lot of sympathy for his situation. It's not any way his fault. As a matter of fact, in a way I have a certain amount of admiration

for a guy that will take a chance on coming across knowing that at best he'll get sent back, but a lot of things worse than that can happen. They can do a lot more to him than just send him back. So you have to have a certain amount of sympathy for him, and personally I have a certain amount of admiration for his determination to help himself.

W: Did the Border Patrol come around to see your sites very often?

P: Constantly. They undoubtedly know that a great number of illegals work in the construction industry. They go around the construction jobs. I saw them there hundreds of times. One particular which might be a good example is some new apartment buildings being build up behind Cielo Vista Mall, a big huge apartment complex. We had a subcontract in there to put in the underground conduit for telephones, for cable TV, and for underground electric. There was probably many other subcontractors there. Probably electrical work was being done by a subcontractor and plumbing, the internal plumbing and the mechanical work, air conditioning, refrigeration, all this kind of stuff. A number of contractors were working there. All kinds of carpenters and steel and just all the types of jobs would be going on in the apartment complex. A Border Patrol vehicle would drive up there, and it's just as if they would scatter like quails. They would break and run.

W: They could never catch them all?

P: No, they would just catch a very few of them. I don't know, I get the feeling that if the Border Patrol picks a guy up off of one of my jobs, which they have, they've done it while I was right there, and that man is back to work at 7 o'clock the next morning, I sort of feel that the Border Patrol doesn't really want to keep that man out. If they did, they would do something besides just sending him back across. If a guy comes over here and steals something and gets caught, I think there's an effort made to keep him out of the United States. But, a lot of these guys are family people. They don't bother anybody. They don't steal. They come over here and do their job. And a lot of them have relatives over here. They come over here on Monday through Friday. Friday they buy their groceries and buy whatever they want to buy and get back across. They spend the weekend with their families and come back over. So they sort of eliminate their chances of getting caught crossing. The only chance they have of getting caught is out on the actual job. But the Border Patrol, yeah, that's what they do. They just hunt them. They know as well as everybody else that a great many work in construction, so that's one of their targets.

W: Do they check all the workers' papers or anything? Do they have to have anything?

P: No, I'll tell you. I know they do it, but I personally have

never seen a Border Patrol go out on any construction job and start checking documents. It's been my experience that they would drive in the driveway. I guess they do this (this is just my thoughts) thinking that if there's an illegal working there, he's going to break and run. So they'll drive by real slow where there's no question that you'll see them. I think if nobody runs they just go on. But I have never really seen them personally. I'm sure they do, stop and check around for anybody's identification.

We did one interesting job down right on the Rio Grande. We put in some storm control drainage pipe, four foot, five foot, six foot high concrete pipe, and built some concrete retaining walls to keep the river from washing all the soil away from these pipes. I didn't go down there too often because I had some real tough jobs going on up in Coronado, but I would go down there every couple of days and you could just see them come across. On the levee road there, a dirt road there, you could see the Border Patrol driving up and down like gang busters. When they'd go down this way the people would come across behind them. Maybe some guy somewhere else would radio that they were coming back this way and they'd turn around and start back, and then they would come back where they just left. There's no way to stop them, in my opinion. As long as the economic situation in Mexico

is such that it is today, these people are going to come across to get a job. I would come across to get a job if I was over there. And I think that you would find most of the people in the United States that gripe about illegal aliens, if you could let them change places with the illegal aliens for twenty-four hours, they would come across.

W: How did these Mexican people feel about their position, their insecurity? Did they ever express any feelings?

P: Well, the ones that I knew personally didn't worry about it. Most of them had been successfully working here for a number of years. They knew that...well, let's say companies that do mostly water and sewer distribution systems, which we got into pretty hot and heavy. Now these guys say they have worked for us. They know that we appreciated them as an employee and they knew that they were going to be among the last that we let go because, you know you get a job that you get a contract and you hire people to do that job. Now, by the time that job ends, if you didn't get another contract you sort of lay all these people off. But there's enough contracts coming out so that one of my competitors would get this job. So these people just move over to whoever's got the job. Maybe the next job that comes out I'll get, and maybe by that time he's finished. So they feel pretty secure. They're pretty good carpenters. They have a variety of skills, and I think they have a pretty good chance of staying employed.

I've never had any association with the farm workers. I think these are the ones probably that have received more mistreatment and more exploitation, I've heard, you know. We would do some jobs down in the valley, and we would have to dig across some of these farmer's fields, and so I'd get to know some of these old farmers that have been down there a long time. And I have heard some of these tales of how they would disguise their farm workers from the Border Patrol's planes flying over and looking for them, how they would give them certain types of clothes to wear and stuff like this, so they couldn't spot them from the air. And also stories that they would hire 50 farm workers. You know, they would send the word out that they would need 50 starting Monday morning. They paid once a week. On a Thursday night the farmer himself would tip off the Border Patrol. They would swoop down on Friday and gather all these people up and take all these people back, and then he didn't have to pay them anything. I know these things happen. I didn't see them but I don't think you can hear this many stories without there being some truth to it. Personally, I never was exposed to any of the farm workers on the Bracero program.

W: How about the interaction of the Mexican-illegals with the legal people that were working there? Did you have any problems? Did they get along well together? Or what did you see as far as that's concerned?

P: Yes, they got along very well. I think I mentioned a while ago that most of my foremen were Mexican American. I've had them say to me a lot of times, "I wish they would keep all the illegals out of here," because they think they hold the pay down and they take jobs that Mexican Americans should get. But by the same token they will have guys that they know are illegals working for them. And they have the authority to discharge this guy. They have the authority to fire him. And they don't do it. In many cases they are real good friends. You know another thing that makes it hard to tell if a guy is an illegal or not, we had Fernando and we had Mr. Mata and all of his sons, and Olivias, several guys that I've known for years, that have worked for us for years that are American citizens but lived in Juarez. They owned homes over there. They lived over there. They have come out and said, "Hey Jim, I've got a good friend in mind that's a pipe layer. He's an American citizen now. Do you want to hire him?" And I'll say, "Yeah, we can use him. Bring him on out." Well, chances are probably better than two to one that this guy was not an American citizen. But he did have at least enough documentation so that I could think that maybe he was.

But I really didn't see any problems between Mexican Americans and the illegals. I've heard the Mexican Americans say a lot of times that they wished to hell that there were no

illegals coming in here, but I've never really seen any arguments between them. I've never really heard of a Mexican American that in my experience in my company who would come up and say, "Hey, don't you know so and so is illegal and you ought to fire him or something," I've never had that experience.

W: And there's no organization between the legal ones?

P: No, you mean any effort to put pressure on me not to hire the illegals? I think I mentioned Solis was a guy that worked for us for a long time. I've had some of our legal Mexican Americans that were born and raised here, come and say, "Hey, I saw Solis the other night and he's looking for a job." And you know they know that he's an illegal. Personally, I didn't see any animosity. I'm sure that it exists out there somewhere, but I didn't see any.

W: Do you want to elaborate on anything about the illegal problem, what you think about it?

P: Well, it's very prominent in the news today and people have all kinds of ideas. I agree that it is a problem.

W: Did you ever have to turn down legal Americans because you had too many people there?

P: No, I made this statement myself sometimes. I know we have a problem with illegal aliens. I've said myself, and I'm not sure how strong I believe this or how I feel about it, but I know I've said it. There should be some way so that

every resident of El Paso, or every citizen of the United States or whatever, should have a job. Then if there is jobs left over, then let the green card workers come and fill them. I do think it's unfair to a Mexican American that lives in El Paso to be out of a job, when 25,000 illegal or green card holders have a job over here. I think everybody here should have a job that wants a job before a great amount of aliens, be them from Mexico or anywhere else, are allowed to come here and have a job. I think the same situation should be true of Mexico. If they have "X" number of jobs, I don't think they should let 50,000 people come in from Argentina until the Mexican citizens had these jobs. I've said that a lot of times. To a certain degree I feel that someday that would be a nice situation to have if you could get it. I don't know how you would do it.

But by the same token I feel that if I was in the position of this illegal alien and I needed a job that bad, I would come across here and try to get a job. The guy that lived over here could just scratch for himself. The fact that I was putting him out of a job wouldn't keep me from trying to get a job if I needed it that bad. I just think some way the United States Government should, in cooperation with the Mexican Government, should try to better the economic situation in Mexico. If all the efforts and money and talks that are going on tried to solve this problem, if that amount of energy and devotion were put into eliminating the

economic situation that creates this. . . You know the minimum wage thing, when I came here to El Paso and went into business over here it was \$1.60 an hour. We had a lot of young American guys, gringos, getting out of the service, didn't have a job. They were working out there as laborers. We had a lot of Mexican Americans working out there as laborers. We had some illegals working undoubtedly. Well, what kind of a wage is \$1.60 an hour? You can't make it on that. I mean you can survive, you can eat, but that's about it. So I think there at least has to be a good wage paid. I think this is a problem of both countries. This is not one country's problem. This is not another country's problem. And neither country by itself is going to solve it. If they don't cooperate, they're never going to solve it.

They took the railroad, streetcar tracks out from here to Juarez. Well, it's the most idiotic thing I've ever heard of in my life. I don't think because the Mexican people and the American people couldn't get together, I think because the authorities in El Paso and the authorities in Juarez couldn't get together. You know, it's got to benefit both cities. It would be the only international streetcar line in the world if they had one from the United States into Mexico. That's a unique thing. It's just a lack of cooperation, just hard headed, "I'm going to have everything my way," you know. And both of them do this. I think both countries

just have to realize that this problem of illegal aliens is only going to be solved if both countries make a concentrated effort to solve it.

- W: But when you were hiring you never had to turn down a legal person because you had too many there already and some were illegal?
- P: No, I don't think so. I think if I were faced with that choice I would not hire the illegal, if I knew.
- W: Would you tell the illegal to leave? Or you never had to do that?
- P: No, I never did. Not to my knowledge. I might have had some illegals working and some guys come into the office and put in an application for work and we would say, well, we just didn't need anybody at that time. Undoubtedly that situation, now that I think about it, probably did happen.
- W: But there's enough demand in other places that they probably got a job, or are there a lot of people in that industry out of work?
- P: Well, right now it's picking up, but at times it's pretty slow. But, what I was going to say was, if I was faced with that situation where I could only hire two guys, and I know that one of these guys was illegal, then I wouldn't hire him, I would hire the legal person first.
- W: These workers that were illegals, did they learn what they were doing here, or did they learn it in Mexico?

P: They learn it here.

W: They learn it here, on the job, or. . .?

P: Yeah. There's one contractor here in El Paso that I know that has almost all of his equipment operators are illegals and they have been working for him for any number of years.

W: They don't consider it a risk to take the time to teach them how to do the things so that they might leave?

P: Yeah, they are just some of his most skilled employees. They operate his heavy equipment. But they almost have to learn these skills here because we use different types of machinery. We use different types of equipment. We have different specifications and requirements. So yeah, they learn their skills here. If you find an illegal and he's a skilled worker, you can almost rest assured that he started out as a laborer and progressed and worked himself up to the position he's in. I don't think, myself, from my experiences, that in the construction industry, you know, from my viewpoint, I don't think that the illegal is treated any better or any worse than anyone else. Surely there is in some cases, I don't know, but I didn't see it. I know that in the farm industry and other things that they are but, like I said, here, if a guy has all the necessary documentation, how could you know he's an illegal alien? How could you pay him less? Because you can't separate him from the other employees. If you have a government contract,

they specify how much money you are going to pay the different skilled laborers, so they just. . .

You know, I've had guys that I've known for four or five years that have worked, that have lived in Juarez and worked over here. They told me that they were American citizens. And they had a driver's license and everything. They spoke good English, and then I would find out later that they weren't. But I might think for two or three years that they were. Some of them that I know started building homes over here, started moving over here. Some of them especially, their kids would start getting up to six or seven, eight years old, and they wanted them to go to school over here, so at least they said that was the reason, so they would start building homes over here. So I asked one guy one time, I said, "You know, all your partners are building homes over here. Why don't you?" And he said, "Well, I'm not really an American citizen." But for two or three years I really thought he was. And if you would have asked me, I'd have told you, "Yeah, he's an American citizen". So you know, it's difficult to know.

W: Do you have any other comments about things that you might have experienced on the job, or people that might have come in and mistreated?

P: Well, no. I just didn't see too much of that. No, it's hard for me. I'm sitting here trying to think of something that I might have seen. I just think that the two governments

ought to get together and solve this problem, or at least make it better than it is now. I know that it's easy for me to sit here and say that. And it may be very difficult to do diplomatically and internationally and I don't know what else. But I feel like if you can place a man on the moon you could do something about this problem. I mean, it's simple to say that, but if they could spend the billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars to try to help humanity a little bit instead of space exploration, then we might be a lot better off in the long run. And I think a great deal of this is Mexico's fault and I think a great deal of this is the United States' fault. And the border is here. And people are on each side so they can't hide their head in the sand. They can't act like the situation doesn't exist. And it's not a case of if you ignore it it will go away, because it won't. They are just going to have to say, "Well, what can we do?"--and both work together!

W: How long have you been here in El Paso?

P: Since 1966. Twelve years.

W: What do you think of life here?

P: Oh, I love it here. As I told you before, I've traveled all over Europe, all over the Orient, and all over the United States many, many times, and I was sort of foot loose and fancy free. I was just in the service. I could have retired. I could have bought a home. I could have lived anywhere I wanted to. Nobody

made me choose El Paso. I chose it because I like the climate and I like the location. I did have some, I was stationed here at Fort Bliss about a year and a half before I was retired and I made some acquaintances and some business contacts that I felt would help me earn a living, make some money, after I got out of the service. I had already bought the home, before then. I had already decided to stay here. I bought the home before I went to Viet Nam. I got a 30-day furlough from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and I brought the family back here and we found us a home and bought it. So the business contacts I made were after I had already purchased the home. I just liked the atmosphere, the casual living in the southwest, I liked the place and the people. I think there is a bright future for El Paso.

W: OK, thank you very much for this interview!