UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: D. V. "Sonny" Flores
Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdes
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Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: P.E.C. Corporate Office, 1710 Telephone Road, Houston, Texas.

EV: Are you ready Señor?

SF: I'm ready.

EV: Alright, just give us your full name if you would. It will be like a deposition.

SF: Okay, like a deposition. My full name is Dionicio Vidal Flores and I was named after my father and my grandfather.

EV: So are you like Junior or the third or did you dispense with all of that?

SF: Well no because I have both names I wasn't a junior so my mother started calling me "Sonny" and so that's where the nickname came in. Also, my mother did not have anything to do with the naming of the child. In those days the doctor wanted to fill out the paperwork as soon as they got through, I was born at the house and the mother had no idea that my father and my grandfather were naming me out there in the outer room. And they both agreed to name for each other, therefore getting their own names. My mother had no vote in the thing. So my mother's revenge was to give me the nickname of "Sonny."

EV: What was she going to call you, did she ever tell you?

SF: She never told me.

(laughter)

SF: But she said, I was not going to be a junior. For some reason she had a thing about juniors. "You're not going to be a junior." "Fine with me Mama."

(laughter)

EV: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

SF: I have one sister; there are only two of us.

EV: Is she, where is she?

SF: She's alive and well in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

EV: Okay and did you go to public schools there in Falfurrias?

SF: Both of us did, my sister and I, yes.

EV: Did you go, all the way, high school and all that?

SF: All 12 grades, yeah.

EV: And then you went to college at…

SF: Texas A & M.

EV: Now, what inspired you to go to Texas A & M?

SF: Well, you know we didn't have very much money and by then, I worked every job you could think of and I had a whole $300 in my pocket when I left Falfurrias. In those days, if you got to go to college in that little home town down in South Texas, you would go to Texas A & I which was 40 miles away, it was convenient and so on. And I wanted to get the best education I could. It was never quite an option to me that I would not go to college, my mother always instilled that in me, and so I found out that Texas A & M was fairly affordable and that you could automatically get a job at the mess hall and earn, you know, another $300 and you could go to school for $900 a semester meaning $100 a month in those days. So I said, I can always figure out how to get the other $300

and so I went with my $300, I worked in the mess hall, I sold flowers at the football games, sold cold drinks at the football games, I sold used light bulbs, I sold all kinds of things to make enough money and so I made it through my first year. And then I made it through my second year at Texas A & M. - my second year I got through on $700 for nine months, if you can believe it. Then I ran out of money and so I had to drop out of school, but the idea of having a college education was so instilled in me that I went back. Most people drop out and then go right back out. So it took me 4 ½ years to get out and get my degree, because I had gotten out of sync on it. The proudest day of my life, I guess was the day I graduated and not only did I graduate from Texas A & M and got a degree in engineering, but I also in the same day got a commission in the US Air Force, because that was the branch of service my father was in. In the morning I got the degree and in the afternoon I got the commission. But the commission had a significance to me that all of the sudden I was a first class American citizen that they *always claimed to put me as a "second class citizen" as a kid growing up, and it was a somewhat significance to me. But I think it was my mother's proudest day to see me walk across that stage, twice on that day.

EV: So you went in from the beginning into the Corps, the A & M Corps?

SF: At the time yeah, there was no option…

EV: Oh that's right…

SF: It was a military school and only disabled and veterans and foreign students could opt out, we had no choice.

EV: Did you speak Spanish in your home when you were a kid?

SF: That was my first language.

EV: And, were your parents born on this side or were they born in Mexico? [1]

SF: No, no they were both Americans and my grandparents were also Americans.

EV: Wow that's interesting for a border city.

SF: A border city, we're 90 miles from the border so we were right close by there.

EV: I assume like the rest of the people on the border you had family on the other side?

SF: I didn't have one relative on the other side, not even one.

EV: Now that really is unusual.

SF: So I didn't have a tie but a lot of my friends did and so I found it unusual but I guess we had been so much on this side that the other thing was that most of my family came to Starr County and Starr County was a desolate desert like area that, I mean anybody can come across there at Roma and nobody would even check there and that sort of thing. They had little barges that they used to pull across [the river] there, eventually they built a little bridge in there. But for that reason, you know, there's never been any question in my mind, I was American.

EV: Wow. And, did you, when you were in college did you participate in any kind of extracurricular activities, sports or clubs…

SF: Well I always loved sports but I never was any good at it. So I couldn't, I wasn't a very good baseball player although I loved baseball. It was my greatest dream to become a baseball pitcher by the way. But I tried working out and trying to be on the track team. I worked like hell for two years and of course I didn't make it. Because I obviously wasn't trained for it and the other thing was I didn't have the talent, but that

[1] Among Mexican Americans, the phrases "this side" or the "other side" refers to which side of the river you were born in.

was one of the things I did, and I was I tried to run for the student senate and I lost. And then I forgot what else I ran for. There were all kinds of student this and student that. But I don't remember participating in too many activities. Mind you there were only 5,000 men there, they were all men, and there wasn't much of a social calendar. We had things like, they had a Foreign Affairs, they were a group that had speakers come in from all kinds of different things, but it wasn't much. You know, it was essentially, I always thought of Texas A & M as kind of like being in prison with a bunch of men. You know, because we were in this tiny town with, very far away from major cities. I didn't have a car, I couldn't hardly afford to go to school much less get a car. If I came to Houston or Dallas I had to hitch a ride, you know, on the highway or one of my friends would have to bring me over. So I was pretty isolated all that time I was there I didn't go anywhere or did very many things, you know. It, I felt emancipated whenever I left Texas A & M and I got a real job somewhere and I earned $450 a month and I thought I had all the money in the world.

EV: Oh yeah. (laughter) Did you play any sports when you were in high school?

SF: I tried playing sports but I had a problem with a knee. The bone in my knee was too big and kind of messed up my nerves here. I practiced baseball, throwing a baseball for hours on end I guess my uncle's brick garage trying to be Bob Feller because I thought it was my lifetime dream. [2] I tried for the baseball team and didn't make it but they made me the manager so I enjoyed being the manager of that baseball team that went and won a bunch of stuff. But that's about it.

EV: Speaking of, when you went to A & M, did you catch any flack for being a

[2] [Bob Feller: Hall of Fame pitcher for Cleveland Indians, 1936-1956],

Mexican American? Did they give you a hard time?

SF: Well, you know, all freshmen were like prisoners of war and we got treated accordingly. But I couldn't help but think there were certain folks there that didn't like *Hispanics and they made fun of the way I talked, my accent, and, had to hit a brace every once in a while, y'know. You had to clean the upperclassman's room, you have to clean the hallways, yeah. They could wake you up in the middle of the night and they could take you on midnight runs up and down the railroad tracks to harass you. So I went through all of that. And, although it was, it would come through from time to time but it was more subtle than not. At the time I was there, like I said we had about 5,000 students, excluding the foreign students from Latin America and Mexico, I suppose there were about 100 of us Hispanic Americans from Texas in the whole university, Lupe Fraga being one of them, we're friends.

EV: So you knew him in college?

SF: He was my upperclassman. He was a year ahead of me.

EV: Oh I see.

SF: He was a big star baseball player.

EV: Yeah he was, wasn't he drafted by some pro team, Dodgers or something?

SF: No. I don't think so. He had to go to the service right after that. If he was drafted, I'll tell you what he'd have to go serve Uncle Sam first and then he had to worry about baseball.

EV: (Laughter) Yeah, I remember that well.

SF: He was one heck of a good baseball player.

EV: Yeah. And so then when you got your commission, you went immediately to the

Air Force right after college?

SF: I spent four months in Houston working for the highway department here as an engineer. And then I went to, I spent three years in Reno Nevada at a training base where we trained helicopter pilots and prisoner of war for training.

EV: Oh that was a tough job wasn't it, Reno Nevada?

SF: Yeah, well I'll tell you what, I'll tell you what I was emancipated and I went to Heaven or so I thought for three years.

EV: So I guess.

SF: I certainly enjoyed living there and thought about actually settling there had it not been for my father had died while I was in the service. I needed to be close to home because I was the only son.

EV: Yeah that's when Lake Tahoe was crystal clear I think.

SF: Yes it was, yeah, it was absolutely clear. I had never seen a lake that clean.

EV: I know isn't that funny. The first time I saw rivers and streams with crystal clean water. I thought wow. The first one I saw I think was San Marcos River. (laughter).

SF: I thought it was only calendars…

EV: Yeah. (laughter). I did too. So, and then you went to serve and you spent your entire tour at fighting off the enemy in Reno?

SF: Yeah fighting off the enemy in Reno. Did a little traveling on my vacation time to Europe and Japan. Then I hadn't ever been anywhere. When I went to Texas A & M the furthest place I had ever been to was Austin, Texas. Which was maybe 250 miles from my hometown. So that's, that's kind of a sheltered life I had.

EV: Oh. What was the ethnic ratio in Falfurrias?

SF: It was probably about 60/40: 60% Hispanic 40% Anglo, no blacks.

EV: What make you think of going to A & M over the University of Texas, Baylor?

SF: Well, number one the affordability…Baylor, I don't think so. I kind of had a tendency to be an engineer. I wasn't quite sure why, but I was very good at math; I was very good at science; I was very good at chemistry. All those things were fairly easy to me and I got good grades there and they paid well and it looked like a fun. I always liked building things so I put all those pieces together and I said, "Well, I think I'd like to be an engineer." But you know what, I didn't even know one engineer when I went to Texas A & M and thought I wanted to be an engineer. I didn't know one human being that was an engineer…no role model is I guess what you'd say…

EV: So when you came here you worked for, is it Texas DOT? Texas Department of Transportation.

SF: Yes. Texas DOT.

EV: And then you did your military service right?

SF: Uh huh (in the affirmative).

EV: And when did you check out of that?

SF: In the military service?

EV: Yeah.

SF: I left in 1962.

EV: Okay. And then did you come straight to Houston after that?

SF: Yes.

EV: Back to the Texas Department of Highways?

SF: No, I came looking for a job and while I was in the service I worked part time for a structural engineer in Reno and he knew this man here in Houston that owned an engineering company and through him I got a chance to meet with him, and interview with him and got a job there.

EV: And what kind of engineering was that?

SF: It was civil engineering, At the time I was doing like roads, streets and drainage, water lines, that sort of thing. A big company called Lockwood Anderson.

EV: After that, I mean just give us a little short history of your before…where you got where you are now.

SF: Well I spent four years there with that company and they were very good for me. At that time I got registered as an engineer, which is one of the things you need to do to earn a living as an engineer. Somewhere along the way I met, doing some civic work, I met Howard Telepsen who owned Telepsen Construction Company. I wasn't real happy with being just a consulting engineer and so I had talked to Howard Telepsen about some opportunities and I had thought about maybe even going into the real estate business. And I came to talk to him one time and he said, "Do you know how many real estate brokers there are in this town? And I said, "Well there's probably a lot of them." And he said, "Well let me open the phone book." And he opened the phone book and went page upon page upon page, seemed like the "R's" were all real estate brokers. He said, "You're going to have a hard time doing this." So in the process of that he said, "I have an opening in my construction company running a products company that had on the construction site and with a fellow who is running it just restarted the department and he needs an assistant. If you are interested I'll have you talk to him." And I said, "Well that

sounds like something I'd like to do." And so I got the job there. I started building marine water front type developments and so that's how I learned a different kind of business. I really have enjoyed that and somewhere along the way there I started my own company because Mr. Telepson's company was having financial troubles and was on the verge of bankruptcy and so I had to go find a job somewhere else. After that a friend of mine kind of coaxed me into getting into business. So we started a partnership that didn't last very long. And I started this in 1980 and I have been at it every since.

EV: That's yours…your PEC, is that PEC Corporation?

SF: Yes.

EV: And are you doing primarily civil engineering now on constructions sites or do you…?

SF: Well right now I'm doing mostly consulting, mostly plant specifications and that type of thing. When I started the business I was actually running a construction company and then I had people who went out and built those things. In my latter age I started moving away from construction because the risk was rather high and I figured in my old age I couldn't afford to, you know, blow it all on one, it's like going to Vegas every day when you have a construction company. It floats on water. So that's why I was convinced that getting to drawing drawings instead of building them.

EV: So the year, what, in something you said a little bit earlier you said you came here and you were involved in civic work when you met Mr. Telepson. When you came here did you just immediately start doing civil work, I mean helping out being in…?

SF: Civic work? Well what happened is I was working for that engineering company there were a couple of guys there that were real active in the JC's [Junior Chamber of

Commerce] and they pulled me in and I started working with the JC's and they had all kinds of civic projects and so it was through them that I wound up in these sort of things. And we had an international community that honored the port once a year and that's how I got to meet Telepson through that group, so that's how it lead to the relationship there.

EV: Well you have a, I was looking at your list that you emailed me and you have a really extensive résumé on civic work. Was Mayor Welch in office here when you came?

SF: Actually Cutrer [Lewis W. Cutrer] was in the office at the time in '62 and then in 1964, Mayor Welch beat Cutrer and he was in office for 10 years. Louis Welch and I had a good relationship and I have been good friends with him since.

EV: Did you, what was, how do I really ask this? Let me get to the Mexican-American history because you came at an interesting time. When you got there, were there any type of movements by minorities here for gaining more civil rights, you know, I guess pre-civil rights era. Did you see any rumblings of that when you first got here?

SF: No, not really. The, I saw the Mexican-American population go rather docile and so did, obviously the power structure here because they were somewhat quiet. LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens] was the only real viable organization that ever, that ever raised cane and that was on the extreme cases when they refused to give services to Macario Garcia, or people of that caliber, you know. It [the movement] was seeking the right to vote, making voting easy, getting Hispanic, at the time called Mexican-Americans, educated. That was the sort of thing that was going on at the time. And of course there were these small social groups around Houston and being a non-Houstonian I was not familiar with them. If other people that, like my friend Lupe was

intimately involved because he was born and raised in the East End so he knew what this neighborhood was like. You know, I have always lived on the west side of town and was not immersed in that sort of thing.

EV: So when did you, if you can recall, when did you first begin to hear some rumblings about the movements, the civil rights movement of Mexican-Americans?

SF: Well, I guess that was the, it was actually didn't start of Houston, it started in other places in Texas. The, I'm trying to think of what they call it, I guess they were called the *Huelga Movement* [Boycott Movement, against HIDS?]… I'm trying to think of what else they are called but it was people like this José Angel Gutierrez and…

EV: La Raza Unida?

SF: Well it wasn't La Raza Unida, it was really people raising cane in their towns against the established government because there were more Mexican-Americans in those little towns, Crystal City being one of them but there were a lot of little towns in South Texas but that sort of thing wasn't happening here locally until way back into, I would say in the late '60s or something like that. That's when you started hearing more about it and then, obviously you hear more and more about it. That's when you started hearing more about it and then obviously became more and more violent.

EV: And when you were, did you become a member of LULAC? [3]

SF: I was a member of LULAC but not a participant, not really an active member.

EV: Were you involved like in PASSO [4] or any of those other organizations?

SF: Well, being a pretty conservative guy I always thought PASSO was anti-business and I have always been pro-business and I figured that that is what made our country

[3] LULAC: League of Latin American Citizens
[4] PASSO: Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations

strong. And the last thing I want to do is be anti-business. But PASSO was something I never would join.

EV: Did, when you were involved in any of these other civic organizations were they primarily city wide type of projects that you got involved in?

SF: Yeah.

EV: And when the, when you first, I mean obviously at some point this, the civil rights movement began to increase and became a little bit more luciferous and more active and atsome point more radical. We, at the time I guess when you got here and when I got here I don't think there were any Mexican-Americans in any judgeships, city council, or…

SF: I don't remember even one public office that anyone held. And of course, it was an at large system of city government. And so that kept any kind of minority out. Judson Robinson finally won a seat back in 1972 and he was the first minority that ever won a city wide seat. And it, after terms, two times he went after it. And it was kind of a small miracle that he won.

EV: Did that ever come up? I mean usually you're pretty tight with Mayor Louis Welch, did that ever come up with any of your conversations, why that was?

SF: What was?

EV: The lack of Mexican-Americans. Just because of the facility of the people that you mentioned before…

SF: Well I think it was a combination of things. But I think that one of the things was the system. The system was, you know, anti-minority. And, you know we had to win city wide. The Anglos were I don't know what the percentage was, easily 60 to 70% of the

population. Mexican-Americans because there was no other Hispanic that I knew of, a hand full of, you know, Latin American people that migrated here much later on. But, you know, they were just not active, somewhat docile in accepting of things as they were. Yes, Louis Welch and I had conversations of such things. And, you know, first of all I always thought that Louis Welch thought he was Hispanic, the way he always made friends with so many of us, and as you know later on in life married a Hispanic woman.

EV: He did what?

SF: Married a Hispanic woman.

EV: Did he really?

SF: Married to his former secretary, Helen Morales.

EV: I didn't know that.

SF: He was married to his first wife for a long, long time. She died of cancer I can't recall when. I think she died maybe in the '80s. And then when Helen's husband also died, died somewhere about that time, a few years after that they were married. And both families, of course, had known each other for years. But he's always been very…but he was concerned about blacks really most of the time. Because at the time blacks were really…it was the '60s, MLK days and so on. There were racists were trying to burn Houston down. And he was concerned they were going to run the city down. And I think in his mind he was happy there were guys like Judson Robinson that were available to help essentially keep things at a low boil, instead of a high boil. At the time there were people that were trying to raise hell to the point of, you know, burning things down, that sort of thing, the civil disturbances that you saw in Chicago and in some of those major cities throughout the country and it was his greatest fear. Hispanics and Mexican-

Americans were way down the list and being that frankly we were so docile that they were not of a great concern. It wasn't until much later when the at large system was staying to a balance of at large versus district counsel people that he saw the great opportunity to get Hispanics in office, at least, you know on the East and North side. When I ran for office in '73 frankly he was still an incumbent in office and he, essentially put the word out to his friends that I was the one and it was because of him that I almost got elected. Because of him and many other things, but I mean I think that was very *helpful when I had people of the caliber of Walter Mischer and Ben Love so on helping me out.

EV: What was the difference, the edge, between you getting in and winning the election?

SF: The difference was a famous football player that got into the race and like famous named people, people vote for people that they'd remember and the guy's name was Dickey Magel.

EV: Oh, at Rice.

SF: And every year on New Years Day at the Cotton Bowl they replayed and replayed the same old play where Dickey Magel is running down the side lines for a touchdown and Tommy Louis jumps off and tackles him. And so that was kind of one of those famous things where, you know, Magel's name kept coming up over and over again and Magel wound up in second place edge of me, second place and didn't put on a campaign and so Jim Westmoreland just kind of walked into that office, that's the difference, some stupid.

EV: Well how do you, what do you think, how do you think Leonel was able to flip

during that time because he was maybe Louis Welch's next to last, or last administration?

SF: No, Leonel won his election I think right after the '73, must have been '75, Leonel Castillo won it on a fluke and that fluke was the establishment here in Houston had kept an older man in office as controller, I don't know for how long, 30 years 40 years I think. [5] He had suffered, this man suffered a stroke and was not in good health. He was running one more time and his, everybody with a name downtown supporting the same person. Somewhere along the way they were trying to get some debate, some interaction between Leonel and Mr. Oaks and he would not debate him, he would not be seen in public and so on. One scene, one time, one TV guy caught Mr. Oaks coming down the hall way and he interviewed him and said, "Mr. Oaks, would you debate Mr. Castillo?" or something to that effect. And he had even trouble talking and so it was obvious to anybody that this man was barely functioning and here he was being asked to serve two more years. That somehow got to be a big deal, wound up in the papers and was on TV. And Leonel had all of his credentials, because he was kind of an intellect, so he had won just in exposing what the situation was. Once he was in office, obviously, you know you can get re-elected over and over again as long as he wanted.

EV: But he, I don't know what the percentage of his vote, as I recall during that election he had told us that he really didn't feel that he had to campaign in the Mexican community because speaking of his last name identification but he campaigned heavily in the black and white, and he had a lot of white supporters as I recall. Is that your recollection?

SF: I remember a limited amount of Anglo support but a lot of black support. And the

[5] Louis Welch's tenure ran from 1968-1973. Leonel was elected in 1972 and served until 1977.

Anglo support was, you know, the liberal, the more liberal element. There weren't very many in Houston so that's why I say it's limited. But there would be, names that would not normally be involved in more liberal democrat circles. You have to remember that in those days there was only one party. You were either a conservative democrat or a liberal democrat. You had two wings of the democratic party. So it was the liberal wing of the Democratic party.

EV: How much do you think that the growth of Houston for people, say from the Northeast, Midwest, changed the attitude of Houstonians towards minorities involved in politics? I mean, we…to them, it was acceptable or they were familiar with the fact that they could have minorities in office while down here where we that old East Texas attitude that was kind of inconceivable. Do you think that the influx of those that came down with Shell and Texaco and all of those and workers who followed them had that type of an impact? Do you think that was an element of political change?

SF: Undoubtedly. But the, what happened is that the city of Houston started changing about then. And what happened is there were two oil capitals of this country. One was Tulsa, Oklahoma and the other was Houston, Texas. Well obviously there was some in New Orleans but Tulsa and Houston were buying for that. Kind of in a blink of an eye Houston became the oil capital of the country and eventually of the world. At that time the gigantic oil companies start moving all kinds of people in here and those people were world travelers. Not only in the continental US but throughout the world. They had a different view of the world. And obviously they were much more open to, you know, different people of different skins and different looks and that, I think, facilitates things. But it only turned a little bit because these folks didn't participate in the public life of

Houston as the more conventional people did. And I think that put together with the civil rights movement of the blacks of the '60s, you add that to it. I think the awakening of people's consciousness that you know, folks of all different colors of skins and beliefs ought to have the same kind of opportunity in this country as everybody else that started changing. But there was not a radical change. This is like a very slow incline going up a hill at 2% grade or something, you know. It happened very slowly. The only thing that was a huge change and so on is when that movement at TSU in the late '60s, somewhere about then, when the students at TSU were raising so much hell and they tried to burn one of the dorms and so on. And then Hermann Short, the police chief at the time, got real tough with them and that, that was kind of a mini-civil rights I think event in Houston, Texas. That helped, all those things put together helped move the things along to make the small conscious of minority thing.

EV: That's probably the only, really violent outbreak we had, racially, didn't we, in Houston?

SF: It's the only one that I remember.

EV: I mean I can't think of another one.

SF: ….of any consequence. There were little marches but there were little marches. They were all, I think, very peaceful. Obviously there was police protection and so on and maybe a little fight here and there but nothing of any consequence.

EV: You've been involved in education as I, haven't you in some of the educational things?

SF: No, I…

EV: I thought I saw that on your résumé, but I…

SF: I helped organize something called Hispanic…The Houston Hispanic Forum which became interested in the educational field and what it more is interested in is actually getting kids in middle school interested in pursuing higher education and so that's probably one of the few things I've done in the educational field. I've never been too inclined to be involved in the educational field.

EV: Yeah, and the sociology of a community where you have problems Mexican-Americans have, you want them…. it's kind of a vicious cycle - bad education, bad housing, bad employment and each one connects and reconnects. If you don't live in the right place, you don't get to the right school, If you don't get to the right school, you don't get the right school you don't get the right education. so you don't get a good job. At some point that cycle needs to break. I gather from our past experience and something you mentioned earlier, your idea is that that break comes through commerce and business. Is that a fair statement?

SF: There is no question that if Mexican-Americans, and I use that term Mexican-American because that is all of us that have by history, come from Mexico and wound up in this part of the country either by accident or by birth being the difference between one country and the other, rather by crossing it willingly and voluntarily, you know, we are tied to Mexico but all of us despite that we are being, we are getting to the point we're about 50% of the state of Texas. We have about 22 million people in the state of Texas. About half of us are of Mexican-American decent, and we have the people, the votes and so on. But what we don't have, we don't have economic power, we don't have education, we don't have any of the things that you would consider in an successful American. And the reason we don't is we need to get people involved in the economic

mainstream of America if we are going to make a difference. If I can teach another guy to go into business for himself, you know, graduate from the corner grocery store into getting a franchise of corner grocery stores then I think that I would have helped not only him but the people that he employs, his family, his relatives, all of the above into becoming, not only a great number but a power. A power because you are now able to afford to do things like putting money on politicians, like buying the things that requires to make things happen, by sending your kids to the best schools. By sending their friends to the best schools and so on. So I think it all starts with the economic power and you know we haven't done that very well.

EV: My analysis of this thing has shown, we really, really need to improve our schools. And we need to improve them from elementary schools. Because for you, when you are in an elementary situation, an elementary school and you are already starting to catch discriminatory or yeah, discriminatory attitudes or treatment from the school district like, you know, you don't have the right facilities or libraries are bad, the teachers are bad, and then there is a chain of that.

SF: Uh, huh (affirmative).

EV: There's a chain of that from elementary school to HCC. Where everything, nothing really allows us to know our history to teach our kids, to teach our history to our kids.

SF: Uh, huh (affirmative).

EV: And not even the Texas history to our kids. So these kids don't have the role models that they need. They don't have the under-girding of confidence I think that they need. We have guys like you, maybe like me that decide on their own somehow to go to

college, even though we didn't come from rich families. But that takes a certain…

SF: Stubbornness…

EV: Yeah, and you have to have some outside influence. But I see a lot of kids who are brilliant but will probably never get the chance to go to college and certainly, you don't go to Texas A & M now for $700 or $900 bucks a year.

SF: So I've found out…

EV: Yeah (laughter) that's probably per class, per hour.

SF: (laughter).

EV: So, you know, how do we break that? I mean I think we can't all be entrepreneurs. And I go back I think the whole key is education. I think probably Houston is ready to accept Mexican-Americans in any position in management, management, whatever. But we don't have the supply of people to fill those roles. And how do we get them there?

SF: Well you're certainly hitting on what it takes to get there, you know. My mother had a 5th grade education my father had an 8th grade education. They knew the value of an education because they didn't have one. And somewhere along the way they inspired me along the way to know that education was the key to success, same for my sister. My sister knew that the key to success was to get an education and we were just the same way. We just felt that we need to have it. Our children, we will hopefully pass that on to them also. But how do you improve the educational system, you're talking about one of the biggest problems there is in this country. There are a lot of things that you can do to make things happen. It costs money. You have to convince the taxpayers that they need to pay for it. In downtown Houston, the Greater Houston Partnership is telling their

members that you need to provide for a good education and pay the taxes required because it will bring you better employees. Well, you know, that's certainly an argument to be made but I think the Mexican-American and Hispanic community, we need to tell our kids that you've got to stay in school. If there's something wrong with the schools then come home and tell your parents about it. Hopefully your parents will go out there and raise hell, maybe they will go to somebody else to do it for them. But the system is obviously has a lot of flaws. But the key to the whole thing, when it comes to the educational system comes down to the individual. That individual has to be inspired to want to learn, you can send me to Harvard, I have to want to learn and that parent has to give it to that child and that parent needs to be involved in that child's education or else the educational system doesn't work. And somewhere along the way, I know I sound like a damn Republican when I say all of this: it that we have got to convince the parents that the problem with the educational system is the parents as well as well as the school system. And that means if you want to be a responsible parent, your part of the system is to make sure you #1: inspire you child, #2 make sure he takes care of his homework and #3 get involves in the schools and see that the schools don't get screwed around. I was fortunate enough to send my children to an elementary school right down the street from my house, ½ block over. It was called Oral Roberts, (Laughter) [6] Oh my God, no not Oral Roberts, I think it is O. M. Roberts Elementary school and it's, Roberts was a former governor of Texasm, I don't know when, where, what… but that little school was run as good as any public school you want to see because the parents were right in there. It was full of stay at home moms so they had the time to go and get involved. And of course the

[6] Fundamentalist and conservative minister during the latter half of the 20th century.

fathers got involved and they did fundraisers or whatever. But it was a world of difference. When my children went to middle school down the road at another school, heaven help us. I'll tell you what…it was a world of difference. It was just utter chaos and I could see all the problems that all the other parents were raising hell about. But it had to do with the parent involvement. There wasn't the parent involvement in that middle school that there was at that elementary school.

EV: What part of town was that in?

SF: It was in Rice University.

EV: What was the elementary…what was the junior high school, the middle school?

SF: It's, the middle school was off of Bellaire Boulevard…

EV: Twain?

SF: No. It's a big one…oh goodness, I can't think of the name. It's right close to where the Shell Research Center is on Bellaire Boulevard.

EV: It's a public school?

SF: Public school, yeah.

EV: Are you sure it's not Mark Twain?

SF: I'm absolutely positive it's not Mark Twain. If you said the name I'd know it.

EV: From Stella Link, Stella Link and…

SF: Stella Link is one more street over. But I think it borders actually the athletic field there.

EV: Just south of West University.

SF: Yes.

EV: Well that's where my kids went to school but I keep thinking it was Twain, so…

SF: Well it's not Twain but I'll tell you what it was a terrible middle school.

EV: I wasn't real happy with it myself. And did your kids, where did they go to high school?

SF: They went to Lamar High School and my son went to St. Thomas High School for a short while.

EV: Is he also an engineer?

SF: My son's in the movie business.

EV: Oh yeah?

SF: He's a grip in the movie business. He studied movie making at Stephen F. Austin University.

EV: Really?

SF: Yeah.

EV: That's where my daughter went to school.

SF: Is that right. I hope she didn't study movie making…

EV: No, she got into History and Government.

SF: Oh good, she gets to make money.

EV: Yeah, unless you want (unintelligible) (laughter)

SF: My son is one step away from homelessness. Yeah, he probably could he's very good at that thing.

EV: Is he here in Houston?

SF: No he's in Austin.

EV: Yeah, well there you go.

SF: That's where the movie industry is.

EV: Right, right. And now you live in this side of town now right, East end? And you can understand why I ask, why? What brought you to the East end when you could live anywhere you want to?

SF: I discovered my roots, just like some of my older friends did. I had a divorce in 1992 and I had worked in the East end for a long time and so because the construction business was here in the East end and all my workers are on the East side of town, by the port and then I was in a low point in my life and all my friends who picked me up from the gutter during those days and early '90s were my Hispanic friends and it was very comfortable to be here and still is. Another thing is I have a great memories of growing up in a small town that was small, very Hispanic, very neighborly. And I find all of that in the East end.

EV: Can I ask you to expound on it a little bit when you said I found my roots?

SF: Well, you know, the, I grew up knowing that I was an American. And I was only and American. I had no affinity for the Mexico, I didn't have any family. I didn't know anybody there. So I was an American but I was a stranger in my own world. And I knew that all of that country used to be Mexico and then it became America and we were kind of stranded there, all of us that were from Mexico after the big war. Our lands were taken away from us. And now we were poor and we were working in a world where we were the majority in population, but we're certainly the minority in political power and economic power. And I got spanked for speaking Spanish on the playground and I was embarrassed to bring tortillas to school. And I spoke Spanish at the house and I spoke English in school. So I grew up with an accent. And all of that confused me. So I guess I worked very hard at becoming an American because that was the way you got ahead

and I guess I didn't do bad becoming a "real American." But in doing so I forgot what a rich heritage I came from

END OF TAPE #1, Side A

BEGINNING OF Tape #1, Side B

SF: I had, I became more cognizant of my heritage and I became much more proud of my heritage and I guess I arrived at the age of wisdom, maybe. I don't know what you call it, but I wanted to find out more and I wanted to find out why and how we got to be this way. How did we, all of us become to be strangers in our own, you know, country? And, you know of course, it wasn't fair but even though the winners take all and the losers then all have to muddle on their own and I was, I guess my family was on the losing side of the war and so that's how we ended up that way. So it was time to get even and maybe get up there and I was enjoying seeing the changes that I was seeing in this country. And now here I am alive and well in the year 2007, 71 years old with all kinds of friends who are all different kinds of people, some powerful some not so powerful and it was kind of "in" to be a Hispanic-American. And it was kind of "in" to be a Mexican-American and I'm now finding my very Anglo-Republican friends coming to me asking me what makes us tick. And, you know, it's kind of strange, you know, and what our differences are. And I don't know that we're that much different that we don't want the same thing for our children, for our country. We have different ways to get from here to there but we have a, I think, a heritage that we've discovered. I mean all of us that kind of embarrassed to be Hispanics and Mexican-Americans for all those years and now we're finding it and all of the sudden we're becoming the majority in this state. Surely we'll become the majority in this city. We'll never become the majority in this country

but we'll certainly become a significant portion. So that's how I got from here to there so and so the next step there is okay so now you've got the numbers, make sure the numbers count. And the numbers don't count because we don't have economic power, therefore my interest in helping people become successful and in their success reminding them not to forget the ones that are behind them. Do not pull the ladder out now that you've made it to the top.

EV: Sounds very democratic Sonny… (laughter) to a degree.

SF: I have become a much more moderate in my old age. I'm trying to think of the right word…moderate.

EV: I don't want you to overstate your case here. (laughter)

SF: When I started as a Goldwater Republican I could tell you I am quite moderate. I *had to resume the republicans because of Barry Goldwater, that tells you where I came from.

EV: Well you know on this immigration debate they are having in the senate…

SF: I'm very much in the middle of it.

EV: Yeah, I'm wondering, I mean I hear that what I used to hear when I was a kid. It's not that we're prejudiced against you it's just that we don't want you…There are different issues of course with the immigration service.

SF: Uh huh (affirmative).

EV: But I hear that voice, that inflexion, those excuses and because I have no doubt but if England was next door they wouldn't even consider having a fence.

SF: I call them blue-eyed Sweeds. If there were blue eyed Swedds next door everything would be okay. It's amazing the latent racism that's up there.

EV: Exactly.

SF: And I find them, and I'm aghast because a lot of them are my good friends that I've known from years and all of the sudden I can see the latent racism coming out. They don't say it outright. But they say it in a certain way that I know what they mean.

EV: Well I think there's a thing where they accept you as long as they are…

SF: Stay in your place…

EV: As you are what they think you are.

SF: Or stay in your place and what they think is your place.

EV: Exactly. Exactly. You've become Anglo enough or white enough to where they can say, just say "just stay that way and here's our little Mexican friend." But when you start inching into express your thoughts as a Mexican-American or begin to live your culture then you kind of start moving away from that definition of theirs. I'll tell you that Yolanda Birdwell thinks she hates liberals, and the reason she hates liberals is because we don't fit their cast.

SF: (laughter).

EV: They have their own definition of what liberals are. And if you're not, if you don't fit their cast of what liberals are then they don't want us around. We were talking earlier about the kind of money that needs to be spent on education or should be spent on education. And I think there are probably some states that can't afford them and need federal monies to get into better education. But I've always been amazed that we can skewer the system… or politicals that run the school legislatures and all of that will say "We really can't afford to do this now." or the school district says we can't afford that right now. But we can start a dam war that pays out billions of dollars a day and we can

just do it without thinking about, same thing with the prison system, same thing with medical and mental health. And all these things we know are hurting our society, we know that we need better medicine than we have giving our country today and you know all these things are going on and yet we sit back and say, oh we can't afford to do anything about it right now but we can start this goofy-ass war, and perpetuate, the wasting is perpetuated. Billions of dollars, what are we now, the last time I checked it was something like twenty billion, something we're into… I don't get it. And I mean, I just, the Sunday paper had an article, kind of tongue and cheek about Chavez in Venezuela giving operations, eye operations support and all that kind of stuff. Why don't we do that? We have one ship that we sail, why don't we send a fleet to Latin America to stay and help with all of these diseases, like glaucoma of the eye, very simple operation, there's a lot of things like that. You know, Marvin Zindler goes out and fixes a hair lip kids that have that sort of stuff and that's nice but we should have a battalion of ships going out there and doing that kind, rather than arming all those dictators down there like we do. Now, your turn..

(laughter)

SF: Well, you're hitting on a life long argument that we have here in this country and also in, but we' re way behind Europe. In Europe, of course, they have, they select every so many years in the social democrats are on one side and the conservative party is on the other side and so on. And the social democrats want the government, they can do each and every function of humanity and the conservatives want to do as little as possible. Here in this country we have Republicans on one side and Democrats on the other one and you have Hilary and her ilk trying to, you know, have the government go and do

every social program you could think of. And, you know, we the public just aren't going to let them. And so we're going to hit some stalemates on the way. There's a line of demarcation where, you know, there's people that can't take care of themselves but you have this so called safety net, once, but why should we be paying for the guy across the street that, you know, driving a welfare Cadillac to have all this done at my expense? There's a welfare office two blocks down the street here. I see these people come here all the time, and there's a whole bunch of them that are, you know, kids in their 20's and so on, or are in their teens that, you know, they got a kid they're pushing or they are carrying and they hope for something like that, babies having babies and so I'm saying *how much am I responsible to be my brother's keeper? I mean you're the coordinator you obviously you want us to take all our money, give it to the guy….

EV: No, no, I'm not saying…

SF: At what point do you cut people off?

EV: No, I agree with you there's some place you've got to…#1 if that exists that people are going to sit back on their butts and…

SF: Oh, they're going to take advantage of the system, just plan on it…

EV: But what I'm looking and what I think is maybe a little bit bigger picture. I'm saying that if we… the mere fact that we go into a community like Chavez does or is doing I really don't see anything wrong with that. I mean, I think, I wonder why don't we do that? Why don't we put more into this instead of supporting guys like, what was the Nicurgua….Somoza, the Somoza family in perpetuity and they get all the money, they get all the franchises, Coca-Cola, United Fruit, all these big companies, they are all under Somoza. And we keep supporting this guy. And if people have, the, you know…

SF: Why should we, screw around other people's business?

EV: I know, I mean that's cool too. But it's a global war, global world.

SF: Oh, so then, my dictator's better than yours, we're going to play that game.

EV: No, I'm saying…

SF: Because one's a socialist dictator and the other one is a conservative dictator. So most of them are taking care of the oligarcy, so Chavez, and (unintelligible) on the other side they want to socialize everything…

EV: No I don't think they need to be socializing.

SF: They've got to be somehow, in the middle ground in the middle of those two. That's how we find Latin American where you turn…

EV: Well if I understand what you're saying, I'm not, I'm not, my feeling about going to Latin America is simply it's better to go down there and offer something like we do with the health thing, we already knew that ship, what is the, that…

SF: I don't know but…

EV: And Zindler does it with Houston doctors also. My only position is why don't we do more of that? And I think that we would alleviate a lot of conflict…

SF: You mean worldwide?

EV: At least in the Americas.

SF: Of course..

EV: We carry a big stick. If we carry the big stick why not carry a nicer stick.

SF: But what you're saying, what I think you're saying is why don't we take our money that we are taking in so called foreign aid to these dictatorships and do some social projects that get down to the people.

EV: Exactly.

SF: Because you're screwing off somebody else's government. That's why. How can you do it without going through the government.

EV: Well because we put that government in office. We put the Somoza's in office. We put, I mean central America is the black eye in terms of political parties.

SF: Sure.

EV: A couple companies we have in America, we have CIA operatives we maneuver this and this. Remember the assassination of Allende? That was, CIA admitted they did that. So I mean I just think that this country could do a lot more good than we're doing. And I worry about how we have projected ourselves, we've gotten away from what made this country basically "the good guys" particularly after World War II and in the early '50s.

SF: Yeah, because getting involved in 200 some odd governments of this world I think is more than any country ought to be doing.

EV: Oh, I agree…why did we get involved in Iran?

SF: Well look at all the foreign aid that we've got. I mean there are countries that you and I can't even pronounce their names, you know, get foreign aid.

EV: But, you know, we get involved in people's governments all the time…

SF: I know we do.

EV: Middle East.

SF: I know. My question is should we… I'm sounding like fortress America mentality here…

EV: Yeah, well it's an interesting thing that it's an extension of Manifest Destiny.

SF: Well, you're exactly right, you know.

EV: I think it is. And okay.

SF: Forgot where we were?

EV: I though, I have a couple more questions I want to go into. When we talk about, do you see any foreseeable problem with the idea and I don't mean anything by this other than that if we speak of Hispanics, of course we're talking about Central America, South America, Cubans... but Mexican Americans a little bit different than all that. Do you see, do you agree with that #1? Do you foresee that we might have some problems with that?

SF: I think that all Hispanic Americans think that they are different from…I've got to point to a census bureau advisory committee that I work with and I go to Washington every year on this stuff and we have a questionnaire we've been fighting here trying to get ready for the 2010 census. And one of the questions says are you, white, black, yellow, whatever… and so on. And so if you're white then are you Hispanic, the answer is yes, it says, what is your country of origin? And sometimes people don't want to say that they are not white, black, and so on and, they are Cuban, or Venezuelan or they are this… they all relate with their home country, not with their race it seems like. I'm just amazed about that. But you know I don't think that a Mexican is any different than a Cuban or a Venezuela or a Peruvian.

EV: Yeah, well my question kind of comes up from the fact that maybe the first generation might have a problem with that. Their parents are Cuban that come here. But I suspect now with the movement of people more and more, and we're not, most, there are some Hispanic groups like the Cubans and probably the Venezuelans and South Americas who move around more than say Mexican-Americans. I don't know if you

remember back in the '60s and '70s we had scholarships for kids to go to college, we were pushing for a higher education but nobody wanted to leave home. Nobody wanted to leave Mom and Dad. So I'm wondering why not just make that a first generational question, once these other Hispanics start mixing with us and we mix with them that seems to unify rather than separate, because in the Anglo's eyes we're all the same.

SF: In the what?

EV: In the Anglo's eyes we're all the same.

SF: (laughter) I guess we are in their eyes. But the, you know you hit on the most important thing I think, of this conversation it has to do with the generations. If you come from a foreign country, you're the first generation that is a world of difference on that first generation to say about the third one. I read somewhere where, by the… the first generation comes and they speak their home language. The language of where they came from. In this case it could be any language. The second generation still speaks part of that home language but they are very much American. By the time you get to the third one the home language, the language of origin is completely gone. And I think that's what happened. And maybe that's what happened to me because our family has been here so long and I sense, I sense the way I look at life so much different than some of *these *commerciante* [commercial?] Latinos that I know that own this restaurants and so on, they are first generation immigrants and so on, Cesar Rodriguez an example that I can think of. The big successful guy has all these wonderful… but you know he came direct from Mexico and he is very much a Mexican in his mind, he's American, obviously, but his mind. You meet his daughter, you can see her she is very American and the daughter's children I'm sure will be double American and so on. But we start

losing that and I don't know if those children, the Cesar's grandchildren, or my grandchildren are going to wake up one day and say, "I need to know more about my grandfather's roots" and wind up that cultural pride that I discovered in my old age. I don't know because they get so far away from the country of origin.

EV: There's a lot of things that make you go back, I think, that make different people go back and explore their roots like you did.

SF: Okay, what?

EV: Well, mine had a lot to do with sounds and aromas and fragrances and smells. When I worked as a probation officer in San Antonio, the juvenile probation office, barrios of west San Antonio and all of that. But I go down there say, about 11:00 in the morning I'd be back there and I could smell the fideo big browned on the comals.

SF: And you knew what was cooking, just by the smell. Nobody had to tell you what was on the stove. (:Laughter)

EV: Yeah and all of the sudden, exactly. And it just gave me this funny, and I'll tell you another thing that happened to me. There was a night club in San Antonio called El Patio Flamenco, and I went there when I had a three day pass in San Antonio and this guy was a flamenco guitarist, El Curro, *de alguna fama in San Antoinio* [he was pretty well known in San Antonio]. His wife was a flamenco instructor. And it was this little café and it was a very picturesque little place. When I stepped in the door and he was, and you know we for some reason, I don't know about you but in El Paso we were taught you don't talk about your Spanish background because *por que te estas crellendo mucho* [because you will be considered presumptuous] you know what I'm saying.

SF: (laughter) Yes.

EV: So you don't talk about being Spanish, you can say "Mexican" all you want but you can't say my Spanish background, you know. So that's kind of what happened. And, but I heard that and it reminded me of a book I read. I heard that Spanish guitar and it just knocked me over, man. It just, it was, the novel I am talking about is Mischener's *Hawaii* and it goes… have you read it?

SF: No I didn't read it but I saw the movie.

EV: You know, many generations of World War II when the people went to go populate Hawaii, the guy took a young wife and he came back, anyway, and World War II comes up, the decedents of these couples that went there, all of the sudden those guys rowing in, saw that sunset and something hit them. "This is where I belong…" And every since that time I said, okay, I can't deny, it's stupid for me to deny my Spanish background. I mean why not? And the Spanish weren't all as bad as we were taught they were.

SF: A name like Valdés it's kind of hard to hide your Hispanic background.

EV: I mean, you know, the Spanish had a lot they gave…they set up court systems. they left the Indians alone….compared to what the Anglos did.

SF: Well, we're talking about the same things. Yeah, I'll show you a book that says, *this is from the wild horse desert, this is down where I was raised. ???? Your Cooking in South Texas by a lady by the of Guerra. I find myself buying all kinds of cookbooks about Tex-Mex cooking and how it all started and the stories about South Texas and I give them to my children. And it's the same thing because the smells also bring back my cultural tie. And I think, I think I would smell and understand that they were cooking fideoif I walked by something cooking fideo.

EV: Well my point is that was the thing that drew me back immediately. So when you say, did you, do your kids know the smell of fideo cooking in oil. Or do your grandchildren?

SF: Yes. My children…

EV: That's wonderful.

SF: My children do, my grandchild, of course, is too small, he's only.

EV: Well that's great, you know, because then they'll come out and they say…

SF: My daughter and my son cooks stuff like that.

EV: Oh do they?

SF: Because and their Anglo mother taught them because the Anglo mother learned from my mother very carefully and has hand written recipes that.

EV: Oh my.

SF: ….so but then, that doesn't mean I stop buying books like this one to see how somebody else does it, and also to remind them and encourage them to keep cooking that way.

EV: I want to get this. Because I'm kind of an amateur cook myself, you can tell.

SF: Well you'll enjoy that. Because it's got all of those cooked and it's what they cook on the ranches of South Texas, which, of course, all came from Mexico.

EV: That is, I've discovered over the last couple of years is a totally different history than what we had in El Paso.

SF: Yes, I think very much so. There were different people sort of, different parts of I guess of Spain and Mexico that traveled up to the Paso del Norte that traveled up the Rio Grande River.

EV: Yeah.

SF: This was country that they, the viceroy was trying to settle so bad because he knew that the Americans and the French and so on were going to steal this country from them. So they were trying to push anybody up there.

EV: Yeah, and I think the one from El Paso is so interesting because it's so much older and because my families are the ones who ended up in…in Júarez there was a…

SF: 90% plus Roman Catholics.

EV: Right. But not only, but you know the Roman Catholic church is losing a huge amount of people to the Pentecostal religion.

SF: Yes, absolutely.

EV: But now I'm with, my sister's a Presbyterian's minister.

SF: Huh.

EV: Yeah, so I was kind of raised in both Catholic and Protestant traditions and that's why I see when you start poking fun at the church I can, the kind of fun that only people who are Catholic can do.

SF: Yeah, I hear you. It's kind of like blacks and only black jokes.

EV: Yeah, and we only tell Mexican jokes. But those are interesting things and those are interesting patterns going back to this Jesus thing. The reason so many, that they found so many of the, according to this book, the reason they found so many of the Jews were actually Mexican, converted to Protestant-ism, Mexican Protestant-ism and went to the Mexican missionaries, the Presbyterian's for example is because they taught the Old Testament and the Catholics don't go into the Old Testament.

SF: The Catholic Church didn't want you to read the bible. They wanted to interpret it for you.

EV: Sure.

SF: So that's the way it was and, you know, I remember going to school just as dumb as the other kids about the bible.

EV: Yeah, if you didn't get the Ten Commandments from Charlton Heston you would have no idea what that was all about.

SF: I missed the story in the Bible but I saw it on late TV I didn't miss the bible. (laughter).

EV: Is there anything that you want to add that we've already talked about? Is there anything…

SF: I'll tell you what, we've covered everything.

EV: This is going to be your time capsule.

SF: Yeah, one more thing… is it on?

EV: Yeah.

SF: Okay. It's just that I think it is pretty exciting times to be living as a Mexican-American and seeing this incredible change over. It's historic times… that's what it is. And you're seeing the influence, you're seeing a younger generation come in, what I think, with a Hispanic pride that I think is going to make all of us proud. And I think all understand that education is the key to it and hopefully they'll instill it all, all the ones that come behind it. But I think it is really exciting times and a lot of important things are going to happen.

EV: Do you ever rue the fact that this wasn't your generation, that you weren't born at this time?

SF: I do every day. When I get up and I see, damn I say, I wish I was 20 years old instead of 70.

EV: Yeah, yeah because you have that feeling that I could have gotten elected…

SF: Oh yeah but to me it's not so much that it just that I'm going to get a chance to see something that I've been dreaming about, that I never thought I'd see. Who knows, you know, I'm still pretty healthy I may see the day that there's important Hispanic people that are the head knockers of this world that chiefs of industry, the big politicians, the President of the United States. After all, a guy by the name of Richardson is running for President. So the important things that would happen that all of the sudden, you know, Hispanic Americans make a difference in this country.

EV: Yeah, and hopefully that they recognize the difference we made from day one and they refuse to look at. I'll tell you right now that one of the biggest battles going on in the archives, not in the archives but on the plateaus of history is getting the Americanists who dominate the historical classroom and the association to accept the fact that Southwest had a history before they were part of the United States. So they only look at history from the time after 1848 when, you know, that was lost to the United States after the Mexican-American war. That's where Mexican-American history begins. But they refuse to recognize the fact that we have three or four hundred years of history before that. And all of that is part of the United States.

SF: Yes but you know what? Those old guys are going to get pushed aside and all these young Hispanic-Americans coming behind them are going to remind them and they are going to finally fix all of those books that ignored all that history.

EV: Yeah, and there is already a lot of books doing that. There's a fantastic book, it's a classic in Mexican-American literature, history, historical literature, called *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away.* (laughter) Interesting title isn't it?

SF: (Laughter) *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away*… What is a corn mother?

EV: The corn mothers were the one who, you know, corn was very sacred to the Native American and so when they are the ones who raised the corn, they are the ones who raised, you know…

SF: Who worked the fields?

EV: Who worked the fields, yeah. They are the ones that went and so all of their religion was based on the worship of the sun and sacredness of the corn. So when the missionaries came it upset their whole world. The theme of the book doesn't follow that religious thing but it follows the impact that Anglo Americans or Europeans have on the culture that was existing in New Mexico at the time. And it's fascinating, man. It's fascinating. And in our times the, yeah, there are guys hitting the top, doing a real good job of picking on the top. But we haven't found our archives yet. They are sitting somewhere in some, you know, place in Spain or Mexico in some old church and some box and they haven't found it yet.

SF: Well don't worry they'll come out.

EV: They'll come out.

SF: Can I say one more thing?

EV: Sure.

SF: Okay, I haven't said anything about this and it, I remember this every day and I guess I remember every day because I don't like real hot weather or real cold weather and I live in air conditioning. But my grandfather on my father's side, Antonio Flores, he was a share cropper in Duvale County, right outside of Benavides, Texas, I say right outside it actually was about 10, 20 miles and in those days they were all dirt roads and you couldn't hardly drive them because you'd get stuck in the sand. But he didn't own his land. He raised ten kids in a house without electricity, water well that was run by the wind and he worked every day in those hot fields like that. I remember he had, he had a mule and a plow and he had a small tractor and that's how he lived. And I would go there in the summers for about a week, they would send me over there. I'd help him pick cotton, or any other crop, but I remember cotton and peanuts out in the field. And it was July and August, it was as hot as could be, there was no air conditioning. He lived in a house that was, had a tin roof and the upstairs was where we slept, kind of a loft looking place and it was like sleeping inside an oven. And every day that I come to work and turn the air conditioning on, all I can think of is, you know, I'll tell you what, I'm glad I live in this generation number one, number two no wonder I have such good genes because that old man lived to be, if I remember, he was in his mid 70's or like 75 after the hard life that he lived out there in the country like that. But that was a tough way to live.

EV: We had the tarp paper shack, black, black tar paper, and we also slept outside because it was just too hot inside. And the thing wouldn't cool off until like 3:00, 4:00 in the morning. So I can imagine how it was…

SF: Those were tough people.

EV: Oh, yeah. And I don't know how they, you know, I wonder how they, well you survive. You do what you have to do.

SF: I guess so.

EV: You now, how many guys you know came back from Vietnam? And all of the sudden they are in an air conditioning place and they're freezing.

SF: (laughter)

EV: Did you have that experience?

SF: No. (laughter)

EV: Oh man I had that all the time. I was in the office one time at Fort Hood and these guys came in, they were direct, they sent them from Nam to us.

SF: And they were freezing?

EV: They were freezing to death. You know, the Army, they didn't keep their buildings real close to the officer's quarters. But some guys I knew in San Antonio that I'd go visit, the girl I was dating at the time, her father was a Vietnam Vet, got shot up real bad, but the guy would come in and say, "God, turn off that air conditioner."

SF: I'm about to die…(laughter).

EV: But you know they got them here so fast they were hopping in the booneys one day and the next morning they were in San Francisco. You know, just that change was just too quick for them.

SF: Well I escaped that. Lucky me.

EV: Well we all did.

Transcriber this is the end of the interview.