

HHA# 00802

Interviewee: Fraga, Felix

Interview Date: October 24, 2013

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Houston History

Interviewee: Felix Fraga

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Place: Houston, Texas

Interviewer: Emily Chambers

Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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Abstract:

This interview with Felix Fraga starts with the story of Felix Fraga Sr. coming from Mexico to the United States through Eagle Pass, Texas, to start a new life in the Second Ward of Houston. From there come the amazing stories of each of the six Fraga sons, the "Fraga Six," who worked hard to use the opportunities their parents had given them to reach move up in the social strata. At one point Felix explains that people thought the Fraga boys were great because they never got into trouble. Felix explained that he and his brother never joined local gangs but, instead, succeeded. Through the support of the community centers like the Rusk Settlement House and activities like sports, these six boys were able to leave their neighborhood, to learn and grow, and to bring their new ideas to their community.

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Felix Fraga

Interviewed by: **Emily Chambers**
Date: **October 24, 2013**
Transcribed by: **Michelle Kokes**
Location: **Houston, Texas**

EC: This is Felix Fraga, we are in his house and I am Emily Chambers. We are interviewing you about your family.

FF: Okay.

EC: "Fragas and 100 years in East End or Second Ward," is what my article is about. I really wanted to focus on our family history and how we've influenced the East End just with our presence, with your community action, with you know Tejas, with everything that we've brought here. First I wanted to know more about your father. What do you know about him?

FF: Not as much as I should.

EC: As you'd like to?

FF: Well I guess I never gave it a thought growing up. As I understand he came here from Mexico, left by himself.

EC: I have the document that tells me he came here in 1913.

FF: Was it? I was going to say close after 1910. That's when the Mexican Revolution started.

EC: Yes.

FF: I don't know if he had any brothers, sisters or parents even still alive. He came from San Luis, which is where my mother is also and she has a lot of family and he hasn't any that we know of. In fact it was three or four years ago that our son took us to San Luis Potosí.

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EC: I've met with him twice.

FF: His purpose for going there, he took us along, was to find out about our parents, his grandparents. Of course, there is a lot of family on my mother's side.

EC: Yes.

FF: But there wasn't anything about our father, we couldn't find anybody living with a name. I think they finally told us there was a gentleman named Fraga but they never were able to get ahold of him before we left so we didn't even meet that one. I don't know if he's still there, maybe he wasn't there....they didn't know, the family on my mother's side didn't know him that well. They didn't seem to know any more than we did about our father.

EC: Okay.

FF: In fact, they tell me that he was married before he married my mother.

EC: he was actually married?

FF: I don't know. I didn't know that much.

EC: Okay and he had a daughter.

FF: You know Joe our oldest brother was not from our mother but from somebody else.

EC: He's from another father.

FF: No from another mother.

EC: Angela that's his mom?

FF: Oh...see I have that backwards. I thought my father had him before she married my mother Angela. I don't know.

EC: Oh okay.

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FF: Anyway... that shows you how much I know my grandparents. I never thought about it, I never thought about asking then. I never saw a reason to ask him. I don't know if that's normal or not. But that's... that's where I am there.

EC: Did you ever meet his daughter or did she die before?

FF: I guess she died before. I might have when I was one or two. I don't know what year she died. I was born in 1929.

EC: Okay. So before that.

FF: Even if she died after I was born I don't remember meeting her, maybe vaguely. I think her name was Lupe.

EC: Oh, it was Lupe?

FF: I guess, I don't know. I don't even know where I get that from.

EC: It is sad that my grandfather is not alive because I think he actually knew her.

FF: Did he?

EC: Joe. I think they were around at the same time. He was alive enough to know her.

FF: She was my mother's daughter then?

EC: No, no. She was your father's daughter.

FF: Okay.

EC: Felix Fraga had a daughter and then Angela Zamarron had a son and they came together.

FF: Oh, okay! Joe's.

EC: Joe's.

FF: Okay.

EC: When Angela came across, she came across my grandfather when he was one or two.

FF: Joe is your grandfather?

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EC: Yeah. That's why I know so much about it.

FF: That's wonderful. I never ask and I never looked into it. For no special reason. I just took it for granted that these were our parents.

EC: That's okay. Do you think your father was educated?

FF: No because he must have left Mexico when he was maybe under fifteen. I don't know what age. That's another thing we don't know when...

EC: What day he was born.

FF: I think when we buried him on the tomb plaque we put 1889 I believe. I don't know if that's his birthdate.

EC: I think Bolivar has found three dates.

FF: I'm sorry?

EC: Bolivar has found three dates, Bo has found three dates.

FF: Did he?

EC: For three different dates where he think he was born?

FF: I would check with him. I don't know how we got to 1839. I mean 1889, excuse me.

EC: '89, You all just kind of guessed or estimated?

FF: I guess or maybe his citizenship or think it had his birthdate or I don't remember.

EC: And he was a citizen?

FF: He became a citizen here, yes.

EC: Yes.

FF: When did he become a citizen?

EC: In 1950. In fact we have a picture of that. It happened at the Rusk Settlement where I was working. I think there were the first agency or the community center to have classes in University of Houston

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Spanish. In that year it wasn't 1950 because it was when I was in the Graduate School of Social Work which had to be after 1952 when I graduated from University of Houston.

EC: Okay.

FF: I was going to graduate school and working there. They would send us back from graduate school to do our field work here in the agency. I think the agency paid for our tuition with the understanding that we would come back and do our field work here. And that year the agency must have been I started there in 1952 so either '52 or '53...

EC: He became a citizen.

FF: We had the classes because I think our government passed a law there that as of 1950 if you had been in this country twenty years and you were over fifty you could take your exam in the language of your country.

EC: Oh, wow.

FF: So they learned their history in Spanish and they took their exam in Spanish and they became citizens in Spanish.

EC: Wow that's interesting. They would never allow that now.

FF: No, no it's still on.

EC: They still do that they let you take it in the language that you grew up in?

FF: If you were 50 at 1950.

EC: Oh I see. So eventually that's how old we have to be now. I believe that's how it is.

FF: You know I ought to check. Next time I go to one of these immigration things I'm going to ask if that's a law.

EC: Okay.

FF: In college back then, I don't know if you had to pay money.

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EC: Money?

FF: Maybe \$25 at the most.

EC: To become a citizen?

FF: I understand it costs hundreds.

EC: It's a lot of money now.

FF: I don't know if it's even a thousand or something even.

EC: Did your mother also do it?

FF: Yes, both of them did it. I don't know if Nellie has got that picture. Nellie? Do we have that picture of our grandparents at the class at Ripley House? Bolivar has it doesn't he?

NF: It's in the book, no?

FF: Yeah and we don't have the book here do we? The book we are talking about has the history of the neighborhood centers.

EC: Oh okay yeah.

FF: It goes over 100 years. It started in 1907.

EC: I think I've probably seen it. Is it where they are all sitting in a chair and the men are standing?

FF: Yes.

EC: Yes. I think I've seen that.

FF: Both my parents are in that picture.

EC: Okay.

FF: You've seen that book?

EC: I've seen it in my class.

FF: From the history book?

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EC: Yes.

FF: Because, printed under the pictures tells it. It's there only because my parents are there.

Not only because I think we were the first center to start the classes in Spanish. I don't know whether in Houston or maybe in Texas.

EC: That's really interesting. Okay.

FF: It was a large class. The guy that was teaching the class was a classmate of mine at the Graduate School of Social Work. I went to graduate school in San Antonio and our graduate school had an understanding with him like I said that the workers that they paid for would come back and do field work here. If they wanted to send anybody else we would take them.

EC: Okay.

FF: So we would have people from graduate school to come and do field work here with us.

EC: Okay.

FF: The gentleman that taught that class was a friend of mine. I mean I met him at the school and it just happened that he was the one that was teaching the class.

EC: That's funny.

FF: He was assigned to do his field work here. I don't know whether he asked that.

EC: It was assigned...

FF: If they would meet at this location here. If it were assigned by the agency we automatically came over here.

EC: Interesting. They both became citizens...

FF: It had to be in 1953 or 1954. I don't know if it was my second year in graduate school. I graduated from university in 1952.

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EC: Okay, so it was after that.

FF: To get your master's in social work you had to go two years. Normally it takes you a year but because we had to do field work that took away time for the class to do class work. It took two years.

EC: We talked about [your] daughter. What was... what day did he die? Felix Fraga Sr?

What year did he die, your father?

FF: Oh? Gosh it had to be after 1970, I'm sure because..

EC: Okay.

FF: I was married in 1969 and we had already been married a few years when he died.

EC: Okay.

FF: Nellie? Do you remember when my father died? Fernando was already born wasn't he?

Fernando ya vía nacido. You understand Spanish? Fernando, cuando se murió mi papá.

Fernando ya estaba aquí, verdad. Me recuerdo porque él jugaba con Fernando, verdad? Fernando was born in 1972.

NF: 1970.

FF: Was Carlos also born when my father died?

NF: '71.

FF: Carlos was also born, and he was born in '71? He must have died sometime after '72 then.

EC: Okay.

FF: 1972.

NF: He died, 1974.

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FF: You remember? That's good.

NF: Fernando passed away in '74 in October.

FF: Oh that's right okay.

NF: And then in February your father passed away.

FF: That's right he passed away a few months after Fernando, verdad? Do you remember what month? Was it '74 or '75 that he died?

NF: It was '75?

EC: So February of '75.

FF: Was it February?

NF: February.

EC: Yes.

NC: Your father died on the 3rd he was buried on the 5th. On Champ's birthday.

EC: On Champ's birthday. Oh how sad, oh God. Did your mother die before him?

FF: Yes.

NC: What?

FF: My mother died before then.

FF: We weren't married.

NC: '66

FF: Yeah we weren't married. Yeah.

EC: She had heart problems right?

FF: Yeah, and diabetes. She went for an operation and she passed away.

EC: I remember my mom telling me that.

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FF: She had diabetes. She was overweight. We didn't even call it overweight. We never heard the word obesity back then.

EC: That's a new thing. What was your father like? Was he quiet?

FF: He was friendly? He used to make his own beer at the house.

EC: That's funny.

FF: But we never drank beer. He never offered us.

EC: Did he sell it or did he...?

FF: No, no he just made it to drink himself.

EC: For himself. Oh okay.

FF: I remember he used to have a contraption he put a pack on. He made it there in the kitchen. I don't know what he put in it or what. But he never got drunk or anything. You know the railroads in California were done by Chinese immigrants the one in Texas were done by Mexican immigrants.

EC: I know he worked on the railroads. Do you know what company he worked for?

FF: Gosh it will come back to me. I remember the name. It might come back to me.

EC: How long did he work on railroads?

FF: Oh many years, over 30 years.

EC: So when he came here, is that the first thing he did?

FF: I mean that's the first thing I remember about him.

EC: Okay so he was doing it right when he...

FF: I'm sure that's probably the first job he got and it was the only job he had until he could no longer do that. Then he started working at The Shamrock Hotel which is not there anymore.

In the kitchen.

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EC: Was he a cook?

FF: No I think he washed dishes.

EC: Washed dishes okay.

FF: He enjoyed it. He looked forward to going every day. He went on the bus. He would never miss. He wasn't sick much. He was slender. That helped him.

EC: He was a tiny man too. 5'5" I was reading about him.

FF: He was taller than we were when we were growing up.

EC: Exactly!

FF: But we passed him up.

EC: He never was sick?

FF: But he enjoyed life and in his later years he read the newspaper or at least looked at it. He would always get ahold of the newspaper.

EC: In English or in Spanish?

FF: In English.

EC: Oh so he could read English?

FF: They didn't have that many papers in Spanish. There was one that was done in San Antonio that would be sold here but.

EC: How did he learn English?

FF: I think just on his own. I don't know how much he could read.

EC: Okay.

FF: He said he wanted to look at the paper. I don't know if he could read the paper or not.

EC: That's funny. He washed dishes at The Shamrock Hotel and then he worked on the railroads. When he died, did he retire or did he die while working at The Shamrock Hotel?

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FF: No by that time he must have been, he was over 90 when he died I don't know. There were about 10 years before that that he didn't... no longer work. He just... because I think every morning he... we used to live in the neighborhood that was called Denver Harbor. He lived with us with Nellie and I and our first son.

EC: Denver Harbor?

FF: Yes. It was a house that my brother bought when he was in the Navy. Frank, he was in the Submarine service and there was a submarine I don't know if they still have it at the Port of Houston in the Gulf. I don't know if it was just there for an exhibit or for recruitment or what have you but anyway he was assigned there for about two years and we visited the submarine. I took kids from the Ripley house that I used to work with that were kids at risk.

EC: Is it the submarine that's still in Galveston?

FF: I don't know if it's no longer in Houston. Maybe not, maybe it's in Galveston but maybe it's one in Houston and I guess my brother toured at the end of his retirement because he went to the war when he was sixteen he joined.

EC: He lied about his age right?

FF: Yeah my mother had to sign. I think I forgot how old you had to be.

EC: I think it's eighteen. Anyway he was sixteen. When you're eighteen when you say you're eighteen your mother has to sign for you. He convinced her to sign and he went. This was in the summer of '42 I think. The war had started in '41, December. This was early on in the war.

EC: Yeah it is. He was in a group that were called the Houston Volunteers. The Cruiser Houston had been sunk a few months before. I don't know whether Houston promised to recruit 1,000 soldiers to replace the ones that were lost in the Houston.

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EC: Oh gosh.

FF: So when they left they had a big ceremony on Main Street and a couple of theaters that were there. The Metropolitan and the Lowes Theater and that picture came out in Life Magazine.

EC: Life?

FF: Yes ma'am!

EC: Wow! Was he in it?

FF: Life was a big magazine then.

EC: Yeah it was. Is Frank in that photo?

FF: Yes but you can't see.

EC: You can't tell?

FF: It's 1,000 soldiers. From there they marched to the Union Station which was the train station where the baseball stadium is now. They got on a train and they went to San Diego I think is where all new recruits with the Navy would go.

EC: That's right.

FF: Then from there he went to Minnesota I guess to submarine school. He was assigned submarines.

EC: Then you lived in his house at some point is that what you are trying to say?

FF: No I'll get to that. While he was in the Navy, my mother died.

EC: Okay.

FF: This was after the war. I forgot, did Nellie say what year my mother died?

EC: Yes she did it was. It was '62.

FF: '62? The war was over in '45 no...

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EC: I can't remember right now.

FF: That's alright. The war had been over.

EC: It's over.

FF: He was still in the submarine. I don't know how many years he served. Anyway, one of the ladies here in the community that communicated got in touch with the Red Cross to tell him that my brother's mother had passed away could they arrange for him to come? They got ahold of him and I think at that time they were off the coast of Russia doing...

EC: Something...

FF: Yeah doing work. I don't know if you want to call it spying. I understand the main officer told my son. "Your mother died. If you need to go back, it's going to create problems. We have to, they may find out we're here." They told him "It's up to you. We'll do what you say." He decided not to put them...

EC: At risk...

FF: He didn't come for the burial.

EC: That's hard.

FF: Yeah so...

EC: And he was. I can't remember I'm sorry. Is he the oldest? He's older.

FF: Joe.

EC: Joe was the oldest and then Frank and then is it you?

FF: Yes, right.

EC: Then it's you.

FF: Yeah.

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EC: Just because you are named after your father I always feel like you were the first one born for some reason.

FF: No, in fact I wasn't even named after him.

EC: You weren't named after him?

FF: No. They gave me another name that's on my birth certificate. When I was going to start going to school we had to go to court to get my birth certificate noticed to say that I was...

EC: Born here.

FF: Yes and I wanted that certificate that although it's got another name. It has Narcicio which I'd rather have Felix than Narcicio. It's not a very common name. I don't know who they named me after. But when they changed it to... if it was a few days after I was born or a few years but they changed it to Felix. Not knowing that when I started using that name in school that it was going to be a problem. So they required... I had a letter always along with a birth certificate that said that I'm the person that in that certificate.

EC: Interesting. That's funny. Narcicio.

FF: Have you ever heard that name?

EC: It's a Hispanic name?

FF: I've heard it once or twice. I'm glad it was changed.

EC: I'm glad it was changed.

FF: We never used Junior. In fact in Hispanic culture you can't be a "Junior" because your name always has to include your mother's maiden name.

EC: Was your middle name Zamarron?

FF: Yes.

EC: Oh okay so all of you all is Zamarron's in the middle.

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FF: Yes.

EC: Just like my uncles are Ordepessa?

FF: Yes.

EC: That's interesting.

FF: Some places you still see Felix Fraga, Jr. but ...

EC: It's a typo.

FF: Technically you're not a Jr.

EC: Bouncy? they call him "Junior" but he's not a "Junior" because he's Joe Orpessa Fraga.

Do you know my grandfather was he adopted officially?

FF: My father?

EC: No, Joe. Joe. Was he ever adopted officially by your father?

FF: No.

EC: So he just took the name Fraga?

FF: Yeah, I never knew he wasn't his son?

EC: You never knew that he wasn't your real brother?

FF: No I never knew. I just assumed he was. I didn't ask and I didn't see any reason for asking because I...

EC: ...didn't know any different.

FF: I just assumed.

EC: That wasn't talked about?

FF: No, at least I never heard any mention of that.

EC: Hmm, okay.

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FF: When I finally how long ago, I heard, I assumed that my father had him before. I know he can't be because he looked like my mother and not like my father.

EC: There's a picture that Beau showed me. It's my grandfather and your mother before I think they came to America and it's him as a tiny baby and her holding him.

FF: Yeah.

EC: It's pretty interesting. He looks a lot like your mom but nothing like y'all.

FF: I don't know when my father's daughter was born.

EC: Did she come with him in Mexico?

FF: That's what I don't know.

EC: You think her name was Lupe?

FF: That's the thing I remember. I think I've seen a picture of her at some point.

EC: Oh there's a picture of her somewhere?

FF: Somewhere, but I'm sure it's not around anywhere. I think I remember seeing it early on, when we were younger.

EC: Then she died of tuberculosis?

FF: I believe... or was it TB?

EC: Yeah it was TB. Tuberculosis.

FF: Because I remember that Joe and Frank had to go to the place that you quarantine TB people in. There was a place here in Houston. They spent one summer there.

EC: Oh really? To be quarantined?

FF: Yeah.

EC: Oh, God.

FF: Or to be treated for it. Maybe it was more treated. It was considered very contagious.

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EC: Yeah I didn't know that. That's sad.

FF: Yeah. Joe and Frank, I don't know if they spent months there or the whole year.

EC: There was a facility in Houston that did that and they went there?

FF: I don't think there is such a facility anymore. What was that called? It was over off of West Dallas over there just before you get to River Oaks.

EC: That's interesting. I don't know. I can Google it, everything is on the internet.

FF: Yeah it was run by the city or the county.

EC: I guess because there was such a big...

FF: They must have been eight or ten. They were in school. Maybe it was just in the summer, maybe they didn't have to miss any school.

EC: How long did Joe and Frank go to school?

FF: I'm trying to think. Joe, I don't know if anything he might have finished elementary.

EC: Okay.

FF: Frank went about two years to what they used to call middle school. I mean called it junior high.

EC: Junior high.

FF: Back then all the Mexican people, all the immigrants were mainly Mexican. I feel like I never met any other immigrants. I met a few Puerto Ricans. I didn't realize that there were other Hispanics that were not Mexican. There were very few, anyway. We all lived, you couldn't live in a place unless the whites, they were separated. In fact where Ninfa's is on Navigation now on Anglo Street on the west side closer to town was Mexican and on this side was Anglo.

EC: German Americans.

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FF: You couldn't live over here. In fact when Ripley House was built way over here, we had Rusk Settlement on the other side. If you were Mexican you couldn't go to Ripley House. It wasn't the agency's rules that's just, the community didn't prevent that. I don't think the staff got involved one way or another. I'll tell a story. We used to play, we had a basketball team, we went to Rusk Settlement. I started going there when I was maybe three or so. We had a preschool that they would send you. The staff would tell the parents to send you there so they could get us ready for kindergarten. But I'd tell them, the kids went to school there because we got a meal at noon. Some of the real meals I first got in my life were over there.

EC: Wow.

FF: When my brother Frank went to junior high, which is middle school now, one time I saw a picture of him and an Anglo kid they were friends. I remember the guy's name was Delton Charles. That was the first time I'd seen a Mexican kid and an Anglo kid in a picture. I thought it was an amazing thing. Frank was that kind of a guy. He was friendly so he was able to make friends with this guy and was a guy

EC: Didn't care...

FF: ...who didn't care what you were. He hit it off with him. He was alright with him.

EC: Wow.

FF: I saw that picture that and I remember that, thinking it was the first time that I'd ever seen a Mexican kid and an Anglo kid in a picture together. Or together like that as friends. Or that he had a friend that was Anglo.

EC: Yeah,

FF: It was my first time to be aware of that. We used to, we all went to Rusk School. I guess Joe did because there was how many years between us?

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EC: You were born in 1929 and he was before 1927. So maybe...

FF: Yeah before that maybe 1926.

EC: Yeah.

FF: Frank must have been 20...

EC: He was 27. He was December 1927 and he must have been 25.

FF: Somewhere in there. So let's see how much older he was than me then?

EC: Four or five years yeah.

FF: I don't remember him going to school. He must have I would assume.

EC: What did he do then when you were growing up?

FF: We all sold newspapers.

EC: Okay.

FF: And shined shoes.

EC: Where did y'all shine shoes and sell newspapers?

FF: We used to go to the front of the church when people came out?

EC: Guadalupe?

FF: Yeah on Sundays. We would go Downtown on Congress Street. There was the Mexican side of Downtown at a theater and they showed pictures in Spanish, movies in Spanish and a drug store and a little newspaper. There was about four or five blocks on that street that was sort of a Mexican Downtown. But we would go down to Main Street to the movies. We went to the movies every Sunday no matter what they were showing. It was just. Who was it? I think they were asking, "Where was I when they announced the attack on Pearl Harbor?" Which was on a Sunday. We were at the movies. It was about 4:00 or 5:00 and they interrupted the movie to say there's been a bombing of Pearl Harbor.

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EC: Wow!

FF: After that they continued the movie and we just stayed there.

EC: Life continued.

FF: I didn't give it any more thought. Coming home, I turned the radio on and they were still talking about that sort of thing.

EC: You graduated all the way and you were the first to graduate high school,

FF: Right.

EC: to graduate college,

FF: Yes right.

EC: In your family.

FF: I was going to drop out. Joe of course had already dropped out and Frank dropped out. I think he dropped out. I mean he joined the Navy. I think he was sixteen when he joined. He must have gone two years to middle.

EC: To junior high.

FF: Unless he dropped out too, before he even joined the Navy, I can't remember too well. I was thinking about dropping out when I finally finished the 9th grade and there at the center, Rusk, which I went as a kid to play, we'd go there for free movies. I think every Wednesday night they had a free movie. Usually in these movies there was no talking, they were silent movies.

EC: Oh really?

FF: Yeah. They had one a group of guys called Laurel and Hardy.

EC: My dad loves them.

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FF: The Three Stooges and they were silent movies, you had to read the bottom, what they were saying. I grew up, sort of, at the center, when they heard me telling them I was going to drop out of school because I had to go to work they told me that if I stayed in school they would give me a job there at the center.

EC: Oh wow.

FF: So I...

EC: Started working there...

FF: Took them up on it and I started working there. I must have been fifteen or sixteen maybe and they got me through school. They said "You can work here as long as you stay in school." So they got me through high school and I think I was pretty much one of the first one in this neighborhood, certainly the first one in this family. And they said, "If you want to go to college we can get you a scholarship to the University of Houston and you can keep working here." I said, "Okay." I didn't know where else I was going to work.

EC: What else to do.

FF: Where else to work. They had to come talk to my mother to tell her that they wanted to send me to college because she was assuming I was going to start working because I was through with school. I don't remember whether she had to be convinced. She said, "Okay," I don't remember if I asked them to come. Or maybe they came just because they wanted to tell her. I don't remember now whether my father was there. My father didn't get involved. My mother said, "You have to go to work." But I don't remember that being a problem. But anyway...

EC: Was education valued in your family?

FF: I'm sorry?

EC: Was education valued, did your parents want you to?

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FF: I don't think they saw it one way or the other. They just felt the sooner I could get to work the better.

EC: To help out the family.

FF: I think Joe stopped going to school I don't know if it was just to sell newspapers in the street. That's what we did almost all the way through high school just about.

EC: My mom would do it as a kid.

FF: She?

EC: Joe continued to do it, even on Sundays my mom as a kid would sell newspapers with him.

FF: Really?

EC: Yeah, Joe did it forever.

FF: Gosh.

EC: I know.

FF: He went to the war, too. He was drafted and back then if you were drafted you could be assigned to the Air Force and he happened to. I don't know if you know he wasn't a citizen. I don't know if he came after the war. They almost automatically...

EC: Yeah he became it he came through...

FF: Made you a citizen after the war.

EC: He was in the Air Force?

FF: He was in the Air Force, he was in the ground crew. He spent most of his time in Italy at some air base not too far from Rome. I forgot the name of it. But he was lucky that he didn't have to fight the front lines.

EC: No definitely. I think he fixed planes.

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FF: Yeah, he was a mechanic. I remember he had his training in Mississippi because we used to get letters from him and pictures.

EC: Do you still have any of those letters or pictures?

FF: Gosh, probably. Someplace maybe.

EC: Okay.

FF: He got his training in Mississippi.

EC: Then he came back and then met my grandmother? I have no idea.

FF: They lived here too. Pretty much back then the Mexican families were sort of in three areas. The sea side, Second Ward, was one. Then Fifth Ward, north side, had a community. Then First Ward and Sixth Ward over by Washington.

EC: Okay, three areas.

FF: If you were Mexican all your friends were there. Your wife-to-be was there.

EC: Your wife-to-be!

FF: I mean if you think back all the guys who got married then married somebody from...

EC: Either of those places.

FF: It was Magnolia came sort of later, over in East side by the turning basin. I think when the port was built that developed.

EC: Okay.

FF: If you were Mexican that's where all your friends were, any friends you had, girlfriends, there were guys that were that age that married somebody right in that neighborhood.

EC: Joe he went to the Air Force, probably drafted, he came back. What did he do after that? I don't know what my grandfather did after that.

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FF: One job that he did was shafting paper just off of Wayside. That's the last job I remember, like you said he continued selling papers for some time.

EC: I'll have to ask my mother about that.

FF: I remember the big thing selling papers there was, you would sell the Sunday paper on Saturday night. It would come out. I remember selling it, saying, "Sunday morning paper," on Saturday night. I guess it was a big thing.

EC: Selling point.

FF: We sold it until about eleven, twelve, midnight.

EC: Wow.

FF: We'd have to walk to The Chronicle which is where it is now, to check in, to pay them. The daily paper was three cents. I remember there was two of them. The Houston Post was only sold in the morning usually by men because kids wouldn't go there early in the morning to sell. Kids would sell the Chronicle and the Press it was two of them. I remember during the war they had an arrangement with the schools, at least the school where we went, if it was what was called an extreme, in other words if really important news came out they called it extreme, war extreme. They could go to the school and request that those of us that sell could come out and sell. There might have been about eight or ten of us from this one school that were doing that after school. We would get out in the middle of the day to go sell the extreme paper.

EC: Wow!

FF: I remember that they had the Chronicle in the afternoons and the Press and they were both three cents. If you sold somebody a Press and they gave you a nickel they would wait for their two cents change. The guys that bought the Chronicle, because it was the one that had the stock market in it, must have been the people who had a little more money. We sold the

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Chronicle many times and people would tell you “Keep the change.” If you had a choice you wanted to sell the Chronicle instead of the Press. The Chronicle sold more to the older guys. We sold the Press but if we had a chance we would...

EC: Sell the Chronicle.

FF: ...try to sell the Chronicle if we could.

EC: Interesting. Joe and then Frank he did the Navy as a career and then when he came out what did he do?

FF: Let's see here. I think he... I don't know if he stayed in the Navy until he retired? God, we might ask some of his sons or daughters. I can't remember him working.

EC: Okay.

FF: I think he started a printing shop or something. He and my brother Lupe.

EC: Champ?

FF: Yeah...

EC: Tejas?

FF: I don't know if Frank was involved when it first started.

EC: Oh okay.

FF: His hobby was taking pictures. In fact that's what he did in the the submarine service. He was their official cameraman.

EC: I think I've seen some of those.

FF: I know he took pictures when _____ (46.35) came out. I don't think necessarily that's his only job.

EC: Angel Fraga, I heard that he was hit by a car. Is that true?

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FF: He had an accident on the way to leaving school, going out to where we had report to sell newspapers. He sold newspapers with us at the corner of Franklin and Crawford which was just a couple of blocks from the school where we went to. Across the street he had a car hit him. I think he went to the hospital.

EC: Was he unconscious or what happened to him?

FF: When he came out he had his legs in casts and he had to have walking crutches. We had one of those wagons. I don't know if we got it at Christmas or something. I remember we used to pull him around in that wagon.

EC: How old was he like twelve?

FF: He was still in middle school so he had to be under twelve

EC: Yeah.

FF: I don't know maybe eight at the most. We used to call him "Wrecka" because he got wrecked up by the car. Some people still when the school name still call him Wrecka today.

EC: Where did you all go to school?

FF: Rusk Elementary.

EC: Rusk Elementary.

FF: If you were Mexican, each one of these neighborhoods had a school and all of the Mexican kids went to school there.

EC: Where did you go to middle school or junior high?

FF: Marshall.

EC: Marshall?

FF: There was the first contact you would have with Anglo kids. That's where my brother Frank, that's where I saw that picture of...

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EC: The white kid.

FF: Him with the Anglo kid yeah.

EC: And where did you go to high school? Did you go to Austin High School?

FF: No we went on to Davis.

EC: Davis?

FF: Because it was across the street from Marshall.

EC: Okay.

FF: Austin was over here and their middle school was Jackson. They weren't as inviting to us as the kids from Marshall.

EC: Okay.

FF: So most of the kids that lived in this neighborhood went on to Marshall and Davis.

Actually Jackson and Austin were closer but this was more of an Anglo neighborhood and Marshall and Davis were near Northside which was becoming a Mexican neighborhood. It still wasn't completely but it was becoming.

EC: More Mexican-friendly yeah. Angel was hit by a car at a young age...

FF: It was on the way to sell newspapers.

EC: Sell newspapers. Poor kids. He finished school just like you did and became a judge, a lawyer.

FF: Lawyer, went to University of Houston and then went to South Texas Law School. I think they still have that.

EC: Yeah, Uncle David went there. David Fraga.

FF: Oh okay.

EC: He went there and he had to campaign right? It wasn't appointed judge?

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FF: I think he got appointed when somebody had to leave for some reason. When it came time to be elected he had to run and he didn't get re-elected. He served as a judge on an appointment basis until the election.

EC: I didn't know that, okay. Then it was Tom, and Tom is still alive but he doesn't live here.

FF: He lives in Austin.

EC: He lives in Austin. What did he do?

FF: We all sold newspapers and I don't know if all of us shined shoes or not. We didn't do that as much as selling newspapers. He went to A&M, he also finished Davis.

EC: He went to the military too, right?

FF: Yes well when you went to A&M...

EC: He was in the corps.

FF: You would serve. I don't know how many years but he became a pilot.

EC: A pilot.

FF: He came out in a newspaper one time because he was flying in the Mediterranean Sea and his plane was having trouble. He was credited with the fact that instead of coming into land and crashing his plane, he dived it into the ocean, into the Mediterranean Sea. He came out in a parachute and my mother... a picture was there with him, showing him and his mother. We used to have a copies of that. I don't know if we still have that.

EC: I think I have a scanned copy of that. Your mother was really involved in all of you all's lives. It sounds like your dad didn't like make any decisions or...

FF: He would just work, he might have had a beer or two at night and pretty much go to sleep. He didn't go out with friends or anything or to beer joints or cafés or anything.

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EC: Your mom seemed like a very strong person. Was she?

FF: She worked hard. I guess we wore her out.

EC: What did she do? Did she just sell newspapers? Did she clean buildings or what did she do for a living?

FF: No, no she just kept house.

EC: She was just a housewife.

FF: She never worked. I can't remember one day she wasn't home.

EC: That's sweet. She must have been a strong person though, just to come across with a child, was what I always imagined.

FF: She stayed, she was a great mother. I can't remember a day that we weren't with her, except when I went off to graduate school in San Antonio. In fact she came to my graduation.

We went on to Mexico with some friends. They were going to Mexico anyway, so they agreed to stop by for my graduation in San Antonio on their way to Mexico and I went with them. My father never went back to Mexico.

EC: Never?

FF: Never.

EC: Did your mom?

FF: Several times.

EC: Did he go with her?

FF: No.

EC: He didn't go with her?

FF: No.

EC: Do you know why he never went back?

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FF: I don't know really. I never really thought about asking him.

EC: Hmm.

FF: To this day I believe about maybe two or three or four years ago, he wanted to go to Mexico specifically to see if we can find out about him and even my mother's family didn't know that much about him.

EC: He's a very mysterious character. He doesn't seem to, and I was asking your wife, Nellie, about him before you came. She said she tried to ask him about his past when she was doing a baby book for your first son and he was like, "I don't talk about the past. I just don't talk about it."

FF: I didn't realize she asked him.

EC: Yeah was like, "I tried."

FF: We never did ask him. I just assumed...

EC: It must have been hard.

FF: He didn't want to go back.

EC: Yeah, maybe he didn't have anybody to go see.

FF: That could be, too.

EC: Maybe he lost people.

FF: I wonder if he was an only.

EC: She thinks he had a brother.

FF: Really?

EC: Nellie.

FF: I never had given that kind of thought. I didn't think about what might have been. Bolivo was real interested in trying to find out about that.

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EC: I know he's fascinated by it.

FF: But he couldn't...

EC: Yeah that's too bad. We went through Tom. Last is Champ, right. He's the baby? Lupe.

FF: Lupe, like Guadalupe.

EC: How much of a difference? 1936 to 1929, that's not too much of a difference. He went to school all the way through. He went to St. Thomas, he got a scholarship or something?

FF: He started out at Marshall and there was a priest at St. Thomas in charge of athletics that was looking for good baseball players. They told him that Lupe played baseball and a friend of ours went to see him, told him that he knew this Mexican kid that was a good baseball player... they wanted to give him a scholarship, he would probably be willing to come to St. Thomas.

EC: So he played baseball at St. Thomas?

FF: He started at Marshall and I think he just went one semester and then at midterm they changed to St. Thomas. He finished there, then he got a baseball scholarship to A&M. He finished A&M and I don't know if when you graduated if you have to serve. He was in the cadet corps too. I don't know if you have to serve three years, or, but he went into the service after that. I remember when he was in the service I think he bought a car somewhere in Germany and it was shipped to New York. He asked me to pick it up and I volunteered because...

EC: You wanted to go to New York.

FF: I wanted to go to New York. I did it and I drove the car back, I went during the World Series in New York so I've seen one World Series game when I was in New York. New York and Pittsburgh I think it was. I think at that time they only had eight teams in each league and there was only two leagues. I think they only had three, or each was American and National.

EC: They have a million teams now.

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FF: Each one has two sections or so now.

EC: I know. That's interesting.

FF: So that was my first trip, because of that.

EC: Champ started a business, when did he start the business?

FF: Well I guess after he...

EC: He came back.

FF: He worked for a while and then he had a chance to buy this business. Frank somehow, Frank worked with him I think he ran the printing for some time.

EC: That's nice. Frank's sadly gone. I went to his funeral, right?

FF: I'm sorry?

EC: Frank is dead now right? I went to his funeral.

FF: Yes.

EC: So it's just you, Tom, Angel and Lupe.

FF: I'm the oldest now.

EC: You are now. That's right.

FF: I tell people that there were six of us. The oldest, the one that came first was also the first one to die. Frank was the second one and...

EC: I know.

FF: Frank was the second one...

EC: That's interesting. Oh God, I'm so sorry.

FF: I'm the next one in line.

EC: Oh God! I'm sure not, you have long, many years.

FF: It's fair. You can leave in the same order you came in.

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EC: It's true. It's how it's supposed to happen. He was the first to go. I don't remember much about my grandfather. When I had come, he already had Parkinson's Disease by the time I was fully aware you know of knowing him, all I remember was him when he would leave the house he would always give me a quarter.

FF: Oh really?

EC: Yeah he would say, "Let me give you a quarter!" My mom would be like, "No stop giving them money!" And he would be like, "No, I'm going to give you a quarter." And I'd be like, "Oh my God I got a quarter!" Because you're a kid and that's a lot of money when you're a kid. And that's what he would do. I don't remember talking to him or... my brother's got to know him a little more because he would take them to Ripley House and he'd play cards and get them a hamburger. It's too bad, I never go to ask him anything about our family or anything. I'm sure he was a nice guy.

FF: Nellie and I got married, they were living there. I remember we stopped by to see them. They took a picture of us on the porch.

EC: On the porch?

FF: On the steps. I don't know if we still have that picture?

EC: That's funny. They've been in that house a long time.

FF: They were some of the first Hispanic, Mexican families to move into this neighborhood.

EC: They were. My mom said it was hard sometimes.

FF: This used to be a German community. I always thought that the first immigrants to Houston were Mexican, but no I think the Germans came here before.

EC: They did yeah.

FF: This was all called Germantown.

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EC: That's what my mom calls it.

FF: Does she? There's only one German family!

EC: I know there's only like one left! Yeah she said she had...she said she remembers feeling like individual...

NF: It's not hot for you? You okay?

FF: No, you want turn the air on? Lemme turn the air on.

EC: Okay. Do you know if your mom had a visa when she came over?

FF: No.

EC: Never saw anything?

FF: No.

EC: I was wondering that.

FF: You tell me when you came over, you just paid a nickel and you came across.

EC: Yeah, it wasn't a big deal.

FF: They wouldn't ask you much. I think maybe they had a passport. I remember seeing things like that but I don't know where they would be now.

EC: Did they have birth certificates with them?

FF: No.

EC: Either of them?

FF: No. Passports I remember seeing them maybe. Of course citizenship papers when they became citizens.

EC: Yeah. I was just curious because your mother was older. She was born in 1901 and your dad was born in 1913. She looks older than your dad.

FF: No my dad wasn't born in 1913...

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EC: No sorry, that's when they were married maybe. That's when he came over.

FF: No, no he was older.

EC: He was older? He just looks really young in their marriage photos.

FF: No, he was quite a bit older.

EC: I didn't know that.

FF: It could have been fifteen years or so.

EC: So she was born in 1901.

FF: And he was born in...

EC: 1892 or 1882...

FF: It might have been 1885 or something. He had to be at least ten to fifteen years older than she was.

EC: I didn't know that. I didn't know if you look at the photos of them he just looks for some reason he just looks so much younger.

FF: Really?

EC: I'll show you.

FF: Maybe. Hard work is harder than railroad building.

EC: I have the Fraga photos. That's the one of you all together.

FF: See he looks older than she was.

EC: See but look at this one. He looks younger in that one.

FF: A little, not too much. But she looks a little more serious.

EC: Maybe that's why. She looks tired. I don't know if that's a marriage photo or when that was taken. Do you have any idea?

FF: No.

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EC: I just got that from Bo.

FF: Later on you could tell he was older as he began to stop working.

EC: That makes sense. See, I have all these photos. I have, that's not Joe. But these are ones of Frank and people in the army. These are from the reunion, did you go to that? I'm sure you did. The reunion.

FF: Oh yes, at Ripley.

EC: Was it good?

FF: Yes, it was real nice.

EC: Your son gave me the Powerpoint. There's photos just of all your family, all your children and everything in there.

FF: Just the other day, I think Bo was here he was mentioning something, we were talking about the family. They said that somebody told him, one of these rougher guys, all the Fragas were great. They never got into trouble, we had gangs back then. They were more local here. The Second Ward gang would fight with the Magnolia Gang or the Fifth Ward Gang. They used to have, some of them would have black shirts, some of them would have brown shirts. But we never got into that kind of thing.

EC: Why do you think that is?

FF: I think our parents more than anything else. Although they had parents too. There were very few broken families back then. There are many more now. But we got involved into sports...

EC: Did you all play sports?

FF: Your grandfather was a catcher.

EC: In baseball?

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FF: In a softball team. There were more softball teams then. Baseball was more expensive then, you had to get more equipment and a bigger field.

EC: I didn't know that.

FF: They played what's called softball. Frank didn't get involved much into sports. He was more into cars, mechanics, and things like that. He got into photography. There were six of us and it's amazing how the first three were sort of different from each other. It was Joe, who was just a worker, not interested in too many things. Frank was the other guy. He was interested in mechanical things or how things worked, photography and anything else. I was more of a people person. I became a social worker. Then the next three guys, sort of even in looks, Joe and Angel were the ones that were more light complected and looked more like my mother. Frank and Tom looked physically alike but more importantly both were into how things worked, mechanic and had that kind of mind. Tom to this day still has that. Myself and Lupe the last one we are more of a people person and we belong to boards and things like that. Lupe still does. We sort of came in pairs that way.

EC: That is interesting and Joe is kind of on his own.

FF: Joe and Angel physically they look alike.

EC: That's right.

FF: Angel became a lawyer and got an education and all of that. In looks and even in interest Tom and Frank are very much alike and they could make things work. Frank was one of the very first guys to have a car in the neighborhood and he would fix it himself and everything else.

EC: Wow!

FF: Anything that was broken he could mess around and get it going.

EC: That's funny!

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FF: Tom is quite a bit that way too. Lupe and I just we make friends and we mess with people more than things.

EC: Yeah and so is that what you attribute why you picked going into community service partly, just because you are a people person and you...?

FF: He didn't necessarily going into community service but he...

EC: No.

FF: He has joined a lot of committees...

EC: Through his business...

FF: Associates with people more than...And Angel was sort of it gets a little into that but not that much. But anyway he and Joe were the light complected ones and the rest of us were quite a bit darker then. I think I was the darkest one.

EC: Really?

FF: But dad was fairly dark too I guess.

EC: You mom was very light.

FF: Yeah, that's what I mean. Now I see that. She had to be. Joe had to be. Her son not my father's, otherwise he would have been dark like us.

EC: Yeah he was very white.

FF: Anyway I was very impressed to hear that day I don't know how they said it, that the Fraga's were great. They never got in trouble while the rest of the neighborhood.

EC: You all never joined gangs. You all, you all became respect...

FF: There were many more guys that didn't.

EC: Yeah.

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FF: Again it's because we started sort of working early. If you want to call selling newspapers and shining shoes work.

EC: It is work for a child definitely.

FF: Guys in the gangs never cared about doing that or got involved in that.

EC: That's another thing.

FF: All of us played sports, baseball it was easiest to play. We even could construct basketball goals and try and play basketball. Then at Rusk Settlement they had a small gym, we played there. But even my friends that dropped out of school didn't get into trouble like some of the other guys did in the neighborhood.

EC: Yeah.

FF: It would have been good to study what made those other guys get into trouble and what kept us from getting into trouble.

EC: I think that's pretty interesting. I think I've always been very proud of the fact that all of ya'll. My grandfather never did anything community wise but he raised five children who all ended up going to college and who were successful themselves. My mother always told me that education was really important to all of them and succeeding and not getting you know stuck in one place.

FF: They say that for minorities that are having difficulty or not you know having opportunities going to the service was a big thing for them.

EC: Oh definitely.

FF: I think that's true.

EC: Just in your family. All of you went except for you.

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FF: They could see other things. If you were just stuck in this neighborhood that we were living in and like I said I never saw a guy that had a friend that was not a Hispanic but my brother with that picture. The parents were real important and everybody had two parents. The guys and gangs were just didn't I guess just didn't have anything else to do probably. I mean they didn't play sports. They didn't want to sell papers or shine shoes.

EC: I think you all getting involved in sports and all that was a big key. Yeah definitely.

FF: How long you probably have to.

EC: Let's see how long have we been talking.

End of interview

