

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Jose Guerra

Annotation

Mr. Jose Guerra is a local business man, a graduate of Texas A&M University. He is active in the Hispanic American Genealogy Society and as a result was able to trace his Mexican American roots into the early 18th century and establishing familial relationships with some of the earliest Tejano citizens including those who fought for Texas independence from Mexico.



Interviewee: Guerra, Jose

Interview: May 14, 2007

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with:

José Guerra

Interviewed by:

Ernesto Valdes

Date:

May 14, 2007 at approx. 5:00 p.m.

Transcribed by:

Michelle Kokes

Location:

**Olsen & Guerra Lumber Company, 522 Cedar Hill Lane,
Houston, Texas**

EV: Tell me, just where you were born and the date.

JG: Okay, my name is José Oscar Guerra, Jr., I was born in Falfurrias, Texas when my dad was away in World War II and after he came back in 1945 he moved us to Houston. I was raised in Houston, went to Austin High School for high school. I lived here until that time and then I went to A & M and graduated from A & M, married my senior year of college and I went to work for Procter and Gamble and lived in Harlingen, Texas.

EV: Right after college?

JG: Right after college. A & M has always had a very, very good job market with graduates. Companies really want to give A & M graduates and the, uh, I worked for them four years and then I went to work for Wicks Lumber Company to get into the lumber business and worked for them for four years and worked in both Harlingen and in Corpus Christi and then I came to Houston after I left Wicks and worked for my dad every since.

EV: You told me you majored in...

JG: In building products marketing. It was a course set up by the Lumber Dealer's Association of Texas where they teach you some engineering courses, some drafting courses, some architectural courses, so you'd have a knowledge of building materials

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used in lumber companies or construction companies and I believe the middle of my junior year they dropped it when they reorganized the business department and so I really graduated with a marketing degree from A & M in 1966.

EV: Were you a member of the corps?

JG: No, I was a member for a week, in the corps?

EV: So, long enough?

(laughter)

JG: Yeah.

EV: Did you ever serve in the military?

JG: No I never served in the military?

EV: Was your father, you said he was a veteran?

JG: Right, he was a veteran in the Navy, he was first of all in the Army, and they promised him to go to officer's candidate school and they said well, "We'll send you to the Pacific first," and he had the option to get out so he got out and then he got into the Navy and in the Navy he served in England with the Sea Bees.

EV: Really?

JG: Yeah, my father was a Sea Bee.

EV: Did he, so he stayed beyond after the war or did this happen before?

JG: No, he, yeah, well, he of course and my mother married in, let see, '41, November '41 and then I guess I was born a year and a half later, during that time probably between services that he was in, because some people were being drafted some people were volunteering. And because he was married and had a child he was like between and then when he knew that he was going to be drafted he went ahead and accepted joining the

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U.S. Navy and they put him in the Sea Bees because of his experience in the lumber industry and he worked for a lumber company in Edinberg, Texas, in South Texas. So he had knowledge of construction and building.

EV: Okay, did he have any, um, I'm sorry when he was in England what were the years he was in England?

JG: He was in England probably from '43 to '45.

EV: So he was there during D-Day.

JG: I'm guessing he was.

EV: Yeah, because that was in '44 I think.

JG: Right.

EV: Okay. Did he have a college degree too?

JG: No.

EV: Okay. Now, when you went to, when you cut out and got active in your own business where you an active member in a civic organization?

JG: I was on the board of directors of the Houston Minority Voting Purchasing, let's see Houston Business Counsel is what they call it now. It used to be called the Minority Purchasing Counsel. I was on the board for about 6 or 7 years. At the time also I belonged to the Rotary Club, the Downtown Rotary Club, uh, made it very difficult with the business that we had to attend all the meetings and the Rotary Club you have to go every week. It's hard to make up so I got out of the Rotary Club, but, once I got into genealogy I joined the Hispanic Genealogical Society and have been a member, probably 15 years. I also belonged to the Clayton Library Friends, which is a society or organization that supports the Clayton Library of Genealogical Research. I served on the

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board as a Secretary and Treasurer and, uh, it is something I enjoyed very much because we raised funds for the Clayton Library.

EV: Were you ever involved in anything like LULAC or Sembradores de Amistad?

JG: No.

EV: Okay. Back in 1971 I think is when they had the school board called the MAEC. Did you participate in any of that negotiations or anything like that one way or the other?

JG: No. I was in Corpus Christi at the time.

EV: Do you have any family left in Mexico that you all communicate with other than the ones....let me put it with this way, because I know you made contacts after your genealogical work... prior to that time were you in contact with any members of your family in Mexico?

JG: Probably very distant, probably very distant. Actually we have been on this side of the river since about 1750. Although my paternal grandmother was born in Mendes and she came over probably in 1914 and married my grandfather, I'm sure she still had some brothers and sisters living in Mexico but she died at about 90 years old so, uh, she had lost contact and had lived longer than the rest of them did, but living here in the United States. So when I say we came in 1750 when they granted the land grants on this side when Escandon came north and they were establishing the cities was along the Rio Bravo which is now the Rio Grande, they got land grants on this side.

EV: Do your family still own those land grants?

JG: We still own some property in one of the land grants, in Porcion 66 (?), which is outside of Roma, Texas and then we have land in other places from my mother's family.

EV: Are you talking about plots, acreage, thousands of acres?

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JG: Well, no not thousands of acres. In one plot in the original land grant we probably have 16 acres that we share with some cousins. In other places we probably have like 300 acres in both Star and uh, I'm sorry, Duval County and Brooks County.

EV: Did your family in Duval County ever work for the Duvals...the Duke of Duval?

JG: George... The Duke of Duval? I can't really say that. My maternal grandfather was the first sheriff of Brooks County when it was established. He was a landowner. He was also a court worker, court interpreter later on in life. He was always involved in politics. My grandfather was in politics in Hidalgo County. He was Assistant County Tax Assessor and he worked, he had to be political having those kinds of jobs. He had been a telegraph operator for the Texas Mexican Railway and very smart. When a job came open in the county courthouse, with his uncle's connections he got the job and was like just right under the elected official.

EV: You mentioned earlier that you had long distant family in Mexico, where are they living?

JG: Uh, probably Reynosa. I suspect there is probably some in Mire, maybe some in Camargo, some in Laredo, but they would be very distant.

EV: When you went back into your family history, your family background, I suspect you found that most of your people stayed...you'd mentioned that most of your family stayed on this side of the border or thrive on this side of the border.

JG: Yes.

EV: Okay and are your historical roots, what I'm trying to determine is the movement of people into the Americas...

JG: The Canary Islanders...

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EV: ...of your mother's family?

JG: My mother's family, part of it came with the Canary Islanders. The Canary Islanders landed about 1740 in the coast of Texas and went up and helped establish San Antonio.

EV: Do you know where the Texas entry was...around the Matagorda...Galveston?

JG: Right. Matagorda, not Galveston.

EV: Okay.

JG: But they actually landed in Tampico and they came north. They didn't really land on the Texas coast. They may have made some passages along the water until they actually went up to Sabinas San Antonio. That's part of her family. Another part of her family came from Hidalgo, Mexico. Another part landed in Camargo about 1750, which is across from Rio Grande City. One prominent member, I call him prominent, his name was José Julian de la Garza and he was actually related to me paternally also. He was one of the early founders of Victoria Texas, along with the Deleon family. They have a street there called Le Calla de los Diez Amigos and he is listed as one of the Diez Amigos. So then that's maternally. Paternally, they were on this side, they also maintained their houses in Ciudad Mier, and they probably stayed in Ciudad Mier for 200 years but they were landowners on what is now Texas on this side.

EV: Was that Texas y Coahuila?

JG: Yes, it was Texas y Coahuila.

EV: Now, move the camera back up to the present, at least to your lifetime. Have you ever been involved in any political... any political involvement in campaigns?

JG: No.

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EV: Okay. So your connection to Houston is primarily business?

JG: Right.

EV: Did your, (cell phone ringing).

JG: We may have one more interruption when my driver comes in, go ahead.

EV: Okay. Um, as long as you've been here do you know how Anahuac got it's name have you researched that name?

JG: To me that sounds like a part Indian but I can't really tell you. I know Anahuac was really what we called East Texas and might have been a Spanish person it was named after but I can't really tell you. When Spain was in control of Mexico and what is now part of the United States and everything they used to designate the classifications of the people where they would list them as mulatto, they would list them as mestizo, españoles, coyotes, whatever they were. Once Mexico gained their independence the churches, which were keeping a lot of these records, stopped classifying the people.

EV: Yeah, I think they had something like 26 different classifications.

JG: Right.

EV: The Pope got ridiculous they just started making up names that had nothing to do with the mixture. Were you ever called upon to serve in any capacity (this is the last time I'm going to ask you this question I just want make sure I'm covering the fields), were you ever called upon in any capacity to try and negotiate any relations or conflicts whether it's school, business or whatever between Mexican-Americans and the Anglo establishment?

JG: No.

EV: No, okay.

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JG: Although, let me back up, being a part of the Houston Business Counsel, you are working with probably Anglo run companies and trying to build relationships with what I call good business practices with the minority community. And as a consequence it builds a real good organization to try to not be forced into purchasing, doing business with minorities but to do it on a, like hand in hand basis, which I think was very beneficial for Houston. Houston is very forward looking. There wasn't as much anxiety over doing business, people doing business...the large oil companies were looking for people, good people to do business with. People that would take care of them, their business, look after their business and I think Houston has been far and above other cities in accepting doing business with minorities. As a consequence you've been able to build up a very good middle class of business in the minority businesses and what I see now is probably an upper class. Because you see a lot of people that have passed through the system and have been very successful in having their businesses accepted as certainly in my opinion as equals. I think being accepted as equals is part of what's inside of you. If you know you're just as good as anybody else and you don't have to have a crutch. Then you are going to be accepted as such.

EV: There was... I'm trying to recall the exact era when this happened, I remember there was one period of time when the Mexican-American Businessmen were having trouble, particularly in construction business from getting insurance back for their workers back when Workman's Comp was a little different than it was now. And also getting the bonds they needed for their companies. Did you ever, were you ever involved with any of that?

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JG: Uh, not really. In our part of the business we didn't really have to provide bonds because we were suppliers.

EV: Okay. Did you ever have any minority set aside that took care of, that helped you out?

JG: We qualify with the City of Houston as a minority. I don't think it's... it's a two bladed sword for the minority set aside. It helps you but as long as you're doing good business and you're paying your bills and they are paying you, it's not something, if you're talking about an eight-eight, not we haven't - I would consider an eight-eight, like a minority set aside, we never participated in that. We always competed with everybody on a per equal basis.

EV: You all do many wholesale?

JG: It's probably wholesale/retail. We have a lot of things that go direct. We have a lot of materials that with our Internet presence we send materials to Mexico, we send materials to Panama, we send materials to different states, especially with the railroad contractors. But now with the vast knowledge that we have, people will ask me for anything and with the Internet you can find it. You can find specific products.

EV: Share with me the expanse of your business, exactly what is it you do.

JG: I'll tell you first the companies that we sell to. We sell the large industry along the ship channel, which are the oil companies, the construction companies; we were made a supplier of building materials and lumber on the Reliant Stadium. We were also a supplier of materials to the George R. Brown Convention Center. We were also a supplier of materials to the Toyota Center. We did business both with the general contractors and subcontractors. We do business with railroad contractors, electrical

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contractors, because we stocked railroad ties and telephone poles. We sell to a few home builders and we sell motel builders. We don't try to stock as much lumber as probably we should because we get enough turns. We let somebody else buy it, stock it. We buy it from them and we sell it. We are very stringent on our credit with our customers. We stay, make sure we get paid. We sell large building developers here in town. They just... word of mouth gets around.

EV: Right. Is it primarily, but is there something more than lumber that you sell?

JG: It's probably basically connected with lumber and building materials. We sell ceiling tiles. We sell floor tiles. We sell carpeting. We sell computer floors - anything in these plants that's needed in maintenance, we sell. We sell fiberglass panels. We've sold metal buildings, the sheet metal that goes into the metal buildings, corrugated steel. Once you've gained experience, it takes the purchasing burden off the people in the plants, they are willing to buy from anybody that knows about their products more than they do. They buy fasteners from us. They'll order things and they'll use probably old nomenclature and we pin them down as to what they really want, so we try and avoid duplication or avoid mistakes because it costs us to send our trucks out. And so they know they are dealing with knowledgeable people.

EV: Okay. you were telling me when I first met you...you told me that you'd struggled with your identity until you got involved with genealogy. Could you tell me about that?

JG: All right, I'll tell you a funny instance. When I was in high school, people really didn't know probably that I was Hispanic. When I was a very young person I was going home from school and I saw my report card it said "José" and I know my mother would

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speak to me and my grandmother would speak to me and on my report card it said, “José.” But when I looked at it I said, “Why did she write Josey on it?” (laughter) And so then I realized that it was José. All right, all through high school people really didn’t know that I was Hispanic probably from my actions, probably from my participating in school activities. I didn’t make a big thing out of it because I felt like our family had somewhat assimilated, even in going to college, I felt like at the time, maybe because A & M was all male, there weren’t as many distinctions of being Hispanic at the time. It wasn’t a crutch or wasn’t something that held me back, until later on I got into the business world working for Procter and Gamble and the reason I left Procter and Gamble is because I really felt like I had a prejudiced district manager. He didn’t tell me, but he told my boss that I would never promote a Hispanic or a Mexican is what he said. And of course he would never admit it to me but I figured, “Hey, I’m not going to get promoted, I’m just going to leave.” And I knew what I had, I knew my background, I knew I had been able to converse both in English and Spanish, and that was a benefit. It is even more of a benefit today to be able to speak both languages with the way things are changing. And it has been something that’s I think that’s really helped me. Now, as I came back up into the business world, I’m seeing more and more Hispanics being promoted within the companies and we have a common denominator between us. I think it is a tremendous benefit. I can see it in a lot of these companies. You see the largest construction company here that builds the highways, Williams Brothers. They’ve been building all these interchanges here for many, many years. They were at one time our main customers. And we supplied a lot of the lumber that went into these interchanges at 610 and Katy Freeway, the Gulf Freeway and as they have changed and evolved

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somewhat, they want to take longer to pay their bills and we don't want to wait that long.

Because they don't want you to make any money on the lumber you sell and they want to pay you in 60 to 90 days and we just can't operate that way. We don't operate that way.

Did I really answer your question?

EV: Well, actually, no but it was a very nice sidetrack.

JG: Okay. (laughter)

EV: The question that I presented was your own personal identification after the investigations.

JG: Okay, all right. I always used to discuss with my father our background. And at times probably I could see other prejudices against Mexicans or Latinos or whatever, Chicanos, whatever you want to be called at the time. I could see these backlashes that were established by the Brown Berets that were fighting against the system that wanted their rights and it made me think about it. I felt like it wasn't anything to hold me back, but my father wanted to "Anglosize" us. He wanted to Anglosize us because we had to compete in the world. It's not where we were going to open a Mexican restaurant or go to traditionally Hispanic businesses at the time. His aunts and uncles were pharmacists here in town. They had their own pharmacy. They dealt with the public. He had a brother that was a graduate chemical engineer for Rice Institute that graduated at 15 from high school and went on and graduated from Rice. So, I felt that our family background had nothing to hold us back. So, in this Anglosizing of us in our business, I loved my culture. My wife is Hispanic. She was raised in South Texas probably felt more Hispanic than I did. And it was just something that was pulling me. My, dad used to tell us to answer the phone "Joe Guerra", which is an Anglosized version of my name. After I got

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into genealogy, I really found out what my ancestors did, how they were explorers, they

were surveyors, and they were landowners. I had one great, great grandfather that had

40,000 acres and then his father had 25,000 acres right near Corpus Christi that was

killed by Indians. So they were always moving up. They were always raising cattle.

I've been fortunate to find the registration of the cattle brands that that had, the sheep

brand. And so when, even though we were Anglosized probably for our own benefit I

think, to be able to compete. Then as I started finding out more and more about my

Hispanic heritage, I started going by the name José Guerra. Because it gave me great,

great pride in learning what they did. Learning how they were fighting for their own

rights. Fighting for their own existence. And right now when I go to the ranch in South

Texas and you look out and you look at the *monte* [countryside] out there. You think to

yourself, "God, man, what would happen at night when there was no light out there?"

They had to go by the campfire. Being raised in the city, I really forced myself to take

that part of my life and enjoy it because I think about my ancestors when I go hunting

down there I look out and I think to myself, "What did my ancestors have to do out

here?" It's pretty scary - everything bites you, everything stings you. Everything tries to

attack you in those days and when you read about how the people would go about on the

Old Spanish Trail coming north probably to as far north as Nacogdoches. Wild cats or

pumas, cougars would come out and grab the people and take them off. And think about

the hardships that they had in those days. They were hardy people. So as a consequence,

to finish, I have so much more pride in what they did. And as a consequence, I feel, and I

tell many people, "study your ancestors and see what they did, see what they went

through." I have a friend of mine that said that he (a cousin really) he found out his great

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grandfather was a colonel in the Mexican Army during the revolution. And my great grandmother's other brother was also a colonel in the Mexican Army, and they both died in the revolution. So my cousin said, "Well what do you think they did?" I said, "With a name Guerra they were *pelonieros* [fighters] they always were fighting [Guerra in Spanish means "war."]." (laughter) So, they, in my opinion, were looking to get ahead. In the past couple of weeks when I got to go to Mier and see my great grandfather's house, great, great grandfather's house and his wife and see the date on the beans, it gave me even more pride.

EV: There is a circle of those who are *güeros* [fair-skinned] and you know people talk around it but they never want to talk about it, but being güero lends a tremendous advantage. And the mere fact that another Mexican may be darker puts him at a greater disadvantage. Have you...do you agree with me?

JG: I'm agreeing with you. As a matter of fact, I'll sit here and I have a customer that comes in and *pobrecitos* [poor guys], they struggle to tell me what they want in English, to make it easier for them I'll say, "*¿Que es lo que quieren?*" [What is it you need?] "*¡Ah, no sabíamos que hablabas el español!*" ["Oh, we didn't know you spoke Spanish!"]

You know, so you're right it is an advantage. It's definitely a thing that you're able to probably live in both worlds....you know probably being able to assimilate easier.

EV: Yeah it makes the assimilation a lot easier....(looking at some pictures Mr. Guerra handed me) and are you going to let me have this. (laughter).

JG: I'll let you have it.

EV: All right. Uh, well you need to let me have more of it. I can make copies of it and bring it back to you. That's no problem.

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JG: I will tell you this, if you have access to the Internet, which I know you do, you can download them and what I can do is send you, I got them on Shutterbug and there are beautiful pictures on it, it's about oh about 400.

EV: Oh but we can't, I mean I can do it but the school needs to have these to make copies of it.

JG: Okay.

EV: So if we ever want to print them in a magazine article or something like that we need have these. I can download them to put them into the file but if you ever want to do a publication on them.

JG: You can have it.

EV: Um, and maybe a couple of others.

JG: Sure.

EV: Yeah, and see this is where I have historically seen, not necessarily a breakdown, that one group may get ahead of the other, and about the only thing that makes the difference is because lead group is made up of güeros. And of course, the second advantage is being able to speak English without an accent. Which is what a lot of Mexicanos did, your father and my mother. And that is because those people, *The Greatest Generation* of Mexicanos is what they tried to do with their children is to teach them English so they wouldn't have to suffer the humiliation on jobs and all that kind of stuff. On the other hand, sometimes in high school other Mexican Americans could make it rough for you. Did you ever have that experience?

JG: No, not really. No. It was different, but I will tell you this. At the time Austin High School, there was probably only 6 or 7 Hispanics, at the time. See it's 1960, I

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graduated in 1961 and really people didn't associate me, probably because I was more güero and I participated in some of the sports. Certainly had a good high school life. I didn't see necessarily where people....they may have said something in the background that they wouldn't tell me in the front, in front of me. But I didn't feel...

EV: Did you have any trouble dating?

JG: No as a matter of fact the only Hispanic girl I dated was my wife and all the rest of them were gringas (laughter). But I felt like there was something pulling me and when I found one beautiful enough and educated I certainly went for it and she was a beauty queen in college. So it probably gave me even more pride.

EV: Where did she go to college?

JG: She went, well, she went to TWU.

EV: In Denton?

JG: In Denton right. And then she went one year at Pan American, she was Miss Pan American at Pan American University and then we kind of got back together as boyfriend and girlfriend and she went back to TWU and I was at A & M and I'd go see her every other weekend.

EV: TWU was a sister schools to A&M back then, wasn't it?.

JG: Right, Right.

EV: Yeah. You said that she was a beauty queen at Pan American, right? We'd have to worry about the beauty queen at TWU (laughter)...

JG: No, well it's, well it was a different atmosphere. Essentially what I saw was a lot of the Hispanic families that wanted to be more protective of their daughters so they sent them to an-all girls school and the ones that in those days "quote unquote" were wild,

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they would send them to a co-ed college and live that life. But at TWU they were kind of protected.

EV: Yeah, I think that's what my family thought when they sent their girls to Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio.

JG: You know what I'm talking about.

EV: Yeah, that's the big thing Our Lady of the Lake and all the Catholic girls schools they had there.

JG: Yeah.

EV: Well, then, so all right, so did you find anything that surprised you about your family tree? Was there anything that really caused you to say, "Wow I really didn't know that" or did you find any...?

JG: Well I know that they were the early explorers. They were also the founders of *Monterrey. They were the founders of Ceralhua which were the earliest cities in *Northern Mexico. They were de la Garzas, they were Guerras, they were Tereses, they *were Barerras.. I found out that in some instances they were born as *hijo natural* [designation on birth certificates that one is a "natural child," as opposed to an adopted child] . I found out in some instances they were killed by Indians. They were always fighting the Indians. They participated in early Texas history, especially Placido Benavides, who was a brother to my great, great, great grandmother living in Victoria Texas. He eventually...when the Anglos took over and established Texas, they pushed him out, they were the landowners in Victoria and he had to go to Louisiana.

EV: When you said he had to...to survive?

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JG: To survive, right...because they were pursuing him. The laws changed number one, the taxes changed. And essentially they wanted to get rid of the Mexicans because the Anglos wanted to take over their land, to take over their cattle so they had to move.

Because they.... Martin DeLeon was the founder of Victoria, he had died a few years before the Texas Revolution in 1831, but his children, and two of his sons were killed by Anglos. One of them, a daughter to Julian De La Garza, her name was Antonia De La Garza. She married the youngest son of Martin De Leon. His name was Agapito de Leon, and he was killed by a guy named Mabry Gray, who was kind of like an outlaw... and they were set up to push them out. The government changed and they had fought against Santana and they had won, and so they wanted their lands.

EV: When you say "they" you are talking about the Anglos?

JG: I'm talking about the Anglos. Right.

EV: Do you know whether or not any of your people were in the Tejano branch trying to fight against Santana himself. Didn't we talk about, the professor at Tijerina at UT Arlington?

JG: You're right. This Placido Benavides did fight against Gen. [Martín Perfecto de] Cos in San Antonio. And for a while they pushed him out, but of course that was all preceding Alamo fight and then this Placido also had gone down to Matamoros and they were getting horses, probably taking them from the Mexican calvary and they were bringing them North. And General [José] Urrea, as General Santana was following Sam Houston's army, General Urrea was coming up along the coast and he is the one that captured the men with Fannin at Goliad and was given the orders by Santana to execute everyone. And they executed them. General Urrea in his diary wrote that he had spent

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the night at the rancho of don Julian De La Garza, which was right at what they called the San Patricio, Texas, which was a low water crossing on the Nueces River where they could get across. And his grant and his rancho were right there.

EV: Was that part of the Paul Revere family that mentioned to me before? Would please, for the record, repeat that story?

JG: That's right.

EV: But he rode to warn...and

JG: Yes, he rode to warn the people in San Patricio and to warn the people in Victoria that Santana, or that the Mexican army was coming and one of the people that was riding with him was not as good a horsemen and the Mexicans caught them and probably executed them along with Fannin. He was able to get away and he did have an Anglo friend that was with him and wounded and he was taken him towards Victoria, because Victoria was still free, wasn't quite involved in the battle. But the Mexican army caught up with him and then of course he turned on his Mexican background and said that he had captured this Anglo and turned him over. Even though the Anglo lived after the revolution, he had it against him all the time trying to discredit him. So essentially they played both sides because it was tough. You had these armies coming North and they met the landowners. You hear stories about another gentleman named Carlos de la Garza outside of Victoria who was sympathetic to Santana and their efforts, but because he helped the Anglos in that area that were caught by Urrea and saved a few of them. They took care of him and didn't push him out.

EV: Did you make a study of the how Monterey was settled?

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JG: I've studied it, probably not quite as much as I should have but I do know that

*first of all they settled Ceralvo and then they settled Monterrey, and of course at the time when you, they've had more running water and they would establish these towns that had running water, either with springs or running water. And Montemayor was the Diego Montemayor who was one of the founders of Monterrey and is part of my ancestry. And he, they got pushed out for about 10 years, but they came back...

EV: Pushed out by whom?

JG: By the Indians.

EV: Okay.

JG: The Indians in that region were very fierce. The Indians in what we now call the Texas-Mexico border were poor. They were probably not very well fed. Things were tougher on the plains. But there was more for the Indians in the interior that were very, very fierce, and fought against the Spanish for many years. And even though Texas was a state...was a country and then a state, Texas pushed all the Indians out. And they went really to Mexico. So Mexico continued fighting them during the times that Texas, with I guess Lamar, was maybe the second president of Texas. Lamar was an avid Indian hater and they pushed the Indians out as much as they could and that's why there's probably only one Indian reservation even though they have tried to establish what was the Tiguas, in, I don't know, El Paso. But the Indians over here, the uh

EV: Alabama...

JG: The Alabama Coushatta is the only other Indian reservation in Texas, where as other states have many, and because of that Anti-Mexican, Anti-Indian fervor, they just pushed them out.

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EV: Did any of your research show that those Indians were pushed out were Lipan Apaches?

JG: Yes.

EV: Okay. And in the organization of the economic stability or the development of Monterrey did you run across any suggestions or names of Sephards, Spanish Sephards that were involved in the founding of Monterrey?

*JG: Well, of course Carvajal was probably considered as one who early on established Monterrey and of course he and his family...he left his mother and his sisters in Mexico City and they were garroted and burned as his heresy against the church because they had supposedly gone back to their Jewish religion...

EV: Right, do you know right about when...

JG: I'm going to guess it's right around 1600.

EV: Okay.

JG: The Inquisition wasn't as tough in the New World as it was of course in Spain. And they had to prove, to come to the New World, that they were Catholic. They might go back and regress back to being some of their Jewish practices, but they had them watched them very carefully and they had to be Catholic to come here. Montemayor, I mean Carvajal, was prosecuted and sent to Mexico City and died in prison but there was never any real proof that he had gone back to his Jewish religion.

EV: I'm also trying to substantiate, I think we had talked about Dr. Andres Tijerina from UT Arlington, about this momentum that was already ongoing among the Tejanos that were here at the time they opened up the border for Anglo settlers to come in and this is what you are saying, what part of your family was?

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JG: Right.

EV: Okay, did you find in the context of your family research, there was any kind of movement to set up an independent Texas by the Latinos themselves, to set up Texas as a separate Latino community or state within the context of Mexico and before the Anglo dominance?

JG: Yes, as a matter, well in the context of Mexico when Mexico was part of New Spain. Yes I had a, an ancestor named Bernardo de Leon that actually fought against the Spanish authorities in San Antonio. And when it looked like they were losing he went towards (tape ends).

END OF SIDE 1

Benardo de Leon was caught by the Spanish and actually walked back probably, dragged back in by roped until he died, and when he died and they left his body out there in the field somewhere. They, his family, were not allowed to retrieve his body. He had been a large landowner just outside of San Antonio. And he his wife and children were left destitute. They were helped along by the church to try to make it. So they were trying to break away from Spanish control. That's part of the family. Another part of the family of those same Canary Islanders of the people from San Fernando Church which was the Canary Islander Church in San Antonio, was a man that went to punish the Indians because of the Indians had attacked a church in what's now almost like San Angelo. And he was a Spanish soldier but he may have been an español [Spaniard] living here so that they did have positions of power and they were captains. They were maybe even generals in the Spanish army. But they very quickly became Mexicans when Mexico won their independence.

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EV: Okay. Two of the categories that we talked about today, the Spaniards categorized the different populations in the new world. They referred to themselves being *peninsulades* [born in Spain] and they enjoyed the highest rank that you could reach in terms of ethnic status. The next one would be the *criollos* [Creoles, those born in the Americas to Spanish parents], who represented the second tier of social status. . .

JG: Right.

EV: Do you know why these Spaniards, these criollos would have been anxious to break from Spain at that time?

JG: Yes, they wanted to break from Spain because Spanish laws, I'm assuming, because it prevented them from, from rising above captain in the armies, number 1. Number 2, they couldn't be in specific professions. They couldn't do very much - like the English colonies, they were like stepchildren from Spain. And as a consequence they wanted to hold them back, that's why the families that actually were from Spain sent their wives back to have their children in Spain so they would have a higher social standing. And I think this is still probably very prevalent within Mexican society, with Hispanic society. You can see it very prevalent in television. In television programs that probably, as we discussed, about the lighter skinned have these jobs. You see very few of the, what I call the *telenovelas* [Spanish-speaking soap operas] or the shows that they have, these people are very European looking who have these primary parts in it. And, uh, it is in society probably a little easier, even though there is very, very rich people of various colors of the skin. But they like to maintain their lands, their holdings, within these, quote unquote, "top families." Later on, when they had land in various places, that is why they would intermarry to keep all these things together within the families.

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EV: Do you have any idea what kind of government they were eager to establish, were they going to put up another kingdom, another dictatorship...or were they influenced by any of the political theory of the time?

JG: I'm sure they were. There was a Gutierrez de Lara that set up a separate country in a sense for a short while or tried to in what we now know as Laredo, and I forget what they called it. It's probably not given much credit and they overthrew him right quickly, probably with the Mexican authorities. But, yeah they did try to set up their own little....

EV: Kingdoms?.

JG: Kingdoms, right. Just as kingdoms were later on set up politically, either in counties, later on as the Anglos moved in you saw these "kings" like George Parr, Jim Wells, A. Y. Baker...

EV: King Ranch? (laughter)

JG: The King Ranch, right. And, of course they got their power because they had the money. They had the power to round up the Mexican vote, essentially.

EV: There seemed to be, I mean the Anglo guys weren't stupid they knew how to be *patrones* [bosses] and they probably treated their *campesinos* [workers] and *peones* [peons] better than the Spaniards did. Which was to a great disadvantage because I think that's probably what caused a lot of problems in the revolution and certainly in the French-Mexican war too.

JG: Right.

EV: Um, do you know, were any of your people ever or in any of your research did you come across with anything having to do working in the Sanchez-Navarro ranch, or are you familiar with it in Coahuila?

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JG: (Mr. Guerra shakes his head, "no".)

EV: Okay. Is there anything that you may want to add that we have talked about in this area so far in terms of your family coming into Houston. Is there anything that you want to add so far that I haven't touched on.

JG: No, other than the fact that we probably the rest of my family, my brothers, my brother and my sister married Anglos. And I would say assimilated into society. I have a brother in law that is a very successful developer and architect and my father helped him at times when he had hard times. But now he is very, very wealthy. My brother and I have worked hard in our business to establish it and it's just a good feeling. You want to live in the nice neighborhoods. You want to have a nice house. You want to have a nice car.

EV: Oh, yeah, sure.

JG: I have my wife is very educated, she's like a Senior Vice President of Family Services in Houston, which is a social work agency with United Way. At one time she was offered a top position with Catholic Charities and turned it down to stay with the agency she is with. So I have a very smart, very political family still in South Texas. Her brother was a mayor of a town, I think it's...you know, they are attorneys and physicians.

EV: I suspect they stayed there, almost from the beginning; their roots go back very far with South Texas right?

JG: Right.

EV: And your position here, have you ever been in a position where you could...

(Tape was paused)

JG: The riot there at the park...

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EV: At Moody Park?

JG: Yeah, at Moody Park.

EV: I don't remember the, anyone. Well the guy who got accused, I don't know, the guy who got accused was Travis Morales.

JG: Okay.

EV: As far as I remember. And that was, there again, that was one of those things where the police could have used a little bit more finesse I think than they chose to use.

JG: But you know that they were there fighting with the blacks and the whites. Look at what they did at TSU.

EV: Right.

JG: You know, and it was actually all of the minorities that were fighting for their rights.

EV: Well that was going to be one of my earlier questions. Which was based on this fact that one of the reasons that I feel that I'm doing this particular project and doing the writing that I think needs to be written is because in the '60's and in the '70's we were always in the position of being accused of riding the coat tails of the blacks in terms of civil rights and in terms of our rights, our position in this society and I think that's demeaning because we were already here and we were already pushing for independence. We were already pushing for our own and we didn't ride on the coat tails of anybody.

JG: Right.

EV: But the fact is that because we were so overwhelmed by the Southern white flood that came in after, just before just after the revolution, we got kind of pushed aside on that issue.

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JG: But we were also assimilating at the time also.

EV: Oh, yeah, into the white.

JG: That's right.

EV: Well, but let me, they were assimilating into us.

JG: Well now yes.

EV: No, no I'm saying even back then and that's because of the census records.

You'll see that they've adopted Spanish names.

JG: Right.

EV: Even though they were Oliver and O'Connor or whatever it was, they all had, and many of them married Mexicanas or Indians that were already here in Texas. So I take my, in that view. you know who Carlos Fuentes, no?

JG: No.

EV: The Mexican author.

JG: Yeah.

EV: He said, you know, we didn't go to the United States, the United States came to us.

JG: Right.

EV: And so that particular establishment, that particular structure that was already here is the one that I think needs to be taken out of the ashes and reviewed again. It's just, you know, they write about something in the '80s and '90s and it takes a while for it diffuse up into the general thing. But David Weber is one that has a fantastic book out about this stuff., *The Spanish Frontier in North America*. He establishes the Spanish-Mexican

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presence in Texas and if you remember, during the 60's and 70's we were accused of riding on the coattails of the African-American movement.

JG: Yeah.

EV: And it wasn't true.

JG: Well its because they were truly fighting the backlash. You know, there was backlash against the Hispanics, you had the Zuit Suit Riots in uh, during the war in California just because they dressed differently. Uh, and the other thing that I feel, Ernesto, is the fact that you've got the families here that have been here a long time that were able to assimilate into society as economically and so forth. But you have always had this group of people that continues coming that essentially throws the whole group back because of the fact that they are poor, they are uneducated. Whereas at one time you would look at the Irish, they were considered the lowest of Europe and they have certainly assimilated. Have presidents. They even had to fight against the Catholicism of John F. Kennedy. You have the Italians. The Italians have certainly moved up into society and economically. And is, but they cut off that what do you call it, the immigration in a sense, but here, they Mexican and the Latino, the Latin countries, continue to send the people over. So you have this uneducated masses that is slowly being educated but its, its kind of like they throw me and you into the bunch of the lowest class. They like to, but yet they see that we are just as equal as anyone else.

EV: Yeah, and I have some, I think that probably the only time that's ever going to balance out is when more of us get into positions of authority. But where we can see, because it will never change as long as that's Mexico and this is Texas.

JG: Right.

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EV: That's going to continue. I don't care if you put up a 100 foot fence.

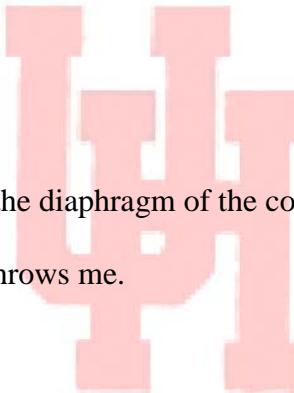
JG: My wife tells me about the time, well she grew up in South Texas. They weren't allowed to speak Spanish in the schools and they would get in trouble if they did. And she tells me the time and maybe the first or second grade where she said a Spanish word and got into trouble. About the times when the kids, the Mexicans would take tortillas and beans, tacos to class and eat in class. And they'd keep the taco in the brown bag to be able to eat them. And then once the Anglo kids found out how good they were they were trading and they were getting the sandwiches. And now you look at the Hispanic influence on our culinary habits, our restaurants. You know, who could imagine that there would be shrimp fajitas?

EV: Yeah.

JG: When really the fajitas is the diaphragm of the cow (laughter)

EV: Chicken fajitas, that just throws me.

(laughter)



EV: Well did you speak Spanish in your home?

JG: Yes, my mother spoke Spanish to us. My dad did but he more or less made us speak English.

EV: Okay.

JG: Probably, one of the things that when I was growing up and my dad was away in the war, my grandmother and my mother spoke Spanish. I spoke Spanish and I can speak Spanish with a fairly good Spanish accent. Uh, but when my dad came back from the service, he made us speak English at the house. And even though my continued to speak and we would speak English Spanish back and forth, back and forth. And only later on

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when I took Spanish in high school and in college did I really learn it a little bit better. I am able to communicate and write it now. I watch Spanish television and enjoy it.

EV: Do you catch the humor?

JG: No, the humor at times when they have the skits where the kids are in school but they are really grown people, I can't always catch that. It's a play on words.

(laughter)

EV: Right, exactly.

JG: But when you've got the *novellas* [Spanish language soap operas] when they really express themselves, then it is beautiful to watch. And it has really helped me and even my son that's working here with us, he's had to learn Spanish to be able to be able to deal with the people and essentially he's the boss over everyone in the yard and he communicates to the drivers. He tells them in Spanish. And he was raised, we spoke Spanish to him but he was basically speaks English. But he has to tell the guys where he wants them to go. So he sees now how beneficial it is to speak Spanish.

EV: When you were going to public school you didn't have any trouble speaking Spanish? You didn't speak Spanish at that point?

JG: Right.

EV: But none of your friends were Hispanic, and you went mostly with Anglo kids right?

JG: Right.

EV: Okay. Yeah, I mean that was going on when I was in school and we'd get kicked out or suspended for speaking Spanish in school. And in fact, when I came here to Houston, one it was Dow Elementary School was just on the other side where the police

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department is on Reisner and.... what's the name of that church is that Guadalupe church?

JG: No Guadalupe is the...

EV: Guadalupe is

JG: Guadalupe is on Harrisburg.

EV: Whatever that little church is right there by the cop chop. On the other side of it was a Dowell Elementary School. When I first came to Houston and I was working with an Organization called UOIC, United Organization Information Center. We had representatives from LULAC and everybody, kind of like a little clearinghouse for all the Mexican American organizations, but Joe Rojo and I went over there to talk to this principal, and he was kicking kids out of school that brought tacos to eat at home. "You bring white bread when you come to this school." These were elementary school children. And I don't know, you can imagine the damage that was doing of course. You couldn't speak Spanish number 1 and then you couldn't bring Mexican food. So you know it was awful. So we got rid of that son of a bitch and then we also got, the coach the guy who was the principal, I can turn this off.

JG: Well I don't know if it's on. Is it on?

EV: It's on.

JG: Okay.

EV: The principal Jeff Davis was we caught him and he had, it was like 10:30 in the morning and he wasn't even in the classroom. But we found out from talking to the jocks that they worked for him on the summer time on his ranch out in Deer Park or

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somewhere out there. He was working the boys in the summer time and not paying them.

He wanted to keep his boys in shape.

JG: I know it was done to Anglos also though. Because when I was in high school the assistant principal, his name was Bull Patrolla. and Bull Patrolla had been the football coach at Austin High School and I've got a very good friend that played football during that era. Was probably a year or two behind me and he would take the guys to work on his ranch. But they were the football players and he felt like he could get them in shape better. But you're right,

EV: They could afford it. These Mexican kids came from poor backgrounds they needed to be working for the family.

JG: That's right.

EV: That was the big difference. We had, it was the same thing I used to work on the ice docks and the coach would get us jobs on the ice docks in El Paso, that's before they had refrigerated cars. We'd be pulling these big old blocks of ice and throw around 90 pounds of cement and potato sacks, it kept us in pretty good shape. But we were getting paid for it.

JG: Yeah.

EV: Put that bunch of poor kids out there and just make them work under the BS that you want to keep them in shape is nonsense. And that's the kind of, we found that all through HISD when we were coming through. We found the same thing in city. Did you ever know, meet, Luis Cano? He was an educator, one of the guys who started the Chicano-Mexican-American Studies at U of H?

JG: Yes, I have met him. He has spoken to our group.

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EV: Yeah, he is a great guy. But he is the one who challenged

JG: Mendiola, also Mendiola, a statistician..

EV: Yeah, God I can't remember his first name...

JG: Tacho. We've had a lot of those guys come and speak to our group.

EV: Well Luis challenged all the media to their licenses, that caused all kind of ruckus.

But he's the one that finally, because way back then, we only had one Mexican-American

that was on the media....and that was Greg Dumas. About that time was when Luis

challenged this time and then Bill Balleza came in from Vietnam about that time and so

the complexion literally began change. But before that, we didn't have newspaper

reporters either. But I did find this out: and that is the first concert pianist at the Houston

Symphony was a Mexicano.

JG: Is that right?

EV: Is there anything you want to add to this at all. Now, believe me, we can always come back. If you think of something you want to keep in your little...

JG: No, like I said to me and I'm going to run through this book here to show you these pictures. Because it's something I've been accumulating. In the society that I belong to I started out as a peon. You know, until I started doing the research and started finding out more and more about my family. And then I ran to the forefront and when I made the web site, then we went from 20 members to over 100, 150 members and were nationwide. And you know its taking advantage of what's on the Internet now is so important. People communicate, people contact me and say, "Hey, the person you put on this web page is my great, great, great grandmother, we're *primos* (cousins) can you help me?" And the fact that I don't try to keep all of this stuff for myself, I share. You know,

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the fellow that I took and I'll let you look through these pictures with me is my, his great, great grandfather was killed in the revolution. He was the brother to my great, great, great grandmother, which I certainly knew in my lifetime, and they were very proud of their Mexican heritage. My grandmother, even though my dad's mother, even though she became an American citizen later in life, maybe in the '70's, she refused to speak English, she just spoke Spanish, but she was güera...she was a feisty character. I'll tell you something else that my dad felt. I don't know if you want to record this?

EV: Go ahead, it's on.

JG: Oh it's on. That my dad felt. My dad felt that the Catholic Church, because he was Protestant, held back the Hispanics somewhat.

EV: Really? (laughter)

JG: And he was Presbyterian and his mother was Methodist and the fact that the church, the priest would run everything, didn't allow the people to participate as much in the hierarchy of the church. Only when they had the Protestant churches did they become more able to communicate, more able to essentially get away from the patron system, because there were Mexican patrons also. And it gave them the power to be able to have their own "quote unquote" religion and not have the priest, as one of my cousins tells me now, the priest in the small towns had all of the gossip by giving confessions and he knew what was what (laughter) whereas thing were different in the Protestant churches. Even though my mother brought us up Catholic, my dad was Presbyterian and so we had, not that we participated in Presbyterian Church, but it allowed people to have their own church and get out from the patron system of the priest.

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EV: You and I have so many similarities (laughter) it's uncanny. I was raised in the Presbyterian Church. As a matter of fact I was going to be a Presbyterian minister.

JG: Uh, huh.

EV: I was going to go to seminary and all that kind of stuff but my sister is a Presbyterian minister.

JG: Wow.

EV: And my grandfather's brother, I have a Scotch-Irish grandfather, his brother was a missionary in China for he's the president of Hangchow University, Presbyterian. So it's very, he was one of those Irishman that married Mexican. Uh, but yeah that's interesting. That's interesting. And there is an interesting history of the Presbyterian's in New Mexico.

JG: Is that right?

EV: Yeah, but that's another story.

Transcriber, this is the end of the interview.