

Interviewee: Azios, A.D.

Interview: September 6, 2007

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
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"Mexican-American History"

Interview with: Judge A. D. Azios
Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdés
Date: September 6, 2007
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: 4533 Brinmore Street, Houston, Texas

EV: Transcriber this is Ernesto Valdés. I'm interviewing Judge A. D. Azios at his residence which is 4533 Bryn Mawr Street, Houston, Texas and it is approximately 10:45.

AA: It's hard to get up, like... you know. I've got my father's name up here.

EV: Oh yeah. Oh he was a cashier at the Candelario Mine, oh man, that has a long history. Do you know, have you read the history of the Candelario Mine?

AA: No, but he was just a young guy.

EV: That would be a nice to have a copy of. Do you have a copier?

AA: No.

EV: Okay. So they worked there on the Candelario Mine, eh?

AA: Yeah but this, this is McKenna this is Barry... I think whatever his name is. Yeah Barry. And so...

EV: Okay so did they have a, so that's how your Dad wound up in Laredo hu?

AA: Yeah.

EV: And you were the baby?

AA: What?

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EV: You were the baby?

AA: I was.

EV: El consentido [the favorite].

AA: *El coyote*, they called me.

EV: Did they really?

AA: Did you know that? The baby is called the *el coyote*.

EV: Si?

AA: I don't know why.

EV: I don't either. They have a different name for that now you know. They have a different use for that name. So how many did you have in your family?

AA: Me?

EV: Yeah your brothers and sisters.

AA: Oh there were six brothers and I was the last one.

EV: Who was the oldest? Who came here with Henry, who else came with you, Enrique was here with you, Hector?

AA: Yeah, they Hector and Henry were born in New Mexico and they came to Laredo. Leopoldo and Roberto the eldest also came but they were born in Mexico.

EV: Do you know what the derivation of the name Azios is?

AA: No and we have tried very hard to find out and... some people volunteered, like when I was running for office here in Westlayn there were two Greeks running filling stations, separately they were. One was in Bellaire, the other was in... the other side. And when I was running for office I gave them one

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of my cards, "Vote for A.D. Azios" and he says, "Oh I'm going to vote for you because we Greeks have to stick together." (laughter) They were Greeks, they had a thick accent but I didn't tell them I was Greek. I didn't deny them but I said, "Okay." And one of them was so kind that I had a big board, cardboard sign that was about 18 by 18 with my picture and then vote for A. D. Azios. He says, "Put one of those in front of my cash register. All my customers will come here and buy gas, they come here and pay me at the cash register and they are going to see your name." So I did it. He said I was Greek.

EV: So you don't know there's no derivation anywhere?

AA: No.

EV: Wow.

AA: Well when my wife and I went to Greece in 19, I forgot 1992 something like that, I asked a Greek guy there if my name was Greek he said, "No."

EV: Alright. So then you were... did you go to... you went to all of your schooling in Laredo?

AA: Yeah, public schools there.

EV: Did you speak Spanish in your house?

AA: Oh yeah.

EV: And English or did you learn English in School?

AA: No Spanish at home.

EV: So you learned English at school?

AA: Yeah.

EV: *A huevo*, [by force] I mean...

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AA: That's the way I learned it.

EV: A huevo, maybe I shouldn't use that...(whispered)...

AA: That's alright I don't mind.

EV: I'm more worried about your wife actually. She's heard you all these years.

AA: What?

EV: She's had to listen to you all these years.

AA: Oh I don't use those words.

EV: (laughter) And which schools did you go to in Laredo, where there only... was it just one high school back then?

AA: Only one high school. Mark... well I went to two high schools because the older one was replaced by a newer one, brand new one. It used to be Laredo High School and the new one was called Martin High School from which I graduated.

EV: Okay, did you do any extra curricular activities when you were in school?

AA: Debating...

EV: Were you a hero jock or anything... football?

AA: I tried football. I couldn't even make the B squad. I tried but I was so thin and I never played.

EV: But you could argue.

AA: I debated and that helped me.

EV: Yeah. your father ever in the military?

AA: No.

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EV: Okay. So what did you go, where did you decide to go to college and how did you go and where did you go and all that?

AA: I graduated in 1939 and of course my ambition was to get a good job. I had a good job, same kind of work my father was doing, custom brokerage, which is a beautiful profession, but my inside kept telling me I wanted to go to college... lalalala. So finally in '41, my father's dead by this time by the way, I just hitchhiked to Austin on Labor Day weekend to try and get a job. I went back because I had work, I had a good job, and I made up my mind, "I'm going to college." So I gave a two week notice and I left. I hitchhiked to Austin. I found me a co-op house and I found a job and I worked my way through completely, it was beautiful.

EV: What kind of job did you do to get to school?

AA: Janitorial. Janitorial work.

EV: On the university campus?

AA: University campus yeah. Cleaning the tower, the fourth floor of the tower.

EV: Oh yeah? That's the library isn't it?

AA: No the library is on the second floor I believe. And then the war came on and a lot of young guys who worked there went in the service. So they had a lot of need for young guys. So my superintendent would call me from time to time with a job, "Can you run the elevator at the tower?" "Sure." "Can you be the host at the top of the tower receiving the people who come in and observe the tower?" "Sure." "Can you be a night watchman at the Greg gym?" "Sure."

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“Can you be the keeper of the store at Hogg auditorium when they have operas and things?” “Sure.” Anything that came up I said, “Sure.”

EV: (laughter). Was there any discrimination back then at the University of Texas?

AA: Well, I’m sure there was. They didn’t bug you or anything but I’m sure there was. Well, they don’t spit at your face but you could tell that some of them were not exactly inviting, I don’t know what but I know it wasn’t completely open.

EV: You had a sense of it right?

AA: No, I guess I...

EV: I mean when I’ve experienced it I could walk into a room and be around some people and all of the sudden you can just feel it, you have a sense. Once they hear that Valdes, you know...

AA: Yeah.

EV: Sometimes it used to make a big difference.

AA: I don’t think it was that obvious but I, I wasn’t a fraternity boy. I don’t even know how they select fraternity brothers but I wasn’t asked to join one.

Good thing they didn’t because I had no money. But I wasn’t asked.

EV: So when you went home on holidays did you have to thumb it back then?

AA: Oh yeah I never paid for transportation.

EV: Really? And when was it you started, did you say you started at UT?

AA: September ’41.

EV: Well then that December was Pearl Harbor right?

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AA: Pearl Harbor. Let me tell you something strange about that incident. I was coming home from Laredo hitchhiking of course and you hitchhiked as close to town as you can get but if they drop you off before that you ride a public bus. Metro. So I was riding a Metro bus in San Antonio to the corner of Commerce, wherever the Guthrie Hotel is, Gunther Hotel...

EV: Gunther Hotel.

AA: Right there on the corner as I got off of the bus there was a newspaper stand that says, "Roosevelt expects war within a year." That was the headline.

EV: He says, "Roosevelt does what?"

AA: "Roosevelt anticipates war within a year." And sure enough it was the weekend after Thanksgiving so that would be December 1st. So within a week we had war.

EV: So did you enlist then or...?

AA: Well not really. I wanted to get all the education I could get before I went in so I stayed until the draft board called me to go to San Antonio. I had hitchhiked again... and I went to the headquarters which is catty corner to the Greyhound station now, that old building, way up in the top floor. Not air conditioned, it was... anyway, the guy says, "Well I'll tell you what, you don't have to go into the Army now. You can join the Army Reserve Corps and you can stay at the University until we call you." I went, "Good." So luckily I stayed there a few more months. In April of '43 and by the way there were hundreds of us at the University of Texas and other universities under the same program.

ASTP, Army Special Training Program. The morning we were called, the bells at

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the tower at the University of Texas woke everybody up by playing, “You’re in the Army Now. Da, da, ta, da, ta, da...” And incidentally, the daily paper...

EV: The newspaper?

AA: The daily paper at the university.

EV: The Daily Texan?

AA: Whatever, I forgot the name. The Headline says, “ERC’s Called to Active Duty. Hundreds of UT students were called”. Among those who were called were four guys. They mentioned three football stars and little old A.D. Azios (laughter) because I had been very active in university politics and all that stuff. And so out of hundreds they mentioned only four and I was one of them.

EV: But they took many, right? Many but they only mentioned you or you were the only four that were taken?

AA: No they took hundreds.

EV: Okay.

AA: And by the way that was in April. They gave us credit for the rest of the semester so we went home. We got credit for the rest of the semester which was beautiful. Now there were hundreds but out of the hundreds only four were mentioned.

EV: Okay.

AA: And we all reported to Fort Sam Houston, oh a few weeks later. And from there we were shipped to Camp Maxey in Paris, Texas where we had basic training, infantry training for 90 days.

EV: Is that Maxie, M-A-X-I-E?

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AA: Maxey.

EV: When you said you were active in politics UT politics did you ever hold an office there?

AA: No I never ran I just got active with either one candidate or another one and then debating.

EV: Where you a member of the debate team at UT?

AA: Well no, every club had its own team. I belonged to I think it was Athenaeum Debating Society, I believe that was the name of it because there were two or three.

EV: So who did you debate with, debated other colleges or...?

AA: With other debating clubs.

EV: Oh just on campus, you didn't debate Baylor or SMU...

AA: No we didn't.

EV: Okay. So when you went to Fort Maxey, I take it it's probably not there anymore right?

AA: Right.

EV: Okay and you went infantry right?

AA: Right.

EV: And then when you completed your basic training where did you go then?

AA: When we went in the army they gave us tests. IQ and I made it, a lot of us, not a lot of us, quite a few of us make a very high score, got a high score. So after basic training they said, "Alright you guys come here, you guys have made high scores." I was one of them. "Because of your high score we're going to

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send you different groups, one to the University of Nebraska to study German, others in California to study Japanese, others in California to study Italian. So I went to the University of Nebraska to study German. I was there three months. I then learned enough German to get by. Not fluent and not eloquent but high school, like high school Spanish in other words. It helped me tremendously once I got to Europe.

EV: Did you get a promotion when you went to that school or...?

AA: Yeah from Private to Private First Class because of the school.

EV: Then were you shipped to Europe right after that?

AA: Not right after that. When I finished that program in December of '43 I was sent to Fort Leonard Wood Missouri which is next door to Saint Louis with the 75th infantry division. We went through hell in the winter time in Saint Louis. I mean 10 below and we slept outside and everything. From there I was transferred to the 9th Armored Division.

EV: Really?

AA: We were supposed to be a tank outfit but I was infantry so I marched. I went over to the 9th Armored Division, we were stationed in Camp Polk which is now Fort Polk. From there we were shipped to New Jersey or New York. We were shipped out of New York City on the *Queen Mary*. We went to Glasco, Scotland, took us 10 days to go there, and we were unescorted. In other words, we had no one, no battleship protecting us. It was a very fast ship and we always went, never in a straight line always changing its course so the enemy is trying to torpedo you, it's very hard to do.

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EV: Did you have any lasting friendships with the guys in the service?

AA: Oh yeah, well lasting typical Army, "keep in touch" we never do.

Although one guy did, I think in '85 he wrote Laredo just under my name and the mailman since we were well known in Laredo, they took the letter to my brother, my brother knew he was talking about me because I was in the Army. Now this was after the war. And he sent me the letter so I wrote to the guy who was a very close friend of mine in the Army and he was visiting in Dallas, Texas visiting his daughter and son in law, and so I called him and we got together. And by coincidence that very month I was on my way to Germany to go and visit my old fighting places and so I went to visit this guy and we talked about old times. And that's it.

EV: So from Glasco, were you involved in the... were you part of the D-Day invasion?

AA: No Glasco is in Scotland, and we went by train through Scotland and whatever else. We went to England, we were stationed for a few weeks, training and getting acquainted. No I was not in D-Day we were quite a few days after D-Day. Some guy... (ringing)...

EV: It's a friend of mine, he doesn't matter...(laughter)

AA: No it's a friend of mine you understand.

EV: So you came in, let's see D-Day was June '44.

AA: June 6, '44.

EV: June 6, '44 and you got there still in June or months later?

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AA: No. I think we got there late August. Let me tell you something ironic about that. On the way to Europe on a ship over here in the news we were whipping the hell out of the Germans, I mean destroying all their tanks and trucks and we were getting the news. I said, "Dog gone it. I hope they don't beat them. I hope they wait until we get there." Well I wish I hadn't said that because I got my wish anyhow.

EV: What is it they say, never...

AA Don't make your wish you don't know what you might get or something.

EV: (laughter), Yeah, your wish might come true. What was your position, what was your job, were you a rifleman?

AA: Plain old rifleman.

EV: Plain old.

AA: Like we used to say, nothing between us and the enemy but your rifle.

EV: When you went on to Europe you crossed the channel right?

AA: Right.

EV: And then you moved up to the front. When was that that you moved up when you went into combat?

AA: I would say that was in September.

EV: '44?

AA: '44 yeah.

EV: And then, you were in... the Battle of the Bulge came right after that.

AA: Exactly that's where I was.

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EV: Yeah. Okay and were you, which Army Corps were you under do you remember that?

AA: Army Corps?

EV: Yeah well you know... no the corps, Third Corps, Second Corps... okay?

I was in the First Army Division but not in the Second World War (laughter). But

I was in the... did you have that triangular pattern?

AA: Yeah, with a "9" on it.

EV: Yeah. #1. '49 was the Texas National Guard wasn't it?

AA: I don't know.

EV: You said the 49th? I'm sorry you're 9th.

AA: No it definitely was not Texas. Most of my brothers were Yankees.

EV: What was your first combat that you encountered?

AA: Well let me explain. When we landed in France, France had already been liberated by the Americans and we crossed France like a knife through butter. We went all the way to Luxemburg, which is a little bitty nation right next to Germany, that's where we went. The Germans had been evacuated by the Americans and so we settled in a small town there for a couple of weeks which is right across the river from Germany. And then we went back to the city of Luxemburg city to take a bath and delouse and all of that. We went back to the woods again. When we came back we went to a little town called...Luxen...anyway I'll think about it later. We were there a few weeks and so every day I talked to the natives, to the local people in my broken German and

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so that helped me a lot. A little town named, I forgot the name. I'm surprised I forgot it.

EV: Was it in, a town in Luxenberg.

AA: In Luxenberg which is two miles from the German river.

EV: Are those the ones that are famous now because of stamps, people collect their stamps?

AA: Yeah you're right.

EV: It's only about 360 acres or something isn't it? It's a small country.

AA: Yeah and the town was very small, very typical European and I talked to everybody, the kids, the people, and everything.

EV: So were you... how long were you there... excuse me when you said you went into the forest or into the woods right, that's where you said you went? You came in you got deloused, took a bath and then you went back to the woods.

Were you already, were you stationary there or were you moving ahead or what were you doing?

AA: No we were stationary.

EV: Okay. And was that the Ardennes Forest, the Black Forest? Do you remember, the Black Forest, the Ardennes Forest?

AA: I don't know it was a huge forest and I don't know the name of it. But from the forest we got promoted we went to a little town named... anyway...

Jesus, how can I forget. And that's where we were when the battle started, the Battle of the Bulge.

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EV: Were you the typical Battle of the Bulge, you're just sitting there watching, waiting and all of the sudden here come the panzers at you or?

AA: Well we didn't get to see the panzer because first they send the infantry in with machine guns. They had machine guns we had a dang rifle. First they knocked the heck out of you with artillery which they did. And then the infantry came in, that's it.

EV: And so you all made your stand at Luxemburg?

AA: Yes.

EV: Okay. And were you...

AA: I'm trying to think of the name, go ahead.

EV: And where you, did they just go right by you, come over you, hold them off, did you retreat or what happened?

AA: We didn't retreat but let me tell you what happened. In the meantime I got wounded with the artillery and two other guys were wounded. We all had minor injuries but minor is critical, it was right between my eyes. So they had to patch me up. Therefore I couldn't see, I could see sideways but that's no way to fight a war so. My outfit was retreating because we were overrun by the Germans.

Listen to what the captain told me. They were leaving, they were going to leave.

He says, "You three stay here and this is an order. Don't go anywhere. Stay here.

We'll be back." I'll never forget those words, "We'll be back." Well they never came back. That was on a Monday I'll never forget. But anyway. We were

there. Either that night or two nights later I told the other two guys. "Hey this is a two story house we get bombed we're gone. So we ought to find a taller building

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that is more secure. There was one tall building there, a four story building. But then I said, "No we'd better not go. I'd better not go." The other two guys left. I never saw them again. I don't know what happened to them. But I stayed. The third day after being there the Germans came and captured me. Which is a separate chapter, very interesting. But anyway I was alone in the basement and I woke up in the morning, that morning and I heard clicks and German boots out in the street. I looked through a little window that was parallel to the street. I look sideways and I saw two German soldiers coming and they came into the house and I knew they were getting close to my stairwell, I was in the basement. So I heard this step being stepped on and I hollered in my best German, remember I studied German in the University of Nebraska in German, I said, "German soldiers I'm an American Soldier, I'm wounded, I'm alone... all alone." All is a very particular word in German pronounced Gaanz which means deathly all alone. That must have been a fine word because that impressed the Germans. Anyway...yeah I'll tell you that later. They said, "Come on out." I stuck one hand out and then the other one, not together. They said, "No both together" they said, "Both hands together!" So came out with my hands up and I had a feeling they were going to shoot me. I got upstairs to the first floor, they searched me. They said, "Alright let's go." And I asked them again in my broken German, "Can I go downstairs and get my bag, muzzet bag." So they said, "Okay." And they waited down and I said, "Oh now they are going to shoot me." But ultimately they didn't. I got my muzzent bag, came up there with my raincoat I mean my overcoat, that's very important, overcoat. I found out later on when I

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joined the guys from my own outfit, no one had an overcoat, I'm the only one who had an overcoat out of several hundred guys from other units that were captured and put together. I'm the only one that had an overcoat. That's interesting.

EV: You said a mizzen bag is that MIZZEN?

AA: Muzed it sounds like MUZEUT, I don't know how they spell it. That's what they call them in the army. MUZEUT I guess.

EV: Is it a...

AA: Like a back pack. Where you carry your underwear, your shaving lotion, your whatever...toothbrush.

EV: I assume you didn't have a weapon at the time that you lost it or something?

AA: No. I had it with me but I left it in the basement. I couldn't come up there with a weapon.

EV: No, I just wanted to know if you...

AA: I don't blame you it's a good question.

EV: Did they, were they surprised that you spoke German?

AA: Oh yeah. The first question the guy asked me, he says, "Are you German?" "No, of course not." My eyes were patched. You couldn't see my big brown eyes. I says, "Nein [no]." "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah I'm sure." "Is your mother German?" You know he thought maybe I'm half German. I said, "Nein." Then, "Where did you learn German?" "At the University of Nebraska." I said. He said, "Ve lon... How long?" I said, "Three months." He says, "You

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sure learn it well.” I’m not saying I did but well enough for him to understand me and I could answer questions.

EV: So that’s why they treated you okay.

AA: Those two guys were great, really.

EV: Did you have any food and stuff while you were down there did you have your rations or?

AA: I didn’t even think about it. I was there I say two or two and a half days.

No I didn’t have anything. And frankly I wasn’t hungry. You’re not hungry under those circumstances. But I’m sure I had some in my muzet bag because I found it later on as we were marching. We were starving. I knew I had some but I didn’t care that I had some.

EV: You said you were going to tell me something that was about... when we were talking you said I’ll tell you about that later.

AA: I already told you.

EV: Okay so they just turned you over that day to somebody.

AA: Yeah but not quite. This is interesting. These two guys took me down out of the house, turned the corner. At the corner there were about six or eight Germans, sort of celebrating their victory. And one of them told my two guards to kill me, I understood that much. And my guard said, “Nein.” They said, “Kill him.” He said, “Nien. He is wounded “E rest vunted.” To me that means that if I had not been wounded they might have killed me. Because as a matter of fact there was a dead GI in front of me. As we walked there he was lying down in the street with no weapon, it means that he wasn’t fighting. It means he was not

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killed in action. It means that probably somebody else captured him and somebody else killed him., but not my two guys, my two guys wouldn't do that. So we came marching to a little bitty building about the size of... a very, very small building which was being used by the Germans as a concentration camp. "Bring all your POW's here." So at first I was so ashamed that I had been captured I felt that I had disgraced my uniform and all that. But when I got there I was relieved because my top Sergeant was there and other guys, there were about 15 so I was not the only one, that made me feel better. The artillery was just coming in very heavy and bad all around us. Scared the hell... finally they walked us to the German border which was about two miles from the little bitty building. And we met a lot of Germans crossing the river still coming in. And I talked to a lot of them, I was very aggressive, approachable... I don't know what the word is but I wasn't afraid to talk to them, I talked to them. And those guys would tell me that their goal was to capture Paris and give it back to Hitler as his Christmas gift. And I didn't want to laugh but I said, "Ridiculous!" But it didn't happen. But that was the goal I found out later on and they almost got there. I think they got to Antwerp, which is I think it's in Belgian, next door. Anyway they had a big goal to throw the Americans out of Europe again. And then from there, we walked... they took me across the river on a raft and I thought maybe I could escape here, but hell it was December the 18th, I would have frozen so I didn't jump. We got to the other side of the river, we walked a few miles to a two story house where we spent the night and the guy in charge attending... he was the only one there. And my top Sergeant had been wounded in his legs, we had to

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carry him. So I asked for the doctor, "I'll get you a doctor." A couple hours later there was no doctor. And me, aggressive me, went to the Lieutenant and raised hell. I said, "Rahhhhh." And he told me in German, "You go back to your room or don't talk to me like that." So I went back to my room. The next morning they took us all to a big, great big camp, the doctor never showed up. Anyway, they took us in a truck. We spent the night in a little abandoned school house. That was interesting. The next morning they got us up for breakfast, there were eight of us. They lined us up in front of a table, a make shift table. And the guards all forgot there were two, I forgot how many. They were a distance away in front. They had the bread on their table and we were a few feet away from them and they were pondering and pondering. What are they thinking about? So I asked them, "What's the matter?" They said we don't know how to give the bread to you because you might jump on us. See there were eight of us and two or four of them, probably four. I said, "Very simple. You assign one of our group to go over and get the loaf of bread and walk back to the group. And then send another one of us and get another loaf of bread until we get all our bread." "Ahh, they said "Wunderbar" "Wonderful, wonderful." So I was the first one that went up there and got a loaf of bread, brought it back to my group until all of us did it. We split the bread, we split it and that's it, very simple.

EV: Did you get your eyes cleared up?

AA: Oh yeah, yeah. At the first I forgot I remember the place but I don't know in what sequence. but anyway when we got to this I think it was Camp Lindbergh they had a clinic there. They were treating all the POWs and they took me to an

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English doctor who had been captured. He removed my patch and everything.

By coincidence there was a guy from Laredo there.

EV: Who?

AA: The doctor were working on his knee, on his leg, yeah. And I had seen that guy in my building, in my headquarters that came to get orders and then when we left "I'll see Arnulfo." So I saw him in good health and I saw him in the hospital. And this is very important for him later on. After the war I went home and the poor guy had been killed in an automobile accident in Laredo, ironically. So he put in a claim for disability for his leg injury and his widow wrote to me. I was back at UT, the University of Texas after the war. She said, "My husband had put in a claim and we need proof that he was hurt." I said, "Hell, of course he was hurt." And I wrote a form, sworn to affidavit how I had seen him, what they were doing and that's it. So I sent it back to her and that's it. I don't know if she ever got her pension or not.

EV: Did you know him when you were in Laredo?

AA: Oh yeah I went to school in Laredo.

EV: Mexicano?

AA: Victor Cavazos.

EV: Oh. Did you run into any more Laredo-ians when you were in the service?

AA: Oh yeah, God what an interesting... In my first permanent station Luchwa ??, there was a guy there.

EV: Lukenvahl?

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AA: Lukenvahl, yeah that's in Germany. He was from Laredo. He had very long hair and under the conditions of the prison camp it is dangerous to have very long hair because of the moist and cold, you can get lice. We all had lice eventually. But with long hair you would get more lice and you could get a very fatal disease and spread it around. So I wanted him to cut his hair but that was beside the point. The point is I found out he was from Laredo, he was a cook and waiter in the Hamilton Hotel in Laredo which is four blocks from my house, where I had worked after high school installing air conditioning. So we had a lot in common and we became very good friends. And this is material later on. Anyway, when I finished his haircut I brushed it. I laughed I did a horrible job. And that's the end of that.

EV: You did a horrible job on what?

AA: Cutting his hair?

EV: Oh you had to cut his hair?

AA: Oh my gosh. And we got transferred. I went to one camp he went to another. The next camp, this is the most interesting coincidence. One of the guards, German guards had been working in Mexico and Tampico in the oil fields which you may remember they had oil fields there, a Dutch company. Dutch and Germany were very close. So he saw my name on the list and that I was from Laredo and he came to me and spoke perfect Spanish. Started speaking to me in Spanish and we became friends. And he told me about the Hamilton Hotel and I had told him that I lived four blocks from there. That I helped install air conditioning and became very good friends he and I. And I told him about the

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cook that was at the other camp. He said... the way I described him he remembered him. He said, "He sounds like my waiter." I said, "Then he was." Anyway, when I got to Laredo, when I saw the Hamilton Hotel it had been changed to a senior's home. So I wrote a letter to the Laredo Town about that incident and the editor called me he thought it was a most interesting story and front page that I had... that Hamilton Hotel was the first building I saw when I was coming to Laredo from overseas. They reminded me that I had the guard and my friend Rodriguez.

EV: This guard was a German guard?

AA: Yeah a German POW guard, he was my guard.

EV: And he had been... he was the Dutch guy you were telling me about.

AA: Yes.

EV: Wow, boy that is a coincidence.

AA: And I had the front page. If you have time I'll go get it for you when we take a break.

EV: Yeah that is interesting. Okay. Was that, were you moved to different prison camps after that?

AA: Yeah. From there

EV: Excuse me... how long were you at that particular camp?

AA: Well from February 8th, we marched from Lukenvahl to this Altengrabow in three days.

EV: Altengrabowl?

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AA: Alten ...and then another word...Grabow. Alten Grabow. Ends with a W. We left Lukenvahl on my birthday. windy, snowing and we marched three days.

EV: On your birthday?

AA: On my birthday that's why I'll never forget it. And we got there on the 8th, that's how I remember the 8th. And we left in March, March of '45. We left Altengrabow and went to Stendahl, which is very memorable in my opinion. We got there. It was still cold and damp. And the next day we went to work on the railroad, repairing the railroad which had been bombed by the English and the American Air Force. We were straightening up. We had a crane to remove the bent tracks out of there and we'd would bring in new ones, line them up, dig... They don't nail the tracks over there to the tie, they screw them on. The screw is called in German, a schleusal, they only had one schleusal for four groups of 50 men. You know we couldn't find the schleusal. I would say, "Where's the schleusal?" instead of where's the key, the turn key. And everybody called it a schleusal.

EV: Well you said salt... or Stendahl why was that such an interesting city?

AA: Stendahl.

EV: You said it was a very interesting city?

AA: Well interesting because not only were we in a camp we were out working in a railroad yard. We were most of the time going to work and coming back. So it was interesting. It reminded me of Monterey Mexico. It was an industrial city. It was small but they had a lot of, they had two or three big factories.

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EV: And I assume that you kept your... from what I understand from military and from movies you still had ranking officers in the barracks of your prison places?

AA: No we were all enlisted men?

EV: Oh really?

AA: All enlisted men in my group. Everywhere we went it was all enlisted men. Officers had their own barracks, darling (sarcastically).

EV: With their golf courses (laughing).

AA: When you see movies about the officer's POW and how they dance and they did all that, that's BS. You didn't see that in enlisted men's barracks, they were filthy and all that stuff.

EV: I had heard that the Germans were just impeccably clean in everything. Did they not require that of you all when you were in the camp?

AA: Yeah we had nothing to dirty it with.

EV: Did you... there were also some stories that came out in World War II like at Christmas time when the German Christians sang Christmas... did they invite you to supper or did you get any special treatment during Christmas?

AA: No on the contrary. I'm glad you asked that question because the Christmas of '43 when I was in camp Fort Leonard Wood Missouri. Christmastime they had a lot of POWs there and they had... we had American as far as Christmas Trees, Christmas decorations. And I saw what they were eating, they were eating great, the German POWs in our camp. So when I was captured on December 18th I thought, "That's alright." They didn't feed us for two or

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three days so we were in march. So I said, "That's alright on Christmas Day they will give us something good to eat." Well hell Christmas came and went and nobody noticed it. Not like the way we treated their POWs.

EV: Alright so now you went... so after Stendahl you went to this where...?

AA: Stendahl that was my last camp. We were working on the railroad camp and something interesting happened. On April 6th we were working on the railroad tracks. April began to be not warm but not as cold. And I had two guards. One of them... both of them were kind but this one was an old man, he was kinder. And he stood in front of me and he saw a spider web on top of me and he snagged it. He says, "In German we believe that's a sign of good luck" superstitious.

EV: What to have a spider over you?

AA: Yeah. I said, "What does that mean?" "Something good is going to happen to you." And I find out later on, April 6th, this is April 6th my brother's birthday I remember, 6 days later the Americans were approaching and he knew that but we didn't know it. So I think that is the good news he was talking about it. Because six days later we woke up in the morning, that's April 12th of '45. We didn't go to work early in the morning. We stayed in until about 9:00 at the camp and we said, "Let's go, let's go to work." So we went to work and with another group coming back a group of POW's they said, "No work today because the Americans have come." So they took us back to the camp and we stayed there an hour or two hours. The Germans were trying to decide what to do with us. And they said, "We are going to take you back. We know where the Americans

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are we are going to take you to the Americans.” We could hear the artillery, we knew they were coming and they knew too. You understand?

EV: Yeah.

AA: But a lot of my guys said, “No we’re not going... we can’t trust...” See they lied to us many times...

EV: They said they were going to take you to the American camp that they were going to take you to the...

AA: “The Americans are coming and we are going to go and deliver you to the Americans.”

EV: Oh man!

AA: And some of our guys wouldn’t believe it... “No we can’t believe they’re not going to take us to the Americans. They have lied to us so many times.” Which is true.

EV: Okay stop. Let me change the tape okay?

End of Tape 1, Side A

Start Tape 1, Side B

EV: So you were telling me about the...

AA: Oh we couldn’t believe them.

EV: Yeah okay.

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AA: So we had no choice. I told the guy, "Hey." We were all enlisted, man we were all equal. I says, "We have no choice. We have to go with them." So we went. We marched and about three miles...

EV: How many miles?

AA: About three miles. We were marching. Well they kept going but I stayed. There were four groups of 50 POWs, there were 200, four groups of 50. I was a group leader of one, and hell I decided to escape. By that time you were ready to escape. If they kill you...so what? There was one T-5, which is a Corporal, which is higher than I was, to me he was a higher officer. I said, "You want to escape?" He says, "Yeah." Unfortunately it was this third guy next to him who was a tattletale. He would squeal on everybody, and he overheard us. And I didn't want him to hear. So when I gave the signal to the Corporal, I said, "This is it, let's sit down." My plan was to sit down while we were marching, let the group go by. And the guards tell you, "Come on." Just tell them "We're taking a break, we can't walk anymore." That's exactly what happened. We sat down, the Corporal and I and here comes the tattletale with seven other guys. He invited seven other guys to join him. That's what I was afraid of, so now ten guys we're sitting by the side of the road. And as each group came by the lead guard would say, ??? Get up let's go." I said, "No we're taking a ten minute break." And then I said, "No we're taking a ten minute break." I was in command now. So all the groups went by when they are gone long in the distance. We're sitting in the side of the road and I said, "Well we can't stay here." There's a forest about 30 yards from there. "Let's go in the forest where we can hide." We went to the forest.

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And we're sitting there and here come by German language again. We were five to five sitting like this and one of the guys facing me says, "Azios don't look back but there's a German officer coming." I said, "Alright don't panic lets remain where we are." So we were being very cool. The German officer comes in the front, by coincidence facing me. He said, "What are you all doing here?" Maybe he didn't say, "You all." But he said, "What are you doing here?" Thank God I understood him. Listen, how did I think of it? First of all I'm glad I got to understand the question perfectly well. And I came up with an answer quickly and very logical. Here's what I told him in German. "We're all POWs. We're all wounded. We just got out of the hospital in Standahl." (There was a hospital, a military hospital... so I knew that he knew there was a hospital because a military hospital). So he believed me. "We just got out of the hospital. We're all wounded. We couldn't keep up with the other group so the guard told us to stay here where we can walk to go up the road to join them and catch up with them." Anyway it was getting sort of late in the afternoon. So they are going to camp somewhere. So here's his question, trying to pull a Valdes on me...(laughter) He says, "And how will you know where you'll catch up with them?" Well I pulled a Valdes on him, I said, "Well he told us that they were going to march 6 or 7 kilometers up the road and they were going to spend the night there. That when we can walk for us to go meet him there." All that in German, broken German but he understood. He said, "Okay." And he left, he went away. After he left we all decided. "No use staying here this is just a forest." There was a farm, a dairy farm about 50 yards from us... 50, 75 yards. So we started to go there. In the

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meantime the artillery broke up. There was artillery all over the place. You see what I didn't know was that the Germans were retreating and they were a few yards from this farm. And so we were getting all the artillery. We went into the barn that was full of cows and that's where we spent the night. In the meantime I guess the Germans had retreated past our. ... the fighting ceased for a while. We spent the night and the next morning a Jeep, an American Jeep drove into this farm with a Lieutenant and a Corporal, in the meantime we were joined by a few German... British escapees. And one of the British guys saw the Jeep in the morning and says, "The Yanks are here!" And I went to the door and I saw the Jeep and I started to run to greet the Lieutenant and I fell down, I forgot I couldn't run. So I fell down and I got up, walked. From now on I'm in American hands. Let's see... so that's it. And something interesting happened. We were there waiting. The American Lieutenant told the owner of the farm to kill the pig and feed us. And the guy refused but he made him do it. So we were waiting for that pig to dry, first they remove the blood and then da,da,da.... We were waiting for that when one of the guys said, "Hey there are two Germans outside that want to surrender." They were about 100 yards and since I'm the only one that spoke German, I greeted them... Why did I go? I wanted to get their pistols and their wrist watch. So I asked them. "do you have a weapon and ??? (in German). They didn't have either. So I took them to camp. Now listen to how smart the Germans were. They didn't hear any shots right? After we had got to camp so they figured we had not shot their...so they were not shot. So they were not afraid. Two more came and I would go and greet them and bring them back. I

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think there were ten total, a total of ten. But no one had a watch or a pistol. So now we had ten prisoners that I (emphatic) captured.

EV: You captured? (laughter)

AA: Yeah.

EV: Were these guys Wermacht or were they just regular soldiers?

AA: No they were regular soldiers.

EV: Okay.

AA: They surrendered to me so I say I captured them. And after a while they would turn to us and say, "He kept the ten German guards. I guess he's going to get credit for the ten German prisoners." He told them now you all go walk out this gate, turn left, walk about two miles on the left. You're going to meet the 5th Armored Division, and so we did. And as soon as we turned the gate, right there, there were four German machine guns facing towards the Americans. The Americans came this way, so that's where the fighting was going on right there a few yards from us. It was hell. Anyway we walked to the 5th Armored and from then on we were in American hands.

EV: What did you do with your machine guns that were there? They were manned?

AA: No the Germans ran away.

EV: Oh they just left the machine guns and split.

AA: Yeah.

EV: And you never got a watch or a...?

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AA: Not then. Later on I did. Ironically, after we were in American hands they put them in a truck and took them back to Standahl where we had been working. And Germans had, in every city had orders to turn in all the weapons, knives, pistols, rifles in front of City Hall. So I took them back to Standahl, now we were free people... Free. So I walked there. I told you I was really aggressive. I walked over to the pistols and I picked up the stupid little two or three pistols, not worth a damn but to me they were pistols. And a German civilian in charge of guarding the weapons, he called me, called me over and he gave me a beautiful pistol. It was a Belgium automatic pistol, like a 45. It had an insignia of a Belgium Kingdom, that means it was an antique because there was no kingdom and he gave it to me.

EV: Do you still have it?

AA: I sold it. I can't tell you I sold it because it's against the law to sell it but I sold it many years later. And many years past now so the statute of limitations...

EV: Did you get yourself a good price I hope?

AA: Darn right.

EV: Did you walk out with any souvenirs after the war?

AA: Did I what?

EV: Did you keep any souvenirs of the war?

AA: Remember I told you I had several pistols that weren't worth a damn.

EV: You kept those?

AA: I sold them on the ship coming back. Really they weren't. I wanted to get one for each of my brothers but I wouldn't give those pistols to anybody. They

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were of no use. I think one of them is a target pistol. I said, "What the hell would my brother want with a target pistol?" So I sold them.

EV: Were you the only Azios brother that went to war?

AA: No, four of us served and we all came back.

EV: Really? Where were the others?

AA: Bain was in the Air Force was a tail gunner. Hector was in the anti-aircraft artillery. He landed in the Philippines on D-Day, in the Philippines. He shot down several planes. And Henry was drafted toward the end of the war so he went to basic training and then advanced training and then the war ended and then sent him home.

EV: So now were back in Stendahl and you're trying to rip off some pistols. What happened to you then in terms of military?

AA: After that, we were under orders so I don't know if it was that night or the next day the big Army outfit came and took us over, so now we're under their command. One thing that I had heard or read that whenever Germany leaves a building when they abandon a building they leave time bombs there so when Americans come in...

EV: Oh yeah.

AA: And so there was a big building there where everyone was going. I didn't go in because I said, "I'll be there and then the damn thing is going to go off." So I'll tell you what, you asked me what I did, but I didn't go in that big building which was a rat house city hall. And then they took us by truck that night to an air base, a German air base which had been captured by the Americans. I just

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spent the night just sitting around just waiting. In the meantime I had acquired about 8 beautiful swords. One of them the handle had a lion face which is my favorite thing, a lion's face. As you can see I have lions all over here. And I fell asleep. I was so weak I fell asleep at the air base out in the open it was April so it was a little warmer. I sat down on the ground with my swords all around me and I fell asleep. When I woke up there was only one and not my favorite. They left the lousy one which I have here. Somebody walked... it was dirt not cement... I would have heard the pavement but not on dirt. Dirty bastard took my swords away. Why didn't he get any, there were plenty of swords?

EV: Oh by the way all this time by the way... I'm sure they were feeding you but I mean did you have to go to a chow hall or did they give you C-rations or K-rations.

AA: The first two or three days they fed us whenever, whatever... they took care of us. We're now in American hands.

EV: Yeah. Did you have any trouble eating full meals and stuff after that?

AA: I didn't. Well we met the Americans. Remember I told you, they put us in a truck and they took us to a little village it was so... everybody went on and on knocking on the door to the Germans to please give us some eggs because that's all they could fix in a hurry. So we're eating... we ate two eggs whenever they gave us. And I quit, because I nearly (unintelligible) but they kept eating and eating and they got sick. Aw, that's horrible, so I quit eating. This went on for two or three days eating very lightly. I did. They took us to camp Lucky Strike which is in France. They flew us over there and some guys couldn't stop eating.

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They were over eating and they spread a rumor that two guys had died from over eating. I think they told us that so we wouldn't do it. I quit. So all I would eat would be oat meal in the morning which was precious. Camp Lucky Strike, every camp had a name of cigarette.

EV: Oh really?

AA: That's what I heard later on.

EV: Camp Chesterfield somewhere?

AA: Yeah.

EV: You know when I was in the Army we went out to maneuvers in the Mohave and they issued us old World War II rations.

AA: (laughter)

EV: This was in the '60's man!

AA: Oh my God!

EV: Yeah in the 60's. And I opened up you know those little package that have your toilet paper and your gum and chocolate and all that stuff. I had a package of the green Lucky Strike package that was...

AA: Oh you should have kept that!

EV: I kept it all and my ex wife through all my stuff in the trash.

AA: Remember Green went to war?

EV: Yeah that's right and then later on a second pack I got had Fatima, the old Fatima cigarettes. Yeah that's crazy but she threw all that stuff away. I wanted to keep it because if I ever wanted to think that I had it... that life was a little tough I could always open up that pack and remember how bad it could be. Okay so

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what, how did you begin, did you just stay recuperating until, in Europe until the end of the War?

AA: No, Lucky Strike a few days, they took us to England. I forgot the name of the port right there at the very tip of England.

EV: The Portsmouth?

AA: Anyway it was a tip close to Europe. Anyway they shipped us to the United States and I think we were unescorted. And that's terrible.

EV: After the war?

AA: The war wasn't over yet. The ship was going without an escort, man that was stupid. After going through all that hell and POW then we're going to get killed in the high seas. One time we were attacked and I said, "Oh shit." But we didn't get hit. Okay. We landed in Boston, we were on a Navy ship, I forgot what they call it, personnel carrier. We landed in Boston, Massachusetts on Mother's Day. And I said, "I'll never live in a big city because Germany all of the big cities were destroyed completely." And look where I'm living now in a big city.

EV: Did you ever... I'm asking you this question because it happened to my uncle, did you ever have this almost insane craving for Mexican food just go craving?

AA: Yes, but I'll tell you what I did dream. My best friend in Laredo was Beto Chavarria, we lived on the same block we were always together and when he went in the army at first he went to Alaska. They were fighting in Alaska. And his mother says, "Please write Beto and tell him not to try to be a hero. Tell him

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just to do his duty.” Listen how close we were. She asked me to help her to help her son. That’s fine. When I came back from POW camp before going to my house I stopped at her house because I wanted to see if my family alive, anybody had died or anything. That’s why I stopped there. Oh here’s... when I was a POW one time I dreamed that She made the best tortillas in town!

EV: De maiz [from corn]?

AA: No, de harina [from flour], I find out later how she made them, but anyway I woke up from that damn dream as a POW and I said, “Damn it was a dream. Oh shit!” Well the next night or two night later I dreamt again, and I dreamt this is not a dream. See? So go ahead and enjoy... here’s another dream enjoy it. I woke up it was a damn dream, the same tortillas. So when I stopped at her house I told her, hey “¿Que cre, sonie tus tortillas dos veces?” and I described my dream the way it was, and I was there 60 days... do you think she offered me a tortilla? Never offered me a tortilla. Knew how close we were. Her son and I was very close. They had a little grocery store, we bought all our groceries there and nary a tortilla. I’ll never forget that... chicken shit.

EV: And what did you say your nick name was?

AA: Feras. FERAS.

EV: How’d you get that?

AA: My mother she was screeching one time in such great love the word that just came out.

EV: Okay so you eventually made your way back to the U.S. after camp right, after being a POW and they gave you what a 30 day furlough?

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AA: I got 30 days and then I got a letter extending it to 60 days.

EV: Wow and you just stayed in Laredo after the 60 days. And then where did you? Was that the end of the war?

AA: No, not yet. The war against Japan was still going on. They sent us POWs to the best hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

EV: Hot Springs?

AA: Yeah. Hotel Arlington I'll never forget it, beautiful hotel. We were there a couple of weeks, beautiful, guests of the United States. Then from there they assigned me to a little camp in Arkansas which eventually turned out to be Fort Smith. I was there learning how to counsel people who were going to be releasing from the Army. I would give them their rights tell them what they are entitled to and everything. And that's where I was Fort Smith, Arkansas on August, I think it was the 15th of...

EV: '45.

AA: yeah, '45, getting ready to go to Fort Bliss, Texas in El Paso, your hometown.

EV: Yeah.

AA: Climbing on the train when the bells of Fort Smith, Arkansas started ringing and it was the afternoon that the war was over. They announced that the war was over, so we got on the train and went to El Paso. So we didn't get to celebrate like they did in New York City. How can we celebrate we're in a damn train a bunch of guys together.

EV: So that was about the 14th or 15th of August.

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AA: I think it was the 15th, but yeah of August.

EV: And then so...

AA: Excuse me September... no August...

EV: Well the A Bomb was dropped on August the 8th. So it had to be a few days, a few couple weeks after that. Because then they had to drop the one on Nagasaki. And obviously a couple of days after they dropped Nagasaki is when they surrendered.

AA: They said I give up, yeah.

EV: And did you stay at Fort Bliss is that where you stayed until you got discharged?

AA: Yeah.

EV: So you have nice feelings about El Paso right?

AA: Yeah.

EV: Fort Bliss was back... well maybe not. Was it an artillery school back then do you remember? Probably not. No it was a guided missile school is what it was and that didn't come in until after the war. So then you get discharged in El Paso. And did you hitchhike back home to Laredo?

AA: No, hell no. My Uncle Sam was paying.

EV: Ok so now...

AA: Went to San Antonio.

EV: Did you go by train or plane?

AA: Train. Went from San Antonio to Laredo went by Greyhound.

EV: Did you have a high school band waiting for you when you got there?

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AA: No.

EV: And no tortillas. No high school band and no tortillas?

AA: No my mother went and greeted me and picked me up in the car and drove me home.

EV: Were there a bunch of other Laredo guys on the train with you?

AA: No. They were all coming in at separate times.

EV: Then how long was it then before you went back to the university to finish your studies?

AA: I'm trying to think. But I went back to Austin immediately as soon as I could. I didn't want to waste any more time. But it wasn't immediately it was, I would say, six weeks maybe. I worked in my brother's office. We were custom broker. He needed my help so I helped him. He paid me for it.

EV: When you went back to the university, of course, you had the GI Bill by that time.... Well you had big bucks then didn't you? You had some money in your pocket you didn't have to?

AA: From what?

EV: From the GI Bill. Did you still have to go out and get a job and work your way through school or the GI bill?

AA: Not after the war no.

EV: Okay.

AA: Not there because I was single.

EV: Okay and how... what was your classification when you came back, were you a junior?

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AA: High sophomore or something. As a result of the war it was packed, the university was packed it was hard getting a room but luckily I found one. And so I had a room.

EV: Where did you find one was it a house or a ...?

AA: A house, a beautiful house. Are you familiar with Austin?

EV: A little bit.

AA: It was a beautiful house, that's it.

EV: So what did you major in when you finished?

AA: There it was pre-law.

EV: You knew by then you wanted to be a lawyer.

AA: I wanted to yeah.

EV: When did that desire hit you or knowledge that you wanted to be a lawyer?

AA: I don't know. It's funny how some people make up their minds. Some want to be a doctor, lawyer, architect...

EV: What was your minor?

AA: Probably not as such but I don't know what my minor was. I took accounting as part of my pre law. I took history, English all that stuff.

EV: Did you have any kind of adjustment problems or experiences from military to civilian?

AA: No except nightmares, horrible nightmares about POW. Particularly about being bombed, particularly starving like that tortilla deal. That was only two

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dreams. I had other dreams about eating, eating, eating...bull shit. Yeah it took me about two years to forget the nightmares.

EV: But you didn't...were you involved in any heavy combat situations?

AA: Oh yeah. Battle of the Bulge itself and let me tell you. Let me see. In one of my dreams, I tell you I was very aggressive. One of my dreams we were on a ship. my four brothers, my three brothers and I and we were getting bombed by the enemy and I being the youngest brother, I was very aggressive. I was trying to tell my brothers what to do, how to protect us. I was the leader, I don't know what made me the leader but I was the leader. I think being a POW increases your will power to the point of where you escape it is very daring and very stupid. I wouldn't do it again if I had a chance.

EV: Really?

AA: It makes you aggressive. It won't do you any good because we ran across this officer and he could have killed us right there because they had orders to shoot escape POWs. He could have shot us.

EV: Okay. Oh we were talking about the campus at University of Texas. So you had no more problems with adjusting back then?

AA: Not adjusting. I suffered but at night when you're asleep. When I was in Houston officing at Main and Preston in the Scanlon Building, they were repairing the streets. I was turning the corner and they were jack hammering and that scared the hell of out of me "rat tat tat!!" but other than that, unless some noise reminded me of my war then I would bother me. Otherwise I got along fine.

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EV: Did you, what was the pre-law back then. You went right... did you go into a law school?

AA: Yeah.

EV: Like a three year, four year program from the university into the law school?

AA: I don't know what they called their program but I qualified for law school so they admitted me. In those days it was easy to get in.

EV: And was it a three year school back then, three years on top of?

AA: Absolutely, yeah.

EV: So you put in a total of seven years, four years of regular college and three years of law school? I thought that there was some kind of change where you could evolve from...

AA: Yeah you could go three years, two years and one year of law school, plus three years of law school, people get two degrees or something. I wasn't interested in that. I was interested in finishing law school and getting out.

EV: Where did you open your first law office? Did you work for a firm or did you go to work for yourself?

AA: I went to work for Gabe Nahas.

EV: Did you really?

AA: I was away from my bar exam grade. I was a security guard at Foleys. And there was a detective that was the detective of the Texas Service. I guess he liked my work. He said, "When you get your law degree, your license, let me know I'll get you a job." I knew it was hard to get a job, a young lawyers. So

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anyway I said, "What the hell." So when I got my license I told him. The next day he told me, alright go see Gabe Najas. So I went to see Gabe Najas. He grabbed me, so I started working for him, hard worker! I was a hard worker. He made me work weekends, New Years, everyday. Which is good... good training.

EV: Was Hector already a lawyer too?

AA: Later he became a lawyer later on. Let me tell you about Gabe Najas. He was in the same building with John Herrera. And Johnny Herrera, asked me if I wanted to go with him. I said, "No, not yet." But later one Gabe Najas said, "Hey I can't pay you anymore. You can stay in my office. You can use my office, my secretary everything you don't pay me anything. You can stay here but I can't hire you anymore." So I went to John Herrera.

EV: And John paid you?

AA: Did he pay me?

EV: Did he pay you? You said Gabe said he couldn't pay you and then John could pay you.

AA: Oh yeah John paid me.

EV: How many lawyers were there with John at the time?

AA: Just me for the time being, and then a young guy from San Antonio, I think his name was Al Hernandez but I'm not sure of his last name. He was a former lieutenant in the Air Force or something. I don't know if he went to work for John or not. Or if he did I don't know if he lasted very long. I forgot. But then Jimmy De Anda came and he joined John for a couple of years. So then

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Jimmy De Anga and I worked together for a couple of years. And then he went to Corpus.

EV: De Anda did? Was he from Corpus, was he from there?

AA: No he was from Houston.

EV: Really? When you were, what kind of practice did you get into, what kind of cases?

AA: With John Herrera?

EV: Yeah with John and Gabe?

AA: Oh Gabe was strictly criminal and divorces. Johnny Herrera had a mixed practice, he had a good practice and I did a lot of the work.

EV: Did you try cases when you were with Gabe?

AA: Oh absolutely.

EV: Yeah?

AA: With Gabe and with Herrera. One time Jimmy De Anda and I went to Wharton, Texas, we had never met the client. It was Johnny's client. It was set for trial that day and he told us to be there at 1:00 in the afternoon. I walked in and said, "Whose Juan Diego?" whatever his name was. And there he was it was a little guy on the front bench with a friendly woman both were Hispanic. It wasn't his wife, but does it really matter? Anyway this guy was an ex-convict charged with aggravated robbery of an Anglo guy by putting a knife on his throat. Want to hear the whole details?

EV: Yeah.

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AA: And the D.A. was very, very prominent and Robert Bassett, terrific guy. We picked a jury. And the allegation was that this Defendant had robbed this Anglo guy with a knife and took his money... this was payday for the Anglo guy... pay day. And remember we had never met the Defendant before. He was an ex-convict. I couldn't put him on the stand. So I pulled an Ernest Valdes. See I was the lead counsel. I asked the guy, "Well isn't it true that you didn't get robbed? Isn't it true that you made up that story because you have done that twice before? You get home on payday without any money and your wife told you the next time you did this she was going to leave you and take your kids away from you and all that stuff?" He said, "Yes." I got it! (laughter) "And isn't it true on the second time that it happened that you swore to her..."

EV: Are you making this up or did you know the guy?

AA: No I made it up!

EV: Okay.

AA: I pulled a Valdes I said.

EV: (laughter)

AA: "Isn't it true the second time that you swore to her, not just promised, you swore to her you're not going to do this again. So therefore..." part of my argument is to the jury, "This man swore to his wife that he wouldn't spend his money on drinking again. He did it again and now he doesn't want to get kicked out of the house, deprived of his children so now he's blaming this Defendant here. He swore to her and he lied to her so he's swearing this is true and it's not true. If he swore to his wife under oath, he swore to you under oath. It's a bunch

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of lies.” And the jury came out with “not guilty” verdict. You should have seen that District Attorney. Literally his mouth fell open. “How can he be found not guilty when he didn’t even testify?” We had no testimony from the defendant. Not Guilty. And that’s how we became friends, the D.A. and I became friends.

EV: Wow.

AA: I guess you...

EV: Did you have an all Anglo jury too?

AA: Yeah, of course, in Wharton.

EV: Oh yeah you all were in Wharton I guess so. That was what in the early ‘30’s I mean 40’s.

AA: Early ‘50’s, maybe ‘51, ‘52.

EV: Did you all... were there any discrimination type of laws filed back then, civil rights cases? I know John Jay eventually got involved in that.

AA: John Jay and Jimmy De Anda and that attorney from San Antonio, Gus Garcia.

EV: Gus Garcia.

AA: Filed Motion to Quash the Indictment or to reverse the conviction, I forgot which because the grand jury who had indicted Hernandez was all Anglo and they had never had a Hispanic in any grand jury in Wharton County since the time of immemorial.

EV: Was this case, this case you just tried you were talking about or is that another case?

AA: No.

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EV: That's the famous case.

AA: The *Hernandez* case.

EV: The *Hernandez* case.

AA: I said Hernandez, but I don't remember,

EV: What was the name of that little judge, I say little judge...chaparrito

[short] in San Antonio on the Court of Civil Appeals...Cadena?

AA: Cadena..

EV: Wasn't he involved in some of those cases back then...?

AA: He might have been but maybe not because if he was a Judge he couldn't participate because... but I don't know when he became a judge. I think it was the Court of Appeals.

EV: What was the name of that Mexicano famous attorney from San Antonio...

AA: Gus Garcia.

EV: Was he the one they found dead on the park bench or something? Yeah that's sad, that was a sad case.

AA: He was so good that he tried a case in Houston one time and all the D.A.'s, all the Assistant D.A.'s went hear him try the case to hear it. It was supposed to be very, very good.

EV: Did you know him?

AA: I met him but I never heard him argue a case.

EV: Okay. So then... primarily you were doing, by the time you got with John then you were doing family law and criminal law...

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AA: Anything I came out with.

EV: Did you ever do any civil practice of any consequence?

AA: Not from John except divorces and adoptions and stuff. But when I went on my own I did try some civil cases which really I had no background. And believe it or not every civil case I tried I won. But you know why? The experience I had acquired trying criminal cases. They managed gymnastics, every one. And I believe two of them, I won't mention names but they represented big civil firms, beat the hell out of them.

EV: Civil law I'm not trying to put... not trying to minimize your victory but civil law was not nearly as complex as it is now. With all the discovery and all that...gosh!

AA: Yeah but for me it was a rare animal because remember preparing a charge, I never charged a charge in a civil case. No, no it's very complicated. It was then.

EV: Yeah, so even then it was complicated?

AA: For me it was.

EV: Yeah, because I remember...

AA: I had no background for it.

EV: Well when I took family law at Saint Mary's that was my first year of law school. I remember family law was still the common law, they didn't have the family code yet. That was... okay well after John did you ever hang out your own shingle? When I came here weren't you and Hector practicing together?

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AA: Yes. John finally... I started getting clients, not many but one or two or three. And he says, "Hey Azios you need to split your fee with me." Well under the circumstances I didn't think it was fair because frankly I wasn't getting what I was supposed to get. So we didn't agree so I left by mutual agreement, it was time to leave. And luckily the first morning I opened my office I had... one of my old clients, one of his old clients had shot her husband and instead of going to John she came to me. Because I used to do a lot of work for John so they got acquainted with me and that's the way it started rolling.

EV: Where did you open your first office?

AA: The Mayfridge Building which was the corner of Fannin and Preston, about half a block in between.

EV: Were you by yourself then?

AA: I was by myself and then Hector my brother passed the bar later on and he joined but we were never partners. We officed together but not partners because...

EV: Because you didn't want to kill each other.

AA: No because Hector frankly was very kind, overly kind and I was reasonable but I had to get paid and Hector if he didn't get paid it's alright, he felt sorry for the people. Well I had to make a living so I charged reasonable fees and that's it. They all paid me.

EV: When did you get married?

AA: I got married in '47 I was still in law school. So I had to work the last year of my law school, because my GI bill was not enough.

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EV: And where did you find your lovely woman that became your bride?

AA: She's from Laredo, I knew her.

EV: You knew her in Laredo?

PHONE RINGING

AA: The Fraternal Order of Police.

EV: Oh yeah those guys are a rip off.

AA: They are trying to get money because they're looking for a missing person and they need more money to pay for the volunteers.

EV: Sounds great. So you were telling me how you met your wife.

AA: She and I went to school together. Junior high, high school but we just knew each other. I never had any intentions of dating a girl or anything. I came back between semesters, I was at UT then and she belonged to a club and they were having a barbecue that night. One night and she invited me and I went and there you go. From then I wanted to go.

EV: Was this after the war?

AA: Yeah it was very soon after the war when I was still suffering from hunger pains so I ate like a pig. And she told me that she saw me, and I went back for seconds and she couldn't understand where I was putting it all, well hell. It's all in the mind. You can't quit eating, just eat, eat. And that's it from then on. Of course I was in Austin we corresponded and we got serious, we got married.

RINGING

EV: So when...

AA: You want a Coke?

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EV: I'm fine.

AA: We don't drink Coke do you want a Coke?

EV: No, I'm fine, thank you. So you met your lovely bride in Laredo and you fell in love. You didn't have anyone during the war?

AA: Did I have a girlfriend during the war?

EV: And you know what I'm glad I didn't.

AA: I didn't but I saw other guys that got Dear John letters.

EV: And you're just worried about it all the time. I mean I didn't really go to war but I was in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

AA: You were what?

EV: My first, the First Armored Division was moved to Florida and Georgia during the Cuban Missile crisis.

AA: Ohhhh.

EV: And what scared me about that was that war would have had no front lines.

AA: That's right "spew!"

EV: Yeah and so I realized that my mother in El Paso would have probably been a prime target because of the missile stuff and the refineries and all that. So I was just scared more than anything else. But then I was glad that I didn't have a girlfriend because that was a worry I didn't have you know, one less thing to worry about.

AA: I purposely did not have one and I wouldn't.

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EV: So then you married... she went back with you for your last year. Were you already a lawyer when you got married?

AA: No when we got married I was in law school here in South Texas and she worked. She was supposed to work my way through school but she got pregnant and then I had to work and that was hard Ernesto.

EV: Hard to be. Did you... you didn't finish your law school at UT and you came here to South Texas? Was that when it was at the YMCA?

AA: Yeah. One year of hell for me God Damn It. Go to law school, I mean work all day and then go to law school at night. When did I study? Oh... I don't know. I did it. I couldn't give up. I could have cut down my hours instead of 15 but I never even thought about it. Would have been easier but I don't like the easy path I like to grab all I can. It was rough God Damn!

EV: Yeah.

AA: Do you know where the golf course is for the City of Houston?

EV: The Park or Memorial?

AA: Memorial. Across the street there are some Army barracks.

EV: Yeah you lived in those?

AA: Yeah did you ever see them?

EV: I knew the very last house that was still standing that became the German concentration camp that was there. It had been part of the Army camp. They made it a German concentration camp. And the guy who is now the head of the school of architecture at U of H was the one who owed that little house. It was

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just a square cement cinder block house. And he added an old airline trailer to it.

He was a hippie back in those days. But that's the only ones I ever saw.

AA: We didn't have cinder block. We had regular Army stupid value lumbar.

EV: Those old Army barracks.

AA: Yeah we were worse. We didn't have a barrack we had a dining hall.

Dining halls have windows way up high right? So we had no breathing, no ventilation. It was hell but that's alright.

EV: So did you just have one child while you were in law school or did you have more?

AA: One. No she was born when I was already a lawyer but she was pregnant when I was in school and that's part of the game.

AA: By the way I bought a DVD from a girl who came from El Paso a Mexican Singer.

EV: Oh Vicki Carr?

AA: No.

EV: Vicki...

AA: Vicki Car?

EV: Yeah Victoria Cardona, or something like that.

AA: I think it's Vicki Carr it's beautiful.

EV: Yeah she's a beautiful voice.

AA: *Las Canciones de mi Papa.*

EV: Oh no, no, no that's Ronstadt, she's from Tucson

AA: Yeah Linda Ronstadt.

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EV: She's from Tuson or Phoenix or something like that she's from Arizona.

AA: She's beautiful.

EV: So how long did you... did you just work practicing law did you acquire any political ambitions along the way.

AA: I don't know how but I think when Jack Knight... Remember Jack Knight the lawyer.

End of Tape 1, Side B

Start Tape 2, Side A

AA: When _____ knew him, maybe you never met him?

EV: Jack Knight, I don't remember.

AA: Very respectable lawyer, da, da, da... And I used to go to the courthouse to check the criminal index to check the complaint in county court and [REDACTED] in district court. And one time I looked and I pulled out the wrong file, next to my file and I read it and it was in county court. It was a fatal defect in the pleading I find out it was Jack Knight's case. So I wrote Jack Knight a letter saying, "Jack Knight regarding case number so and so, state verses so and so... I wasn't intruding your file but I pulled this file by mistake and I noticed what I think is a fatal mistake and I'm inviting your attention to it." Well he accepted my invitation he got the case dismissed and he thought it was great of me to do that, to find a mistake, a fatal mistake and so one time I was standing on the corner of Fannin and Preston waiting for the traffic light. And he says, "Hey AD, Mr. Azos," whatever he called me, "You did a great work, I think you ought to run for

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judge.” I think that’s how I got the idea. From then on I kept thinking and I finally ran for judge.

EV: Weren’t you a Municipal Court Judge first?

AA: Oh yeah, many years.

EV: Were you appointed by…?

AA: Mayor Welch.

EV: Louis Welch?

AA: I was there six years. And I was asked to run for District Court.

EV: Well I have to ask you about that. But let me ask you this first: when you… were you active in Louis Welch’s campaign?

AA: No.

EV: I mean how much did he come up with you?

AA: Interesting story. I was very active in politics, very active. I was walking out of the elevator in the criminal courthouse this guy who was very active in Louis Welch’s, a very powerful politician. He was a lay person but very active, sitting on the benches in the criminal courthouses. As I walked out he says, “Hey AD,” or whatever he called me, “Come here I’ve got something to tell you.” He knew I was very active. He says, “I’ll tell you what if you help me with Louis Welch’s campaign, if he wins I’ll get you a Municipal Court bench.” I says, “I can’t do that. I’m supporting somebody else. What I can do is I can withdraw my support just remain silent that way I won’t be helping the other guy nor hurting yours.” He says, “I’ll take that.” So sure enough Louis Welch got elected and I thought that was B.S. no he appointed me about two days later. He said,

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“Remember what I told you? You want it?” I said, “Sure.” So then he got it.

That’s how I got it.

EV: Did you have that... by that time you’d been practicing law how long?

AA: That was in ’66, from ’49 to ’66, 12 years, 11 years.

EV: You were just practicing law and then you get this appointment. So did you find it difficult to change your mentality to a judge?

AA: No, I didn’t want a full time Judge because then I’ll have to quit practicing. So I became an associate judge. No I didn’t find it difficult. I still had that sense of fairness, you know that one gets as a defense lawyer. I was fair that’s why a lot of policeman hated me. I found people not guilty sometimes. One times because of finding a young guy not guilty I got a letter from his father, who I found out later was a prominent oil man, wrote me a letter as a judge. He says, and I’m not bragging this is what he says, “The City of Houston should be proud to have somebody of your caliber as a judge in municipal court.” I wish I had kept the letter. Anyway, so when I ran in ’72 I wrote him and asked him if I had his permission to show this letter if I had to. He said, “Sure.”

EV: Okay and then you ran for County Court Judge?

AA: First time I ran was District Court and I came third out of eight which was good.

EV: That’s right. That is what I was going to ask you about. Word on the street was that you first put up your billboard and signs of Arnulfo.

AA: No, not billboard... no, never.

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EV: Well whatever your ads were. You had Arnulfo on there. And that because you had that Hispanic sounding name, that's why you lost. The second time you just used A.D. And everybody thought you were Greek I guess.

AA: Not the billboard. By the time I had billboards I was A.D.

EV: Okay.

AA: When I said Arnulfo that was in my ballet registration. I registered as Arnulfo. And the same day I got a call from a prominent, do you who Curtis Brown was?

EV: Curtis who?

AA: Curtis Brown. Judge of Court of Civil Appeals.

EV: Oh yeah.

AA: He called my brother Henry and said, "Henry what's the matter with A.D. He registered as Arnulfo hell." And several prominent people called my brother Henry because they knew Henry. And they said, "What the hell!" And the night of the election, I lost by the way.

EV: I know.

AA: I went to the courthouse to check, two or three ladies, Anglo ladies, who knew me and liked me says, "I couldn't find your name. I didn't for you I couldn't find your name." Of course not Arnulfo so no more Arnulfo.

EV: So then you ran as A.D. for County Court? I mean after you lost to the District Court?

AA: No.

EV: Were you appointed to the County?

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AA: No. I used Arnulfo when I ran for a Civil Court appointment I was appointed. No for District I ran as A.D. But for County Court I ran as Arnulfo. I got my ass whipped. I said, "Fuck Arnulfo. Don't be patriotic." And then from then on I whipped everybody and for County Court where I think 13 guys, so a friend of mine, an Anglo friend says, "A.D. Don't waste your time or your money. You're third on the ballot, there are 13 running, you'll never get the majority. You get majority you're in. So don't waste your time but I did and I came out first out of thirteen. I got 49½ %.

EV: Oh my gosh so you had to have a run off?

AA: Yeah I had to get a run off and I won. But it was that close.

EV: Who ran against you do you remember?

AA: At the time there were 13 guys, I don't know one of them was...

EV: Who put you in the run off I mean?

AA: I ended up with it being, he became a District Judge later on he died recently. I forgot his name. It's a short name, are we on the mic?

EV: Yeah.

AA: Oh my God.

EV: What do you think this is all about?

AA: Not that part.

EV: Which part?

AA: (inaudible).

EV: (laughter) that's all there! On the... how long did you serve on the county as a County Judge?

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AA: Nine years.

EV: Okay and then in the District Court?

AA: Oh excuse me, County Court on the nine, I said six years. Then I went up to District Court where I served twelve years.

EV: Okay. And did you... apparently you enjoyed being a judge?

AA: Oh yeah, sure.

EV: You liked it. Did you see any, I mean from the time you practiced law until now, what dramatic changes have you seen, if any during that period of time in terms of how court is... how law is practiced?

AA: I cannot speak for the last ten years because I have been retired ten years or more and I haven't kept up with the dynamics of the court house. But, and you'd probably be a better judge than I would be since you are still in the courthouse and you talk to lawyers and you hear their gripes, I hear their gripes of the lawyers.

EV: Well I just know that I mean it has gotten very frustrating, became very frustrating to practice law, certainly as a sole practitioner because it is very, I don't know, very difficult. I don't know how guys do civil law and remain as sole practitioners because you get a blizzard of paperwork that you cannot keep up with. And so that's probably the way they beat you. You know my wife is a paralegal for a big law firm that represent the insurance companies and all that. And that's their stated practice. You get one poor sole up there, sole practitioner and you just inundate him with paperwork and so he wants to settle. But that's not justice.

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AA: Right.

EV: And I don't know how we correct that. I, because they can come back and say, "Hey we have a right to do this," so it's a tricky little thing. And the criminal thing you know the last time I did anything memorial, you know because I got involved with the immigration stuff, but because frankly I got tired of going down there every day and you argue with the D.A. and worst of all you argue with your client.

AA: Yeah.

EV: And you know this is, that just gets to be... So those are things that come up and I think they probably began with... but anyway I just wanted to know what your feelings were about all that stuff. But I found, but during your profession as an attorney and a judge the Mexican-American bar has just exploded hasn't it?

AA: Yeah.

EV: I mean your brother was the first president of MAABA. I was the second one. But I remember that in one of our meetings and I don't remember who it was, I think it was during Hector's administration, during that first year that we organized, that none other than young Felix Salazar stood up and said, "We should not get involved in the politics of endorsing judges because there are so few of us and we are so weak that it's just going to push us further down the line and they will ignore us." And unfortunately we took that advice. And I say unfortunate because I think we probably should have taken a bigger stand, a more aggressive stand than we did. And I say that because we were getting such, we

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were never getting, I never got an appointment from the courts unless they had a defendant who did not speak English. And I resented... you know and we had meetings with the administration judge about that kind of stuff and then when the federals came along and they put up the public defender system and only, they only place they had Mexicano lawyers was in the valley. They didn't have any here. So that's the kind of stuff that I found but it's just changed tremendously now.

AA: Which way?

EV: Well I just think there are more guys out there who are, you know participating in large law firms, you know being empowered by the large law firms. I mean I, my career pretty much followed yours, you know you work for whoever has room for you. I didn't even have that I just had guys who rented me space. And there were... and no law firms were taking Mexicanos, hiring them and they certainly didn't hire guys from South Texas. Because back then it was the Ivy Leagues and University of Texas, maybe Baylor. And Houston was beneath us. I don't know any guys from U of H that got to the big law firms. But whatever Gabe or John Herrera was doing when you were a young sprout lawyer, Armando Martinez was doing for the young lawyers on Sampson and Canal. Remember he took in [Robert] Niño and he had all those young lawyers in his... they would work for him for a little while and then go out on their own and work... So he did a lot of training but most of the stuff that we did as you probably know is "the seat of the pants" you know you just didn't have that kind of training. Do you have anything... do you remember anything from the, that we had, I remember I met you at the UOIC meetings do you remember those?

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AA: UOI?

EV: UOIC meetings that we used to have down on Main Street and something.

AA: Yeah.

EV: With Travino, Dan Travino, Ben Canales...those guys.

AA: Yeah, yeah.

EV: That was during, El Movimiento.

AA: Yeah I remember that.

EV: Did you, were you involved in any of those type of lawsuits going on back then from, I mean I think Abe Ramirez used to help MALDAF.

AA: No I wasn't involved in those groups. I was active in whatever came up.

EV: Yeah, okay. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you want to include in this? Keep in mind this is going to be like your time capsule. So anything you want to put into this for future Historians can come back and look at them like this or some other things that you might have that you might want to put in there so they can see what kind of great *vato* [guy] judge you were.

AA: I wasn't any kind of good *vato* I just trying to do what I felt was right and I certainly wanted to get ahead in my profession as a lawyer. And I certainly wanted to maintain a clean reputation not only for myself but for Hispanic lawyers and that's it. And remind some of our young lawyers that always, always speak the truth to your fellow lawyers when you are making a deal and definitely to the courts because if they find you lying one time you are non grata from now on.

EV: Okay is there anything else senior?

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AA: That's it.

EV: Thank you A.D. I really appreciate it.

AA: I think you've covered it very well Ernesto.

EV: As I said if you ever think of anything you want to include let me know because we can include it in the recording. I can probably record over the telephone if I know ahead of time. But if you find any papers that you have that you want to put in to your, into this archive you are certainly welcome.

AA: Well I don't want this shown but I'll show you what I have from Laredo. We don't need this. Remember I wrote to one time about that cook and waiter who was a POW that started my communication with this man, he wrote to me, called me and wrote to me and from now on we became acquaintances and he wrote this about me.

End of this interview