

Interviewee: Partida, Frank

Interview Date: July 7, 2009

**University of Houston
Oral History Project
“Mexican American History, Politics”**

Interviewee: Frank Partida

Date: 7/7/09

Location: 2006 Forest Hill, Houston, Texas

Interviewer: Natalie Garza

Transcriber: Carol Valdes

NG: So, we're just going to begin with some biographical information. Can you tell me what your full name is?

FP: My name is Frank Partida, Francisco Partida, what my birth certificate says.

NG: Okay, and when were you born?

FP: I was born June 20, 1928.

NG: Where were you born?

FP: Here on 7904 Avenue B, I mean Sherman. It has Avenue B on my birth certificate but it was Sherman.

NG: So you were born in a house?

FP: In a ..no, in a hospital but that was where my Mother and Dad lived.

NG: So that hospital is in this neighborhood?

FP: Park Place, what is it, it's that hospital right there on 75th and Parkview, Parkview Hospital.

NG: And have you lived in Magnolia your whole life?

FP: All my life.

NG: All your life. There's a 100 year anniversary coming up, correct?

FP: Yes in Magnolia Park.

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NG: What role are you playing in that anniversary?

FP: My role right now is a director. We're all directors, we're supposed to be 14 directors, and we have a treasurer among the directors, a secretary and an assistant treasurer. The last four meetings I have run the meetings. Every month at the last Saturday of every month we have a general meeting of people in the community that want to participate. Once a month, also the second Wednesday of the month we meet at De Zavala Park, just the directors to [hash] out what's going on during the general meeting, of what the people are saying and make decisions.

NG: When is the anniversary going to take place?

FP: Well, when we first got together we agreed to have three, first it was four historical markers that we wanted to put up this year, but one of them was dropped for the American Legion later on, but the first ones we're gonna have that's already been worked on and we'll have it by October the 6th which is National, what is it when the neighbors meet, National Neighborhood? Okay, it'll be that day. We'll have a little celebration there at the park, De Zavala Park, and that's where we're going to uncover the historical marker there. We hope to have the mayor there, make a proclamation there, and that will be our first historical marker. We had also applied for one for the Miguel Hidalgo Park. This is what was established back in the 1926 - 27, but the state historical commission denied us that application for the simple reason that they only do one subject at a time. In other words, a park, a city hall, or a home, or whatever. So, depending, probably next year we'll submit it again and try to place a historical marker at the Miguel Hidalgo Park. We also applied for one for our old city hall which is located at

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7300 block of Avenue F. It's still there, owned by the city, and that was the first city hall that we had there.

NG: What is it, that building now?

FP: It's a, it belongs to the city but its run by an agency that help the community.

NG: What kind of activities are you planning for the anniversary?

FP: For our anniversary we're planning to have a parade, which would be October the 17th, which would begin at Hidalgo Park and come down 7700 block run into, what would it be? Oh, go to Canal St. and then from Canal come to 75th from 75th to Avenue C, and then the American Legion, and right there behind the American Legion there's a huge warehouse which we're trying to get to have a concert there, and have local musicians that come from Magnolia participate there. But I mean local musician, groups like "Sister & Sister", Rick Treviño also, and the "Aviso" is the name of the band that we're trying. They're mostly musicians that were born and raised here in Magnolia.

NG: Did any of those musicians, were they playing when you were growing up or when you?

FP: When I was growing up there were little kids, the ones that are there now. Like Sister & Sister, they're good friends of mine. My daughter here, and their parents were good friends of ours, and of course Rick Treviño, he grew up across the street from where I used to live, and Aviso, Robert Durantes, he's the leader of it and he was raised here in Magnolia at 77th and Avenue L.

NG: Who is sponsoring the anniversary?

FP: Well, we have fundraisers. We applied for a charter, non-profit organization, 501-

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C, and we've already made, we got a lot of donations. Last March we made a bar-b-cue and it was during Lent. We didn't want to have it during Lent, but the other day that we wanted to have it, we couldn't have it. So anyway we went on ahead and we sold about eight thousand dollars worth of bar-b-cue. We supposed to raise money and of course we got a lot of donations from different agencies and companies, and now we have another one since the parade. The city only allows us fifteen intersections free of charge, and after fifteen we have to pay for it in effect if we're going to participate. Then we have to buy a million dollars worth of insurance. So that runs into money so we're going to make another fundraiser August the 14th at the American Legion Hall.

NG: How do you advertise for the fundraisers?

FP: We put out flyers, and then we can get somebody to do it over TV or you know those spots where they give you free of charge.

NG: Has it been difficult to get, you'd said corporations or organizations to sponsor?

FP: Well, our problem was that it took a long time to get our charter, and you see a lot of companies, and now you now they request it. A lot of companies...and now you know the recession...a lot of companies do their business one year before. You have to apply one year before, like Budweiser. We were planning to get Budweiser to sponsor a big name band like Little Joe and La Familia or Ruben Ramos, so they can sponsor them and of course they might be helping us anyway with their horses, Clydesdale horses in the parade, to be used in the parade. Big companies which you know like I said before, that you have to apply and put in your letter for a donation a year before, and since it took a long time to get our

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charter, that was the problem. But there's still some companies that are, you know we're still trying to get as much as we can.

NG: I want to talk a little bit about you growing up. Where did you go to high school?

FP: High school? I graduated from Sam Houston High School. It was the old Central High located downtown on Capital Avenue between San Jacinto and Austin.

NG: Was there, there wasn't zoning then? You didn't have to go to a certain high school?

FP: Well actually that high school was one of the oldest high schools in Houston, and it used to be called "Central High" before, and that's where Lyndon Johnson once taught there and there wasn't zoning. Like where I live I was supposed to go to Milby, but then we applied, sometime you put another address like they usually do, but if I went to Sam Houston, I caught the bus across the street from my house, right at the corner and it would leave me one block away from the school and if I went to Milby I'd have to walk from 74th and Navigation all the way to 74th and Harrisburg, and then catch the Harrisburg and go to Milby. Then coming back it'd be the same way, drop me off on 74th and Navigation, I mean 74th and Harrisburg and walk all the way to Navigation. So, are you, do you know how far the Navigation Street is from Harrisburg?

NG: Not exactly. About how far is it?

FP: Well, they're not those long bocks. You have from Harrisburg you have Avenue B, Avenue C, Sherman, E, F, Canal, H, I, J, K, L, Navigation, twelve blocks. So it was easier for us to go, and then my aunts had gone and my uncle had gone to that school so where we wanted to go.

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NG: What was that school like? What was the ethnic breakdown of the school?

FP: Ethic breakdown? Well, I liked it because you know right before that time that I went to high school there use to be gangs here in the barrios, and there we went to school with students from Second Ward, Mexicanos, from Fifth Ward, from Sixth Ward, from First Ward, from the West End, from all over. We went to school there. Where here at Milby you would only go with the students from the East End, or to Austin, but it was like that then and of course the Hispanic percentage was not that much. It was more Anglo at that time. Of course it was at the time that no blacks were allowed in white schools.

NG: That was at all the high schools?

FP: At all the high schools that I went to. They had their own schools. They didn't even participate in sports with us, and at that time there were still, they always had to sit in the back of the bus or drink out of another fountain, you know, the restrooms.

NG: And what was it like for Mexicanos?

FP: Well, it was the same. I don't think were discriminated against as much, but it was like the Mexicanos, they would get back in the back, or in one corner all together, you know, but that is the way we were accustomed.

NG: Can you tell me what it was like growing up in Magnolia?

FP: Well, I grew up at the time like I said when there was gangs. You couldn't go to another ward or they would beat you up or fight you, gang up on you, but I was lucky enough to have my father was in the kerosene business. He had, at one time he had three filling stations. One close to Heights and White Oak Drive, and one

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here in Magnolia, 74th and Navigation where that's place where LULAC started here in Houston, and then he had one on Lyons Avenue in Fifth Ward, and he use to deliver kerosene in all of those barrios, and in Pasadena, went as far as Webster, went to Sugarland to deliver kerosene to the farmers, you know the one's that lived further away. You know kerosene was used for the stoves, for heaters you know, and I remember I use to ride with my Dad and that's the reason that they saw me in different, they didn't even do nothing or say nothing to me 'cause you know they were accustomed to seeing me everywhere. The only thing that I did notice was that some of them would go write their names, you know like graffiti on the truck, like in Second Ward, and then we'd go to Fifth Ward and some of the guys would see the names of guys from Second Ward and they'd scratch them out, or you know write messages. That's something that I saw. Our truck was used for sending messages. But besides that when, at that time my Dad formed a baseball team in order to keep us off the street, you know because if we came down here to Mason Park, they wouldn't let us swim because we were Mexicanos. So, I learned how to swim in Buffalo Bayou, which was very dangerous, there's a lot of [tadpoles] in there. So, we got to playing ball, at that time there were no little leagues. So, here we are at fourteen and fifteen year olds playing old men, you know, no age limits. So this is how we were kept off the streets, or you know going around with gangs and all that. And then not only did he organize clubs for baseball, but for all sports.

NG: What other sports?

FP: Football, basketball. Yeah, and baseball.

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NG: And what did you play?

FP: I played football, basketball and baseball.

NG: But where did you play? Where were the games at?

FP: Oh, my Dad when he started, he use to like to take us to out to those country towns like Sugarland, Richmond, Rosenberg, Pasadena. We'd go all the way to San Antonio and all the way to Galveston, New Braunfels, and Refugio, Bay City, all around. Every Sunday. We only played on Sundays.

NG: Did you practice?

FP: Yes, we use to practice about every day. That was what made us good. And you see my Dad wanted to keep us from joining gangs or you know where you didn't have any loose time you know. You either were at home, work, or you went to practice.

NG: Where did you practice at?

FP: We use to practice at, right there where Robert Durante use to live across the street. We broke a lot of windows. We started when we didn't have no back stop, we put our own back stop there and all that.

NG: Was it in the street or a yard?

FP: No, no, no it was, yeah and the outfield was railroad tracks. It's where East Navigation is right now.

NG: You mentioned Robert Durante?

FP: Robert Durante, he's the, he's the one that I said is the leader of the Aviso band.

NG: Okay. You mentioned a couple of times about gangs, were they Mexicano gangs?

FP: They were Mexicano gangs.

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NG: And what was Magnolia like? Was it a mixed community?

FP: Magnolia was very few blacks, but blacks lived from the railroad tracks right there by Avenue N down to 75th, down to [Memphis] Street which is now Peavy Drive, that's where they lived and of course they use to come, that's they where they had the union hall, and they were hired, them out of the union hall. So that's the reason they made that little community there. Of course, but I can remember is that we all the Hispanics use to live from Canal that way north, and from Canal south it was Italians and Anglos, Germans.

NG: Did you continue your education after high school?

FP: Well, at one time during the war a friend of mine was going to be drafted so he joined the Navy and I looked at him like a brother, 'cause I was raised with him. Of course he was a couple of years older than me, but when he joined the Navy I went and joined and forged my mother's name and father's name and went off with him. Of course I only served three days because my mother reported me missing, you know 'cause I didn't tell her anything. So three days later I'm back home. No hair, just everybody making fun of me. Yeah, but that was my history of the military. Of course, right after that they told me, "You like military? We're gonna send you to military school." So they sent me one year to Allen Academy in Bryan, and after that I said, "No, no I want to come here to high school." You know over there was nothing but boys. I wanted to come where the girls were.

NG: How old were you when you joined the Navy?

FP: Fifteen.

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NG: Fifteen. What kind of work did you do when you started to work, where did you work?

FP: Okay, my first job right before I got married, you see I got married right after, a year after I graduated and I had quit school you know for two years. So I was supposed to graduate in '47. I had quit school. Since I was the only boy in the family, I had three sisters, my mother kept after me that she wanted my diploma. She said, "I don't want theirs mijo, but yours is the one I want." So I promised her I'd go back to school and they let me go back for my final year and I graduated.

NG: What year did you graduate?

FP: '49. In fact in June we just had our 60th reunion. So then I got married a year later and my first job, of course I had already worked during the summer in the docks here. I wanted to do something else than just being in the service or the gas business. So I worked in the docks some summers and then I worked for Anderson Tatum a couple of summers.

NG: Did a lot of people work in the docks, a lot of people from Magnolia?

FP: Oh, well you know that's where when the Hispanics started coming and living here in Magnolia Park, that's where they use to work. They either worked at [Armor] Fertilizer, or the compres, or the docks. That's where they worked and just about everybody who came here came up to work right here. That's the reason why Magnolia grew so quickly Hispanics, on account of the jobs, being close to the jobs.

NG: What kind of work did you do at the docks?

FP: At the docks I was just like, loading and unloading material.

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NG: And after that you said you worked where?

FP: At Anderson Tatum. Well you see the cotton, they bring it in bales. When they bring it in they take a sample off the bale. That sample's sent up to the [classing room] where class of cotton, see what grade it is and all that, so I worked a couple of years in the summer months for Anderson Tatum and it was just helping the grader that's writing down the number of the grade of the cotton. He told you 07, 05. Whatever he told you, you'd write it down on the ticket.

NG: And you told me earlier that you were retired. From what job did you retire?

FP: Well my next work was doing carpenter work. I did work, when I started work I worked with Mr. Sampson, the guy we use to play basketball for. So he gave me my first job. After that I went to work for a lumber mill where they showed me how to make molding. Then I got my first break with Grand Prize Beer which was Gulf Brewing Company which was owned by Howard Hughes. I don't know if you've heard of him. Okay. I started there as a mail and messenger boy and worked myself up to a salesman. After a year they made me a salesman. I started as a junior salesman and then became a salesman and then a new administration came in and I was laid off. Then I applied to Pearl Brewing Company. I was one of thirteen that applied Hispanic. They needed Hispanics here in Houston. They didn't have any, as a salesman. So I was chosen to work for Pearl. I worked for Pearl and then I worked for Lone Star. I quit Pearl because you know being on the road away from home when the kids are growing up, you know and then I just worked for a year for Lone Star and I figured I was abusing my body too much, drinking every day, so. Then I came back and worked at the docks a little while

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and then I got into the Teamsters Union, and worked that and then I started doing a little carpenter work and cabinet work, so and that's what I retired from.

NG: Where did you learn how to do the carpentry?

FP: An old man taught me. An old man from Mexico they use to call "el Coronel". He taught me a lot and you know and the guys my age, especially the ball player use to tell me, "How come you stick around with that old man?" I said, "Cause I learn a lot from that old man." And he taught me how to do carpenter work you know. Electrical work and from there I went to carpentry.

NG: Did you have like your own business?

FP: I use to but the filling station my Dad in later years turned it into a drive in called ["Two Roses"] Drive In. That's where the LULAC started that I told, and after that he made it a drive in, okay. Then he got sick. Then a friend of mine, he rented it out. I told my Dad to rent it out to him. So after that whenever somebody left or ran the business down I'd go and start it up again and in a year or two years, somebody say, "I'll buy this business from you." I'd say okay and I did that three times.

NG: Did the name always stay the same?

FP: No, no. Then I rent other ones. Three years I rented a manager of boy's night club and then I got my own club called, it was named the "La Copa." Then I changed the name to sports.

NG: And all of those were in Magnolia?

FP: Uh-huh.

NG: You were talking about being a salesman. At that time were not very many, they

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didn't have very many Mexicano sales men?

FP: No. There weren't that many.

NG: Was it difficult to do sales?

FP: Well, no it wasn't. I don't think it was difficult, but to be given the opportunity to go out and do a salesman's job, but of course at that time the promotion side of it was going into a business, a tavern, or a restaurant, wherever they serve your product and try to promote it. Buy the people a bottle of beer, introducing yourself, talking with them, belonging to clubs, whenever they had a dance, if they had a club box where they serve beer, well you go promote.

NG: You mentioned LULAC, that it got started where your father's filling station was at.

FP: Yes, by my grandfather.

NG: Oh, it got started by your grandfather?

FP: Uh-huh. My grandfather was one of the charter members. Not only at that one but he also started the Sociedad Mutualista Benito Juarez. That was in 19, what was it, 26 I believe.

NG: Was your grandfather from Houston?

FP: Yes, in fact he has a building named for him right here where use to be offices on Polk. Name is Elias Ramirez, um-hm that building, and my cousin, Senator Mario Gallegos is also a grandson of his.

NG: So how did the LULAC get started?

FP: Well, I remember back that I use to go clean up the place because they were going to have a meeting in there. My Dad had the filling station here and at first he had

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a book store then he put them together. Then when he got through with the book store he had a, it was a cleaners for a while, but before that when he put them together this was where the LULAC use to come in and meet.

NG: Were you ever involved in LULAC?

FP: Oh yes. I joined LULAC back in '52, '51. Right after I got married I joined LULAC and I stayed with them until about, Council 60. The council that started here they took it downtown to the criminal courts building and they had the meeting there for a while. Then Felix Tijerina donated the home which is where they hold the meetings now on Bagby, and then I remember I quit when he donated that house, I remember we use to go up there, we remodeled it. We worked on Saturdays and Sundays, and then you know I quit going when I got involved with the poverty program, and that didn't give me much time for anything. So, in what was it, '69, 1969 I formed the Gus C. Garcia Council here in Magnolia. You know who Gus C. Garcia is from San Antonio?

NG: No.

FP: You never heard of Gus C. Garcia? Look it up. He's the one that went to the Supreme Court and was, to fight a discrimination case, where I don't know what town was it that, they had tried this Hispanic because he had killed somebody 'cause he called him a bad name, and he just went in there and killed him, and when they had the jury there were no Mexicanos, and they were never included. They never included Mexicanos on the juries. So, LULAC headed by Gus C. Garcia went to the Supreme Court to fight, not to fight for the man, but to fight how come they didn't ask Hispanics to be on the juries, or they didn't select any

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jurors, Hispanic jurors, and it was at that time, I don't know now, one of these, I think it was a black man, that told him that he had never seen what Gus C. Garcia had done. That when it started they told him he had so many minutes to present his case, and they told him, "When you see that red light go on, you stop right there. That's the end of it." He said, "Okay." So he started presenting his case and when the fifteen minutes were up that light went on and he stopped. So the members of the court got together and the Justice, who was it, Warren, I think it was Warren, told him, "Mr. Garcia, you have presented such a case that we're really interested in. Would you please continue to [present]." And they have never allowed anybody else to do that.

NG: So you started a Gus C. Garcia?

FP: Uh huh. You know when he died, he became a alcoholic. Um-hm, there in San Antonio. Look it up and he was a good lawyer, but he had a habit. So I started that in '60..., and you see I have a lot of friends that I had gotten jobs for in the poverty program, that you see the blacks wanted to take over completely. Most of the whites wouldn't participate because it's all blacks, and they wanted to take over completely so I started going in there and getting Mexicanos. Where I use to go and sit outside the personnel department and see how many Mexicanos went and applied and then when they'd leave I'd ask them their name and what they had applied for, or what their application was, and then when they had the meeting, you know what I would ask them, "How come you haven't hired any Hispanics?" "Well they don't apply." I say, "What do you mean? On certain days so and so came and applied. What happened to their application? I'd like to see

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it.” They couldn’t find the application. It was thrown in the [pc]. The personnel director was a black, and his staff was blacks. So you know what they were doing to the application form. They were just throwing them away, until I stopped that and then they started hiring more Mexicanos. Before I left, I formed that, I got a lot of them that worked for me like Ernest and they joined the council. Ernest wasn’t here at that time.

NG: Where was that where you were taking down notes of who applied? Where was that at?

FP: The main office was at 6300 Bowling Green.

NG: Was it a -?

FP: It was the agency for the Harris County Community Action Association. The one that would work with the community.

NG: And you worked with them?

FP: Well, I was a member of the board. I couldn’t work for them. If you worked for them you couldn’t be a member of the board. I represented the community. You know all the ones that preceded me when I became a Chairman of the Board, they had always been only lawyers, that were the Chairman of the Board, and that’s what I ran on. I represented a poor area and there had never been no Mexicano Chairman of the Board. There had never been nobody else but lawyers. I wasn’t a lawyer and I wanted to lead it so I was elected. I beat out a lawyer which was president at the time of the NAACP and also he was the chairman of the Harris County Council of Organizations, made up of all the negro organizations within Harris County.

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NG: Who elected you to the board?

FP: At that time they were twenty-five members and out of twenty-five there were four Mexicanos, and there were eight blacks and the rest were white, and one of my campaign managers was a black, an activist, and he came on my side.

NG: So the board elected you?

FP: Yeah.

NG: Can you tell me what the Harris County Community Action Association, what did they do?

FP: Well, you know the War on Poverty programs? They had community organizers. We're the ones that started the Head Start. We had a lot of good programs. We had the program for troubled youth. We'd work with youth that dropout and were always getting into trouble. We'd try to keep them out of trouble, and of course you know about the Head Start program? You know the program I really enjoyed watching, the Grandparents Program. These were grandparents that didn't have any more grandchildren. They were by themselves and we would hire them for four hours a day. Free bus they got. Instead of giving them tokens for payment we'd get them passes so they could travel to work and home. All they did was give loving care to the children in Harris County, you know the ones that are taken away from the mothers, or the mothers leave them, nobody cares about them. Harris County picks them up and they were to go there and give loving care, and we use to tell them don't bring candy to the children. I use to get a kick out of watching them hide candy, and watch everybody give the child a piece of candy, and then seeing the – when it was time to go, the children would be crying,

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'cause the mother or the father were gone. And we not only hired women but also men and we paid them minimum wage for work.

NG: So with that organization there was a lot of community outreach?

FP: Yeah. Neighborhood developers that had a center, like they had a center here on 75th and Navigation, and we had a neighborhood developers go out. I'd talk to the people in the neighborhood and see what their needs were. You know another thing we found out that there were a lot of people that weren't collecting their Social Security.

NG: Why weren't they collecting?

FP: They weren't collecting. They didn't know. We'd have those neighborhood development chairs to take them, to get them get started, and another thing we found out that, we had a lot of fun with this one, over the Mexicano -

End of Tape 1, Side 1.

FP: - that's it and you write their name. Except that they won't put a cross. What do you mean they won't put a cross, I mean an "X"? Don't put an X. I said, "Why is it they put a cross?" He said, "Well you tell them to put an X, they won't put an X, they put a cross 'cause they don't know the alphabet in the first place." And you know there were a lot of them that, and this is where you taught people in a community how to organize, how to ask the city for services, that were denied to all of them and all that, that if you organize they will pay attention to you.

NG: Do you remember an example of when that happened?

FP: What?

NG: When you went out to teach a community how to organize?

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FP: Well I didn't go out there. They were trained by the agency. They were trained and then they would come out to a center and a lot of the time we'd try to get somebody in the community to work with his own community, that knew the people.

NG: Where was the money coming from?

FP: From the federal government. That was the War on Poverty program that Kennedy started. Actually he started to do it then Lyndon Johnson was the one that started it like the civil rights, that was the same time.

NG: Did the board have to ask for money every year?

FP: Every year. The budget and all that, they go through everything.

NG: Who decided where the money went?

FP: The executive committee, which was the twenty-five members. Of course, we had representation from different areas.

NG: Where did the money go to?

FP: They went, you know the first thing about this is the thing that I didn't like that a lot of the money was spent on rent, telephone, you know, things that you need. Gas, so whenever you make all those expenses and salaries, by the time what's left. You see we were not supposed to be giving people money, just teach them how to help themselves.

NG: Did people on the board get paid a salary?

FP: No. We only got paid going to and from the meetings, that's gas mileage.

NG: When was that started in Houston?

FP: That started in Houston, I don't remember exactly. I know that it was in the 60's.

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NG: Was that in a lot of different neighborhoods?

FP: Uh-huh, yeah. We would go and get the neighborhood developers and all that to get with us, a run down of what these communities were, where it was needed.

NG: And at that time were there specific neighborhoods where it was needed more?

FP: What was that?

NG: Were there specific neighborhoods where it was needed more?

FP: Oh yes, um-hm.

NG: Which neighborhoods?

FP: Well, you take, there were a lot of poor neighborhoods where the mother had to go to work. Where the mother had to go to work, a single mother, and they just needed to have help 'em so that they could go up and work and then somebody take care of the child.

NG: Can you give me an example of some of the neighborhoods that were, where that?

FP: Oh yeah, Magnolia was one. Yeah, and Second Ward, and of course Acres Homes, and here in Third Ward, Fifth Ward, Denver Harbor. But of course this program was a county wide program. It wasn't only city. It went as far as Baytown.

NG: The Gus C. Garcia Society you said you started?

FP: Huh?

NG: You said you started the Gus C. Garcia Society?

FP: The LULAC Council. LULAC Council 503.

NG: That was Gus C. Garcia?

FP: Uh-huh. Of course about two years later it was abandoned. You know once I got

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out of the program I wasn't too much with them and I had to go back to work 'cause I'm spending all my time there twenty-four hours and my kids have to eat, so once I started dedicating myself to my family the membership started dwindling. See most of them were working with the program. A lot of the time they had meetings and all that so it gets bad.

NG: Can you tell me some of the activities that LULAC participated in?

FP: LULAC, Project SER.

NG: What is that?

FP: Project SER is a component of the Labor Department where Hispanics, mostly Hispanics went to apply to get jobs, to be placed in jobs and all that. And then of course Felix Tijerina started the School of Four-Hundred. Did you ever hear about that program?

NG: No.

FP: Well, Felix Tijerina and got an idea and got a teacher, a Hispanic teacher, from the barrios somewhere, and came out with a formula to teach four-hundred words to children before they started kindergarten, 'cause they were at a disadvantage, like me when I went to school the first thing you wanted to learn how to ask the teacher if you could be excused. You know the word we use to say? "Teacher, can I go to the 'biscuse'?" That's the way we said it. Felix Tijerina got the idea that teaching them four-hundred words before they attended school would put them on par with the other students. They would be on a level playing field, and that was sort of the idea of Head Start.

NG: Do you want to take a break to stretch your legs?

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FP: Huh?

NG: Do you want to take a break to stretch your legs a little?

FP: Oh no, no. I'm beginning to get a, I been on my feet too much. Cramp.

NG: Just let me know if you want to take a break.

FP: No, no, no, its okay.

NG: So what other interests was LULAC involved in? During your meetings what were you trying to accomplish?

FP: Oh, well you know LULAC is a service organization, serving the community. Especially right now they're much in civil rights. They don't get involved too much in politics and things that they endorse, but they do always, always work real hard on voter registration and voter education, to get the people to vote, how to elect officials and what to expect of them. It's always been like that. In fact they're having the, next week they're having the on the 13th the National Convention in Puerto Rico. I was thinking of going but the price is too high. Close to \$2,000, God!

NG: So when you were involved, what kind of things did you do to get voter registration or to make people aware of voting rights?

FP: Well, you know my grandfather got me involved in politics when I was ten years old, pushing cards. I remember here about ten years ago I still had a card that I always kept, and I'll never forget the name, this councilman his name was 'Phil Hamburger' and when he brought me cards for me to pass out it was in the form of a hamburger, so you know I thought it was real funny, and people did too. I got that card and I lost it. But, that's my grandfather started me when I was ten years

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old and I haven't stopped yet. They brought that out last October the 6th, Mayor Bill White gave me a proclamation for working all these years, with different clubs.

NG: Do you know how your grandfather got interested in politics or why he was involved in politics?

FP: Well, let me tell you my grandfather was a janitor. He was born in [Coxquital], Texas. Do you know where that is? Over there by, in Duval County, by San Diego, okay and he was always, you know an [ordinary man] he didn't drink, he didn't smoke, but he had a large family. I don't think he could afford to drink. He worked for Rice. At that time it was called "Rice Institute" which is now Rice University. He worked there thirty-four years as a janitor, and my grandfather use to, we had the street cars here in Magnolia. He use to catch the first one going downtown. He'd get downtown to where Market Square is. They had the bus station there[] bus station. He'd buy the paper, he'd read the paper and then he'd go to Rice. He didn't go in until about 8 o'clock, but he worked there thirty-four hours, or thirty-four years there. And he was always interested in getting things done, getting organized, you know like this Sociedad Mutualista and then LULAC, [Women] of the World, he was involved in all that.

NG: The Sociedad Mutualista that he started, do you know, what they, what kind of activities they were involved in?

FP: In helping the community, you know how the Sociedad Mutualista, what it was for? How it got started?

NG: Um hum, well I know they use to help with funerals, things like that.

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FP: Funerals, uh-huh, that's what it was. 'Cause it was the Mexicano ones that died and didn't have any money to be buried, and they started that, and it was to help them out with funerals.

NG: And is that what the main purpose was?

FP: The was the purpose of course and later on they started doing something else.

NG: Did it become more of a social organization?

FP: Yeah, more of a social organization.

NG: Can you tell me what other types of community organizations you were involved in?

FP: Yes, I was involved, of course political was PASSO. I was involved with PASSO ever since the Kennedy and Johnson Campaign.

NG: What does "PASSO" stand for?

FP: Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations.

NG: And how were they started?

FP: Hmm?

NG: How was that started in Houston?

FP: Well, actually in Houston it was actually started by the Johnson - It was the Viva Kennedy Viva Johnson campaign when Kenny and Johnson ran. That's how PASSO got started.

NG: And how were you involved in PASSO?

FP: In PASSO, just working for voter education, working for the candidates, and helping the candidates, and asking the candidates to do something about community needs and all that.

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NG: Did you, did PASSO ask specific things of Kennedy?

FP: Of candidates, oh yes.

NG: Of Kennedy?

FP: Oh, Kennedy? Well, let me say this, that we wanted to see the first Catholic and we wanted somebody that was well liked, and of course Johnson was from Texas, and they liked Kennedy and he was a candidate. Well you know the majority of Catholics of Mexicanos...

NG: Do you remember what that campaign was like in Houston?

FP: In Houston? Oh yes, real hard. But I remember what I liked best was when he came here to talk to the Baptists, that church on Main Street 'cause the Baptists weren't too eager to go help him, and he was asked a question, since he was a Catholic was he in any way going to be doing what the Pope ordered him to do on account of being a Catholic, a devout Catholic, and he answered that his country came first. So, he had them in his palm of his hand. Yeah.

NG: How was the campaign hard?

FP: Well, it wasn't that hard it was just that it was very close.

NG: Are there any other campaigns, working with PASSO that you think were important or memorable?

FP: Uh, no the only thing that I saw as very funny, but in a way there was a candidate. PASSO was Democrat. Most of the Mexicanos are always Democrat. But there was one year when this guy from Dallas, very conservative Democrat, he was running for senator, but he was very conservative. So the liberal Democrats didn't like him too much and PASSO was a liberal Democrat so John Tower was

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running against this guy and I forget his name. But anyway, PASSO was for John Tower, a Republican. Everybody was surprised. Even Kennedy had mentioned the fact that sometimes party loyalty asks too much.

NG: How did you hear about PASSO?

FP: Well, it came out of that Viva Kennedy - Viva Johnson campaign. That's what it came out of and grew out of that.

NG: So you said PASSO was more liberal Democrat?

FP: Oh yes.

NG: Were there a lot of conflicts at that time?

FP: Well yes. There were a lot of conflicts. In fact that was the reason that Kennedy was killed. You know, he came to Dallas to keep the Democrats together 'cause the conservative Democrats were fighting the liberal Democrats and Connally was a very conservative Democrat. And the liberals, and he was always the guest of liberal Democrats, and you know we kept saying that out of all those Democrats, you see here's what they would do, in the primaries the Republican would vote in the primary Democratic primary. Now you have the Republican primary. So what the Republicans would do, in the primary they would vote Democrat and they would vote for the weakest candidate of the liberals. Okay? Okay. Came the general election, where party was against party, and then they turn over and they vote for their candidate. They wouldn't vote for the Democrat. For the one they voted for in the primary, they vote against him in the general election, and they had been doing this for years. So you see, here Connally, after he got of governor, and he turned Republican. Did you know that?

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NG: Hm-hm.

FP: He turned Republican. He was a Republican when he died. And you know another thing, Connally went to school with Gus C. Garcia. Gus C. Garcia stood up in Connally's wedding. Connally was from Floresville, Texas, you know close to San Antonio. They were good buddies and Gus' grades were real high at the University of Texas. That's the reason I'd like for you to look up the name.

NG: What role did PASSO have besides in politics? How is it important to the Mexican-American community?

FP: Well, a lot of times PASSO took it upon themselves to say that they spoke for the Mexican-Americans, and this is what some Mexicanos didn't like. You know, "They don't speak for me." Once we started getting smart, find out about the candidates, about the campaign, you know what their platform would be. They started finding out. They started thinking for themselves. So, they would say, "We don't have to go and talk to them. We know what we're doing. PASSO doesn't have to tell us." And then PASSO, the leaders at one time, I remember this happening, there was a police officer that use to work here at the docks and he was called, "Tiny Roman" and he use to work security at the docks, [], and his famous saying was that he loved to kick Mexican butts, you know in other words. He was also very a discriminating guy and at the time that he was going to run for constable one time and the president of PASSO was Roy Elizondo from San Antonio. He'd come from San Antonio, had a business here so he was a president and I'll never forget that. He came into this drive-in called "Tony's" and he saw me there and said "Hey, [] You know I think we're going to back Tiny Roman."

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“For what? For constable?” I said. “Yes,” he said, “Well you know all the people here. Being from Magnolia, you know everybody here. Why don’t you pass out some of these cards?” I said, “Oh no. No sir.” He said, “What do you mean? Why? What’s wrong with Tiny?” I said, “You don’t know Tiny. You’re not from here.” I said, “Why don’t you go even to Tony the owner, and just ask him what he thinks about Tiny Roman.” “No, but why? You’re going to get me in trouble.” I said, “This is what he use to say, he use to discriminate against, this is what he use to say.” He said, “He did?” I said, “Yeah. That’s the problem with you. When you guys come from out of town you don’t know what’s affected us before, and now you’re backing him up? You’re going to lose a lot of members like that. You got to listen to the community. First find out about [].” So he didn’t go pass no cards and then it came out that some of the members said it wasn’t right to endorse him. ‘Cause they use to endorse all candidates.

NG: What happened to PASSO?

FP: Little by little, little by little, little by little [], and the leaders started getting sick and all that. Most of them are dead now.

NG: How did you get out of PASSO?

FP: Well, I just got out and joined the Democratic party []. I didn’t have to belong to it.

NG: What other political organizations or community organizations?

FP: Oh, I was a Precinct Judge in ’64 for a long, long time, and I even, they called me back here about eight years ago, and last year was the last year, ‘cause I wasn’t living in the precinct, you know. I was trying to get some youngsters in. We

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finally got one that he's there now.

NG: What did you do as Precinct Judge?

FP: It's what you call an election judge. You know, you're under precinct during the election.

NG: As Precinct Judge were there any elections that you thought were memorable or important?

FP: Memorable? No, I usually get so disgusted with my people.

NG: Why is that?

FP: We go register them up and then some Mexicano runs, for some reason or another they don't go vote. Even if they're registered, and then you take the blacks. As I've said, a lot of them criticize the blacks, but I said, "Well if you think you can do better." 'Cause I said they might hate each other but they go vote for the man just 'cause he's black, and you know you got to admire when they get out 93, 94, 95, 96 percent of the vote of the one's that are registered. That's pretty good.

NG: Why do you think Mexicanos don't go out to vote?

FP: Well, a lot of times, and now Mexicanas too, with the soap opera, and then Mexicanos you know, they get off the job they want go drink a beer. They don't have time. It used to be before that on election day, you could not open up a beer joint until the election was over. Say the election was over at 7:00, you could open up at 8:00. But it still didn't work. And I remember I use to sell poll tax. That was to vote. In order to vote you had to pay \$1.50 for your poll tax. I can remember when I use to go, that's when I was working for the brewery, 'cause all the month of January, we didn't work. Just went out to write poll tax, and I

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remember I use to walk in a beer joint and say, "Let me get you your poll tax."

"How much?" "\$1.50." "Hey man, that's a six-pack." So take it from there.

NG: Did everybody have to pay a poll tax?

FP: Everybody, but the reason that they did this is 'cause the Mexicanos and the blacks couldn't afford it, and that was another excuse for them not vote, \$1.50. So we did away with that, with the poll tax. Now registering, still low. Now you can do it by mail. You don't have to go election day. Or you can do early voting. They still don't vote.

NG: Have you noticed any trends in voting? Have things changed in voting over the years?

FP: No. Things the same.

NG: So, you don't feel there was ever a time when people really were interested in voting?

FP: No. No. 'Cause you're not behind them, you're not behind them. They're not gonna go by themselves. Then they say, "Well, I didn't know, I didn't know we were voting then." And then, especially the elderly, that's the reason I got very much involved in early voting mail ballot. I use to tell them, "Look, elections are in November. It might be raining, it might be cold, you might be sick. Like this, you get the ballot, and you can keep the ballot at home. You can keep it up for a week, and you can study it and study and study. It's not like going to that machine and you have to go get in line and stand up there in cold rainy. You might get sick." Like this the senior to sign, but still there are some that say, "No, no. I'd rather go out there and see my friends." I say, "Well, as long as you go, but please

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be sure and go.” And then since I use to get the list, I was the precinct judge, and get the list, sure enough, he didn’t vote and he didn’t come in. But I still won’t give up.

NG: What about this last presidential election. Do you think there was more involvement?

FP: Yes, most involved. Especially here in, for Hillary. We were for Hillary. Oh man, and when we got the election for the primary, I remember about two-hundred and some that attended the precinct convention, and only six were for Obama, and I mean old ladies, elderly people coming on account of they were. But well, it happens. And I’m putting in with Obama, he’s our president, and I think we should support him and help him, ‘cause he inherited a big mess, and I think it’s only fair to help him.

NG: Do you see a lot of young people becoming involved or not really?

FP: Not, not too many.

NG: Are you working to try to get involvement?

FP: Oh yes, yes. Young people, yes.

NG: What about, have there been many candidates from Magnolia in to political office?

FP: Um-hm, oh yes. We have one that use to run Democrat and now she runs Republican. The only things she can get is Precinct Judge as a Republican. But she’s run about four times already. Her father use to be the Precinct Judge there. He was what I was, and he didn’t go along with the rules so the Democratic party. His daughter ran against Joe Moreno, Jose Moreno. Do you remember Jose

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Moreno? The one that got killed going to Austin and a state representative here about three or four years, about four years ago? She ran against Jose Moreno in the Democrat party ballot. When the primary was over, Jose had beat her about three to one. So, the party loyalty, especially to the Precinct Judge is you take an oath when you are elected as a representative of the party. You take an oath that you will in the general election you will support the Democratic nominee, be who it may be. Her father was a precinct judge and he crossed the line. He went and supported the Republicans against his own party. So they asked him to step out and he did, and now she's running Republican, and she still can't get it.

NG: So, she doesn't get any support from people in Magnolia?

FP: No. Well she does a little. Her family and friends that went to school with her but that's it. But the other precincts. She's run for council, and she's run for state legislature.

NG: And who is that?

FP: Dorothy Olmos, and her sister Diane, she's with the Houston Community. She's different, like day and night. She's with Houston Community College as a board member.

NG: Do most candidates, if they're from Magnolia, do they get support from the area if they're Democrats?

FP: If they're Democrats, yes.

NG: So you said your cousin is - ?

FP: Mario Gallegos.

NG: Is he from Magnolia?

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FP: Yes, born and raised here.

NG: Did he start in local politics?

FP: Yes. He started as state representative.

NG: Oh, okay. Are there any other organizations or community newspapers that you think were important to the Mexican-American community?

FP: Newspapers, yeah. We use to have *El Sol* and then we use to have *El Puerto* here Magnolia, East End. They played a good role you know, letting the community know about what was going on.

NG: Were they in English or in Spanish?

FP: In Spanish, no, no, in English. Then Juan Coronado had one in Spanish. What was the name of that? Of course he didn't last too long. He tried but he couldn't. He couldn't get the sponsors to make the newspapers. But anyway, and he was the first one to start the Fiestas Patrias Parade here, and I remember I helped him out. When was it? Fifteen cars the first year downtown.

NG: Can you tell me what Fiestas Patrias is?

FP: Fiestas Patrias? Patriotic fiestas. Fiestas Patrias is a fiesta that comes from Mexico. When you celebrate the 16th of September or the 15th and 16th, that's what it is. Then you have the Cinco de Mayo.

NG: Does the Fiestas Patrias, where does it take place now?

FP: Fiestas Patrias? Well, my grandfather use to say the *grito* at the Parque Hidalgo for many, many years. You're celebrating like the *grito*, the cry of Viva Mexico. Okay, it was done on the 15th of September at 11 o'clock, and you always have in those fiestas, you're supposed to honor the hero of that time. That's what it's for.

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NG: Are there any other organizations that you were involved in that you want to talk about?

FP: Like uh? No. There's PASSO, oh, I also belonged to the Sociedad Mutualistas Obrera Mexicana. But I just went there just to help out with the elderly people that come there to get free food on certain days. Of course they would make up, I was just around for a couple of years just to help [] Garcia. She would make up fund raisers, you know. But it's just like an organization for a funeral you know.

NG: What about the United Organization Information?

FP: Center? I was also a president of that.

NG: A president of that. Can you tell me what that organization was about?

FP: Well, when the poverty program started, we needed to disseminate information through out the area, Harris County, so then what did, this lawyer, Dan Treviño and then, what's his name. I don't remember his name. They thought up about four men in that organization like PASSO, having representatives from each Hispanic organization, be it a union, be it a service organization, a social organization, or what have you. Any organization that was Hispanic, we would ask them to send a representative, so that we could disseminate all this things that were going on at the poverty program. So they would know in the area, and they would ask if they needed some kind of help in the area, and this is how it started.

NG: What kind of impact do you think it had?

FP: Oh it had a good impact. We had two representatives from each organization, and we met and we brought up things that were going on and things how to correct it, and we did a lot of that. We would screen the candidates. We wouldn't endorse

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them, but we would screen them like LULAC does.

NG: What did that involve when you screen?

FP: Screening? Well, we ask them, "What are you going to do when you get in there?" "Right now you're looking for our vote" we tell them, "but what are you going to do for us when you get in there?"

NG: And then you let people know?

FP: Um-hm, like LULAC I give a lot of credit for getting the first Mexicano fireman and policeman, 'cause for years and years no Mexicano on the police force, no Mexicano or even blacks in the fire department. You know it was that they did have a black officer before the civil rights downtown, but that black officer could not arrest a white man. He could hold him and then call a white officer to come and arrest him. So what kind of justice is that? So anyway, LULAC screened the candidates. Of course they won't endorse them but they talk about them with the members and outside of the club they go wherever they want to, and we had this candidate for mayor, Judge Roy Hofheinz, father of Fred Hofheinz who was himself a mayor. He went before a LULAC meeting and he was asked how come there were no Mexicanos on the police force or the fire department. He said, "Well, I don't know. Have you all applied?" The only thing is that they had requirements that you had to be so high. So your height has to be I believe five foot eight, at that time. Now it's better than that. And you have to weigh so much. That's the only requirement they had on. We said, "Well, if you were elected would you help us try to get some Hispanics in there?" He said, "Well you know, if they meet the requirements." Two guys stand up. "Do you think Roy Martinez

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here and Ignacio Salvador here are tall enough and weigh enough?" So he saw that both of them were over six foot. He says, "Yeah!" And one was very light complected, Roy. He said, "Well, if I get elected, I'll see to it." Did they apply?

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FP: So anyway, he was elected. So the following month they went to apply and they were accepted and they came out as officers. And Mario Gallegos Sr., the father of Senator Gallegos, he became the first Mexicano fireman, and Roy Martinez' brother also became a fireman.

NG: All of the organizations for Mexicanos at that time, they didn't all get along? They were all very different?

FP: No, no. Yeah, you had a lot of organizations that were different and then they discriminated against each other. Like you had the Familias Unidas, Club Mexico Bello, Club Internacional, and some of them thought, you know they looked down on the other Mexicanos. Mexicanos, like in Mexico.

NG: How did the United Organization Information Center deal with all of that?

FP: Well, we got them all together, and we thought that we were working for a common cause, like feeding all these people that needed help, got the information, where to go or who to contact, you know when they needed something.

NG: So there weren't conflicts within that the UOIC?

FP: No, no. The representatives, no.

NG: What does the upcoming anniversary, what does it mean to you?

FP: Well it means a lot. I think back and I think of the work of not only my

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grandfather and the other people that I knew, you know what they've done, the people that came out of here that were born and raised here in Magnolia that went to Rice Institute at time. It was very hard to get in there, and especially Mexicanos, but they did. One came out as an Engineer, what was his name, Chairez and the other was a plumber here, I forget the name. Anyway, they were two. We also, we're very proud of other Mexicanos like Lupe Lopez who attended the University of Houston. He at one time was captain of the basketball team. Of course, Tacho's not from here. There's other Mexicanos that are from Magnolia. We have some doctors come up and dentists that were born and raised here, that later on came out here to the Catholic Church and did free dental work for the children in the community. This is where our forefathers came to look for that dream. This is where they found it. Of course they had a lot of obstacles before them. They were discriminated against in jobs and at that time all you did was do labor work. I remember Juan Herrera, National President of LULAC at one time, always had that picture underneath the glass of his desk, when in 1944 all the Mexicanos were laborers like in the Shell refinery. In one year since, no Mexicanos drove trucks. All the work they did was labor work. So one year they gave this Mexicano a truck to drive the garbage to the dump there. They had their own dump. So when the whites got a hold of this information, they all walked out to the highway, 'cause they had given an opportunity to a Hispanic as a truck driver driving a dump truck. That was an act of discrimination that we went through. I couldn't come swim over here to Mason Park because I was a Mexican. And the bosses they expected us to sit back with the black. I think that they've

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made a lot of change now. You know some times I look at, I remember when I told one fellow, a police officer, a Mexicano, I said, "You know what? You should belong to LULAC," I said. "Why?" He said, "Well, LULAC hasn't done anything for me. I got the police job on my own." I said, "Yeah, but you don't know who opened that door. It was the LULAC who opened the door for you. Not directly for you but to put the first Mexicanos on the police force, and I think that you should give back, at least one year or something, or do something for them." But you know I didn't like his attitude, to say, "I made it on my own." Sometimes I wish he would have lived at the time of my father or grandfather lived, see if he would have made it on your own.

NG: Are you still involved with LULAC?

FP: Yes. I rejoined here about six months ago. But, of course I can't do much. I'm too old now.

NG: What kinds of things do you think the community needs to do now? What do you think is important for the community to be involved in and to be working for now?

FP: Here, Magnolia?

NG: Magnolia and the Mexican-American community.

FP: Well, what I see, you see most of Magnolia now and Second Ward, Fifth Ward, Northside has been taken over by Mexicanos from Mexico, and I don't have nothing against them. My father was, my grandfather was from Mexico, and my father, and of course they came by around 1910, paid a nickel to get across, so they were here legally. But I believe in immigration of people, for the right

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people. If you cross the line illegally, whether you're, I mean you're still breaking the law. It is the law. I know that they're looking for an opportunity but there is a lot of them that are not here for that. I go for the guy that even if he's an illegal that wants to do the right thing. Like I think Obama, the immigration that he's proposed is that you learn English. Nowadays, they were even saying the other day that if you don't graduate they probably won't let you have a driver's license. So that's good. I think that's good, and I think that the immigration, I think they should give the people that have been in line a long time a chance to become before the illegals, 'cause you know you have a long list of names of people that are doing it the right way that came by and want to become, and just doing it the right way, not getting into any trouble. Let them become a citizen.

NG: So do you think immigration is something that the Mexican-American community should be working on?

FP: Yes, Um-hm.

NG: What about Magnolia specifically?

FP: Well, that's one thing and the main thing is participating in electing people. Show you that you, you know you have a right to go and select people, elect them. So, study their platform and see if they're going to help you or not. See if you like what they're going to do. Of course, a lot of times they say they're going to do this and they don't do it, but that's a chance you got to take.

NG: Is there anything else that you want to share that you were hoping to talk about?

FP: No, just that I hope that we come out real good with this celebration.

NG: How do you see Magnolia different from other neighborhoods in Houston?

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FP: Well, I know that Magnolia has been sort of like a leader in the organizing, coming out even in sports [] and ahead of other barrios, like Second Ward and the roll of the leaders, leading the community, that gets involved in doing something. I think that we have the qualified people to do that. Some of them move away from here but they still come back. They're willing to do something.

NG: Okay.

FP: Okay? Okay.

