

The following interview was conducted. with Antonio Hernandez Alverio for the Star City Treasures AmeriCorps History Project. It took place on June 27, 2006 at "F" Street Community Center. The interviewer is Blaine Lyons.

Blaine: So, uh tell me uh about where you grew up?

Antonio: Mexico.... Nuevo.

Blaine: How to spell that? Do you know?

Antonio: I dunno how to spell that.

Blaine: Ok, Tell me about your family--what was your father's name?

Antonio: Carlos Arangus

Blaine: And your mother?

Antonio: Loreta Lavira

Blaine: And was your father born in Mexico?

Antonio: Yep

Blaine: Where was your mother born?

Antonio: Mexico.

Blaine: And is her family from Mexico?

Antonio: Yes

Blaine: Uhm, are there things that, that you have you have a family tradition? Such as, recreation, you took a vacation every year, food, that you like?

Antonio: Yeah.

Blaine: What was the tradition?

Antonio: What is tradition?

Blaine: Oh, like food, did you go on a vacation every year?

Antonio: My family go on vacation every year.

Blaine: Where did they go?

Antonio: Acapulco, Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta.

Blaine: Were they big resorts back then?

Antonio: What means resort?

Blaine: Big tourist centers then? Lots of tourists got here

Antonio: Mm hmm

Blaine: Uhm. (Pause) Tell me about your education. How far did you go to school?

Antonio: Ten

Blaine: To the tenth grade?

Antonio: Mm hmm

Blaine: And uhmm tell me about some of the subjects that you took when you were in school

Antonio: Mmm...(Pause) Like---a what?

Blaine: Oh math, Spanish

Antonio: Oh, Spanish

Blaine: History? Did you learn the history of Mexico?

Antonio: Mm

Blaine: What were some of the classes you took?

Antonio: Spanish, I don't remember very well. Unintelligible school.

Blaine: Do you remember any of your teachers?

Antonio: No (laughs)

Blaine: Do you remember any of your classmates?

Antonio: No.

Blaine: Uhm, (Pause) do you have any uh-family customs relating to marriage?

Antonio: No

Blaine: No? Uhm, tell about meeting your wife in Mexico.

Antonio: Like what?

Blaine: Meeting your wife in Mexico?

Antonio: Oh, I met her in school.

Blaine: Met her in school?

Antonio: Yeah

Blaine: So, you've known her for a long time?

Antonio: Yep

Blaine: Did her family know your family?

Antonio: Yeah

Blaine: Did uh. Where did you get married? Did you get in a church?

Antonio: Married in a church? Guess so.

Blaine: Was it a big ceremony?

Antonio: Yep.

Blaine: Do you remember anything special about that occasion?

Antonio: No

Blaine: No? (Both laugh)

Blaine: Uhm tell me about your grandparents

Antonio: (Pause) I dunno

Blaine: Do you remember your grandparent

Antonio: I never met my grandparents.

Blaine: On either side? (Pause) Uhm, you told me once that your Mom was Russian?

Antonio: She's part Russian

Blaine: Yeah? Did she ever take you to Russia?

Antonio: No

Blaine: No? And did you ever meet her parents?

Antonio: No, my mama died when we were born

Blaine: Hmm. Why did you decide to come to America?

Antonio: (Pause) got a good life, a lot better than Mexico

Blaine: Um hmm. (Pause) And how did you come to America?

Antonio: I can't remember

Blaine: (Pause) well, did you walk? Did you ride a bus?

Antonio: No, I know I came to the border, but I dunno how.

Blaine: You don't remember how you crossed the border?

Antonio: No

Blaine: How far is your hometown from the border?

Antonio: Hotel?

Blaine: Hometown, where you were born

Antonio: Oh, like a (Pause) like a two hundred miles

Blaine: Two hundred miles?

Antonio: Yeah.

Blaine: What's the nearest city in America to your hometown?

Antonio: Nuevo Laredo, Mexico

Blaine: What is the nearest Mex, uh-American city?

Antonio: What American city?

Blaine: What's the name of the American city across the border that's close?

Antonio: Oh, Del Rio

Blaine: Del Rado?

Antonio: Del Rio, Del Rio, Texas

Blaine: Del Rado?

Antonio: No, Del Rio.

Blaine: Del Rio?

Antonio: Yea

Blaine: Okay. And that's D-E-L-R-I- E-O?

Antonio: Yeah

Blaine: Okay. Uhm. Tell me what it was like when you first came to America? What did you notice different about being in America than Mexico?

Antonio: Well, I live in a like, free life; free life (Blaine: um huh) Oh yeah in America.

Blaine: Mm.... Didn't you have a free life in Mexico?

Antonio: Not really (laughs)

Blaine: Why?

Antonio: Because of crazy people that way.

Blaine: What?

Antonio: Lots of crazy people that way

Blaine: Crazy or cagey?

Antonio: Crazies.

Blaine: Crazy people in Mexico?

Antonio: Yep

Blaine: How were they crazy?

Antonio: Oh all the time trying to shoot at somebody.

Blaine: (Pause) So, the first thing you noticed when you came to America was like you had your freedom?

Antonio: Like I feel like a free. Um hum

Blaine: Uh what di...what did you expect to find when you came to America?

Antonio: Job

Blaine: A job?

Antonio: Yeah

Blaine: Did you find a job?

Antonio: Yeah

Blaine: And where was that at?

Antonio: Del Rio (Small laugh)

Blaine: In Del Rio?

Antonio: Yeah.

Blaine: What did you do?

Antonio: Working on a (unintelligible) dump truck. Picking up the trash.

Blaine: You were picking up trash on the dump truck?

Antonio: Mm hmm

Blaine: Uhm. Why did you decide to come to Lincoln?

Antonio: Juana, my wife (unintelligible) time.

Blaine: Uhm. Let's jump back ta, to your jobs; uhhh did you--how long did you work in Del Rio on the trash?

Antonio: Mmm. Like, 2 months

Blaine: Ok, then where did you go?

Antonio: Bradley, Texas, working watermelons.

Blaine: Picking watermelons? Then where did you go?

Antonio: We work with the training horses

Blaine: You were training horses?

Antonio: Yeah, well see, I train horses and (unintelligible) too in the same town

Blaine: How uh, how old were you when you first came to America?

Antonio: Oh uh around uh sixteen, seventeen, round like that

Blaine: (Pause) and so, you've had a job uh doing farm work and training horses. Uh anything else? Did you travel across the United States doing odd jobs?

Antonio: Well, (Pause) I don't want to say what kind of job I got. (Pause) Got working for the government too.

Blaine: You worked for the government?

Antonio: Oh yeah (pause) looking for jobs

Blaine: Yeah. Uhm, did you work any other states?

Antonio: Yeah, I work in Oklahoma

Blaine: Oklahoma?

Antonio: Mmm Yeah, making food for the cows

Blaine: (Pause) And what was your last job?

Antonio: Lincoln

Blaine: In Lincoln? What did you do in Lincoln?

Antonio: Railroad

Blaine: Railroad? And how long did you work for the railroad?

Antonio: In Lincoln, I worked for fourteen years

Blaine: Fourteen years? (Pause) And what did you do in the railroad?

Antonio: Huh?

Blaine: What did you do?

Antonio: Oh, making new tracks

Blaine: Making, laying new tracks?

Antonio: Yeah

Blaine: Tell me about working for a railroad at that time--what was it like?

Antonio: Well, it's hard work too.

Blaine: Yeah? I imagine it was. Were you treated any different from other people that working for the railroad?

Antonio: No, he's the boss (Small laugh)

Blaine: Well?

Antonio: Well see it's cleaner, much better.

Blaine: Excuse me.

Antonio: Lincoln treated me much better.

Blaine: Much better than what?

Antonio: Than in other jobs (Small laugh)

Blaine: Do you feel like you ran into any uh prejudice when you working for the railroad?

Antonio: Not in Lincoln, but in another state, yeah.

Blaine: Yeah? What were the differences in other states?

Antonio: Well in other states, like uh you know like they don't like Mexican people in too many places.

Blaine: Hmm (Pause) did you uh in (clears throat) those other states, did you eat and sleep like the other people that work in the railroad?

Antonio: You mean like a sleeping?

Blaine: Yeah. Did you get to sleep with the other people?

Antonio: Yeah.

Blaine: And did you get to eat with the other people?

Antonio: What?

Blaine: Did you get to eat with the other people?

Antonio: Well, the nice peoples, the Mexican peoples.

Blaine: Oh. Did you get to work, eat and sleep with the white people?

Antonio: Yep. (Pause) But I didn't understand the word, the last word

Blaine: (Pause) so, you got to eat and sleep with the, you're white people that working on the railroad?

Antonio: No

Blaine: Where did you eat?

Antonio: Hmm?

Blaine: Where did you eat?

Antonio: Eat?

Blaine: Uh huh

Antonio: I eat separate, my jalapeno pepper.

Blaine: Where did the... Did white people go someplace else to eat?

Antonio: Yeah

Blaine: Where did they go?

Antonio: McDonalds. (Small laugh)

Blaine: And where did you guys get to go?

Antonio: Make'n our own food

Blaine: You make your own food?

Antonio: Yeah.

Blaine: What about sleeping?

Antonio: Well uh (small laugh) I sleepin by myself.

Blaine: And where did the white people sleep?

Antonio: Motel.

Blaine: The motels?

Antonio: Yeah.

Blaine: So the railroad company didn't pay for your hotel?

Antonio: Sometimes.

Blaine: Sometimes. Was this part in the western part of the States?

Antonio: Yeah an uh...

Blaine: Scottsbluff?

Antonio: No, in uh Milwaukee,

Blaine: Milwaukee.

Antonio: And Chicago.

Blaine: Oh, ok. (Pause) Tell me what you expected to find when you first came to Lincoln?

Antonio: Job

Blaine: Just a job? Did you have any ideas about the city at the time?

Antonio: (Laughs) No, no nothing about it

Blaine: Nothing about it?

Antonio: No, well in Del Rio, Texas, I never see Black peoples in my life. (Blaine um

hum) I see the black man gee I just scared. I never see my life. I scared, hell, was a black man got close and me don't know this man.

Blaine: So, do you (clears throat) do you feel more comfortable around black people now?

Antonio: Yeah, I feel better now but before I can't, I scared. Of the first man I see is a black peoples in Del Rio, Texas. And I don't want to go closer to black people.

Blaine: Did you find uh there were a lot of black people when you came to Lincoln?

Antonio: Yep

Blaine: Did you feel comfortable around them?

Antonio: Well, I really don't know them before, in Del Rio, I didn't know black people

Blaine: So, you met a lot of 'em in the railroad?

Antonio: Mm hmm, in Del Rio, Texas, too In Texas too.

Blaine: (Pause) Tell me what you think about Lincoln now. Do you feel comfortable in the city?

Antonio: No

Blaine: You don't?

Antonio: No

Blaine: Why?

Antonio: Got too many drugs in town

Blaine: Too many drugs in town?

Antonio: Yeah, you can't walk in the middle of the night now. Before years ago, you could walk in all Lincoln all night. No got too many drug dealers. Now you can't go anywhere, too many gangs, in the middle of the night.

Blaine: (Pause) You know when you think back ta um a long time ago, you think about leaving your country you were born in and coming to the United States, did you ever wish that you had stayed home or are you glad you came to America?

Antonio: I'm really glad to come back this way

Blaine: And meaning you would still come to America?

Antonio: Yep

Blaine: Yep? You'd do it all over again? (Pause) Do you have any ideas that would give uh others who following behind you? That are coming to United States from Mexico?

Antonio: My son's come right behind me

Blaine: Yeah? Did you ever give them any advice about coming over here?

Antonio: No, they came up by theirselve.

Blaine: (Pause) And what do you think your children--do you want your children to learn from or remember from this interview? About the, the. Did they ever meet their grandparents?

Antonio: You mean my grand, my sons?

Blaine: Yeah.

Antonio: (Pause) No

Blaine: No? (Pause) Do you think it would be important for them to learn the things that you had to go through when you first came to America, about you know the prejudice that you found and, and about the working conditions that you had to go through?

Antonio: Well, not really I don't talk I mean I talk to these peoples.

Blaine: You don't talked to your kids about that?

Antonio: No

Blaine: Well, when we get done, you'll get a CD and they can listen to this and you can tell them about what it was like when you first came into America.

Antonio: Yes, I can, I get a CD

Blaine: Really... This is what you are gonna get when we get done

Antonio: Um hmm

Blaine: And um was it really hard when you first came over here?

Antonio: Yeah. Well, for me not too hard, but I got money in my pocket.

Blaine: Oh. So, the difference between having money in your pocket and not having money in your pocket

Antonio: If you don't have money in my pocket, it's hard. You don't, you don't have no money, you're not going to eat (Blaine: Yes.) You see if this time, fifty cents, a day is not thirty dollars a month.

Blaine: Yeah.

Antonio: No, fifteen dollars a month.

Blaine: So you had money when you came to the States?

Antonio: Yes

Blaine: The first time? Where'd you get the money from, from your parents?

Antonio: Yep

Blaine: (Pause) is there anything else you'd like to say, (Pause) about coming to America and uh

Antonio: Well this, this country's good, (Pause) that's why me over here

Blaine: That's why you're over here?

Antonio: (laughs)

Blaine: Do you think you'll go back to Mexico to live or retire?

Antonio: No

Blaine: (Pause) Go back on vacation, to Mexico?

Antonio: No

Blaine: So, you are just happy to be here and not gonna go anyplace?

Antonio: Yep, I can play pool all day over here In Mexico, have no pool tables either

Blaine: So, how long have you been coming to uh F Street Community Center?

Antonio: Ooooh well like for nine years

Blaine: Nine years?

Antonio: Yeah.

Blaine: (Pause) You've got, really felt comfortable here?

Antonio: Yeah, I feel much better over here than my own apartment

Blaine: (Pause) So, is there anything else you'd like to share with (Pause) with me before we close this?

Antonio: No, I'm done.

Blaine: Ok, Well, thank you Tony and I appreciate it and I'm sure your kids and grandchildren will like to hear, will enjoy your story about when you came over to the United States. Thank you.