

Voices from the Past

Mexicans and Spanish Speaking in the
Upper Snake River Valley

By Hermilo Chavez

March 6, 1982

Tape #4 B

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Devon Robb October 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

HF: The Mexican Americans and the Spanish speaking among us who live here in the Upper Snake River Valley. It's my opportunity this sixth day of March 1982, on Saturday afternoon here at my home in Rexburg to have here Mr. Hermilo Chavez, stop in that I might visit with him and his wife Harriet. Mr. Chavez, I understand that you, well, I'll ask you how you spell your last name.

Hermilo Chavez: C-H-A-V-E-Z.

HF: Ok and the first name is H-E-R-M-I-L-O. Now what is your present address?

HC: Its 274 West 1st South, Rigby, Idaho.

HF: Have you lived in the Rigby area for many years?

HC: Yes about 27 years.

HF: I see. Now are you a citizen?

HC: An alien.

HF: You're a registered papered alien.

HC: Yeah.

HF: I see. Did your people have their origin in Mexico?

HC: Yes.

HF: Do you recall the town or the community from which your people had left there?

Harriet Chavez: They still live there.

HC: They still live there.

HF: Now what town is this?

Harriet C: Well your mother lives in Juarez now but he never lived in Juarez.

HF: In Juarez?

Harriet C: Yes.

HF: In Juarez.

HC: This is where they are living now in Juarez.

Harriet C: But you came up here from where, Colonia?

HC: Colonia, Carbonez, when I come to United States.

HF: Oh, I see. And do you recall what year that was Hermilo?

HC: It was 1952.

[Inaudible]

HC: Probably '51.

HF: You can talk up loud and just as well put your contribution on the tape too Harriet.

HC: Between 1951-52 when I first come.

HF: Now did any of your folks, people come up with you?

HC: No.

HF: Now you were a young man relatively?

HC: Si, my parents or any of my family come in, some...

HF: Why did you come in the Upper Snake River Valley?

HC: I come in to work.

HF: What kind of work?

HC: In the beets.

HF: In the beets?

HC: Yeah, at first.

HF: Were you in a group with other Mexicans?

HC: Yes, there was a group that come in to work.

HF: In the spring or fall of...

HC: It was, maybe in the spring when they tend beets, you know.

HF: When they were thinning?

HC: Yeah.

HF: '51 or '52?

HC: It must have been down in '51.

HF: In '51. And do you recall, was it quite a large group that came in with you?

HC: There was around 20, 25 that come in to work in...

Harriet C: But you came to Wyoming first.

HC: I come into Wyoming at that time.

Harriet C: With that group you went in with...

HC: With that group that I came to tend beets there was in Lovell, Wyoming.

HF: Lovell, I see.

HC: And the work run out in there and there was gonna...

Harriet C: Then you went to Pocatello.

HC: I went to Pocatello from there and started working round house in Pocatello.

HF: Around the rail road, for the rail road?

HC: For the rail road...

HF: Were there quite a few, Hermilo, that actually did work for the rail road down there in Pocatello?

HC: Yeah.

HF: And quite a few of them left the rail roads and found work on the farms I suppose.

HC: Yeah.

HF: Now that winter did you go on back to Mexico or did you stay here?

HC: Just stay here.

HF: Did you have a place to work for during the winter?

HC: Yeah.

HF: And for whom did you work?

HC: I was working for the rail road.

HF: Oh, all that when staying in Pocatello.

Harriet C: How long did you stay there?

HC: I worked for two seasons in there.

HF: Two seasons.

HC: Yeah.

HF: In other words...

HC: Almost three years, you know.

HF: I see.

HC: And then come up to...

Harriet C: Targhee. [Inaudible] for some Japanese people.

HC: I worked in Targhee for the, Japanese people.

[Tape is stopped for some reason]

HF: I take it from our little off the record conversation that you came back up here in the Upper Valley in '54 and you worked for different persons off and on, different types of employment. You married in '55, was it?

Harriet C: Yes.

HF: In '55. You married, who did you marry?

HC: Harriet Daniels.

HF: Harriet Daniels and she had been reared by Frank...

Harriet C: My rear name was Lee.

HF: Huh?

Harriet C: My name really was Lee but I had been raised by the Daniels family so in school I went by the name of Daniels though it wasn't my legal name.

HF: I see. Now, and for many many years you worked for the dairy, dairy land?

HC: Dairy land, yes.

HF: How many years?

HC: Twenty-three years.

HF: Now all during those years you lived in Rigby?

HC: Yes.

HF: You and your family. And what were you a trucker?

HC: Yeah, trucker.

HF: For the, you'd get the milk, tell me what you did?

HC: I would haul milk from St. Anthony and other farms, tank truck, and haul them into Rigby.

HF: I see.

Harriet C: In the beginning the milk was picked up from several different farms, some clear down around Shelley at several different farms. But then as Mr. Packer took over the whole business and they put it into producing their own milk, all their own milk at the farm in St. Anthony then they just had the one pick up.

HF: Well now to both of you, have you had any association with Mexican nationals or Mexican Americans down through the years?

HC: No, not very much.

HF: Did you know any of the Mexican people up in the St. Anthony area?

HC: No, I have never known anybody up that way.

HF: Any in Rexburg?

HC: No, I said Phil Madrigal.

HF: You do know Phil Madrigal.

HC: Yeah and his sister Dolores Madrigal.

HF: I see. Now I think your wife mentioned that she knew the Melendez family.

Harriet C: Yes, I knew Julie and Margaret Melendez and then Dolores Madrigal too.

HF: And this could have been in the '40s or '50s?

Harriet C: From '46 through '50. I graduated in 1950 from Madison High School.

HF: Have you come to know any Mexican people, say from around Menan or out West Jefferson? Any in that country?

Harriet C: Not very many, I know there are a lot of new Mexican people in Menan but I don't know, but I know very little about them.

HF: Now there was a name of Leo Giatan.

Harriet C: Giatan.

HF: Giatan, now you knew him?

HC: Yes I know him.

Harriet C: From up on the rail road.

HF: From way back when you worked in the rail road or before.

HC: Just after the, I quit working on the rail road I knew he after we moved into Rigby.

Harriet C: But you didn't know him in Pocatello?

HC: No, I didn't know him from Pocatello.

Harriet C: Oh, I thought you did.

HF: So there aren't many Mexican Americans or Spanish speaking people that you've got acquainted with?

HC: No.

HF: You have just been to steady working I guess.

HC: Yes.

Harriet C: Up until the last few years the most Mexicans that have been here have been transient labor more or less, seasonal work. They came in and worked through the summer season and then left. There were not too many of them that would live over through the winter but now there, a lot of them are staying.

HF: Becoming more numerous aren't they.

Harriet C: Yes, in about '52 or '53 I worked at the store in Thornton and there were quite a few Mexicans there and they would come to, they would come in, in a group to live and work in the beets and they'd trade there at the store in Thornton.

HF: But they were gone in the fall.

Harriet C: And they were gone as soon as the summer was over. Most of them didn't even stay to work the potatoes, they usually only thin the beets and maybe top the beets and then they left before the harvest.

HF: What's been your feeling about living in the Upper Snake River Valley, Hermilo?

HC: Oh, it's been real good for me, I got married here and we started raising a family you know. All I did is just keep my mind on working and buying a home and keeping busy, you know, fixing it up.

HF: Have you felt that you have been properly treated?

HC: Yes.

HF: And had opportunities to work?

HC: I had real good opportunities to work most of the time, yeah.

Harriet C: Neither us or our children have ever had any discrimination of any kind because of...

HF: Now they've attended public school?

Harriet C: Oh yes. Course most people don't even realize that they are Mexican, a little incident our oldest boy – most of our children are blonde – our oldest girl had brown hair and brown eyes but then the next boy, the first boy was blue eyed and blond and when he was about 8 or 9 years old, I guess, why he was fighting with a neighbor boy on the way home from school and the cop happened to be driving by and he stopped and of course he knew them and he said, "Get up, what are you fighting for?" And our boy told me he said, "About me being a Mexican." And so this cop turned to this neighbor boy and said, "well what's a matter with you, what are you calling him a Mexican for? You know he's not a Mexican." Tony said, "That's what we're fighting about, I am a Mexican and he won't believe me."

[All laughing]

HC: So they have not been ashamed of it but they haven't been discriminated against in any way.

HF: That's interesting. Well, would you have anything else that you can maybe contribute to, you know, the research of this subject.

HC: No, no. I think...

HF: Think that's about it, ok.

Harriet C: We raised seven children and...

HF: You've reared seven children, send them all through High School?

Harriet C: Well not all of them have finished High School. We've still got two that are in Junior High right now. We've got one girl here at Ricks College and the oldest girl quit school and got married before she was out of High School. The second one boy joined the army and he finished his schooling in the army. The oldest girl has gotten her GED since she's been married and then the next daughter finished High School and she's married and lives in Rigby and works. And then the next one didn't finish school, she dropped out but she's working and doing fine and then we've got one, as I said, at Ricks College this year. She's a freshman at Ricks. Then we've got a boy in ninth grade and a girl in the eighth grade.

HF: Now have you people affiliated in any religious group?

Harriet C: Yes, we're LDS.

HF: And both of you and your children are members?

Harriet C: Yes.

HC: Yes.

HF: I see. Well that's real fine, I appreciate these little comments you've made and I thank you.

HC: No, thank you.