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**History of the Chicano Movement**  
**Committee on Chicano Rights**

**INTERVIEWEE:** Baca, Herman  
**INTERVIEWER:** Patino, Jimmy, Historian, UCSD  
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**[2 Cassettes – 150 Minutes]**

**BACA:** Here in National City, California. We're at the Aztec Printing Shop, here in National City:

**PATINO:** So, tell me a little bit about your parents, where they were from.

**BACA:** I guess I'll go back to my namesake. That's (Patino: Okay.) the barometer that I have. My family came into what is now New Mexico in 1598. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, the first, really I should say the second recorded Baca was the one who came in with Oñate expedition into New Mexico. The individual's name are mostly Baca I'm assuming, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) because once you got there it wasn't that easy to leave again, you know. (Patino: Yeah.) It was, on the one side there was the Apache Indians and on the other side, in Sonora there was the Yaqui Indians. (Patino: Uhm-hmm. Yeah.) So, you were kind of locked in. And, they say it was easier to have communications with St. Louis than it was, you know, with Mexico City. (Patino: Yeah.) So, Cristobal Baca is the first recorded Baca, I should say of that expedition. (Patino: Uh huh.) There was another Baca that came in with Coronado expedition when they were looking for the Seven Cities of Gold, but they just, they passed by their way. They slept in their reservation, but they kept on going and then they went back. I think that individual's name was Juan Baca, which is back in the, I guess, 1540s, somewhere around there. So, Cristobal Baca is the, our predecessors or most of the Bacas from Mexico. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) There's



an old saying in New Mexico that there's more Bacas than Vacas, you know. [Laugh] (Patino: Right.) So, it's a pretty extensive group of family members now I guess that all came from Cristobal Baca. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) But on my family's side, what I've been able to find in my genealogy is I start off with my dad, Nick Baca. He was born in 1924 there in Adelino. Adelino's a little town outside of Belén, New Mexico. And, there's Hadaleno and Belen, and that was part of the Baca land grant that supposedly we had, which we never saw. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) But, there was some dispute over, over those lands in the '60s and '70s. And his father was Jorge Baca, who moved in to where I was raised into Los Lentes, which is you have Albuquerque and then you're going south you have Ysleta Indian Reservation, and then you have Los Lentes adjacent. And Los Lentes probably has been there since the early 1700s (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) the San Clemente land grant. So, my grandfather, my dad's father, moved into Los Lentes. He was a farmer. What reasons, heaven knows. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) But, he moved there and my grandmother, Sara Baca, Baca Benevides, passed away in 1939 and I forget what the reasons were. And then, that's '39. So, no, no, I take that back. She was age thirty-nine. So, I forget the year that she passed away. But then my father, my grandfather got in an automobile accident there in, coming from out of Adelino and Belen. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Hit a tree and passed away and my dad's family were orphans. I think my father was thirteen when they became an orphan. Jorge's father, my grandfather, now I'm going back to my great grandfather, was a Cristobal Baca and he lived to be 102 years old. So, he was born in 1846 when New Mexico was Mexican territory. So, he was a Mexican citizen. (Patino: Right.) And, he passed away in 1948 at the age of 102. That's what they say. My dad used to say he was much older. But, nonetheless that's the recorded age. (Patino: Right.) So, I think I've been able to get back



two more generations. So I think, genealogy speaking I'm back to probably the 1770s, somewhere around there. (Patino: Right.) And, so . . .

**PATINO:** That's all in New Mexico, pretty much?

**BACA:** And this is all New Mexico. (Patino: Right.) My father was, like I said, an orphan. He married, you know, and doing whatever work he could, you know, as an orphan, agriculture, railroad, whatever there was, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) construction. And, my mother and father married, I think, in 1940, right before the war. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, my father was a plasterer and like everyone else around there a part-time farmer. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, we lived in Los Lentes. Los Lentes was a small farm rural type of community. We were like a mile away from the Rio Grande. My mother still has ten acres there adjacent to the Rio Grande. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, they got married in 1940, '41. The war broke out. My dad was drafted and went into the military and during the war, you know, he landed in Normandy. He was a prisoner of war at the Battle of the Bulge.

**PATINO:** Oh, okay. Wow.

**BACA:** And, you know, while he was away my mother built the home where we were raised at there in Los Lentes. So, you can see the house over there in that picture over there. There's, you can see myself (Patino: Okay.) over there with, that's my horse over there, Pancho, and (Patino: Right.) but if you look under the Aztec god there underneath that's our home and then the ten acres are right below it. (Patino: Okay.) So, after the war my dad came home. My dad landed in Normandy, like I said, and he was a prisoner of war at the Battle of the Bulge. And, when he came out, you know, he got into politics. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) He was like a precinct captain there for the Democratic Party. Later on became a justice of the peace. (Patino: Okay.) So, he and my mom were involved in politics. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) My dad was in construction. Like



I said, part-time farmer. You know, we grew everything that basically we needed, you know, there on the farm. Corn, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) chili of course, tomatoes, cucumbers, melons, what have you. (Patino: Wow.) I was born April 5, 1943. I was one of the, I think one of, I had five brothers and sisters. I think two of us were born in a hospital. The rest were at home. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, we lived next to my grandmother and the ten acres I'm talking about belonged to my grandmother, and like I said they're adjacent to the Rio Grande. So, there was woods, you know, bosque there was a lot of trees. (Patino: Right.) And looking at the purchase documents, the ten acres had been in my mother's side of the family since 1898. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Her mother and father, who were Montoyas, she later became Carrasco through marriage, but the Montoyas bought those twenty acres for \$200 in 1898. (Patino: Wow.) So, I'm assuming that there was a lot of trees on there, cottonwoods. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So my grandfather, while clearing the trees from his ten acres in '48 caught pneumonia and he passed away from pneumonia because they had no penicillin. (Patino: Right.) So my mother, before she got married, was also an orphan and she had one brother. So, that's on my mother's side. (Patino: Right.) My mother is Eloisa Carrasco Montoya Baca. So, my mother basically, you know, while my dad was away, like most women of that time was, you know, a housewife. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, I was born in '43. My brother George was born after me, I think '45, '46, and then my sister Rosie, my brother Dickey, who deceased in 1966, and I have a younger brother Robert. So, there's five of us. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) My mother had been married once before, so we had an older brother, Tommy Arteaga, who deceased probably in '97, '98, somewhere around there. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, that was our family. And, what I remember from New Mexico, like I said everyone knew everyone. I mean . . .

**PATINO:** How big was the town?



**BACA:** There was 600 people too many. So, and most people had been there for generations. And so, everyone kind of knew everyone, I mean. And, when I came to California one of the cultural shocks that I remember was that people had locks on their doors. (Patino: Yeah.) That didn't exist back then in those times. You just used to walk in to, (Patino: Everybody knew everybody?) yeah, peoples homes, just like they were in their own home. (Patino: Right.) As a matter of fact, it was almost a custom. You would call every tio and tia, you know, "uncle" and "aunt" even though they weren't, just out of respect. (Patino: Right.) And, I remember you, if you got out of hand they had the liberty of putting the boot to you, you know. (Patino: Right.) And if you went home and told your parents about it you'd probably get it double, (Patino: Yeah.) and twice as bad.

So, but I remember growing up in New Mexico. I always had a very, very vivid memory. I remember when I was, my grandfather that I said passed away in '48, I have like around three vivid memories of my grandfather. I guess, I'm assuming I was real, real close to my mom's father. I remember the first time, they had the old wagons, you know, with the steel wheels, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) covered wagons. Not covered wagons, just the wagon with the boards. And, I remember he was taking my older brother with him and I ran after the wagon and I remember that iron wheel ran over my foot, and him coming down. Another time I remember we were going, the closest town was, well there was Los Lentes and a mile away was really the town where they had the stores. It was Los Lunas. And, I remember we were going in that wagon, you know, just going along and I remember I had this little suit and there was like a generator, some sort of electrical generator by a store, and for some reason I thought that was San Francisco. Don't ask me why. But, I remember, and I still remember it. I'm talking, what, fifty-eight years (Patino: Yeah.) ago. And, the last memory I had of my grandfather was when



he passed away then they used to have the wakes at the houses. (Patino: Right.) There was no mortuaries. And, I remember trying to crawl into my grandfather's coffin and I remember laying underneath it, you know. So, my grandparents had, you know, had a lot of influence on me. And, when I look back on my life, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) my grandmother was a very, very strong-willed woman and I always remember people talking about that she could write, you know, which was very unusual for a woman back then, I guess. (Patino: Right.) But, that she had gotten schooling. And, the reason she could write, like I said, she was orphaned. So, I guess they sent her to school in a monastery. I'm assuming someone wanted her to be a nun or something, in Ysleta, and Ysleta was the Indian Reservation. So, I'm assuming that my grandmother's, the Montoyas, because they bought that land adjacent to the reservation, that they had some relative, some relation on the reservation. And, the Indians are Tigua Indians. (Patino: Right.) You know. And, Ysleta, supposedly has been there since 1100 A.D.

**PATINO:** Oh wow.

**BACA:** So, they've got the oldest functioning Catholic church in the United States, (Patino: Right.) where I was baptized. So, there was a lot of intermingling. I remember one time my grandmother taking me, and I was a little kid, you know, I was probably five, six years of age, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and my, I remember my grandmother taking me there. I don't know the exact how, but I remember walking in and there was a body on the kitchen table. And, I guess that was their custom, or what have you, you know. (Patino: Right.) But it was, and I just remember looking. And, back then you didn't say anything unless you were asked to say something. (Patino: Right.) So, I just kept my mouth shut, but I vividly remember the house by a railroad track and I remember looking at that table with the body on it and the white sheet over



it. So, I'm assuming there was some relations there between my mother's, my grandmother's side and the Tiguas Indians there. (Patino: Right.)

And, one of the most vivid memories I have of my grandmother that I really didn't recognize until my later years, was there used to be a town drunk who, in Los Lentes, his name was Condras. He was, I'm assuming his name was Condrado, you know. So, we used to call him Condras. And I always used to see the guy was always drunk, you know. And, but I remember one time he came over and like I said we were, we lived around a quarter of a mile from our nearest neighbor and, and from the main road there in Los Lentes, which was Los Lentes road. So, it was a rarity when people used to come over, you know, because everybody was busy doing what they had to do to survive. But, I remember this one time, I must have been six or seven years of age, the guy Condras came by and he asked my grandmother, "Hey, don Rosalie, can you lend me a peso?" because that's what they used to call a dollar, you know, just like in Mexico, a peso. And, he was drunk and I remember my grandmother telling him, she said, "I'll lend you a dollar if you'll chop some wood for me. I'll give you the dollar if you chop some wood for me." So, Condras goes out and starts chopping wood and he starts sweating, and I guess he sobered up. So after that my mother said, "Condras, why don't you take a nap?" So, we got him some water in a tina, you know, the old, the old buckets, whatever they were, tinas, (Patino: Yeah.) And, my grandmother told me to take some of my grandfather's clothes to him. So, he came out and I'm looking at this guy, a completely different person, right. So then my grandma said, "Why don't you have something to eat?" So, he sits down and, you know, I'm just observing, you know, this guy that I'm looking at in a different light. And, he's talking and I'm surprised that it's not the same guy that I always see, you know. (Patino: Right.) He's laughing, and he's talking, and telling jokes, and what have you. And, after a couple hours, after he



finished eating and talking, and what have you, my grandmother gave him the dollar. He probably went and got drunk. But, it wasn't until late in later years I said, "You know, my grandmother was pretty smart, you know. She gave that individual some human respect and dignity for a couple hours." And that, you know, I don't know why the story stayed in my mind, but then later on I said, "You know, that, so that's what she was doing."

**PATINO:** Right. Hmm.

**BACA:** So, my grandmother I remember. What I remember about Los Lentes was everybody knew their place. I mean, you know, men did a certain kind of work. The women did a certain kind of work. You did certain kind of work. Our work was to chop wood, feed the chickens, you know, made sure they had water, you know, the pigs had water, the slop, and what have you, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and that's what I remember. Everybody knew their place. You know, you just, I remember you couldn't go inside the house when company used to come to visit. (Patino: Right.) You had to stay outside. And, if you didn't, you're going to get a good one, you know, for coming in, no matter what your reasons were. And, I guess it was real structured. And, on the one hand it was real, real structured, you know, because your actual routines and what was expected of you, and then you also had your responsibilities, you know. I remember we used to go to church every Sunday. I remember midnight mass. We would go to Ysleta to that church I'm talking about. And so, it was real structured on the one hand, but then on the other hand that's the place where I felt the freest, I've ever felt the freest. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I could go out and if I wanted to start a fire I'd get me fifty tumbleweeds and make a fire go a hundred feet up in the air and nobody would say nothing. (Patino: No big deal?) If I had a .22 I'd go twenty feet from our house and I'd be shooting back there in those ten acres. (Patino: Yeah.) Because



right next to those ten acres was another ten acres, and next to that there used to be some woods. We used to go hunting there, and like I said, then there was the Rio Grande.

The Rio Grande was something that I was always frightened of. I used to go by there, but it had to be lit, and I would only go so far. I would never go to the bank. I kind of had, because, you'd have to visualize it. You had a, what we used to call a drenaje. Drenaje is the drainage of the water, you know, it was clear water. And then there was a [\_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_][256] which means there was like a road, [phone rings] you know. [Recording paused] So, let me see, where were we at? You know, that's the freest that I ever felt. You know, I mean that was, there was rules but on the other hand there was not a lot, a lot, a lot of freedom, I mean, you know, for you to search, explore. And, of course, you know, you were constrained.

You have to go back, you know, if I'm five, six, seven years old, even going up to age ten, eleven when I left there, that whole rural community didn't have any electricity. I remember the electricity coming in. Radio, very few radios. I remember my father telling me a story one time that Joe Lewis was fighting Maximilian? Maximilian, the German, and one guy had a radio in that whole town and so all the men got together and went down there and they're drinking wine and this guy that owned the radio was a boozier. So, you know, so they're, I guess Max Schmeling knocked Joe Lewis down and this guy got pissed off, [Laugh] so he hit the radio with his fist and broke the radio. He said, "Hey, try that with me," because he was drunk, you know. My dad says, "We didn't know who won the fight for two weeks." [Laugh] So, that's how rural it was, you know, I mean. (Patino: Yeah.) There was, you know, the outhouse was out. [Laugh] Like my dad used to say, he says, "I remember when I was a kid we used to cook inside and go to the bathroom outside. Now we go to the bathroom inside and we cook outside and



barbecue, you know." (Patino: Yeah.) [Laughter] So, there was no electricity. (Patino: Yeah.)  
No radio really, I mean, to speak of.

**PATINO:** So, what did people do for leisure and fun?

**BACA:** Leisure? You know I remember, I remember at nights, like now, because it used to get real dark, you know, there was just kerosene lamps, and it used to be hot, and I remember there used to be a lot of mosquitoes because we we're only a mile, a mile away from the Rio Grande, and everybody used to get horse dung, you know, and dry, and they used to light them up and the smoke keeps the mosquitoes away. So, we used to get around and then used to start telling stories, and of course it was dark out there. And, they'd tell the usual stories that would put the fear of God into us, I guess, you know. Like la llorona.

**PATINO:** The classics?

**BACA:** Yeah, and cucui, you know, and everybody would just start getting real, real close, and you know, "Hey man." [Laugh] That was one thing I remember as kids. Like I said, if people came over it was a big, it was a big to-do. I mean you hardly, you only saw the people that you lived with, because everybody was, like I said, doing what they had to do to survive. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) But, I remember when they used to come over, you know, and all the kids used to get together, and we couldn't go inside, so we'd be outside, you know, hide and seek, kick the can, you know, (Patino: Yeah.) the usual games, you know, that you can do in the dark, you know. There was a bunch of guys, I remember we started throwing, rock fights, you know. Just dumb things.

**PATINO:** Whatever you could do? Yeah.

**BACA:** Yeah. You know, and as far as entertainment, you know, outside of that, like I said Los Lunas was a mile away and there was a movie theater there. I think it was, I think it was the



Neto Theater. And, I remember they used to charge a nickel to get in and it cost a nickel for popcorn, and a nickel for an orange drink, but we had to walk a mile to get there. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, just a country road, man, just black, pitch black, you know. If the moon was out you were all right, you know. And, we used to walk down there and then walk back home, you know. I remember on, I remember like sodas or ice cream. I mean, that was unheard of. I mean, that was, that was a luxury. (Patino: Right.) And, I remember they used to have the old peanuts, you know, the old Coca Cola and they used to have the ice in there, and you know the water and the soda. And, I remember we used to go into the store and just look at them. But, like I said, you wouldn't ask. You wouldn't ask like kids now, you know. "Hey, give me that. You know, I want some of that." You didn't ask. You got one across your head real quick. (Patino: Right.) So, you were just there praying, you were just there praying that they would say, "Hey, you want a Coke?" And, ice cream, man, forget it man, you know. So, all those things were luxuries, you know, I mean, just going down there.

**PATINO:** Within the town were there richer people than other people or was everybody about the same?

**BACA:** You know, anybody that had two radios was probably rich.

**PATINO:** Yeah. [Laugh]

**BACA:** You know, the people at the stores probably. But like I said, we hardly ever left, from what I remember, you know. I remember one time those ten acres they had corn back there, and ten acres is, I mean, it's a long ways back and forth. (Patino: Right. Right.) And I remember I said, "Okay, we're going to start hoeing, man." And we had to go all the way and come all the way back. But, I always remember, man, after, around, like around five o'clock, you know, a lot of food. Like right now. A lot of food. Like right now, chili is, New Mexico, you know, New



Mexico green chili, that's what it's known for. (Patino: Right.) Right now is the harvest season, now, between now and September. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, I remember when we used to, you know, a lot of food. You know, chili, corn, watermelon, apples, you know. But, you know, so I remember after we used to eat and we used to go swimming in the sequias, you know. The sequias. I don't know if you guys remember that, are canals. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) They divert the water in the sequias is where you irrigate the fields, (Patino: The farms?) and the they have a [contras?][351]. They're the little, you know, they're little ditches. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, you divert the water into. Like the big fields, like the ten acres you just open up the ridges there, whatever they are. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, we used to go swimming there. And, you've seen the Rio Grande, it's dirty brown water, man, but that was like, man oh man, heaven sent, (Patino: Clean?) you know. So. Little stuff like that I remember. You had the four seasons. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, like right now it's swimming time, you know. And then, you know, you started getting, I guess, September, like it began to be a little cool and those marble times, and then the tops, you know. I used to play tops. And then, I don't remember Thanksgiving too much. Halloween I do, you know, and you had to walk fifty miles just to get five candies, you know, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) but I remember we used to go around there and, because the big thing was to push over the outhouses, you know. The teenagers used to just, [Laugh] [travesudos?][368]. But then, Thanksgiving I don't really remember it that much. Christmas. Christmas was a big thing. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I would just wait Christmas. Around the end of November, you know, we used to kill a pig, you know, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and I remember they used to have matanzas where you would get up around four or five o'clock in the morning. I remember we'd get this big tina, you know, a fifty-gallon drum, a hundred gallon, I don't know what they are, and start boiling the water. And, I remember they used to give that poor little pig



a corn and shoot him with a .22, man. Boing! Lift him up and put him in that water and then you'll skin him. I always used to remember by around eight o'clock the men always used to be drunk, [Laugh] you know. Drunk on their butts. But, I remember they used to make chicharrones, you know, for the lard, and the lard for the, I mean, because you saved, you know, I mean that's what you utilized, you know, the lard for the winter. (Patino: Yeah.) The meat, you know. I remember they used to get the meat, the green chili, you've seen the ristras for the, when it turns into red they put them on the side of the houses. We used to make red chili and I remember they used to marinate the pork and then they used to dry it out in like chicken wire, and it used to dry out and it used to get -- I guess, very few refrigerators, you know. And really, we had no refrigerators. So, it was a process. And I remember during the, you know, like now the harvest, the harvest time my grandmother and my mother used to jar, you know, the fruits, and the tomatoes, you know, for winter, you know. Winter's coming. And I remember they used to get us a chili, this whole room full of chili peppers. We used to make the ristras, you know. The women and kids, we used to do them there boom, boom, boom and then we used to hang them on the side of the adobe homes, you know. So, I remember yeah there were the four seasons. I always loved spring, you know. That was going to be the end of school.

So, I remember when I first went to school. There in Los Lentes they had a one-room schoolhouse. It was like, like you see in the country, you know, Abe Lincoln type, (Patino: Yeah.) just one room. But, we all went to that school. I remember that. And then . . .

**PATINO:** Kids all ages?

**BACA:** Yeah. Kids of all ages, from what I remember. (Patino: Yeah.) Then I remember, I wasn't there too long and then they sent us to Los Lunas, which was kind of a cultural shock to me, because, you know, there were a lot of kids. It was a great big grade school. And, I



remember going there and I don't remember too much of it but I do remember I must have been like around third grade and the whole town was Spanish speaking. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, in Los Lentes there might have been two Anglo families. And, I remember there was this woman and then there was this family that I remember they use to sell eggs, but the rest were, you know, Mexicanos, and we all spoke Spanish. And, I remember when I was in, I remember I was in line and all of a sudden I felt something come across my face, man. The teacher had slapped me for speaking Spanish and, but I couldn't understand it, you know. And, I'd be speaking Spanish. But later on I found out that the Indians, what they used to do to the Indians was they use to get a needle and prick their tongues with a needle.

**PATINO:** For speaking their language?

**BACA:** Yeah. For speaking their language.

**PATINO:** Were the teachers Anglo?

**BACA:** Yeah. Most of the teachers were Anglo. And, I remember, you know, I still have probably three, three friends that I remember, you know, from there. Because, I only went there probably until the fourth grade. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, I remember when I left they used to have bilingual classes, you know. You know, you learned English and Spanish, ironically. (Patino: Huh.) So, I remember we were just getting into Spanish and, but then we moved. But, what I remember of school is that and I remember, you know, our lunches, you know. I remember taking tortillas and potted meat. You know what potted meat is?

**PATINO:** No.

**BACA:** Potted meat is, I don't know how you would describe it. It's not like Spam. It's like brown – but potted meat is a little can like that and I used to put it in like a spread on tortillas, right. I remember, it was tortillas and potatoes, tortillas and beans, or tortillas and potted, potted



meat. (Patino: Yeah.) All year. And, I remember looking at the Anglo kids. They used to have bread man, but they never wanted to trade. [Laugh] But, I do remember at the end of the year we used to have an outing. We used to go to one of the ditches there and, you know, we'd have a picnic, and that was the only time that we got like bologna and bread, or wienies and bread.

**PATINO:** Because they gave it to you?

**BACA:** Well no, a lot of parents would buy it because it was the end of the year. (Patino: I see.) And, we got a little, I guess, cupcake or a Twinkie. I mean it was a big deal, you know. Like, "Wow, man." I couldn't wait for school to end. And the other thing is I remember from school and Christmastime was the courthouse. The school was here, then the courthouse was probably a quarter of a mile away. So, they used to march us down there. There was an old gun from World War II, you know, and I don't know who did it but I remember they used to give us a stocking of candy, and hard nuts, and what have you, and a little orange, or an apple. Oh man. You know, we were in hog heaven, man. And, like I said Christmas was a big deal. They'd kill a pig. I remember the there would be chicharrones everywhere you went. Empanadas, mismochitos, pozole. You know. A lot of food. We used to get, what are they called, manarias. We used to go to the seques canal and, of course it was dry in December, and it had fine sand. So, we'd get regular brown paper bags and fill them up with dirt and put a candle in there and we used to go on top of the roofs. And, our homes were adobe, you know, so we used to put them all around the house and that was our Christmas lights.

**PATINO:** Oh, okay. Hmm.

**BACA:** And, I remember doing that. And like I said, midnight mass. A lot of food, but presents, you know. Maybe you got a little ball or one little Tonka truck, or you know. (Patino: Right.) But, toys, no. I remember this elder gentleman [Mato Paz][510], who just passed away



two years ago at 99. He used to go around and he used to bring fruits, you know, apples and oranges. Oh man, you know, that was a rarity. So, that's what I remember from school. And . . .

**PATINO:** You said when you went to Los Lunas it was different were there are more white kids there?

**BACA:** No, there were more kids. (Patino: Right.) I had never seen that many kids, you know. (Patino: Uh huh.) And I remember, I remember they had a gym, a big gym. You know, I had never seen that. And, it was just, you know, just bigger like, you now. No, but predominately Los Lunas and Los Lentes and that whole area was just, you know, Mexicanos.

**PATINO:** Yeah.

**BACA:** So, that's what I remember from New Mexico. It was very, very peaceful. I had a very, very happy childhood.

**PATINO:** Tell me a little bit about your father's, how he got involved with politics after he came back from the war.

**BACA:** You know, I really don't know. (Patino: Yeah.) Just like I didn't know anything about, you know, the war. He never spoke about it. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) But, I do remember, you know, why he got involved or – well, I guess I can figure it out why they got involved. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) New Mexico politics is run on the patronage system and I always remember two events. The dances, especially the fiestas. We had an annual fiesta for the church, just like every other little rural community has for their church, in that, you know, we used to have a procession. We used to walk half a mile then back, you know, with la virgen, the patron saints. Then afterwards they used to have a little carnival, you know, and stuff, lights and stuff, and then a dance. And, it was a small town but, you know, some people didn't get along. And, I remember they used to solve all their problems at those dances. My dad used to have an old



saying, he'd say, "Hey, how was the dance last night?" "Oh, fine," I says, "you know. No problems. Nobody got in a fight." He'd say, "Ah, that must have been a rotten dance then."

[Laugh] Because at those dances that's when they used to square off, you know.

**PATINO:** They'd settle?

**BACA:** They'd settle their feuds. And, I remember as a kid, you know, fights all over, you know. Guys would get into fights all the time. There and election night. [Laugh] And, the reason was because of the patronage system. The, everybody, if your party lost everybody from the janitor up to the congressman was out of a job.

**PATINO:** Oh. It was a big deal then?

**BACA:** Yeah. So, in other words, you were talking about your livelihood. You're talking about your job. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, I remember, I guess that's the reason why he probably got involved, you know. And I remember my father telling me a story that his father died in 1939 and he was still voting in 1952. [Laugh] Faithfully. And, I remember them, as a matter of fact not too long ago my mother was talking about how politics are so corrupt. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And she starts telling the story about, you know, when her and my dad used to run politics in New Mexico. He said, "Yeah, we used to go pick up the winos and give them a wine bottle if they vote our way, or ten dollars." "Oh, so it's okay if you did it, but it's corrupt somewhere else?" [Laughter] So, but that was New Mexico politics, you know. (Patino: Right.) And, you know, it's, everybody voted (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) because it was jobs. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, how my dad got involved or why I really don't know.

**PATINO:** You're still young at the time, I guess?

**BACA:** Yeah I, I never even thought about it.

**PATINO:** But, you said he was a justice of the peace?



**BACA:** He was a justice of the peace. Oh, I remember seeing some of his papers where, you know, guys, domestic violence and he'd fine them two chickens. Yeah. You know, serious crimes, one pig, you know. Nobody had no money. (Patino: Yeah.) You know. And, so when I look back, I remember the sheriff was a Mexicano. The mayor was a Mexicano. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, the Senator, the U.S. Senator, there's, like I said, Albuquerque, Ysleta, Los Lentes, then Los Lunas, and then there's Los Chavez, and then there's Belén. And, Los Chavez is where the U.S. Senator Dennis Chavez came from. It's named after his namesakes, you know, the Chavezes you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) It's just like Los Lunas. Los Lunas is named after a politician, power broker, Salomona Luna, one of the big power brokers.

**END SIDE 1, TAPE 1, SESSION 1. AUGUST 2, 2006.**

**BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1, SESSION 1. AUGUST 2, 2006. [Counter reset]**

**BACA:** You know, like a million sheep there and, you know. So, he was a big power broker. But, that's why it's Los Lunas, (Patino: Right.) you know. The Lunas, you know. And then you go into Chavez, you know. So, all those little towns used to have people's namesakes. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Lentes. Lentes is, most people think glasses, but no. It was named after an Indian from Ysleta, and his family was there I guess.

**PATINO:** What other relations like that you can remember? [Recording paused]

**BACA:** Both groups were poor. (Patino: Yeah.) Yeah. The whole barrio, the poor looking down at the poor, dealing with the poor. (Patino: Uh huh.) Like I said, I really don't remember that many Anglos. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, that's, there just wasn't that many, other than teachers or maybe – the towns were small, you know. The towns were real, real small, and predominately little. I mean, people that had been there for generations, hundreds of years, you know. So, everybody's kind of just like, back then we're related. (Patino: Right.) You know,



and so like I said my, I have no complaints about my childhood. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I had a real peaceful, real happy, real, you know . . .

**PATINO:** When you all left did you all maintain ties with New Mexico?

**BACA:** Oh yeah. We, see my father came out here in search of work. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) He was a plasterer. So, he came out first. Him and a friend called Joe Luna, who was part of the Lunas there, you know. (Patino: Right.) [Laugh] And, they came. They were plasterers and they came in search of work. There was a lot of work. The pay was better. See New Mexico is, it was hard. Employment was difficult, you know, (Patino: Right.) especially in the winter. You didn't, if you were a plasterer you could forget it. So. (Patino: Right.) And, one other thing before I get into California.

I remember in New Mexico the first time I ever saw TV. That was a vivid, vivid, memory. There was this family, the Tafollas and why they got a TV first I don't know, but I remember they did. My recollection anyway. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, like everyone went over to the house to see this thing called the TV, you know. [Laugh] So, I remember, you know, like was the custom, you know, all the elderly people went in first. And then, you know, there was pecking order and people just crammed into this house. And, I remember kids, we were outside just looking through the windows. And, I remember the program. It was the Lone Ranger. And, I remember the old man making comments about Silver. You remember he used to go up. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) He says, "Ese es caballo," you know, "Now, that's a horse. Look at that." you know. [Laugh] but, I remember that. And then my dad's brother came out of the Korean War. I'm pretty sure the Korean War. And, he bought us a TV. And, I remember there was one station and it would come on between probably like maybe five to ten o'clock at night. And, I remember the programs. As the World Turns, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and that singer



Kay Smith, the one that sings God Bless America, Howdy Doody, the Lone Ranger. I remember wrestling, because they had wrestling. Amos and Andy, I remember Amos and Andy. That's another thing. I never saw a black. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, I might have seen blacks in Albuquerque when they took me, but I don't remember them. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, so I never saw a black until I came to California. (Patino: Yeah.)

And so, those are some of the, you know, the vivid memories of growing up in New Mexico. And, in a way I've never left New Mexico. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, it's, when we first moved here I couldn't figure, "Why did they bring me here?" (Patino: Right.) And I remember when I first came here, when I first came here, like I said, my dad came first. My grandmother used to live next door to us. So, it was just like they, what they say about, some New Mexicans say, "I'm going to go back to my ranchita," you know. "I'm going back to Mexico," and they've been here for sixty years, you know, (Patino: Yeah.) They never left. [Laugh] It was that sort of thing. (Patino: Yeah.) My dad was going to go back. They had our house, you know. But, we don't now. But, there's the ten acres and then there's, our house. And, he had some other property adjacent, five acres that belonged to his father, adjacent to the reservation. So, you know, and all of our family was there. My grandma was there, his brothers, my uncles were there, his sisters were there, you know. So really, supposedly it was going to be a short-term, you know, he was going to get a job and we'll get on our feet and then we'll go back. (Patino: Yeah.) So, I guess that's the reason my dad didn't buy a home until '59, even though he had been here from '50, '51, you know, and then he'd go back, and then he'd come back out, and then. Then he started bringing my mom out here and I remember the first time that I came. Because they used to actually put me on a bus, Greyhound Bus, in Albuquerque, then they used to pick me up in San Diego, all by myself. I must have been ten years old. I used to



get on a bus and I'd just look out the window. And I remember I'd get into California I started seeing the palm trees. I thought, you know, I thought there was palm trees were everywhere, you know. And, but the first time that I came here must have been, I'd have to say '53. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Probably when I was in third grade. And it wound up, we were in Harding, Old Town National City. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, I remember I went to Kimble Elementary School and I registered and it was in between classes. So, I must have looked like straight out of, straight out of the farm, you know, a hick. I was going through the hallway to my class and I bumped into this guy that I still know, Lawrence McGill, and he was the first guy I ever met here in California. And, he says, "Hey, where you from man?" I said, "Los Lentes." He said, "What?" "Los Lentes," you now, like I assumed everybody knew where Los Lentes was at, man. (Patino: Uh huh.) [Laugh] And, I guess they were sending him to the office, you know. I guess that's where he was going, you know, because he was the only one in the hallway. So he said, "I'll see you later." "Yeah. I'll see you man." So, we were here for months and, but I really don't remember too much other than the house and Lawrence McGill. So then they'd ship me back home, one of my brothers, two of my brothers, were with my grandmother. So, I'd go back there and I remember the second time they sent me out my mother and father were living in El Cajon. I mean which is, which is stone redneck, you know.

**PATINO:** Oh wow.

**BACA:** But I remember one time at El Cajon, first when I came the first time one of the cultural shocks that I had was, "Why are the houses so close?" I couldn't get over that. (Patino: Right.) "Why are they so close?" And then the second cultural shock that I had was when we were in El Cajon the, I remember they used to deliver the bread, doughnuts, the milk to the front door, man.



You'd just get up and, man, I thought I was in, I thought I was in heaven, you know. [Laugh]

"Wow, what's this? Doughnuts?"

**PATINO:** Front-door service?

**BACA:** Yeah. Bread, milk, chocolate milk. Man, stuff I had never even seen. And, I vaguely remember being at school, you know, and I think I was like Ray Charles, you know, like one time they, Ray Charles said that they put him in a segregated school and he was blind. He said, "Hell, I didn't even know what color I was," you know. "I couldn't see." [Laugh] You know, and when I look back it was kind of like, I guess most kind of mosque en leche kind of thing, you know. But, I really don't remember too much, or anybody doing anything, you know.

(Patino: Yeah.) So, but my mother's got some stories, you know. Then from there they sent me back home. They sent me back home and now I'm probably getting into the fourth grade and that's when we finally came, you know. That's when they finally sent me home. My mother and father were living over here on Hilltop, which is by Martins Street, the Holy Cross Cemetery.

(Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Right here. About three-quarters of a mile from there. (Patino: Yeah.) And, we moved there and I remember, what I remember about that place was the telephones. I had never seen a telephone. I had never talked on a telephone. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, I remember there used to be party lines. You used to share your number with two or three other people. [Laugh] You know, and everybody, you weren't supposed to listen to other people's conversation, but every body used to pick up the phone and listen. [Laugh] And, so that's what I remember about that place. And then I remember, I remember my father taking us into a room and telling us, he said, "Tomorrow before you go to school," he said, "I want you to, you're going to see some people you've never seen before." He said, "And you can't call them this, this, this," he says. "We call them 'colored people.'" (Patino: Wow.) And, I remember going to



school and I had never seen blacks. You know, I mean, I had never, I had never talked to blacks. (Patino: Uh huh.) And, I remember I became buddies with one, one of them and, you know, just kids, you know. And, that area, you know, 40th and Market, over then Hilltop, which Hilltop's on the back, (Patino: Hmm.) it was predominately white, with a few Mexicanos. So, from Hilltop we came down to 40th and Market. Like I said it was basically all white. I went to Chollas Elementary School. It was a brand new school. You know where Chollas is at?

**PATINO:** No.

**BACA:** Do you know where 47th and Market is at?

**PATINO:** Más o menos.

**BACA:** Yeah. Holy Cross Cemetery.

**PATINO:** Right. Right.

**BACA:** Yeah, right around there is that little elementary school. And, I remember going there and, you know, the kids were kids. I mean, they acted like kids. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, I went there the fifth grade. And, in the sixth grade, I must have been like maybe April, May, towards the end of the school year, but dad moved over here. "We're going to National City." That turned out to be a horse of a different color. You know, when we moved over here, you know over there the kids were like, they were little babies in their little baseball hats, and, you know. [Laugh] But, you came over here man, it was like, "What the heck? People smoking and people," I mean, more grown up, you know, doing things that, [Laugh] that you know weren't being done over there. It was like another cultural shock. (Patino: Right.) And, I remember going to elementary school and I always remembered it was like taking a fish out of water (Patino: Yeah.) and putting him on dry land. And, I said, "You know what? If you're going to survive, you know, you better start getting along with the program." So, you know, people were



more developed. People were faster, you know. People were listening to records, you know. People were, you know, dancing together, you know. Over there they were watching Howdy Doody and, you know, and Johnny Downs' Clean the Plate Club, and I don't know what else, you know. (Patino: Right.) So, I graduated from the sixth grade at Kimble. The, I remember the seventh grade we went to National City Elementary. And, we lived in Old Town on McKimby Avenue. And it was all Mexicans, you know, a scattering of Anglos, poor whites, a few blacks. Not many. So, you know, it was, you know, it was, you know, hang around together and, you know, forged our bonds with one another. And, as a matter of fact the guys I was going to school with I, I mean I still know them, you know. (Patino: Yeah.) I grew up with them, you know. Those are my friends. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, like I said, seventh grade things were different. Different environment. Drinking, you know, fighting. And, then in junior high, I remember junior high, I started getting into some problems, you know, just trying to belong, peer pressure, friends of yours starting to go to juvenile hall, you know.

**PATINO:** So, there are fights, like gangs?

**BACA:** Yeah. Gang fights.

**PATINO:** More like...

**BACA:** Down in Logan Heights where, we were always going to get each other. (Patino: Yeah.) Old ties, you know. The usual, you know. And, junior high I, you know, I really don't, I really didn't care about school. I mean I just tried to find the easiest classes, you know, the woodshops. And, they were very accommodating, I might add. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Wood shop, electrical shop. I never learned anything. It was just monkey around and smoke cigarettes somewhere, you know. Everything you're not supposed to do. And, I remember there was this art teacher and everybody knew that he drank wine. So, the big deal was, "Where is his wine



bottle at?" We were trying to find it, always trying to find it. But he, he was a good guy. I remember that guy used to, you know, I remember that guy one time said, "Hey Herman," he says, because I used to like draw, believe it or not. "Say, why don't you draw a poster for the poppy poster contest." "The what?" "The poppy poster." And, poppies used to be, I guess, the flowers that they used to sell for the veterans. And they used to have a contest, you know. So, I said, "Yeah. Okay. Let me see it." So, I remember drawing a cowboy. A cowboy's hitting another cowboy. And he entered the thing and they used to have a big awards ceremony. And, I remember winning it, winning the first prize, and I got \$5. [Laugh] So, I always remember him. And, I remember junior high like kind of a neutral age there. You had Anglo friends, even though you lived on that side, they lived on this side. Even though you really didn't hang around with them afterwards. At school you did. (Patino: Yeah.) You kind of got to going up together. And then I remember we got into tenth grade it was just like, boom. Everybody went their own way. (Patino: Right.) You know, everybody, you know, they got into athletics and, you know, they run the school, and, you know, we just, "Yeah, the hell with that." (Patino: Uhm-hmm. Uhm-hmm.) And, Sweetwater was basically the same as National City Junior High. We just took shop classes, you know. (Patino: Yeah.) Nothing academic. And, I remember the coach in gym he used to come in there say, "Okay, you tacos, line up." Because you had a number, you know. And so he's saying, "Tacos." You didn't know how to conceptualize it, you know. (Patino: Right.) I mean, you didn't have that politicizing but still you said, "What's he calling us that for, you know?" You didn't like it. Some guy said, "This is a compliment," you know. So, I remember that and like I said, academically I never even thought about it, you know. To me, junior high and high schools an abstract. I mean, you know, I'm just here and I don't know why.



I'm just here. (Patino: Right.) And all I know is that if you want to graduate you've got to get a certain grade and that's it. But, there was no cause and effect for one being there. So.

**PATINO:** Outside of school were you working at all?

**BACA:** Well, I've always worked. In the sixth grade, as you saw the *San Diego Union* you know. Back then we used to sell the newspapers. We used to pick them up over here on Roosevelt, at Eighth and Roosevelt, and we used to sell them for ten cents and get two and a half cents for the paper, and we'd go to all the bars and, you know, some of us would pick up customers. You know, "Hey, bring me the paper." So, you know, you might sell twenty-five, fifty. Fridays were a good day because people got paid. Fifty papers, you know. You'd make two, or dollar fifty, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) A lot of money. I remember I used to hand press all my papers. I would stop right there on Eighth and A there was a Mel's Root Beer. I'd get me a root beer, a nickel, then I'd go to Niederfrank's and I'd get me, it was a nickel, an ice cream scoop. Boy, I'd go down to Carl's, which is by St. Mary's. They've got frosty, you know, get a big frosty for ten cents. So I learned, you know, I learned the value of money and I used to put stuff on layaway, you know. If I wanted a baseball glove or, you know, stop at one of the stores and they'd let you put stuff on layaway. So, I sold newspapers, you know, as a young kid. I remember there was a place in Old Town where they used to make, used to make cans, I guess, for the nurseries. Where they used to put the, so I remember we used to paint those things. That's another job I had. (Patino: Hmm.) And then around the ninth grade there used to be slaughter houses over here and one of the big things of being one of the, one of the boys, you know, (Patino: Uh huh.) I used to work at the hides, picking up hides. What they used to do was they used to slaughter the cattle and then they used to throw the hides up, stack them up. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, of course, you'd come back two or three weeks later there'd be, you



know, the blood and the maggots, and the flies. And so, they used to hire little kids. Don't ask me why. But, I'm like, "Oh yeah. That's great." And, like I said it was like being one of the boys. "Hey, I work at the hides." You know, (Patino: Yeah.) you were one of the guys. So, they had the regulars, you know, and I had a friend and took him, you know, because he was one of the regulars. So, what you used to do is you, they used to pull the hides off the stacks and, of course, like I said it was dried blood, maggots, and what have you, but they used to pull them down and throw them on top of a table and used to throw salt on them to kill all those maggots and what have you. And, then they used to fold them up and tie them up, throw them on this little type of, little wagon, and then used to wheel them out and they'd just stack them up in the railroad cars and send them to wherever the heck they were going to send them to. Well, the first time I went there they put me just throwing the salt. I said, "This is great." And, they used to pay you a penny a hide. So, if you pulled a thousand hides, you got ten bucks. (Patino: Yeah.) If you did fifteen hundred, you got fifteen bucks. Right? (Patino: Yeah.) Which was a lot of money. It was a lot of money, you know. So, I remember the second time I went there. They didn't put me throwing the salt. They put me with my little wagon and taking them to the railroad cars and then throwing them on there. And, those hides had to weigh a hundred pounds. I must have weighed ninety-eight pounds. So, oh man I remember around, we'd start at seven, by ten o'clock man I was dragging. [Laugh] I remember saying, "I'm going to quit." Something in my mind said, "Don't quit." It said, "You quit now man those guys ain't going to let you forget it for fifty years." [Laugh] So, I made it through the day man, but I tell you what man, after that, boom, I'd literally drop man. So damn tired. But, I made it but I didn't go back. [Laugh] "No, I ain't going back." That's some hard work, man, you know. And so, the tenth grade I remember just shop classes. That's basically all it was. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I remember history class. I



remember my English teacher. She always used to tell to me, "Hey, you're real good in history," you know. And, it came natural to me. It really did, you know. I had a friend, to this day remembers, he said, "God, man, I hated you man. You just used to do those history things so fast and I used to study and study and get Fs." [Laugh] And, but other than that I had no interest in nothing else. And, the reason I was good at history was because like I told you before I used to read *Newsweek*. I don't know why. (Patino: Yeah.) I just liked to read. Picked up *Newsweek*, *U.S. World News*, *Time*, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, don't ask me why. But, I didn't read nothing else. (Patino: Yeah.) [Laugh] And yeah, so high school was just, it was just abstract. Sports, seventh grade I remember I didn't like the coaches. (Patino: Yeah.) I just didn't like the coaches and I said, "I ain't going." And, I was a good athlete too, you know, a real good athlete. And, I just didn't like the coaches, the way they treated, you know, the people. (Patino: Yeah.) And I said, "I ain't, you know, I don't have to be out there," and I didn't want to be out there.

**PATINO:** What did you and your buddies do for fun and stuff at the time?

**BACA:** Drink, fight, carry on. You know. Everything we probably shouldn't be doing. So, 1961 I graduate and I didn't think what I was going to do. I remember a lot of my friends started saying, "Well, I'm going to go in the service, you know." (Patino: Yeah.) I never did. I never -- I don't think it ever crossed my mind, you know, to go in the service. (Patino: Yeah.) I had no interest and didn't care to go. And so, before we graduated we used to work at this place called Hewitt Brothers. They used to make barbecue accessories, barbecue baskets, you know, forks, and it was at the peak, you know, like in April, in May. Well, right before summer. They needed a hundred, hundred and fifty people, and I used to, they used to send out boxes of that stuff man and they, you know, you'd weld them and man you'd chrome them and then you'd put



them in boxes and tape them up. And, I remember we were supposed to work only two or three hours at the most, you know, because we were going to school. Hell, we used to work until one or two o'clock at night, no lunch. Didn't have no lunch because we thought, you know, we just come straight from school. We used to get paid ninety cents an hour, you know. So, you know, \$36 a week. A lot of money. A lot of money. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, gas was nineteen cents, twenty cents, you know. So, I remember in the, now that I'm thinking about high school, now that I said "gas", I remember asking my father for a car. "I got to get a car." He said, "You can get a car, but I ain't buying it for you." he says. [Laugh] And, my dad by that time was a foreman where he was working at. (Patino: Uh huh.) I was in the eleventh grade. And, he said, "I'll give you, you know, I'll give you a job for summer, so you can save up and buy your own car." I said, "Okay." So, I remember I went out and I worked the whole summer. Man oh man. Talking about some more hard work. And really, I wasn't doing what you'd call construction. I was just like a gopher, you know, cleaning up. (Patino: Right. Right.) But I remember I used to get up, go to work, and come home, eat dinner, and go fall asleep. Man, I just . . . (Patino: Yeah.) So anyway, so I worked all summer and I bought, bought me my first car, a 1952 Ford. And, it was real nice. That was a real nice car. And, let me see, what happened? I probably got in trouble. Why did I get in trouble? I remember one time I got caught driving without a license and I think they gave me three months probation not driving, and I continued driving and they caught me again. So, they took my license away for a year. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, that was my first car. So, I got out of school. A week later, after I graduated I had got into trouble. I had been getting in a lot of trouble, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) you know. Many fights. (Patino: Yeah.) And, I wound up in juvenile hall a couple of times. Fights, no big deal. No, not that big a deal. No big deal. But, I was getting in trouble and, you know, I'd go to juvenile hall and the next day



be out and, "Ha, ha. Big joke." (Patino: Yeah.) Well, this time it wasn't a big joke. On a Saturday night we were drinking in this alley in Old Town and this guy happened to be going by and somebody said, "Hey, who's that guy?" "I don't know." "Let's go get him so he doesn't go up there." So one of the guys do. And, this poor guy's coming from work. Said, "Hey, you want a beer?" So, we started drinking. So, now it's like around midnight, right? So, we're drinking beer there and around one thirty, two a.m. some genius said, "Hey, I know where there's some girls at, man. Let's go see them." I guess we we're so damn drunk it made sense, you know. So, we get in the car and we go down there and this guy, that later on I found out was married, had a kid, completely innocent, we go to this place in Old Town and it was a two-story building. And those guys go up looking for girls and me and this guy in the car, because it's my car. So anyway, we were sitting there talking and the next thing we hear the window break, because it was a store. A little store. Neighborhood store. And the guy says, "Hey man, they're breaking into the store. Let's get out of here man." So, we take off and I said, "Hey man, I can't leave those guys back there." So, I go back and like a genius I go in this alley and the next thing I know is the cops are coming in from both sides. (Patino: Yeah.) And, all I remember was these guys are coming out -- remember the old jars of pig feet? (Patino: Yeah.) [Laugh] Remember the old big bolognas that come like that? Ah! Pshh they start taking off running and they drop the damn bologna.

**PATINO:** Shoot.

**BACA:** Next thing is, here I am. I'm in jail. And, back then National City had like a dungeon. That's what it was. It was an underground jail.

**PATINO:** Wow. Huh.



**BACA:** And I remember, I remember talking to myself. Because, you know, I was there for three days. I said, "Well, I guess you got a choice now. You can either go this way or that way." And, I guess everything that my parents had taught me, you know, came to the surface. (Patino: Yeah.) So, when I got out of there I got three years probation. And, I kept on working. Like I told you that was . . .

**PATINO:** This is after you've graduated?

**BACA:** Yeah. One week after I graduated. [Laughter] So, I remember saying, "You know what? I'm going to try to get an education." So, I enrolled. Southwestern two-year college used to be at Chula Vista High School, because they had no facilities. So, I thought I'm going to go to junior college. Don't ask me why. So, I went there. If high school was abstract. This was even more abstract. So, I must have went two or three months. (Patino: Yeah.) So, during that time, okay we're now '62. So, I ran into a friend of mine who had gotten married, real, real young, probably in tenth grade, and you know by that time he had like two or three kids when I graduated. So, I saw him at a Pep Boys. And, "Hey, what are you doing man?" "I'm working at this place where they make circuit plates." I said, "A circuit what?" you know. "What the hell are you talking about?" [Laugh] And he said, "Yeah, man, we work a lot of overtime man." He says, "They need some people down there." He said, "Why don't you come down and put an application in?" I said, "Yeah. Yeah. I'll think about it." Because, I had just gotten laid off from the Hewitt brothers. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, I remember that Monday I went down town where the unemployment was at and I remember I'm coming back, it's either F or G, the one that come east, going into 94, and I remember he had told me it was Third and Market. I said, "Yeah, what was that the guy told me about? Ah, what the heck." So, I just made a right turn and I went on Market Street and I came this other way and I stopped there. I asked this guy, I said, "I'd like



to get an application, if I may?" The guy said, "Yeah." So, I filled out the application and the guy comes out and he says, "Well, let me ask you," he said, "do you know how to read a ruler?" I said, "No." [Laugh] He said, "Blueprints?" I said, "What are those?" He said, "You know what, if something comes up we'll give you a call, huh?" I said, "Okay. See you later." I was going to get \$17 week unemployment. A lot of money. [Laughter] Now remember, I was making \$36 working forty hours. (Patino: Yeah.) I said, "Hey, \$17 for doing nothing?" So, I said, "Yeah, that sounds okay to me man." So, I started to get in my car and the guy comes out. "Hey," he said, "is that your car?" I said, "Yeah." "How'd you like a job as a delivery boy?" I said, "A delivery what?" He said, "Yeah. Why not?" So, I go back in. So, I fill out some more forms and a bit later my buddy comes out and he says, "You got on, huh?" I said, "Yeah, man." He says, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, you see those prints and those little circuit plates?" "Yeah." I said, "Well you put them in, you see those envelopes?" "Yeah." He says, "They're different kinds of envelopes and you just throw them in there." I said, "And, you do what?" "Then you taken them, you know, wherever they go, you know, and then they got prints, you know. They got halftones and, you know, they do for advertising agencies." I said, "Oh yeah?" He says, "So, you take them down there, huh?" I said, "Well, what do they pay here?" He said, "Oh, they'll probably start you at \$1.35." "\$1.35?" Because, I'm making ninety cents. Right. I said, "Wait a minute. They're going to pay me a \$1.35 to take this little envelope somewhere in my car while I get to listen to the radio?" He said, "Yeah." And he said, "And they pay you mileage, seven cents a mile." I said, "You're kidding man?" I said, "Wow, man." So anyway a little bit later the guy comes out. He says, "Well, I'm going to start you off at \$1.50 and seven cents a mile." [Laugh] "\$1.50? Man," I said, "Wow." So we, I started working there and that was probably around October, September. I forget when. And, you know, I'm making,



you know, \$1.50 times forty, you know, \$60, and the mileage 70-75. I never made so much money in my life. But then in December of '62 or '61, yeah. So we're now in '62, December we, I'm now nineteen. You know, I'm nineteen, yeah. And, then I found out my girlfriend's pregnant so, mercy. So, I got married in December of '62. And so, '62 to '63, yeah, and I'm, so I'm nineteen. So, you know what, I, I take it back. I wasn't working. I worked for a period of time, then I got laid off. Then later I found out that I was going to get married and I was looking for a job all over because, you know, I wasn't going to make my parents pay, you know, for what I did. (Patino: Right.) I was going to do the manly thing. And, so I looking for jobs and found a job there. So, I was looking all over the place. So, this guy calls me up from the shop and said, "You know, look man we need some help man." So, I went down there man and after that I stayed for a year." And . . .

**PATINO:** It was a printing shop?

**BACA:** It was a, they used to do graphics for, what they call graphics, (Patino: Yeah.). In other words, back in those days everything that was done was done manually. You had to paste it up like an ad for the newspaper. (Patino: Right.) So, back then you just didn't, like now you go on the computer and it says, "Give me six points, or give me twenty-point type." Back then, if you wanted this type right here "Confidential" that's now two inches, if you wanted it four inches you sent it to us and we shot a negative of that and then we dried it up and then we made a print of that and then we send you a print four inches big. Then they would paste it down where they wanted to and they would do that piece by piece. So, that's what we would do. It was called, you were a cameraman. So, that's what I would deliver to the advertising agencies, (Patino: Right.) those prints, and sometimes those circuit plates. But, it was mainly prints. The name of the place was Graphic Straits. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, I was a delivery boy, but when they



used to get backlogged in the back they said, "Hey, can you come, can you give us a hand?" You know, so I'd go back there. On the one hand I would lose mileage that I depended on, but then I figured, "Hey, I'm learning something." (Patino: Right.) So, I used to go back there and I, you know, would work back there, and you know, sometimes we would stay there late. So, I was working a lot of overtime. So, when I got married, I got married in December of '62, and I used to live right over here, right behind the store. And, they're condos now. (Patino: Yeah.) I think the rent was \$65 a month, then I had electricity and water. Don't forget I was making \$60 a week, base pay. But anyway – yeah. So, little by little I started getting into the back, you know, and like I said, I was doing all right with my hourly wage, the overtime, and – the hourly wage, then, and the mileage and the overtime. So, I'm doing all right. So, in June of '63 my son Nick, my eldest, who's now forty-four, was born. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Forty-four. Yeah. Just turned forty-four in June. He was born and I was working there, and kept working there, and like I said, little by little I got in the back. I remember there was a young guy back there. And now we're talking like '66, and the Vietnam War was heating up. And he says, "Hey," he said, "I think they're going to draft me, man." So, it was, there was three of us back there and I remember the foreman, I told him. He said, "Hey, what do you need, you know? They'll pay you. They'll upgrade your pay, which is \$2.50 an hour." Now I was probably up to \$1.75, \$1.85. I forget. Even though I was doing the same work. And so anyway, they finally drafted the guy, so I was sacking next to the foreman. So, there was a time when it was a growing business. And, I remember the guy, he used to be a born-again Christian. And, every morning he would ring a bell and whoever wanted to go pray with him, you could go pray with him, you know. None of us used to from the back, you know. None of us, everybody back there was boozers. So this guy got drafted and I says, "OK." So I remember, um, 2 and a quarter. And like I said, "you don't



know what you don't know, you can't conceptualize what you don't know. I knew, "hey wait a minute this guy told me I was gonna get the same pay." And I got a growing family, and blah, blah, blah. So, I remember that was the first time that I actually did rationalize my situations. I got angry and I went to the boss and I says, "I need to talk to you." He said "about what?" I was told that once Bill left that I was gonna move in his position. He made \$2.50 an hour I'm only making 2 and a quarter.

**END SIDE 2, TAPE 1, SESSION 1. AUGUST 2, 2006.**

**BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2, SESSION 1. AUGUST 2, 2006.** [Counter Reset]

**BACA:** And, I remember telling the guy, I said, "You know," I says, "I was always taught that religion was a personal matter. I don't want to discuss religion." (Patino: Right.) He said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you." I said, "No, that's all right." I said, "I came in here. You know, why, whether it's short change." I said, "I have a growing family and this was what I was told." He said, "Well," he says, "let me talk to the Board," which was his family, right. [Laugh] And, everybody knew he was the Board. And I said, "Yeah, okay." So anyway, instead of \$2.25 he gave me \$2.35 and I always remember saying, "Hmm. Okay. That's the way the game is played." A little reflection going back to, like I told you when I came to Kimble, (Patino: Right.) to Kimble Elementary, "Hey, well, so this is the way the game is played, huh? Okay." So, I said, "Okay." In my mind I said, "Okay, fine." So, I made up my mind at that time, even though now we're talking about '66, maybe '67, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) from '61, so you're talking five, six years, that I had been there. But, in my mind I said, "I'm going to start looking for a job." And I had remembered seeing \$2.50 an hour. I thought that was like a barrier, you know. People talk about the glass ceiling. (Patino: Yeah.) A hundred dollars a week. "Oh man." [Laugh] So anyway . . .



**PATINO:** That's what the guy was making that left?

**BACA:** Yeah, that's what the guy was making that left, you know. So, I started looking around and I found a job. Let's see where did I find the first job? Oh, it was over near Imperial Beach. It was a place called Merlin Printers. And, one of the owners was Frosty, Frosty Foster. And, he was a white-haired guy, old guy you know. So, yeah, he says, "Yeah, come on down man." He said, "I'll give you a job at \$2.50 an hour." I said, "Great man." So, I told the people, "Hey, man. I'm leaving." They said, "Hey, well, why, you know?" "Man, it don't matter why." I said, "I'm leaving. Thanks a lot. Bye." So, I left. And so, you know the old saying, "Be careful what you wish for you might just get it." Yeah, he gave me \$2.50, but man I was starving to death because I wasn't making any overtime like I was at the other place. (Patino: Right.) And I was, you know, hey it was just forty hours, man. So, there was three of us there and I always used to know people in the trade that were union, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and back then the photo engravers and the typesetters and the unionized shops, man, they were like gods. Especially the photo engravers. This was before all this change came. They had like a thirty-five hour week, you know. They were making, \$4.50, \$5.00 an hour with a, you know, time and a half after seven hours. They had double time after nine hours. And, you know, I mean they were like gods, you know. I mean, powerful.

**PATINO:** How were you aware of those guys?

**BACA:** Well, we all worked in the same trade but, you know, they were union and the photo engravers, you know, and so I used to talk to them. "Man, \$4.50 an hour, man." [Laugh] So, I started thinking about, I says, "Hey, how do you get in a union?" They said, "All you got to do is sign up some people, you know, sign up some people in your shop." So, one of the other guys says, "Hey man, you know, those guys are making \$4.50 hour and they work the same?" So, I



remember I got those two guys to sign up. And, I remember one time when there was a bar next to this Merlin Printers and the guy Frosty, man, we were down there having a beer man, he comes in and he says, "Hey, you know, you're a chicken shit." I said, "What are you talking about?" "Yeah, man, putting a union in us." I said, "Hey, it's nothing personal." "Yeah, well you're a chicken shit." I said, "Ah, screw you," you know. So anyway, we went back and forth. To make a long story short, some technicality and guess who got the boot? I got the boot. But, this guy Frosty and myself later on became good friends, you know. You know. So, he was a character. He was a real character, an old Navy chief, you know, married to a Mexicana, you know, and he used to tell me he used to own a gold mine in Mexico and I don't know what else. He was a character. But, we became good friends after, after that. So anyways, so I get the boot. So, the union puts me in a union shop, you know, as a gopher. So, I'm working at this big union shop and I'm a gopher man, and most of the, most of the people there are Anglos, man. I'm like mosque en leche, you know a big bowl. And, you know, "Hey, do this. Do that," and blah, blah, blah. And, you know, and I said, "Nah, man. I'm going to get out of here." So, you're now talking about '67, somewhere around there. So, where did I get me a job after that? I got me a job for PSA. PSA was the airlines at Lindbergh Field. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) They had a print shop, an in-house print shop. So, I remember I used to work there from three to eleven thirty, or, you know. Man I hated those hours man. (Patino: Yeah.) I mean it would break up your whole day. (Patino: Yeah.) I remember, I remember on rainy days the guys that were construction, my friends you know, they used to come over. They were off, right? So, they'd come over to my house and we'd start drinking beer man, and by two o'clock I'm trying to, you know, get straight to go to work, while I'm at work. I hated those hours. I hated them. And so, it's the same thing over there. "Hey, let's join the union man." So, they got wind of it and guess who got the boot?



[Laugh] I got booted out again. So from there, I said, "You know what man?" I had gone to work part-time at this place where they used to do photos. They would pick up the film at drug stores, stores, they'd put them in bags and then, you know, they'd take them, develop them, develop the, print the pictures, and then bring the photos back. So, on this envelop they had the name of whatever company or store it was, or wherever it came from. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, this guy had like a little printing press in his office there, so I used to go there, you know, four or five hours after work. And, I'd knock out those envelopes and then I'd go to work at this other place. And I says, so I got laid off over there. And I said... No, what happened was I was working at PSA, I was working for this guy, then I used to work at this other place. So, I had three jobs, you know. Well that started to get to me man. And, [Laugh] then he booted me out of there and I said, "The hell with it." I said, "I ain't going back until I get a union job." I said, "I ain't going to go back." So, I was at home for a week and this shop calls me from La Jolla and says, "Baca, we understand, you know, you're out of a job?" I said, "Yes." They said, "Well, we'd like to know if you'd like to come and work for us?" I said, "No." you know. "Why not?" I said, "No." I said, "I'm going to wait until I get a union job." I says, "Nothing personal against you." I said, "That's just, that's what I'm waiting to do." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, she says, "Well, you know, me and my husband are in real dire straights, you know. Our pressman took off for a family illness. He hasn't been back. We've got all this work. My husband really doesn't know what to do," and blah, blah, blah. I said, "I'll tell you what," I said, "I'll go in tomorrow and I'll show your husband what he should be doing." "Oh, would you? Thank you." So, I go down there, down in La Jolla, right, and you know I show the guy what to do. And, the guy says, "Hey man, are you sure you don't want to stay, you know?" I said, "No. I told you." I said, "I'm going to get a union job." He said, "Well, you know, how much does a union job



pay?" I said, "Ah, around \$4.25 right now," you know, blah, blah. He says, "Well, you know," he says, "how about \$3.75?" No, he says, no he said, "How much would it take for me to keep you here?" I said, "Well, you know, I figure \$3.75." I said, "\$3.75." He said, "Okay." I said, "Darn. Why didn't I say \$4.00." [Laugh] Right. So anyway, I said, "What the heck?" So, I started working there and then I was, I was there for a year and, you know, it was twenty-five miles one way, twenty-four miles, but there was no traffic back then man. So, no big deal. So that was 1968, okay, and so I got that job. I got this other part-time job, and then I got, the guy making the envelope. So, somewhere along the way I started getting tired, you know. And, I told the guy that was doing the envelopes – all he cared about was the envelopes. I said, "I'll tell you what." I said, "I'll make you a deal," I says, "Let me buy your equipment. You pay me so much, you know, and you know I'll pay you for your equipment, but you let me take your equipment I'll do them at home." And, he said, "All I care about is my envelopes." I said, "Well, you'll have your envelopes." "Okay." So I had, I moved that printing press into my garage. So, you know, then I could do it, I didn't have to travel, blah, blah, blah. So, I remember one time I was getting tired of going all the way to La Jolla. I saw this print shop over here on Thirteenth in Old Town, National City. They used to have a big sign that used to say, "Overnight printers," and I used to go by it and everyday, you know, I said, "Overnight Printers." So, I remember calling over there one night. I said, "Hey, I'm looking for a job." And he says, "As what?" As a pressman. He said, "You're hired." [Laugh] I said, "What?" I said, "You don't even know who I am." He says, "What happens if I don't know how to print?" He says, "Then I'll fire you. It's simple as that." [Laugh] So, I went to work for Overnight Printers and it's a union shop. I didn't even know it. So, I finally got in the union, working seven hours a day. And this guy, this guy's name was Irving Tarbox. Mr. T. And, Irving Tarbox had a partner named Ira. And, Tarbox



would work us six and a half hours a day and you could either go home after six and a half hours or stay there and drink with him. [Laugh] Everyday, four o'clock, you get off at four thirty, four o'clock, boom, shut the place down. So you got, so I used to stay there and drink with him everyday, you know. And, you know, he always used to tell me he says, "Darn, Herman," he says, "you should have came before we opened this place up, man." I said, "How come?" "Can you imagine with a name like Ira, Irving, and Herman." He says, "Man, we'd have all the Jewish trade sewed up." [Laugh] So, he was a kicker. Believe it or not he's still alive. He's ninety-nine years old.

**PATINO:** Wow.

**BACA:** I just talked to him two weeks ago. And, he was a character. You know, that guy was a character. And so what happened was, I was there a couple of months and this guy that used to work at PSA where I tried to get in the union, he got in a union and went to work at a print shop. So, he calls me up and he says, "Hey Herman," he says, "we're looking for a cameraman and a stripper down here where I'm at." He says, "I'm down here in this print shop." I said, "Nah," I says, "I'm working over here." He said, "Well, why don't you think about it man?" I said, "Okay." So anyway, there was three guys working over here at Overnight Printers. I remember there was a young guy there and he had just gotten married and what have you, and they were going to lay him off. So, I told Mr. T I said, "Hey look man." I said, "Why don't you keep this guy honest." I said, "Somebody else offered me a job." I said, "If it don't work out I'll come back." "Ah, man, don't leave man." I said, "No, you know," I said, "Give this guy a chance." you know. I said, "He just got married," I said, what have you. So anyway, I went to work over there. And during this time, like I told you, I had the printing press doing the envelopes in my shop. So, I guess printers attract politicians or political people, (Patino: Right.) because people



started coming around. I had a friend who just passed away last year I think it was, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and he was a staunch Goldwater republican conservative. He had a magazine. So, he comes over and he says, "Herman," he says -- I didn't know him, you know. We just met. He says, "Hey Herman, why don't you print this magazine, I mean, this magazine here, you know? And, why don't we do this? Why don't we do that?" And, blah, blah. And, so we start talking politics, you know. And, after that my friends who had gone to school, who had gone in the service, and now were on the GI bill because, you know, doors were open at the colleges were going to college, right? So, then they start coming over. "Hey Herman," he says, "Can you print this flyer for me?" So, at that time you know I was, you know, I was a die-hard conservative, you know. You know, I thought Nixon was too conservative, you know. So, you know, they would come over, and "Hey, can you print this?" "What are you guys talking about man?" "Yeah, this and that, man." "Ah man, get out of here. You know, you're talking to somebody that came from that side of the track. You guy had all this opportunity on this side of the track." I said, "Man, if I made it you guys can make it. Anybody can make it. You know, what are you talking about?" So, we got in a big argument. I said, "Like I told you, I was hep on history. So, they'd get all teed off at me. "Ah," you know. But, I had the printing press, right? So, I'd print their fliers and what have you. And, I remember one time they came over and he said, "Hey man," he said, "why don't you come to this conference?" I said, "What conference?" Don't forget, it's '68 now. I have two children. I've been married seven years, six or seven years, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I'm living on the east side. I've got the car of the year, '68 Pontiac La Mans, and I got three jobs. I got more money than I know what to do with, man, you know. And so they said, "Yeah, why don't you come to this conference?" I said, "What is it about?" So, it was a MECHA Conference. The first MECHA Student Conference at San Diego State. I



said, "Yeah. I'll go. I'll check it out." So, I went down there and I'll always remember, you know, I mean that was the first time I had seen that many Mexicans gathered in some other place other than a church or a church hall dance, or a community building dance, or a wedding, you know. And, here they're talking about politics. And, I remembered the speakers. There was, Gracia Molina de Pick, there was Bert Rivas, who was head of the EOP there at San Diego State. There was Alurista. And there was Rene Nuñez, who just passed away. And, I remember saying to, in my mind I said, you know, "This is the first Mexican I've ever heard talk at something other than brindis or, you know, at a wedding, you know, they're talking about politics. And, you know, talking about this, talking about that." And, like I said I was a student of history. "Wow. I'm not so much a student of history, a student interested in history, I guess." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, I said, "Wow." I said, "So," I remember in my mind saying, "You know, hey what they're saying is right," and, you know, like I said, you don't know what you don't know, until you know, you know and you start reflecting." (Patino: Right.) I said, "Yeah, that's right. How come there isn't, how come like in New Mexico there isn't no representatives around here?" you know. (Patino: Right.) So, my mind kicked back to New Mexico where people were actively involved, where people did hold positions. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) It was no big deal, you know. They had a sheriff there, the county clerk, you know. And I said, "Yeah, how come there isn't? Yeah. How come there ain't no students up here?" And, blah, blah, blah, you know. And so, you know I read some of the literature, you know, like the farm workers. "Yeah, that's right." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I had been working on those farms, you know. I worked in the farms over here in Otay picking string beans. I remember one summer when I was out there, all of us, everybody found out there was work out there and I remember we got in a big dirt clod fight. The guy fired all of us after a week. [Laugh] "Yeah," you know. And, so that's when I guess



when I made a calculated decision and said, "You know what?" Remember, I wasn't a student. I was there from the community. I was in the area, you know. I had never been to college. I didn't know about college. And, I remember telling a group of people that I work with at the college, I said, "Hey, why don't we start an organization and work on the community?" "What kind of an organization?" "I don't know," you know. So, I start looking around and that's when some other friends told me about MAPA, Mexican-American Political Association. I never ever heard of it. He says, "Yeah, it's a statewide organization in politics." I said, "Oh yeah? Yeah. Good." I said, "Yeah, that sounds like, that sounds like something that, you know, could get people involved in the community." So, I went to a meeting, or we met, and they said, "Well, this is what you've got to do, you know. Get membership cards. Some guys came down from, I think they were from Blythe, from Indio (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and that's our start. That's our start.

**PATINO:** Maybe we can start there?

**BACA:** Okay. We'll start there.

**PATINO:** Maybe look at some stuff? Let me ask you though, these friends they were people you grew up with?

**BACA:** Yeah, people . . .

**PATINO:** That introduced you to all the stuff?

**BACA:** Yeah. People that I grew up, (Patino: Uh huh.) you know, that I had gone to school with. People that I . . .

**PATINO:** Yeah. And they were coming back from the war (Baca: Yeah.) and college?

**BACA:** A lot of people I still know, you know. (Patino: Uh huh.) People that went on to, you now, positions. And, yeah, so like I said the only thing is, like I told you before, is that what I



forgot was I remember I was brought up real, real catholic, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and when I look back that has a lot to do with my thinking, you know, both pro and con about the catholic religion, you know, and its place in our lives, my life. And . . .

**PATINO:** Did you still go to church here when you came out here?

**BACA:** Oh yeah, that was sixth grade. Yeah. (Patino: Yeah.) Probably seventh grade and eighth grade I started separating. But, I remember, I remember, you know, that without a doubt it had a, did impact on my thinking. No doubt about it.

**PATINO:** In terms of morality?

**BACA:** Morality, ethics, right and wrong. (Patino: Right.) And like I said, both pro and con, you know. (Patino: Right.) What they taught and what they did, (Patino: Yeah.) you know.

**PATINO:** What was left out.

**BACA:** Which created conflicts, you know. You know, because you don't know what you don't know. Then when you know it, well, you try to resolve it some way, somehow. And, you know, it's, I'm probably what you call a "cultural Catholic guy." (Patino: Yeah.) That's what my people are. That's what my family is and all my people are, you know. The majority of them anyway. You know, it's . . .

**PATINO:** How you were raised?

**BACA:** Yeah. But, practicing? No. [Laugh]

**PATINO:** Let me ask you one last thing. What is it that, what was it about the speakers and the people in the politics you were being introduced to that made you make such a switch from conservative to . . .

**BACA:** Well, you know, like I said you don't know what you don't know. (Patino: Right.) And, I think it was the freshness, the novelty, [Laugh] like you know, "Hey, we, I've never seen



that before." It was a complete, new presentation, and it was something that, you know, you seen Kennedy do it. You've seen Martin Luther King do it. (Patino: Right.) And, all of a sudden it says, "Hey, look, my own people are doing it."

**PATINO:** Mexicanos are doing it?

**BACA:** You know, and it was refreshing. It was innovative. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) It was exciting. [Laugh] (Patino: Right. Right.) You know, "Hey, what's going on here, you know?" I mean some, you know, and like I said -- but I've always been a person that has tried to confront the truth, you know, one way or another. And, you know, and based on, you know, my experiences, my life, what was taught to me by my family, my parents. So, I'll tell you a story about my grandmother and Condras? I tell my kids that. You know, all my kids know that story. You know, it's like, "Yeah, I remember that story." I said, "There's a big lesson there that, you know, that you don't have to go to college. She gave that man human dignity and respect for a couple of hours and that's pretty fantastic when you stop and think about it." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, I've always been a person that's tried to confront the truth, you know, based on my life experiences. And, I think that's basically, I couldn't deny it because I grew up, you know. Like I told you, we used to come to this neighborhood and it was an exclusive Anglo neighborhood, but we couldn't conceptualize it, you know. We just understood that, "Hey, you're not supposed to be here." (Patino: Yeah.) Nobody, I guess ever asked "Why?" Why not? That's the way it was. You know, I remember telling this reporter one time, "The cops used to stop us so much that when they didn't stop us we felt like, 'Hey, don't they like us anymore?'" Yeah. I mean, we'd cross National Avenue, National City Boulevard, and they would stop us. I mean, that was routine. You know, and it was like a cat and mouse kind of game, you know. (Patino: Yeah.) I mean, it was no big deal.



**PATINO:** Part of everyday life?

**BACA:** Yeah, it was just, you know, crossing the street kind of thing. (Patino: Yeah.) And, we never conceptualized that. So, but when you start looking at it and you put it in another context, and "Hey, how come there's no representatives? Hey, how come, you know, our children are not in school, in colleges?" and blah, blah, blah. And then, "Hey, wait a minute. One plus one is two. Oh, and, you know, ABC and down the road, you know, until you get to Z, everything's connected." So, I think it was more that and, like I said, I think I had a basic background or understanding based on what I had read. And so it was, so you know, it wasn't any, you know, Saint Paul on the road to Damascus kind of thing, you know. It was like, it was like, it was there. (Patino: Right.) I had experienced it. I had seen it. That's why I told you the story about getting slapped in the third or fourth grade in New Mexico. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, "What's going on here?" Also I'll tell you the story about, "okay you tacos get in line." I mean, it was, it's just like that was the truth. Yeah, I had the car of the year, but what did that mean? You know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Systematically, you know. Were my kids going to have a car of the year if things were they were? I don't think so. You know, so those are the kind of questions, and like I told people before you've got to remember the times, the context of the time. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) There was all kinds of things going on. There was all kinds of questions flying from a bunch of groups, (Patino: Yeah.) blacks, the civil rights movement, you know, the riots, the . . .

**PATINO:** Anti-Vietnam?

**BACA:** Yeah. The anti-war, the Youth Movement, the Yippies. Or, not the Yippies. Yeah, the Yippies, right? Is that the word?

**PATINO:** Hippies?



**BACA:** Abbey Hoffman and the hippies.

**PATINO:** Yeah, hippies.

**BACA:** The Women's Movement. AIM, you know. There was, just, I mean there's just 50,000 questions and very few answers. So, that was the context and like I told you before most people looking back, reflecting back, got involved out of anger. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, like, just like what I'm telling you. "Hey, I don't know why they stopped me." Now I do. [Laugh] Dirty rats, (Patino: Yeah.) you know. Or, going back to school, the shop classes. I thought, we thought we were pulling one over them, when . . . [Recording paused]

**PATINO:** It's here in San Diego?

**BACA:** Yeah. It's right here in Lincoln Heights.

**END SIDE 1, TAPE 2, SESSION 1. AUGUST 2, 2006.**

**BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2, SESSION 1. AUGUST 2, 2006. [Counter Reset]**

**BACA:** Dr. Ron Karenga, you know. (Patino: Yeah.) So, there's another book that I've read. It's by a Jewish author, Peter Goldman. It wasn't *The Life and Death*, it was, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*. I think what I liked about Malcolm X was his blunt truthfulness. (Patino: Right.) You know, and you know people mix it up. So, the way they attempt to categorize it. You know, they were the black supremacists, you know. Trying to get an elephant off your foot is, you know, just makes you someone trying to get the elephant off your foot, you know. It's when other people are trying to put an elephant on your other foot then, you know, that's when you get into supremacy. Now you're trying to afflict someone else. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) But I, when I look back I, you know, I was highly influenced by, more by Malcolm X than Martin Luther King. When I dug about Martin Luther King was his personal courage, you know, (Patino: Yeah.) and his confronting, you know, confronting the system, the white supremacist system,



you know, which wasn't easy. And, you know, it's just two different approaches, you know, to have. And something that's , those are options that are open in any struggle, you know. Which direction do you take? But, the real issue is, are you doing something? Are you trying to move something? Are you trying to get the ball forward? (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, you know, and I think where we left off was with MAPA, right?

**PATINO:** Yeah. 1968.

**BACA:** Yeah, 1968, after the student conference. And like I said, I wasn't a student. I had never been a student. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I was already in the community and I lived right across the street from here where we're sitting at. As a matter of fact, I've been living here since, this house here, 1959. And then, when I left I probably, '62 to '66. So, I was gone for four years, but I always lived in National City. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And then I came back and I rented that home across the street that, where my second son was born, or he was just around six months, I think, when we moved in, and I was there from '66 to 2001, 2002. I forget when we moved over there. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I was renting, when I moved into that house in 1966 I was paying \$95 a month, and you can see this yard, right. That's exactly how the other ones are. And, I was renting it and when I got divorced in '72 the owner of that home, you know, was going to sell it and my father bought the house. So, from '72 until 2002 I rented from my dad, from my mom and dad. And, they probably don't know it but, you know, with the ridiculous low rent that I was paying, and continue to pay, they probably don't have any understanding how much they enabled me to do what I did. (Patino: Right.) In 2002 when my father deceased -- my mother's ninety years old now, my father deceased in '98, so that's what, eight years ago? The family had me moved into this house next to my mother's and, you know, so we could be next to



her. So, this area right here I've been here since 1959, off and on, you know, minus four years.

(Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, what is it now? Going on fifty, forty?

**PATINO:** Yeah. Fifty.

**BACA:** Fifty. Yeah. Fifty years and three years. (Patino: Yeah.) So, this has been home, you know, right here. After we came from Old Town National City this is, my dad moved in.

Believe it or not I think my dad paid \$12,000 for this house in 1959.

**PATINO:** Wow. What do houses run these days in this neighborhood?

**BACA:** Well, let me put it this way that neighbor across, who bought his house probably around that time, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) he sold his house two years ago for \$305,000.

**PATINO:** God.

**BACA:** So, right now you're probably looking at \$450,000. (Patino: Yeah.) Ridiculous.

**PATINO:** Right. That's high.

**BACA:** It's almost obscene. You know, it's, you know, I don't know how people do it.

**PATINO:** Yeah. I don't either.

**BACA:** You know.

**PATINO:** It's crazy.

**BACA:** So, for young people nowadays I really don't know how they can live in San Diego.

(Patino: Hmm.) But I, so I kind of lived here and so I was already here. And, like I said after I came out of the student conference, you know, everyone was fired up. There was actions. There was a lot of activity taking place all over, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) in a lot of areas. There was a great awakening. But, like I said, you have to look at it in the context of the time. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, it was happening throughout the whole country. It just, you know, it just wasn't in our community. (Patino: Yeah.) And, in fact, I think to a degree our community was



awakened by the other efforts that were taking place. And people, you know, people started looking inwards. It was a time of reflecting on your given situation whether you were young middle class, upper middle class youth that were being affected by the Anti-War Movement and by the cultural changes that were taking place, the music.

**PATINO:** Civil rights?

**BACA:** Yeah. Civil Rights, you know, the black community, and the women's, the women's situation, the Native Americans, and even poor whites (Patino: Yeah.) in Appalachia, you know. So – there's my mom over there. Pretty good for ninety, huh?

**PATINO:** Oh yeah. [Laugh] If I'm that, if I make it that far.

**BACA:** She's pretty remarkable. Pretty remarkable. People just shake their head. I know some people seventy-four, seventy-five that can barely walk around.

**PATINO:** Oh yeah. That's great. [Laugh]

**BACA:** But anyway, so we're here in the community. Like I said, I was already established. I had two kids, three jobs, car of the year, and I was like so many other people, you know, just looking at the world in terms of my, how it affected my personal situation. And, that's not the total world. That's not even your total family. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, like I said, "We, when I started reflecting I, there were certain things I couldn't deny. I had experienced them. I had gone through them. And, those outweighed the artificial, the artificial materialism that, you know, I had obtained, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) so to speak, you know, the three jobs, the car of the year, you know, blah, blah, blah. And, like I told you the last time you don't know what you don't know. You just don't know what you don't know. That's all there is to it, you know. If people tell you Columbus discovered America, that's what you think. That's all you know, you know, until somebody points out, you know, the other side, or you balance it out with really, you



know, other sides of history, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, we decided to, you know, we said, "Well, let's do something about it." And, when I look back even though I, I always hung around with older guys. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I was always the youngest guy in the group and for some reason I always wound up being the president, you know, [Laugh] of the organization, the club, or what have you, and I don't know why. [Laugh] I really don't know why, you know. There was smarter guys. There was tougher guys. And, but for some reason I always wound up being the president of, you know, the various clubs. (Patino: Yeah.) When I was growing up, you know, we had a club, the Solteros, you know, neighborhood kids from Old Town. And I, we were pretty astute, I guess, you know as far as organizational skills. We had jackets. We had jackets, you know, that, for twenty, thirty guys, you know, that probably cost \$40 or \$50, which was a lot of money back then when you're making ninety cents an hour, (Patino: Yeah.) you know. With an emblem and, you know, we'd have meetings. And we had, we used to have dances and we used to pack them in, man. We used to pack them in. And, I'll show you a ticket that I got at the shop one of these days. Four bands for, live bands, for ninety cents. (Patino: Uh huh.) [Laughter] And, of course, you know, it was, you know, the usual youth stuff, you know, other, you know, engaging with other, other areas of, that weren't from National City, you know. Because, the guys were from National City. (Patino: Yeah.) But, I remember one time we had a dance. There used to be a teenage club where this guy used to broadcast these dances, like a teen post kind of, right here at Eighth and National, Seventh and National Avenue, right here in National City. And, the guy saw that we had attraction power, so he used to have dances every Friday, but he wasn't getting the crowds. So, I remember one time he came over he says, "Hey," he says, "how about you guys having a dance at my place?" He says, "I'll put up everything and, you know, we'll split it down the middle, you know. You just get the people here." I said,



"Okay." So, but what he didn't know was that we had an ongoing feud with some guys from Linda Vista, and there had been some problems the week before. So, that night when we're at the dance there must have been a good five, six hundred people in this place. And, somebody came up and said, "Hey, this guy," a big guy, he was from Linda Vista, he said, "He's outside and he's trying to sneak in through the side door." So anyway, okay, so we waited for him and when he came in there was a confrontation. We started fighting and the whole place went wild. People started throwing chairs, ashtrays, bottles. There was a big giant riot, man. I mean, [Laugh] the Shore Patrol, the NCPD.

**PATINO:** In this guy's place?

**BACA:** Yeah. That place was demolished, man. And, I always remember the next day me and my compadre went down there, had the audacity to go down there, [Laugh] and asked the guy, "Where's our half man?" He said, "Look at my place! It's ruined. Get out of here." [Laughter] I said, "Damn, I said, well we have a deal man." [Laughter] So, you know . . .

**PATINO:** You were the president of that one too?

**BACA:** I was the president of that club. I was the only president they ever had, you know. And, you know, so I don't know. I remember, now that I'm talking about that, I remember when I was a kid in New Mexico, I had to be eight, between eight and ten years of age, I remember I used to like this girl. Her name was Francis. And my cousin in New Mexico, I told him that I liked Francis. So, he says, "I'll trade you her for your slingshot." I say, "No lie?" [Laugh] I said, "Man, that's a good deal man." So, I gave him my slingshot. So, after that nothing happened. I says, I said, "I think this guy got me and got me good, man." But anyway, I remember organizing a softball team and guess who wasn't on the baseball team? My cousin. [Laugh] So, I guess even back then I was political, you know. (Patino: Yeah.) And, I don't



know why. I mean, but I was always, you know, I was always the youngest guy. I always hung around with older guys and, you know, and when I look back I says, you know, I says, "Some things I guess are just meant to be, you know." Like, I'm the only president the CCR's ever had. But, like I always tell people, "Yeah, well you don't get paid either, you know. It's free. You want all the hassles? Take it." [Laugh] Maybe it's not because you're great. Maybe it's because you ain't so bright, you know. I don't know. [Laughter] So, but all those things, you know, it's, you look back, you reflect back, you know, and you know I'm sixty-three years right now and, you know, like I told you I have my mom, my dad, you know. My dad was a hard, hard worker. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, he was a hard, hard worker. He was, you know, whatever he got he earned and he was a workaholic, you know. And, he was a very smart man. I mean, he never went to school but the third grade, that I know of. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) But, he knew about electricity, plumbing, you know, construction, cars, you know. And, if he didn't know he'd pull out a book and start until he figured it out. Toasters, you know, anything mechanical. (Patino: Yeah.) And he, and he never had the formal education. My mom has always been a Rock of Gibraltar, you know. She's always, she's always been there. As a matter of fact, let me put it this way. I think the longest that I've ever been away from my mother or my wives is probably two weeks. (Patino: Yeah.) I mean, I live next door to my mother. I live right across the street since '66, and then before that I lived here. (Patino: Yeah.) So, my mom has always been there, you know. I lived next, I lived across the street and now I live next door, [Laugh] you know. And my mother has, you know, a very, very strong faith, you know. And, you know, a practicing Catholic. And, you know, just the traditional family. My father was the head of the family, and hey, if he would have said, "Let's go to Alaska," we would have been in Alaska. As simple as that, you know. That's the way it was.



**PATINO:** That's kind of the base?

**BACA:** Yeah. So, I've been real, real fortunate. I had some good parents and God has allowed me to, you know, have my mother this long, and like you just saw her she's pushing trashcans around and (Patino: Yeah.) she's ninety years old [Laugh] you know. So, all those things, you know, you start reflecting back, start looking back, and start saying, "Well, you know. But, like I said, it's, when you look back the issue is does the man makes the times or does the times make the man? You know. Who would Martin Luther King be today if he showed up? (Patino: Yeah.) I don't think, I don't think the times are there that, that, you know, would have allowed him to do what he had to do. (Patino: Yeah.) Where would a Malcolm X be at now, you know? But, you know, that's putting the cart in front of the horse, I guess. You know, you got, what they did is why, you know, for every action there's a reaction. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, you, a place and a time for everything, like the Good Book says. (Patino: Uhm-hmm. Uhm-hmm.)

So, you know, we got into MAPA and we said, "Well, let's start and let's do something." And, like they say, you know, everybody was full of piss and vinegar, you know. People . . .

**PATINO:** Did you join MAPA or did you . . .

**BACA:** Well, like I told you, we got together, there were some people here that, there was already a chapter of MAPA in San Diego. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) It was more traditional. It was a more conservative moderate type organization, you know. In other words, what was happening in the community at the time was, and what I always tell people is what I think is going to happen again is there was a "Mexican-American hierarchy," you know, and they were basically very limited. In other words, the power structure like you, you see even today, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) utilized them, you know, to access to maintain control of the community. (Patino: Yeah.)



They were the "responsible" they were the "leaders," and they were pumped up and built up because, you know, because they went along with the program. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, maybe they saw that as the only option, I don't know, but I'm sure there was also a lot of personal self-interest, you know, for either ego things or even business things, or little payoffs. But, back then, you know, the mayor would come around election time and those guys would get fronted some monies you know to have a carne asada buy a couple keg of beer and the candidates would come in and would be introduced by whomever was seen as the "leader" for whatever reasons, and say a few words, you know. "Hola, adios, and gracias," you know, that was it. And, you know, people have a free carne asada and a couple of beers, you know, free. And, you know, that was the extent of the political involvement, the political leadership. But, I always tell people I says, what happened was when the Chicano Movement burst upon the scene in our community it was a like a hurricane, like Hurricane Katrina, and the young people they didn't know of those individuals, and they didn't care about those individuals, and they didn't owe those individuals anything. And, I think that's what's going to happen when another generation wakes up with the established organizations, or the established individuals that we have. Because, you now, it's, they haven't, they haven't met the need. They haven't built the anything. So really, their only link is, you know, whatever power is given to them. But, when you have a mass movement like what existed at that time, when the Chicano Movement burst on the scene those guys were gone in six months. They were there, but I mean nobody was talking to them, you know. (Patino: Right.) They were defending themselves from being accused of being tio tacos, you know, coconuts. [Laughter] So, they had two choices, either, you know, join the bandwagon or go into isolation. (Patino: Yeah.) But, the fact remained that they were thrown into oblivion, into the junkyard of history and that's basically what happened. I mean, this wasn't about individuals. It



was just individuals that were playing a different tune than the tune that came out of this mass movement. Because, when the Chicano Movement came upon the scene there was a lot of activism. There was a newspaper. There was you know, poetry. There was music. There was meetings everywhere. There was pickets, demonstrations. I mean a lot of activity, a lot of activities. You know, teatros, you know, the folkloricos, people communicating with people that they had never, in places that they didn't even know existed, which hadn't been done before, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) you know. Everybody had the same kind of sheet of music type thing. (Patino: Right.) You know, and everybody was singing off the same sheet of music. So, there was a lot of activism. And, of course, like anything else there was also a lot of resistance. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) There was a lot of confusion. There was a lot of apprehension. There was a lot of fear, you know, from the older generation that have been conditioned, "Hey, no, no, don't say nothing. No digas nada. No digas nada." "They're going to arrest you. They're going to harass you. They're going to deport you." See, and like I said we, our youth did not, hadn't allowed us to be conditioned. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, like I said, people were full of piss and vinegar. So, and the system, the system, you know, just like here, just like Katrina man, the system didn't know what hit them. They had to regroup. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, "Hey, how come this water's so high? What do we do? How do we get rid of it? How do we contain it?" You know, "How do we abolish it?" You know, so. All of those factors were present at the, you know, when we started talking about organizing MAPA.

**PATINO:** I'm gonna take a quick break. [Recording paused].

**BACA:** Yeah, so anyway. So that, that was sort of the atmosphere when we started to talk about creating MAPA.

**PATINO:** The Chicano Movement in San Diego, by '68 it was around, I guess?



**BACA:** Yeah.

**PATINO:** And it was based in the student?

**BACA:** It was basically based in, yeah, students. It was coming out of the campuses, you know.

**PATINO:** SDSU, (Baca: Yeah.) places like that?

**BACA:** And, you know, they were bringing it to the community, really. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, and a lot of it was centered around like the farm workers. (Patino: Right.) You know, people started hearing about Corky Gonzales, you know, Reies López Tijerina. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, you know, people were searching. People were looking. And like I said, there was a lot of apprehension. There was a lot of resistance. There was a lot of ridicule, you know, like anything, with anything that changes. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, people are set in their ways. People are conditioned. People believe what they've been told, you know, and they've never had an alternative point of view. And, you know, it wasn't like it was accepted with open arms, you know. (Patino: Yeah.) I remember, there was so much activism that some of it was even, you know, turn your head. Like I remember reading in L.A., Catholicos for La Raza, you know, they were protesting inside of a church, you know. I said, "What?"

**END SIDE 2, TAPE 2, SESSION I. HERMAN BACA. AUGUST 2, 2006.**

**END INTERVIEW SESSION I.**