

Pedro Ibarra

(A) Pedro Ibarra and his daughter Leonor, are you Ibarra too? (L) Yes.

(A) Señor Ibarra cuando nació usted?

(L) Que cuando naciste?

(A) Dejalo alli no emporte.

(L) Dile cuando naciste, cuando naciste.

(P) En el noventa.

(A) El noventa.

(P) El ninety.

(A) Ninety, huh. When did you come here to the United States? (L) Cuando veniste aqui en los Estados Unidos?

(P) En el dies.

(A) En el dies, entonces usted tenia veinte anos cuando bino verdad? Y porque bino aqui?

(P) Con quien vine?

(L) Porgue veniste para aca.

(P) Pues vine a trabajar, para ased la vida.

(A) No habia trabajo en Mexico? Y no habia manera de aser deso en Mexico?

(L) Que si no habia trabajo en Mexico?

(P) Pues sobria, no habia. Nosotros veviamos en el rancho. We don't know nothing about it. No sabemos nada de que era lo que se movia.

(A) How did you know to come to the United States?

(L) Y porque sabias tu que aqui en los Estados Unidos habia trabajo. Quien te dijo?

(P) No avia trabajo.

O.K. this comensaria the way that everything that the Mexican needed and they would take it out of their check. They didn't have to go to the store or anywhere, they could buy right there in the comensaria. They had everything right there for them. Working shoes, everything except food. They had to go out and get the food. But they over charged them guys a little bit more for that clothing, and that comes out of their check. They took it out of the check. But when the employee got the check, a lot of . that is already taken off. But they didn't care because they were not getting to much in Mexico. What they got here was quite a bit. And I found two things also in the comensario. Some of these Mexican people would want to send money to their parents in Mexico. They would come up to this man at the comensario and tell him. Send this money for us you know, to my family in Mexico. He would take the money and he would try to claim that he send it, he wouldn't send it. Then the fellow would come back, they used to tell me a lot. Tell me that my family didn't receive the mail, they used to blame the Mexican mail men, that they robbed the mail and all this and that. But sometimes the guy wasn't sending the mail. Until one man, I told this man one time, his name was Raymond Gonzales. He was an uneducated man. Everybody thought that he was real, smart because he did acknowledge. So I went to him and told him. I said, Ramon some of these Mexican people here that send money to Mexico, claims that the parents I mean that their families aren't getting it. How are they sending it. Well they give it to the comensario man. Well the comensario man would say he put it, the money in the letter. We told him that's wrong. Because at the post office we have the man from the post office to come over and investigate to Mr., Raymond Gonzales. They said you have to make a check, a certified check to send. These people in Mexico. lot of them

couldn't even cash a check, because they didn't have a way to do it, and if they did they would rob them anyway. But some of them would do that. So then he got after this, the company, the railroad got after this man and told him what he was doing wrong and the company took responsibility to see that the people would get their money in Mexico. A lot of them would send their money through the railroad. But that commissary was nothing but a give me, and a guy would pay a contract to the company, Pay so much a year, just like a consession at the ball diamond to run the commissary. They would sell these people different things that they needed and to their price. They would go, these people, a lot of them, they know a lot of them like you say, they were well educated. Because I got to talk to some of them, and even I was ashamed to talk to them, because they could read and write in Spanish to me and they could tell me things that I didn't even know about it. Because of well educated, but they came here like you said, on a need of a employment. That's when the commissary come in from the railroad. Every railroad had it. Santa Fe, U.P, Rock Island, all of them had it. They used to call it commasario, commissary. They would go get their clothing, working clothes, things that they needed.

(Q) Also, were the Unions coming in, a lot of these Mexican people, black people before they retired and they knew the Union was coming in, they laid all these guys off.

#1 Yes, well the railroad, really, I tell you what. The railroad didn't want to lay off none of these old timers. I'll tell you the reason why. There were the guys who worked, that the railroad had. I don't care how cold it was, I don't care how much it was raining, sometimes we would go out in the yards and this young man can tell you. Water clear up to your knees. You have to get the train out, get the cars out. A lot of the people wouldn't do it. Then they'd lay off. Have the kids lay off and would have to call the old timers to come in. Now you take the packing houses and other places, they did. When the Union began to come in they'd start cutting down, then laying some of the Mexicans, the company, Union request of good benefits for the employer. We had trouble, he's a member of the Union, same one I still belong since I've been I still pay my dues. We had trouble with the Union itself, the Mexican people. They would verify that they would approve some of the other anglos, the other people on jobs, do something we had to fight. We had a Mexican boy that run for local chairman and got elected. And to the telephone conversation he just quit. They trapped him and all this and all that.

(Q) What was it like for women during that time? Were women working?

#2 Well I never did see all my life. All my life I've worked all over. You name it, and I've done it. I worked in the packing house. I worked about thirteen and a half years in the packing house.

(Q) Were there a lot of Mexican women working?

#2 Not very many, not very many because they wouldn't hire. I really don't push myself, I don't like to be pushed anywhere I go. You know push myself and I'm going to do this until I'm asked. But I'm there just like any other anglo organization and I have to belong to a line. And I'm the only Mexican, a lot of times to let them know that we're there, we're not gone, we're there. We want to participate. And I don't care how hard it is, I'm going to try to do my darnest to get to where they're at.

#3 I think during the war a lot of housewives went out to work. Lucy Medina never worked in her life and she worked at Wilsons during the war. (three people talking at the same time)

#1 She was making notes to kill all those Japs. She was a good woman

(Q) In the packing house what was the working conditions like?

#3 Dirty, very hard and very bad. You know you find all kinds of people there, but you yourself

are yourself. You know they talk so much about how they taught women about packing houses. They should talk bad about the women in packing house, but I'll say you're yourself, not because you go to a packing house. He's who you are and what you do, that you know; your self respect and all of that and nobody bothers you. I used to go inside that packing house and come right out, and they were bad working conditions.

(Q) There was pressure then?

#3 Well, there were; during the depression we would keep on coming and we would keep on going until we finally established our seniority and then they had to take us. But they were hard because I know some Mexican woman that she's not living now. She bought herself a job. Because she said, I have some children and she said I have to work. And she said, I don't have a husband. She actually told me that the reason that she bought that job is because they would never hire her. So she called this time keeper to a side you know, and told her that she would pay him so much if he would hire her. She did pay the man and the man did hire her. And she said, I don't care how I get a job but I do want a job. And I said, well if you got the job I guess that's what you need. I said, If that's the only way you can get a job, get it.

(Q) Can you describe maybe a little bit, what it was like working there? You said the working conditions were pretty bad.

#3 Well, pretty bad because you have to walk all over the water. All over blood and pretty soon before you know it you would be working under all this meat. And here comes one around you and you turn around and you know things ...

#1 A bull would turn loose they would kill each other, they have to get a knife, stab it... She was talking about buying those jobs. They don't allow on the railroad, alot of these poor Mexicans on the railroad, but the company didn't know lot of these foremans, see what I mean. They would tell this guy, you're getting so much and I'll put you on. And he knew he needed some people, but he would go out and tell some of the others, pick some of the other guys here and charge him so much every pay day, twenty five or thirty dollars a pay day. Well they weren't getting to much on the railroad and these people needed the job. They had to go ahead and pay this guy. They used to call them coyotes, the same coyote was the one that used to go and bring those guys here. Now they're still coyotes and they come across you know, the river without any papers and stuff, they're still coyotes. Them coyotes were a long time, I mean they have them on the railroad many years ago. But like I said,...

(Q) So the coyotes were Mexican foremans?

#1 Mexicans, and they would, in cahoots with the foreman.

(Q) I see.

#1 See, they were Mexicans. A lot of these foremans were coyotes themselves. They would ask the guy, I know when I was carrying water, one guy asked me, hey you're suppose to give me, I think he said ten dollars a month. I said, for what? I said, you're not the red cross or the salvation army. He said, so you can keep the job. I said, you can stick your job here, I'm not going to pay you no ten dollars a month. Then I turned it in to the superintendant and they got after them. They used to be some bad ones, right here in Argentine, foremans.

(Q) The company was unaware of this?

#1 Oh yea, the company wasn't aware of this. The company wouldn't ask those guys to do that, the company was trying to do everything right with the employees, with everybody but just the people that run. It's the same thing like way back when Benito Juarez and Maximillionario came

over here. He tried to do a good thing with Mexico but the ones he had working for him done him dirty. No the company was not aware of it.

#2 That's part of the work here. I don't know, I may be bragging but

#4 Well he told us me and him had to take ...

#2 Well it's thirteen years that, I don't know how many he's got now. But it's been thirteen years ago and seven years before that it was the last time cause one time about

(Q) You had accumulated sick leave?

#2 I think my brother and my husband were about the best workers.

#5 It's about forty years now, I started in 41 but I had a year in

#1 they had food to give you. My dad so when we was doing that they told me if you're old enough to go out and get your job, so they made me quit school. This goes back fifteen years later maybe longer than that. I wanted it was the only thing that was opened here. We'd go in May and come back in November. You made good money but it was long hours. When we came back, when I got this job here at the railroad, he said you have to have a high school education. But I worked for this guy that had a lot of pull there and he told me, you're too young to be doing this kind of hard work. He said I'll get you a job I said I don't have a high school education. He says, you just leave it up to me. The next day he called me up and said you got a job. So I started working down there... I worked one year and then went to the service. Well then during that one year that I worked, I worked enough time to get a vacation. So while I was on vacation they so I had gone up to well because I had vacation they sent two guys that were younger than me around me, three guys around me. So when I came back that guy said that's alright you're going to the army you only have one week to go. We'll fix it up when you come back. So two guys behind me, two three years behind me. So when we got out of the service the third man would come by and say, no you're late. I said, well these guys who were here already. Some of them didn't hire till I was in the army two years, during the war. No that's when we got together and complained to the govt. well, some of them won't some of them like he was below me in seniority about fifteen guys, well he went ahead of me about fifty. Because while he was here they set it up, they said they had to work one day as a helper. With them people, say I'll fix it up when you come back. So they just beat me so we worked there, then the initials were bad and I'll tell you the work was alright.

(Q) As a veteran were you able to fight that

#1 Oh yea, so when we came back they had this company, they weren't very strong. So then they got their own, they would not let Mexicans after World War II. This was in 48, so then they fought it and the court said they had to admit us in. So then we got in the Union and then we couldn't get no offices. But we let it go for a while and then between them when we come out of the service we tried to perform a veterans group they wouldn't have us. We met in his house in the first floor doing and we formed the first veterans group around here. Still and it was the only one in the state, probably the only one in the and just because the wouldn't have us, these guys wouldn't have us.

(Q) What year was that organized?

#1 Back in 45. There's about twelve of us, fifteen of us ... A problem to meet I got to get another apartment house, come over there and meet and then I had a place in Armoudale. It used to be the Pan American Recreation Center and it was just a basement that we bought for them to meet and have dances. Then we started having then they started even that we had a hell of a

time.

#2 On this Union they finally allowed us in the Union. So then we seen that things weren't going right for years, that they had their own and everything. So one day we got together, again we got the Mexican group and said, hey want they want to hear, we can take it. Easy, we took the first just like we took everybody, with everybody and took and them all up.

(Q) What year was that?

#2 That year was in let's see, in about 1968, 67 we still and we threw them out and they called it illegal and went and got some lawyers, their Union did. We're all paying the same Union and they're fighting us, this group was fighting us. We did it legally so they went and got some lawyers and they said that the ballot box didn't have a lock on it. That was so we had to go back again and this time we had the thing back in the Armoury, they had some policeman there, had it out So then they were really mad, so we and see what they wanted, they wanted to keep this so when we was in there John Mendez, and this and me and another fellow were neighbors to Topeka at night. We tried to keep it down so the company wouldn't get after us, finally complained about discrimination well they had the restrooms right here to the door, brick wall they had but we was in a box car. So and jobs too, no foremans, no nothing.

(Q) in the Constitution that minorities could not move trains.

#2 We couldn't move trains or nothing, nothing

(Q) So in the Constitution of the Santa Fe where minorities could not move engineers, firemen, anything connected with moving...

#2 All this is week stuff because we went out to Topeka and had a meeting with the employer which was a football player who was called he was the head of the team, and entered the capitol at night, filed his complaint. Well naturally we wouldn't have bothered him, the group he wanted was individually well then I said, well, you know if the company is willing to come back So we said well, let's just file it as a group, we want you know this restrooms first. So we come back, it wasn't a week before the company had windows and they had a big they had apprentices, see they had apprentice at that time they had a quota they had one Mexican, one Black, four whites your chances were very slim. So the one that had a room where they had the locker rooms and when the apprentice of that month he well this Mexican we got the Union, they told him to get out with that and at that time there had been a clipping, a thing about somebody had lost their kids because they took him here in Kansas took him out of the waiting room. So next thing about So we took it up with him and we voted you know, we said look, if you put him out of here, I belong, I pay Union dues to the American Legion And that guy just ready to write this up, he said I'm gonna write it up if you don't write it up and put it in the papers. Man he got mad. Since that time there was a fight here. Then we made another trip to Topeka at night to find you see you had to follow at that time through the Federal because Santa Fe was hauling mail. the Government had a contract and they had to follow the Government through. So then the Government come in.

(Q) The Federal Government?

#2 The Federal Government and we had meetings. with them and the guy come out and then finally the Mexican guy came in there. They fought it for about ten months, so then finally the guy gave them, he come in there and they hand that wall between the restrooms. So then this man comes in there about three o'clock in the afternoon and was sitting down and comes in and he told the guy, I don't care how many guys you get you get some busses and have this wall

busted by tomorrow night. And he came up there with busters and busted that wall down. When they made the restroom wall in the guys were eating in their cars, they didn't want to eat with us so actually I say it's been hard and everything in a Union and then the Union itself tried to keep you out, since that time you were supposed to make seven meetings to be eligible to run for office. So I knew I had seven meetings, so I go down there, I sit there meeting and hear it all. They got two guys who check the books and they read out the names, and they didn't read my name out. I said, well I'd be foolish to say I got maybe I'm wrong. So then I couldn't be put on the ballot. So then I said to the man I'd like to I said check them, no I'd like to check the books. So then I counted the dates and I had enough and it cost that Union \$600.00 for that mistake, for that bullheaded guy not to put \$600.00 they had to do it all over because I filed a complaint and said you have to put that man on the ballot. So since then, now it's pretty we got together through the GI forum and the American Legion and we filed a complaint with the Federal Government about foremans. Well at first they didn't want, oh they were mad they just didn't want us. When the Federal Government they sent lots of people from the labor down to the GI two ladies and a Black guy and set up typewriters and they took up all your history like you're doing here and since back when you were discriminated, when you should have been up here, then the guy said you want to be up here. The guy said you got seniority, there. Since then we got lots of But fight after fight they had it written down on there not one thing. After a while, you do this, one thing I noticed, you gain a little respect from those people.

#3 But we should have forgave them for that you know because regardless whether they discriminated, they did hire even for menial jobs. Because you could go to a lot of places and you couldn't get your toe in. You wouldn't work at the dime store, the first time I walked in and saw somebody at the dime store. I said, gosh a Mexican, here at T.G.& Y

(Q) When was that?  
#3 Well I can't remember, but it's been not too long ago. At the bank mind you, at the bank... At the bank it's been seven years ago probably. Six, seven years ago, where we've had golly thousands of dollars there of our community. And not even a janitor was working there. My son tried to get in there, they told them the, what? The overturn, the turnover was very slow. I says, you know I've been banking for thirty five years and you you mean the turnover is so slow that in thirty five years and so finally the Mexican people a group of five or six Mexican people went down to the bank. And I think Lucy Villenas

#2 We got there, we used to meet there every Monday in the morning John Mendez and Dave and all of them. Who said, let's get a committee and go talk to this man. So Joe went, we was invited, after they talked to him the first time he invited a group of us to go out and eat. He took them out to steak dinners. I didn't go John Mendez went. Anyway, the first thing that would come up was the pay. The pay wasn't that good. But now the first kid that got in there was this Galvan he's the Assistant, Vice-President now.

#3 But that was seven years ago.

#2 There's another thing, they had to go he forced him to.

(Q) Was he to file a suit?

#3 Yea, but they didn't give it to him.

(Q) Did she lose the suit?

#3 No, but I don't know if she lost it.

#2 I think they hired, they hired somebody else.

(Q) But they hired another Mexican?

#3- #2 Uh, huh they hired two, three other Mexicans, yea they're fully integrated now.

(Q) We talked maybe a little bit about other situations, like you mentioned the bank, other businesses or careers or...

#2 When this Simmons came over I didn't want to be rude to him, but I told him you know what, I wrote a fifteen page history of Argentine, I just will never get printed

#3 gets published in the Star.

#2 Sort of, but you know what, I said you the history I write about, I wrote about Argentine will never get finished, in any book. I said, I mailed the copy to the publisher of the record and I mailed a copy to Ed Shut. I said, I never got a response. I said, why would you. Because it's about the people, yourself how can you have read it. And I didn't want to be rude to him and tell him, well you were the main one too because, you know how do they say, from the cradle to the grave they discriminated. For a long time they wouldn't take Mexican people at Simmons you see. I mean it's been rough we like Argentine, we like Argentine but it has not always liked us.

(Q) How do you feel about your own children?

#2 Well they haven't been discriminated, well especially the little one now. Because they're fourteen years old. He had break up discrimination.

(Q) So it's better for the last generation?

#2 Oh, absolutely. But the other kids, now I have seven. Now they had on occasion they knew discrimination but not a whole lot. But then you know how it was, I mean where we knew where to go, where to work, where to play. Why go bucket, you know hurt and we didn't have to go where we weren't wanted so we avoided it.

#3 I had occasion where I knew that before I went to the army it was that bad and the police would catch you around that corner. They didn't want two, three Mexicans now you see now. He'd come up there and start with the you know, they'd get off the corner. So when I went to the army. I'm in the deep south where it's bad. I didn't want to go any place, the movies, the roller rink, anyplace. Bowling, so when I came back we lived in Turner, I got my