

SHADES OF L.A. INTERVIEW PROJECT
INTERVIEW SUMMARY
PETE RODRIGUEZ - 8/4/94
INTERVIEWER: SOJIN KIM
2 Cassette Tapes

SIDE A, TAPE 1

000 Silence

002 Introduction

004 Born in Sonora, Mexico --Cananea, a copper mining town in the mountains of Sonora. Born in 1919. Came to Los Angeles in 1923. He didn't know at the time that they came as political refugees because his father was involved in the 1910 Mexican revolution--was exiled to the United States. Came to Douglas, Arizona. Description of a photograph of Pete and his brother Eddie in navy outfits that his mother sewed for them--picture taken in Douglas, Arizona.

018 Crossed the border from Agua Prieta, Sonora into the United States through Douglas, Arizona in 1923. His oldest brother Eddie was a pioneer in bilingual broadcasting in Los Angeles.

024 Everyone in his family was born in Sonora. Father was Pedro Rodriguez and his mother was Teresa Acosta. His father was a Yaqui Indian and his mother was a Mayo Indian.

031 Father was in mining--family of miners and farmers. Father got involved in the revolution with the Obregon people and the de la Huerta people. His father was a labor organizer in Mexico. A lot of foreign investments were in Sonora due to the copper and farm lands (including the Guggenheims and the Chandlers).

048 In 1923 his family joined his father in Los Angeles. Moved to the old "Sonoratown"--around Macy and Olvera Streets. Los Angeles was much smaller. There were a lot of Chinese--near Chinatown. "La Placita," the Plaza was also called "Sonoratown" because a lot of people from Sonora came to Los Angeles. Lived near Macy and Ord.

066 When the Mexican workers began to migrate East of the river to Belvedere and Boyle Heights, his family moved as well. They lived in the "Russian flats"--now called "Aliso Pico," between 1st and 4th Street on Mission, Pecan Street up to Boyle Avenue.

074 A lot of people from Sonora were migrating to L.A. for work. His family had relatives in Sonoratown and then in Belvedere and Boyle Heights. They moved to the flats around 1924.

- 084 Impressions of Los Angeles when he moved here. He was four-years-old and from the desert. They took the Sur Pacifico (Southern Pacific RR) from Arizona to Los Angeles--passed through Palm Springs, Imperial Valley, Indio--he was amazed at the greenness of the state. He remembers horse-drawn street cars on Spring Street. They got off the train at the station on Alameda, and went to Ord and Spring to stay at a hotel. He remembers the tall buildings and seeing a lot of Chinese.
- 109 The family moved to Catalina in 1925 when his uncles got a job building Avalon Bay. Catalina Island and Avalon Bay were built by Mexican labor. In the early 20s, Catalina was just being built. A lot of Hollywood stars were there--the film industry was doing a lot of filming at the time on Catalina. He and his brother would watch the film crews, go fishing. They saw Oliver Hardy, Stan Laurel, Hoot Gibson, Tom Maynard.
- 134 His father returned to Mexico shortly after they arrived. He was part of the "Partido Liberal Nacional"--National Liberal Party, a radical party. He got involved with Ricardo Flores Magon--who had a paper called Regeneracion--Regeneration. He had opposed the Mexican government before the revolution and he had been living in Los Angeles. His father got involved with him and returned to Mexico.
- 148 His uncles had come from Mexico and joined his family in Los Angeles. They got jobs working in the shipyards in Wilmington and San Pedro Harbor, where they also lived for a while. Then, they got the job on Catalina Island.
- 153 His mother was a seamstress. She worked for Mission Linen Supply Company on 1st and Mission--this is why they moved to the Flats. When they were living on Catalina Island she didn't work.
- 160 Started the 1st grade on Catalina Island. The school no longer exists; it's now a Baptist Church. His uncle was killed on Catalina Island after he went into a bar where Mexicans were not allowed. His other uncle returned to Mexico because he was tired of the prejudice and violence. Pete and his mother and his brother returned to Los Angeles.
- 187 They moved to Orange County. It was all farms and orange groves--no freeways, no houses, no Anaheim Hills. He remembers the smell of the orange groves and that there were a lot of Japanese farms. His family lived in a small town called Olive that no longer exists. There was a big reservoir, which was used to irrigate to the Santa Ana Valley.

- 201 He became "a Mexican Huckleberry Finn." He didn't like school. He didn't understand what was going on so he would try to avoid it. He would fish all day in the reservoir--he became friends with the caretaker. He lived in Olive from age 9 to 12, from 1928 to 1931. He would hunt in the hills with his slingshot. There were no grocery stores--if you wanted eggs, you went to the hen house; if you wanted milk, you milked the cows.
- 221 The Depression hit in 1929 and his family was living in Olive. He was having such a good time in Olive, he didn't realize he was poor. He didn't wear shoes--his feet were so calloused from walking around, he once stepped on a burning cigar and didn't notice.
- 235 His brother liked school--he was the smart one. Pete didn't get into school until he was in Junior High. In grammar school, he couldn't understand what was being said in school because they didn't want people to speak Spanish. Teachers would get mad when he didn't understand them. He wouldn't go to school but he still got graduated from school in Olive. His mother bought him a pair of shoes to graduate in. He was embarrassed by the shoes and all the kids teased him because of the shoes. He recently went back to the area to research the town and he met a woman who went to Olive grammar school at the same time that he was there.
- 262 He used to fool his mother and not go to school. He used to warn his brother not to tell his mother--his brother was more studious. He had two dogs that would go fishing with him. His dogs would be waiting for him when he would skip out of school.
- 273 It was wild country in those days. His son now lives in the Anaheim Hills. There was an old haunted flour mill in the area--now it's a historic landmark. The town was 6 blocks by 2 blocks in dimension.
- 303 On Catalina Island, the Mexican kids were separated from the Anglo kids in school. In Olive, the schools weren't segregated but you couldn't speak Spanish. He remembers being hit on the hands for not understanding what was being said.
- 332 His father would go back and forth and spend time with his family. He took the family to Olive. His other uncle had returned to Mexico after the other uncle was killed. His father stayed with them about a year before he left again.
- 345 Returned to Los Angeles in 1931. They moved to Boyle Heights on City Terrace. The neighborhood was primarily Jewish and affluent. Could see all of downtown and Griffith

Park. They used to have car races at Ascot Speedway, near where the General Hospital is. They would sit up in the hills and watch the races. There weren't any freeways. The affluent people built beautiful homes. There was an all Mexican section, but there were also a lot of Japanese, Blacks, Russians. Housing segregation wasn't really forced, but people tended to group together residentially.

- 374 He grew up on Soto Street and Brooklyn Avenue. They called him "Rodriguezov" because he hung around with a lot of Russians and Armenians when he went to Stevenson Junior High. He went to Roosevelt afterwards--called "Jewsavelt" because there were so many Jews there. He was drinking tea and eating bagels when he was 14, 15 years old at Canters and Ratner Bakery. Canters started on Brooklyn and Soto before they moved to the Fairfax.
- 401 Didn't go too far out of the neighborhood at that time. Later in the 1940s during the war and the big band area, they went out more. He jokes that it took him nineteen years to cross Main Street.
- 410 They used to go to the San Gabriel river in South San Gabriel to swim. The L.A. river was pretty big in those days before the concrete flood control was put in. They used to wade in the river. They would go to Lincoln Heights and go buy wine with the Italian guys after playing ball. They were very athletic: they played softball, baseball. He played football at Roosevelt with a lot of Japanese, Russian, and Jewish guys--they were City champs in 1933. The kids from different ethnic groups would "razz" one another--but it wasn't as racist as it is now.
- 438 In high school, he formed a club with some friends called the Fresno Athletic Club. He was president for 4 years.
- 444 During the Depression years, he realized how much graft and dishonesty there was in City Hall. When he lived on Orme in high school, a bomb went off nearby; a car belonging to a friend of the mayor's was blown up. It was the gangster days--gangsterism was rampant throughout the country, especially on the East Coast. But it was also present in East L.A.--mostly among the Jewish population.
- 480 They used to go to the movies a lot. They were influenced by the characters like James Cagney that they saw in the movies. They would see guys come out of nowhere and become rich. They learned a bit about the free enterprise system in the U.S. The Mexican areas were called "Colonias"--colonies. He and his friends learned how to band together and control certain corners to sell papers, shine shoes. They would go the Crystal and Jewel movie theatres on

Whittier. There was also a big Vaudeville theatre on Ford and Whittier that they would go to. Remembers the silent movies--their mother would give them 15 cents and they would go the movie, buy candy and soda, and still have money left over.

- 534 He and his friends also hung around at Evergreen Playground and Fresno Playground--on Fresno near Olympic. His mother didn't like that he shined shoes across the street and he became friendly with people his mother didn't like--The Evergreen Knights, who had a bad reputation. He played football, baseball, basketball with them at the playground.
- 555 There was a black neighborhood on Evergreen and 1st between Brooklyn and 3rd. There was a church on Evergreen and 2nd and his Japanese friends would practice Kendo at the church--Pete learned how to do this from them. He used to hang around with Japanese, Russians, blacks, and Mexicans. He used to be amazed by the difference between the houses and the way the Japanese Americans lived and the way he lived. In the Mexican colonias, there were cactuses, unpaved streets, like a Mexican barrio. Up on Marina Street and 4th, 5th, 6th, there were Japanese homes that had neat gardens. On Sunday the Russians would dress up in long, white brocaded dresses. There was a Russian church on Lorena and 6th. There used to be a ravine down by 4th Street and Whittier that they called the gulley and a little creek went through it. Pete and his friends would have rock fights with the Russian kids down in this area. The Japanese guys were quiet but they were good athletes--there were seven Japanese Americans on the team when Roosevelt won the city championship. Didn't really get to play much until his senior year because he would work to help his mother--shining shoes, paper route.
- 676 His mother was working in the garment industry as a seamstress. She joined the union. The shops were slave shops. His mother would work all day long in the shops, feed her kids, and then go over to City Terrace and Boyle Heights to wash and iron for the ricos--the rich people. Sometimes, Pete would go with her to clean houses on the weekend. His mother had to work hard because it was the Depression time and she was all alone.
- 730 End of SIDE A, TAPE 1
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- SIDE B, TAPE 1
- 000 Silence
- 002 They always rented their home because his mother was never able to buy a home.

- 003 He used to shine shoes on the corner of 1st and Rowan Streets, 1st and Soto Streets, Whittier and Euclid. When he was 14-years-old he talked a man next to the fire station on Whittier and Euclid into letting him put a shoe shine stand there. The YMCA was across the street and there were drug stores and bakeries also in the area--all the people in the area became his customers. He would make \$1.50-\$2.00 on weekends--he would keep 50 cents and give the rest to his mother. This was a lot of money then. On Sundays he would deliver the Herald Examiner.
- 020 He had started shining shoes when he was 10-years-old and still living in Olive. He would go to the pool hall and shine shoes on Saturdays. He was friends with a neighbor's dog that was a mastiff and a good fighter. The guys at the pool hall would take Pete and his dog to Yuerba Linda, Fullerton, Placencia, Tuston, and fight the dog for money.
- 045 He graduated from high school 1937. Went to work learning how to paint cars in a body shop.
- 063 He and his friends were having a good time during WWII. The big band era had arrived. They used to have record dances at Fresno, Evergreen, and State playgrounds. People from different neighborhoods would come to the dances.
- 075 This was at the beginning of the Pachuco era--the Zoot-Suit era. It was also the beginning of the gangs in East L.A. They were influenced by the gangsters and also by the Pachucos--people who came from El Paso to Los Angeles during the war to work. The pachucos dressed nicely in zoot suits, danced well, spoke calo. He and his friends would imitate them and began to get in fights in different neighborhoods.
- 094 At that time, East L.A. was from Main Street to Ford Boulevard. It was dangerous to go to other areas. If you were from East L.A. people would pick fights. Since it was hard to go anywhere without being fought, he and his friends had to band together to protect themselves. In these days it was just fist fights over the way you danced, dressed, and where you were from. They couldn't go to Clanton to the Shrine Auditorium for dances because of the guys from Clanton and 38th. At this time, boxing was very big. Most of the big name boxers came from East L.A. Other neighborhoods resented this.
- 131 There had been a shooting at the Colliseum. Pete and his friends went to a dance at the Royal Palms Hotel in the Westlake area--everyone would come here for big band music and dancing. The owner warned Pete not to get in a fight one night because some men from the East Coast had come out to calm down the gang fights in L.A.. He was brought into

an office to talk to these men and they threatened to kill him if he got into any fights. These men stayed out in L.A. for a few months. Pete and his friends became friends with one of these men, who encouraged all of them to enlist in the service.

- 189 Pete went into the army in 1943. He and all his friends enlisted in the airborne--paratroopers-- because they liked the uniforms. Pete was about 23-years-old. He had a bad knee so he was put into limited service. His friends went to the South Pacific, Europe, and Pete went to the post office in Ft. Irwin.
- 229 A lot of his Japanese American friends were interned during WWII.
- 259 He only remained in the service for 12 weeks. He was first sent to Ft. Irwin and then to Henderson Field in Las Vegas to work in a post office. Las Vegas was just a small town at the time. He met a guy from Texas who suggested to him how to get out of the service by injuring his knee. He was given \$127. when he was discharged and he went to Las Vegas and gambled it away. He got a ride back to L.A. in a horse trailer.
- 310 All of his friends were in the service, no one was left at home. Pete went up to Sacramento to get a job as a lumberjack. He was sent to a camp near Oregon. He wasn't in the union and his presence almost caused a riot--there also were no Mexicans in the area. Pete decided not to stay and was trying hitch a ride back to Sacramento when he met a man who was the owner of a lumbercamp. He got a job with this man and worked for three years.
- 347 He returned to L.A. in 1946. Three years later he got involved in radio. His friends were coming back from the war, he got another job painting cars. Meanwhile, his brother, Eddie, had begun a radio career in Pomona, California. Eddie was an advocate of bilingualism. He started a popular radio show in Pomona and then came to L.A. and worked for KPMO. Pete began to work with his brother on a show called "Buenos Dias," which got very good ratings. His brother was called the "Pied Piper of Los Angeles."
- 396 Pete and his brother had a show on KFVD and they had a great time. They would play a variety of music: trios, mariachi, big band, and Anglo music. Spanish language D.J.'s were critical of his brother. His brother also wrote articles in the Belvedere Citizen and Watts New.
- 451 Television was just beginning in the late 40s and Eddie Rodriguez became the first producer of television in Los

Angeles on KHJ-T.V.--the Spanish Theatre Hour. Then, Eddie got a program called "Momentos Alegres"--Happy moments, which was a Latin variety show. Eddie and Pete produced a highly rated show called "Fandango" on CBS, KNX-T.V. Their show battled ratings with Laurence Welk and The Lone Ranger. The program sponsor was Rheingold Beer. The Mexican community did not buy the product. Eddie was heartbroken by this and died.

- 520 Before Eddie died, he had been involved in making movies. Eddie's co-producer on the film "The Cadillac," asked Pete to work on it after Eddie died. The film was shot in Dominguez Hills and El Monte, and was nominated for an Academy Award.
- 568 The same producer got Pete involved in another movie, "The Legend of Jimmy Blue Eyes," which also was nominated for an Academy Award. He didn't stay in the film industry because it is such a phony business. He received offers to continue Eddie's career in radio because he felt it wasn't his field.
- 605 In the 1960s, he joined an organization called "Justicia"--Justice for Chicanos in the motion picture industry. He became a radical during these years. Ray Andrade, the founder and leader of the organization, was a highly medalled Vietnam veteran. Latinos were the most decorated soldiers in WWII and Vietnam, although the media never reflects this. Ray Andrade formed Justicia to combat images of Latinos in the media. Andrade had been hired as a technical advisor for the John Wayne movie "Green Berets" and had been disgusted with the environment.
- 710 Justicia confronted all of the major television studios and industry guilds through the 1960s. They demanded an end to stereotypes of Mexicans in Hollywood.

728 End of SIDE B, TAPE 1

SIDE A, TAPE 2

000 Silence

001 (repeat of 710 from previous tape)
Justicia demanded an end to stereotypes of Mexican in Hollywood. They also demanded that Hollywood provide meaningful parts to Mexican Americans actors and to hire Mexican Americans for support staff. This is one reason Pete got his job at ABC.

012 They tried to win their demands through threats and boycotts.

- 017 There was an organization called "Nosotros" that was an organization of Hispanic Hollywood actors. Pete met Ray Andrade at a meeting where Nosotros was giving a presentation. Ricardo Montalban gives a speech about Nosotros. Ray Andrade confronts Montalban and criticizes him for acting as if he were the spokesman for the Chicano community. Pete was impressed by Ray and went to meet him. Eventually, Pete became chairman of the board of Justicia.
- 060 They went to all the directors to make their demands. They had a meeting with the Hollywood Director and Producer Guild to protest a Peckinpah movie. An argument ensues and Ray confronts Charleton Heston and Clint Eastwood.
- 140 Justicia lasted until 1973 when police raided the office on Huntington Avenue and confiscated Ray's papers. Ray had gotten too strong and people were listening to him. Pete got his job at ABC because Justicia had met with the ABC people from New York in L.A.--they had presented a list of demands, one of which was to hire a Community Affairs Director to oversee the needs of the community.
- 163 Pete met his wife in 1947 when he returned from northern California. He met her at a football game where he was playing against her boyfriend. They met in April and married in November. They lived with her parents in Maravilla--on Gleason and Eastern. They have three children--two daughters and one son.
- 178 At ABC, Pete was involved in any issues that had to do with Mexicans or Chicanos.
- 189 Eddie Rodriguez was the first person to broadcast the Rose Parade bilingually--and in Spanish--on Channel 9 in 1954-1955. Pete and Eddie broadcast four Rose Parades.
- 203 Reflection on degree of success of work that was done in the 1960s. Ultimately, feels that it is hard to accomplish much because of the amount of power held by those in leadership. Television was taken over by business people in the late 1970s--they don't care about the community or different ethnic groups.
- 226 Changes that have occurred in Los Angeles. The city has grown a lot and there are a lot more immigrants coming to the city. He doesn't consider himself an immigrant--he is a migrant: He came to occupied Mexico. He is very proud to be an American, though he may be critical of some of the things that are done in this country. The city is too confusing, big, and smoggy now. He feels that some of the new immigrants' customs have disrupted some of the things that he and his colleagues tried to combat. He doesn't feel

as safe going out in the city at night.

306 End of Interview
Remainder of tape is blank

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SHADES OF L.A. INTERVIEW PROJECT
TRANSCRIBED EXCERPTS

Accession #:

INTERVIEWEE: PETE RODRIGUEZ
INTERVIEWER: SOJIN KIM
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 8/4/94
LOCATION: EAST LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
ETHNICITY: MEXICAN AMERICAN/CHICANO
OTHERS PRESENT: NONE
TRANSCRIBER: SOJIN KIM

INTERVIEW NUMBER: SH-
NUMBER OF DAT TAPES: 1
NUMBER OF CASSETTE TAPES: 2

K: Kim
R: Rodriguez

These excerpts have been selected for the purposes and use of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. They represent only small portions of the tape recorded interviews available for public use. Researchers are advised to refer to the actual tape recorded interviews.

Note: Interviews were recorded on DAT (Digital Audio Tape) and transferred to standard cassette tape for transcribing and listening purposes. The three digit numbers are indexed from the cassette recording and not the original DAT recording. These numbers may be used as a guide for locating indexed information on the cassette tapes. In some cases, the numbers on the transcript may not correspond exactly to the counter readings on the cassette player.

SIDE A, TAPE 1

000 Silence

002 Introduction

R: 003 I was born in Sonora, Mexico. I was born in Cananea; it's a mining town--copper mining town--in the mountains of Sonora. And I was born in 1919, and we came to Los Angeles in 1923. And I didn't know this but I guess we were political refugees because my father was very much involved in the Revolution--1910 Revolution of Mexico. And he was exiled from Mexico to the United States. I didn't know that at four-years-old. But we came in through Douglas, Arizona.

012 Description of a photograph of Pete and his brother Eddie in navy outfits that his mother sewed for them--

picture taken in Douglas, Arizona.

018 Crossed the border from Agua Prieta, Sonora into the United States through Douglas, Arizona in 1923. His oldest brother Eddie was a pioneer in bilingual broadcasting in Los Angeles.

R: 024 We were all born in Sonora--Sonora, Mexico.

K: And who were your parents?

R: My father was Pedro--that's who I am named after--Pedro Rodriguez. And my mother was Teresa Acosta. My father was a Yaqui Indian and my mother was a Mayo Indian from Sonora--not a Maya, a Mayo--M-A-Y-O. And those are my parents.

K: 030 And what did they do when they were in Mexico?

R: My father was in mining. My family, as I understand it, were all miners. A few farmers here and there, but mostly mining. Then my father got involved very much in the revolution with the Obregon people, who became president of Mexico, and de la Huerta--they both became presidents of Mexico and my father was involved with them.

K: Do you know what he was doing with them?

R: Well, he was actually a labor organizer in Mexico. Because the United States and a lot of foreign investments were in Sonora because of the rich copper and gold and farming. I'm sure you've heard of the Guggenheims and--I forget their names--the Chandlers, and all these big United States, rich landowners owned most of the land and all the business in Mexico--in Sonora at least, you know, the border states. And so they were farmers too. Farmers and miners.

K: 048 O.K., and then you came to the United States in what year?

R: In 1923.

K: And the circumstances were political--

R: --well, I didn't know that but in doing some of the research and background on my family--yes, my father was exiled, as I told you, on account of the revolution and his part in it. And we came to join him in Los Angeles in 1923.

K: And what neighborhood did you come to in Los Angeles?

R: We moved into the old Sonoratown, which is around Macy and Olvera Street. Los Angeles was a small, little--well, it wasn't

small--to me it was huge. But, in relationship to the way it is now, it used to be a very small city. And there were a lot of Chinese around Chinatown. And La Placita, what they call The Plaza, there was a concentration--they call it Sonoratown because there were a lot of people from Sonora that came to California, and to Los Angeles specifically. So that's why I call it Sonoratown. And we lived there in the Temple area. We lived on Macy and Ord, around there I think.

066 Then when the Mexican workers started migrating East of the river and to Belvedere and Boyle Heights, we came with that tide too. And I lived in the Flats; it was called the Russian Flats in those days.

K: Which area is that?

R: They call it "Aiso Pico" now--between 1st and 4th Street on Mission, Pecan Street, and all those up to Boyle Avenue. It was called the Flats.

074 A lot of people from Sonora were migrating to L.A. for work. His family had relatives in Sonoratown and then in Belvedere and Boyle Heights. They moved to the flats around 1924.

084 Impressions of Los Angeles when he moved here. He was 4-years-old and from the desert. They took the Sur Pacifico (Southern Pacific RR) from Arizona to Los Angeles--passed through Palm Springs, Imperial Valley, Indio--he was amazed at the greenness of the state. He remembers horse-drawn street cars on Spring Street. They got off the train at the station on Alameda, and went to Ord and Spring to stay at a hotel. He remembers the tall buildings and seeing a lot of Chinese.

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345 Returned to Los Angeles in 1931. They moved to Boyle Heights on City Terrace. The neighborhood was primarily Jewish and affluent. Could see all of downtown and Griffith Park. They used to have car races at Ascot Speedway, near where the General Hospital is. They would sit up in the hills and watch the races. There weren't any freeways. The affluent people built beautiful homes. There was an all Mexican section, but there were also a lot of Japanese, Blacks, Russians. Housing segregation wasn't really forced, but people tended to group together residentially.

K: 373 Was there much interaction between the different groups?

R: Yeah, oh yeah. I grew up on Soto Street and Brooklyn Avenue there with Russians. They used to call me "Rodriguezov," can you believe that? Because I used to hang around with a lot of Russians, you know, when I went to--and Armenians--when I went to Stevenson.

K: That's a junior high?

R: Junior high. Junior high. And then to Roosevelt--used to call it "Jewsavelt"; there were so many Jewish people. Great friends, great people to me. I was drinking tea and eating bagels when I was 14-15 years old at Canters and Ratner's Bakery, you know. We used to go have bagels and cream pies.

K: Is that Canters in the Fairfax?

R: Canters was started right here on here on Brooklyn and Soto and then they moved when the Jewish people went to West L.A., the Fairfax area and left City Terrace. Then, the Mexican people started moving into these areas.

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438 In high school, he formed a club with some friends called the Fresno Athletic Club. He was president for four years.

444 During the Depression years, he realized how much graft and dishonesty there was in City Hall. When he lived on Orme in high school, a bomb went off nearby; a car belonging to a friend of the mayor's was blown up. It was the gangster days--gangsterism was rampant throughout the country, especially on the East Coast. But it was also present in East L.A.--mostly among the Jewish population.

480 They used to go to the movies a lot. They were influenced by the characters like James Cagney that they saw in the movies. They would see guys come out of nowhere and become rich. They learned a bit about the free enterprise system in the U.S. The Mexican areas were called "Colonias"--colonies. He and his friends learned how to band together and control certain corners to sell papers, shine shoes. They would go the Crystal and Jewel movie theatres on

Whittier. There was also a big Vaudeville theatre on Ford and Whittier that they would go to. Remembers the silent movies--their mother would give them 15 cents and they would go the movie, buy candy and soda, and still have money left over.

534 He and his friends also hung around at Evergreen Playground and Fresno Playground--on Fresno near Olympic. His mother didn't like that he shined shoes across the street and he became friendly with people his mother didn't like--The Evergreen Knights, who had a bad reputation. He played football, baseball, basketball with them at the playground.

R: 555 There was a lot of blacks. There was a black colony right there on Evergreen and 1st, between Brooklyn and 3rd. There was a black colony and a lot of Japanese. You know I also learned how to do that...what do they call that Japanese...with the bamboos? I forgot the name of it? Now that you brought that up...because I used to...

K: Describe it?

R: I used to...there's a church there right on Evergreen and Second, and I used to have a real good friend Cedric--I forget his last name. I remember Jack Kukuchi because I played football with him later on--big guy--we used to call him Jake. And they used to go and practice this Kendo or whatever it was with bamboos in this church, and put these masks on, you know? And I learned a little bit of that too. You see, I used to hang around with Japanese, with Russians, with blacks, and Mexicans. So you get pretty good education. I used to go to Jake's house and eat. And then I had another friend Mike Yonai. I used to go there because he had a lot of turtles and had a beautiful garden in the back. Used to be amazed at some of their houses that I went in. And the difference between the way they lived and the way we lived.

K: How was it different?

R: Oh, it was different. Mexican colonias, I was more comfortable in that atmosphere because it was just nothing but Mexicans and you see--what do you call these, nopales--cactuses. You see cactuses hanging and you see alleys and you see unpaved streets and little shacks here and there: It's a Mexican barrio. Then up on the top on Lorena Street and 4th, 5th, 6th, around there, you see Japanese homes real clean and neat, with neat gardens. It was different. And then the Russians: On Sunday they would dress up with all these--and we used to wonder why they went to church like that.

K: How did they dress up?

R: In there white and long brocaded kind of stuff. Long dresses and it was just "why did these people dress like that?" You know, we couldn't understand why the Russians--but they were our friends, the sons of these people. Because there was a Russian church right on Lorena and 6th, an Orthodox, real Orthodox. And we used to live on the bottom; we used to call it "the gulley" down there, you know where 4th Street is: The bridge and then Whittier over there. There's a ravine over there; we used to call it a gulley. There used to be kind of a little river going through there, a little creek. And it was just like a Mexican town, and we used to have rock fights with these Russian guys--friendly rock fights but they could get a little serious sometimes because we'd be down here and then they'd see us and we'd throw rocks at them just to---ah, kids, you know--and they'd throw them back and we'd have all these terrible rock fights on Sundays when they're going to church.

The Japanese guys were very, very quiet. They didn't get in too much--they just, they just would say "You guys are crazy. Leave us alone." But they were good atheletes. I'm telling you, we won a city champion at Roosevelt High School and there was seven Japanese on the team.

650 Pete didn't really get to play much football until his senior year because he had to work to help his mother--shining shoes, paper route.

676 His mother was working in the garment industry as a seamstress. She joined the union. The shops were slave shops. His mother would work all day long in the shops, feed her kids, and then go over to City Terrace and Boyle Heights to wash and iron for the ricos--the rich people. Sometimes, Pete would go with her to clean houses on the weekend. His mother had to work hard because it was the depression time and she was all alone.

730 End of SIDE A, TAPE 1

SIDE B, TAPE 1

000 Silence

002 They always rented their home because his mother was never able to buy a house.

003 He used to shine shoes on the corners of 1st and Rowan Streets, 1st and Soto Streets, Whittier and Euclid. When he was 14-years-old he talked a man next to the fire station on Whittier and Euclid into letting him put a shoe shine stand there. The YMCA was across the street and there were drug stores and bakeries also in

the area--all the people in the area became his customers. He would make \$1.50-\$2.00 on weekends--he would keep 50 cents and give the rest to his mother. This was a lot of money then. On Sundays he would deliver the Herald Examiner.

020 He had started shining shoes when he was 10-years-old and still living in Olive. He would go to the pool hall and shine shoes on Saturdays. He was friends with a neighbor's dog that was a mastiff and a good fighter. The guys at the pool hall would take Pete and his dog to Yuerba Linda, Fullerton, Placencia, Tuston, and fight the dog for money.

045 He graduated from high school 1937. Went to work learning how to paint cars in a body shop.

K: 063 You went into the service during WWII?

R: Yeah.

K: Can you tell me about your experiences--well, first here, what happened when the war started--your memories of that?

R: 064 I remember just that we were having a ball at the time. I had good time all my young life. The Big Band era was around and we used to have these record dances at Fresno Playground, and at Evergreen, at State Playground. And people from all over different neighborhoods would come to these dances. And I became kind of a jitterbug. Yeah, 1939-40, with Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw and all these big band guys; Duke Ellington, and...we were very influenced by black music in those days.

And I was having a ball when...There's another thing that I'm not too proud of, we got a little wild. We got a little wild. It was during the beginning of what they call the Pachuco Era, Zoot-Suit Era, you know. My mother didn't like me to dress with those tight pants--she tore a couple of my pants. But we got a little wild. And it was the beginning of the gangs in East L.A. The reason I think... because we were influenced, like I was telling you, by these gangsters, and also by these guys, what they call Pachucos--really they're people from El Paso--that's how we interpreted it. They came from El Paso to Los Angeles during the war to work--there was a lot of work in Los Angeles. And we were hicks, you know, here in L.A. compared to them. And they used to dress real sharp and have these zoot-suit and tailored clothes and dance real good. And you know, we got influenced by them. They used to talk real funny: what we call calo. And we learned how to imitate them, and we started to get a little out of hand. And we were starting to get into some different fights with different neighborhoods.

094 See, East L.A. now they consider anywhere East L.A. East L.A. when I was born was from Main Street to Ford Boulevard. That's it. None of this El Sereno or--you know, it was just an area: Just Belvedere and Maravilla, they called it. And in those days it was kind of dangerous. You had to be careful going any place because if you were from East L.A. they used to, you know, try to fight with you, jump with you. So we started getting together and saying "well gee, we can't go anywhere because right away there's a fight, so let's band together and stick together." And that's the way it was.

K: Was it because of racism that people would--

R: No, it was among the Mexican people.

K: So if you were from East L.A., if you went anywhere--

R: --if we went anywhere--went to Lincoln Heights, say for instance, the guys from Lincoln Heights would get mad. If we went downtown, Alpine--they had a gang called Alpine. It was during the gang era. Well, gangs are bad now but in those days it was just fist fights and just, you know, young guys.

K: What was it about? Was it about neighborhood?

R: About neighborhoods, where you're from. You know, the way you danced, the way you dressed. And East L.A. had the reputation. Clanton too was a bad area. We couldn't go to the Shrine Auditorium or to dances over there because the guys from Clanton were there, and the guys from 38th. You know, the usual...It was just the beginning of the gangs in the '30s.

K: And you think that started with those people who came from El Paso or that's more--

R: Well, they influenced us--

K: --the style--

R: They influenced our style of dress and our style of talking.

K: The neighborhoods were already tight.

R: They were already established and East L.A. had that reputation because--I don't know if you know but there was a lot--in those days, boxing was very big. And most of the big name boxers came from East L.A. because of the situation, you know, the way of life. And we had a lot of great boxers and I guess these other neighborhoods would resent that. And we dressed a little different than they, and we danced a little better than most of them. And that used to cause conflict.

131 Well, back to why I got into the service. We were at a dance. There had been a shooting at the Colliseum. I didn't know anything about it, but I went to this dance. They used to call it the Royal Palms. Big Bands used to go there.

K: Where is that?

R: Royal Palms Hotel. Around the West Lake area. And all of the neighborhoods used to go there. But I didn't know this. When I walked in that night, the owner says "Be careful tonight, don't get in a fight you guys because there's some guys here from back east, and they're going to arrest you." "Why?" He said "Well, just cool it. Don't get in a fight." That was the first night. The second Saturday, the same guy--the owner that used to make the dances--says "They're here. They want to talk to some of you guys. Cooperate with them, O.K." So I said "O.K." My name was on list that they had. They were from back--F.B.I. people, I guess, I don't know. I remember the guy's name. But anyway, I was about the fourth one called into this little office. And there was four goons in there--big guys, men, with guns. They were here to calm down the gang fights in L.A. And they were sent here--and this Bud Young, I'll never forget his name, Bud Young. When they called my name--well, a couple of my friends came out and said "Phew, take it easy tonight. Don't be getting into anything." I said "O.K. I don't know what's going on." They said "Well, you'll find out right now."

157 So, when I walked into this room, this Bud Young--huge guy, man. He's got arms about this size [gesture], big hands, and he was sitting on top of this desk like this. And there were three other guys in the back, just watching. And when I walked in he said "Your name's Pete?" I says "Yeah." "They call you gato?"--Cat, you know, the guys used to call me gato and chino because I had these chinky eyes; and gato because they said I looked like a cat. And I says "Yeah, they call me gato." He says "I'm not going to fool around with you." He says "I'm going to get right straight to business." He says "I want to see how tough you are, how bad you are." I says "I don't know what you're talking about." "You know what I'm talking about. I want to see how bad you are. Just you and me, right now." And he had his coat off and his shirt sleeve, but he had his gun still there, you know. He says "Just you and me. Never mind these guys over in the back. Just you and me, we'll get in a fight right now, and I want to see how bad you are." I said "I don't know what you're talking about." He says "You know what I'm talking about." "No I don't know what you're talking about." "Yes you do." He says, "Well, let me tell you this. We're going to be here for about three months and you're going to see me. And if you get into any trouble or any fights, I'm going to come for you. I'm going to come for you and I'm going to kill you. We have permission to kill you. That's why the guns. You understand that lingo?" You know, he talked to me straight and I said "wow." Scared

straight, that's really what it was all about.

181 So he did hang around and he became friends with us. He used to come to the dances and buy us drinks and we'd buy him a drink. "Why don't you guys go into the service," he says, "That's the only way you're going to stop this. Go in the service. You're young and healthy all of you. Get out. The wars going on." And that's how I enlisted. Boy. I didn't wait to get drafted. With all this turmoil, I said "I better get out of here," you know.

K: Was this the army or the navy?

R: Army, I went into the army.

K: So what year did you go into the army?

R: In 1943.

K: So this is prior to the Zoot Suit riots then? What year would that have been?

R: No...yeah, that was prior to the Zoot Suit Riots. Yeah, I wasn't here when this happened. Most of us did all just go and say "The heck with it." And that busted up the gangs, really, for a while.

K: So it was a big enough problem that they sent someone out here to do that?

R: Yeah, government people. They were government--they were police, you could tell. They had badges, they had identification. And they were serious. They weren't fooling around. It was getting out of hand too much so they had to do something. I don't think anybody's ever talked about that.

203 Pete went into the army in 1943. He and all his friends enlisted in the airborne--paratroopers--because they liked the uniforms. Pete was about 23-years-old. He had a bad knee so he was put into limited service. His friends went to the South Pacific, Europe, and Pete went to the post office in Ft. Irwin.

229 A lot of his Japanese American friends were interned during WWII.

259 He only remained in the service for 12 weeks. He was first sent to Ft. Irwin and then to Henderson Field in Las Vegas to work in a post office. Las Vegas was just a small town at the time. He met a guy from Texas who suggested to him how to get out of the service by injuring his knee. He was given \$127. when he was

discharged and he went to Las Vegas and gambled it away. He got a ride back to L.A. in a horse trailer.

310 All of his friends were in the service, no one was left at home. Pete went up to Sacramento to get a job as a lumberjack. He was sent to a camp near Oregon. He wasn't in the union and his presence almost caused a riot--there also were no Mexicans in the area. Pete decided not to stay and was trying hitch a ride back to Sacramento when he met a man who was the owner of a lumbercamp. He got a job with this man and worked for three years.

K: 347 What year did you return to L.A.?

R: 1946.

K: When did you begin to get involved in radio?

R: Three years later. Three years later. I came back to L.A. and guys were coming back already, so it was starting to get a little better. So I started getting back into job, working painting cars. I became a pretty good painter. I had a little reputation here in L.A. for being a good painter. And my brother had started his career in Pomona, California, in radio. There were only two Spanish language radio stations here in L.A. And we never worked in Spanish language radio. But he was an advocate of bilinugualism, which was very radical in the '40s because either you spoke Spanish or you spoke English. But to use bilingual, it's brand new. He started it.

366 And so he started his radio show in Pomona, California, and became very popular. And he came into Los Angeles to work for KMPC (check?). So he told me "Get away from that environment over there. Come with me. Learn how to do this." And he was three years older than me. So I started working with him. And I began to enjoy it. I began to enjoy radio. I started just bringing him the records that he'd ask me for and answering the phones for requests. Mexican people do that a lot; they call in for requests--"Will you please play a song for my birthday." And the name of the show was "Buenos Dias," Good Morning. And it was 6-7--it's amazing, I didn't know there were so many people up so early in the morning, you know what I mean? It had a great rating. He became so popular that "Buenos Dias" became the show to hear in the mornings for people going to work.

K: 385 What kind of things were on the show?

R: What kind of what?

K: Things--was it music?

R: Music. Music, we played music. But he was such a fun guy. And he was so totally opposite of what you're supposed to be as a radio person. He said "Don't be--I'm not like these kind of Disk Jockey's with an affected voice. I'm just me. Plain old me." And he used to talk to people and they loved him. And became called the "Pied Piper of Los Angeles."

396 And I began to like it so much. And hearing such great music every morning with the ear plugs. See, we worked at KFVD. And he used to have a lot of fun with that, you can imagine: "This is radio station KF-V-D, pardon the expression." And he used to run the board. I didn't know how to run the board. And I could see him--you didn't have engineers in those days--he used to run it all: tapes here--not too many tapes, but reels, those big reels, and run the board and the pots and sound and all that. And I was in the next studio and we used to laugh so much and have so much fun. We used to just laugh. It was just a joke. But I guess the people enjoyed it because we had a tremendous audience. He became the first person also to get involved in the community--really involved in the community--with all kinds of things that were happening in the Mexican community. And he was always selling the biggest, the second largest city of Mexicans in the world was here in Los Angeles. So he had quite an audience. And he was such...and I became very popular too because I started to talk on the air with these dedications and public service announcements. I liked it. I liked it very much.

K: 422 What kind of music did you play?

R: All the old Perez Prado, what was the name of the trio that was real--Los Panchos, Trio Los Panchos. I don't know if you've every heard of them. But trio music, and mariachi music, and big band music. We even used to play Anglo music. That's what used to make it so different. We used to play--what's the name of that Italian singer right now that's real hot? We used to play Frank Sinatra. We used to play Mario Lanza. My brother used to play Mario Lanza, this big operatic song, and then he'd put on these dogs barking in the background. He'd do these crazy things that nobody would think of doing that in Spanish radio. So the Mexican radio disc jockeys used to pan him, and he used to pan them. And then he used to be a writer too. So he used to write on the Belvedere Citizen his column, Watts New--W-A-T-T-S New? And he used to pan all these phony Mexican announcers. You know, he said "You're not in Mexico, you're in America." He was very proud to be American. And it was a lot of fun. I became very much involved in it.

449 And then he was so ahead of his time that he was dealing already with television. And television was just beginning in the late '40s. And he became the first producer of television in Los Angeles. And I, of course, hanging on to his tail coats--coat tails. I learned how to edit film because we used to show

film--Mexican movies to the large Mexican audience here.

K: Which channel was this?

R: KHJ. It was called "The Spanish Theatre Hour." And then he got another program after that called "Momentos Allegres," Happy Moments, "Momentos Allegres." And this used to be a Latin variety show, and it was "Pachuco Boogie" and all this stuff. We had a ball--13 weeks on KHJ too.

Eddie was something else. And he was dealing with Footcone and Belding and all these big agencies. You wouldn't see any Mexican doing that. He was the only one that was doing that and having these meetings. Then we got "Fandango," which was a highly rated show here in Los Angeles. Do you know what a Fandango is? Fandango is a big Mexican party. And again, it was on CBS. It was KNX-T.V. And we were on for 86 weeks on that.

K: What did you do on it?

R: 477 Produced the show. We did variety type...I think I have some of the photos here. I don't know how many I have. Yeah, we had...We used to have Lalo Guererro, he's a very famous ...

K: This wasn't a Spanish-language station.

R: No, CBS.

K: So it was very popular at the time?

R: Oh gosh, we used to have high ratings. We used to battle ratings with Laurence Welk and the Lone Ranger at 6:30 on Saturday.

492 The show was a variety show. They had on actors, dancers and musicians as guests. The program sponsor was Rheingold Beer. The Mexican community did not back the program by buying the product. Eddie was heartbroken by this and died.

520 Before Eddie died, he had been involved in making movies. Eddie's co-producer on the film "The Cadillac," asked Pete to work on it after Eddie died. The film was shot in Dominguez Hills and El Monte, and was nominated for an Academy Award.

568 The same producer got Pete involved in another movie, "The Legend of Jimmy Blue Eyes," which was also nominated for an Academy Award. He didn't stay in the film industry because it is such a phony business. He received offers to continue Eddie's career in radio because he felt it wasn't his field.

- 605 In the 1960s, he joined an organization called "Justicia"--Justice for Chicanos in the motion picture industry. He became a radical during these years. Ray Andrade, the founder and leader of the organization, was a highly medalled Vietnam veteran. Latinos were the most decorated soldiers in WWII and Vietnam, although the media never reflects this. Ray Andrade formed Justicia to combat images of Latinos in the media. Andrade had been hired as a technical advisor for the John Wayne movie "Green Berets" and had been disgusted with the environment.
- 710 Justicia confronted all of the major television studios and industry guilds through the 1960s. They demanded an end to stereotypes of Mexicans in Hollywood.

728 End of SIDE B, TAPE 1

SIDE A, TAPE 2

- 000 Silence
- 001 (repeat of 710 from previous tape)
Justicia demanded an end to stereotypes of Mexican in Hollywood. They also demanded that Hollywood provide meaningful parts to Mexican Americans actors and to hire Mexican Americans for support staff. This is one reason Pete got his job at ABC.
- 012 They tried to win their demands through threats and boycotts.
- 017 There was an organization called "Nosotros" that was an organization of Hispanic Hollywood actors. Pete met Ray Andrade at a meeting where Nosotros was giving a presentation. Ricardo Montalban gives a speech about Nosotros. Ray Andrade confronts Montalban and criticizes him for acting as if he were the spokesman for the Chicano community. Pete was impressed by Ray and went to meet him. Eventually, Pete became chairman of the board of Justicia.
- 060 They went to all the directors to make their demands. They had a meeting with the Hollywood Director and Producer Guild to protest a Peckinpah movie. An argument ensues and Ray confronts Charleton Heston and Clint Eastwood.
- 140 Justicia lasted until 1973 when police raided the office on Huntington Avenue and confiscated Ray's papers. Ray had gotten too strong and people were listening to him. Pete got his job at ABC because

Justicia had met with the ABC people from New York in L.A.--they had presented a list of demands, one of which was to hire a Community Affairs Director to oversee the needs of the community.

- 163 Pete met his wife in 1947 when he returned from northern California. He met her at a football game where he was playing against her boyfriend. They met in April and married in November. They lived with her parents in Maravilla-- on Gleason and Eastern. They have three children--two daughters and one son.
- 178 At ABC, Pete was involved in any issues that had to do with Mexicans or Chicanos.
- 189 Eddie Rodriguez was the first person to broadcast the Rose Parade bilingually--and in Spanish--on Channel 9 in 1954-1955. Pete and Eddie broadcast four Rose Parades.
- 203 Reflection on degree of success of work that was done in the 1960s. Ultimately, feels that it is hard to accomplish much because of the amount of power those in leadership have. Television was taken over by business people in the late 1970s--they don't care about the community or different ethnic groups.
- 226 Changes that have occurred in Los Angeles. The city has grown a lot and there are a lot more immigrants coming to the city. He doesn't consider himself an immigrant--he is a migrant: He came to occupied Mexico. He is very proud to be an American, though he may be critical of some of the things that are done in this country. The city is too confusing, big, and smoggy now. He feels that some of the new immigrants' customs have disrupted some of the things that he and his colleagues tried to combat. He doesn't feel as safe going out in the city at night now.
- 306 End of Interview
Remainder of tape is blank