

This is an oral history interview with Frank Nolasco on June 9, 2009 at his home in Boardman Ohio. I'm Sherry Linkon.

S – I want to start with your parents' story. They were the first members of your family to come to Youngstown, yes?

F – That's correct, yes.

S- And when did they come?

F – Well, I imagined it, from what I've seen, I would say around the 19... late 1920s, probably 1928, 1926, at that time. Coming in... my father had originally been here before and he come here by crossing the border and gunshots, he told me, from working there on oil fields and working as a, I don't know, like a, just a, just general labor work in the stockyards in Chicago, things like that. And what he did, he managed to get to Youngstown, Ohio was he'd hop the train. They told him there work here in Youngstown at the steel plants at a place called Carnegie. He really didn't know what that meant. He got on a train with a bunch of gentlemen and they all got here and the next thing they knew, they were pulling into Youngstown and these days went by, they had maybe... they went around looking for jobs but they couldn't find any, really, just like that. But they found Carnegie and he would tell me, he went up to the gatekeeper, and the gatekeeper said, "you guys want jobs? We can hire you legally. Sign here." And of course, he couldn't write, he couldn't read or write so he just put a big "X" on some documents and the next thing you know, it was 42 years later. He'd worked here all his life. That was how he got here.

Mom, of course, he um, I'm not sure quite exactly how they met. In Mexico, they have a thing they do, a lot of the smaller towns were, on Sunday's they'd go to the square area and the boys walk clockwise, the girls walk counter-clockwise and they pass notes to each other and that's part of the wooing portion. And my dad said he caught my mom's eye and she caught his eye, and all that. And of course, he was from the campo which means he was from the farmland and she was from the city which is the city called Zamora in Michoacan. And, uh, so as far as she was concerned, he was a little bit poorer than she was and all that kind of stuff. They always argued about that fact. But I guess he was able to slip some kind of note or gave her a flower or something like that and she came back to Palm Sunday. And then, course there all chaperoned by older people and that progressed. Apparently, uh, there was some kind of a romance existed by sight, never much more than a few words spoken and all that kind of stuff, so much to against their families' -- they ran off together and got married.

S – When did they get married?

F – Well, I think they got married in 1928 if I'm not mistaken. You know, they got married and then that was, you know, that was not good at that time. Everybody got a little upset about the whole deal. Mom, I think, wanted to escape the house. I'm not saying that's not what typical but sometimes you want to get out and get out of there and things weren't going good at home, maybe, I don't know for sure. But it is, Dad is, of course, appeared to be some, this great guy from United States who had a job, which he really didn't but you know, this kind of deal. And

of course, he left her, and he came back to the United States. I'm sure he came back here for a while and maybe a year or so and got his job at Carnegie, and went back and got her. And he received documents they had given you that they cross legally into United States, at that point and came right here to Youngstown. She never knew any other place.

S – Do you know where they lived in Youngstown when they first arrived?

F – Uh, I was told they lived in a number of homes. Most of the Mexican community could not afford any home, period, so they tended to, the families tended to rent a place and they all showed up to one house. One of the families that, that I heard my parents talk about so much that they're very grateful is the Mallorca family. And the Mallorca family apparently had a large house somewhere on the east side and when the Depression came and everybody lost their jobs and, you know, my dad was even unemployed for a long period of time, many of the families moved in with this family, the Mallorca family. And, uh, it was interesting because later on is, some of the interesting things about Mallorca family is they were well established at that time but their son, one of their sons became a heavyweight boxing person here in the Youngstown area. Art Mallorca is very well known for his boxing prowess and here and he fought in Madison Square Garden and all that so he was a big champion in Mexican community here at that time. They continued to move around different places till they purchased this, this, this house on 1712 Oakland Avenue in the Brier Hill Section of Youngstown. And this house was their residence for the rest of their lives, they continued to upgrade it and do things to it and homeownership was very important to the Mexican community at that time. One of the things they did, they wanted to have a house where he could actually walk to work which is what he did. Because they would walk down through Brier Hill into, past the fields and into the...

S – And which mill was he working at?

F – He worked at the Carnegie, the United States Steel, the Carnegie Works which was later called the Ohio Works along the riverbend area here in Youngstown. Forty-two years, working there, and primarily doing a lot of jobs, and then he ended up being what they called a “scarfer.” He was very proud of his scarfing abilities. And those were the guys that with a blowtorch knocked off the impurities from the steel rods and all that. He was pretty good at doing that but he would come home just covered sometimes with burns and stuff like that and, hey, no one wore protective clothing. It was hot work and all that so, but he liked doing that. He thought he was pretty good, I think, I'm sure he was pretty good at it.

S – I figure anybody who does a job for that long, you get good at it.

F – Right, right.

S – Before we go on further through their lives, did either of your parents ever say anything to you as you were growing up about why they wanted to leave Mexico to come to the U.S.?

F – Well, um, I'm sure it's economic. It had to do with economics. You know any nation doesn't progress very far unless its people are educated and I think that my father had no education. My mother had about up to about the sixth grade of education and they saw possibly

a future for themselves and any children they might have. And of course this looked like an opportunity, a place to come to maybe be able to get something or at least exist well. So then they, they took a chance, it's a tremendous chance for anyone to pick up your roots. I don't think I could go somewhere unless I was really you know, in some, in dire need or dire straits of some kind. But they did that and I think that was, that behind their idea was to come here, do as good as they can, provide for an education for any family they might have, possibly get enough money to return to Mexico, to return to Mexico and live the life that they wanted to live. Because you know, in Mexico, you're either rich or poor. There's an emerging middle class now but at that time, you're either an aristocrat or a non-aristocrat. And they wanted to go back with plenty of dollars. My mother always talked about driving in with a big pick-up truck. You know, having a house up in the mountains somewhere like, you know. So I think that was the motivating factor to get here. To leave family, moms and dads and brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, that's um... you know you're... I think my dad asked a lot of my mother to do that, you know. Most women would not go too far from home if they had to, but she was a trouper about it. Many times, she would wish she was back. She got very solemn and very sad around the holidays. She missed her mother an awful lot, and I remember she'd, she would have some little crying things about wanting, missing home and missing people speaking Spanish and missing Mexican food and all that. So the results, sometimes the Mexican Society maybe kind of filled these, these blanks and all that. I don't think ever imagined that they would stay here all these years. I don't they ever imagined they would die here. There's a Mexican song, a very famous ranchero song that, in essence says words like "if I die, make sure that you take my body and bury me back in Mexico. Then I'll be happy again." It's a, it's a very ranch song that's sung in a happy type of phrase and all that, but I think many Mexicans believe in that kind of stuff, but I... so... That's what motivated them.

S – Did they speak any English when they came here?

F – No, I doubt very much. I don't think they knew much more than yes, no. It was interesting that my mom continuously hammered the English language. She, she'd make up the words, half English, half Spanish, for Spanglish, I guess you want to call it. You know, and get away with it. Very aggressive lady sometimes and you know, it's just a, make up words and just push her way into, into scenes and things like that and just get away with stuff. I used to laugh, you know, she would get away with it. At remnant sales, she would go and buy and get stuff and you know, and because she didn't have enough money, just hand, hold her money out like that and then people would take the money from her hand, you know. But I knew she was watching, you know, what she was doing. And dad, of course, had no formal education whatsoever, and I admired his ability at the age of I believe around fifty-five, he decided he wanted a car and he was going to drive 'cause he was getting tired of walking to work. So, of course, he had to pass the driver's examination in English. He memorized and with my help, a little bit of my help, you know, we went over those exercises, what all the signs meant, what the word 'stop' meant, all this kind of. And darned if he didn't get himself a driver's license. That was just the most amazing thing to me. And I would see him sometimes at night really looking at the Youngstown Vindicator. He'd put his finger on each, on each word and pronounce it, you know, phonetically. "For the Democrats" (speaking slowly), er, like that. And so he was actually very intelligent, I just didn't realize it.

S- So it sounds like he sort of taught himself whatever English...

F – Yes.

S - ... he knew.

F – Right.

S – Is the same true for your mother? Did she ever take classes?

F – Mmm, they both went to the International Institute for a number of years and did, they took, I'm sure they took English classes in order to get citizenship. And I think that blossomed to other things. So we lived in an ethnic neighborhood where there... We were surrounded by Polish, German and Italian people and everyone had their own language most of the time. It was interesting. It was like the United Nations. People would speak their ethnic language but yet, there was the English was in the middle of this. You know, especially among the young kids, especially in... and all that so you could hear anything, any variation of any language and all that. I don't think... they were quite proud that they could converse and talk, go to the physician and talk to them about what would, where it hurt and all that. And of course, you know, when you work, my dad had the advantage of working with people that speak English 'cause you mean, at the mill, even if there were different ethnic groups at the mill, they called, they still had to speak English to the foreman, the superintendents, and whatever. All them all spoke English, of course, and they, and if you pick it up, you know, it's... Put anyone in the country for about three months and sooner or later, they're going to start, at least something, you know.

S – Sheer survival. While your dad was working at the steel mill, was your mother also working outside of the home or was she being a homemaker?

F – No. No, she was a homemaker entirely except for one small period. I think she went to work at this tile supply place that was on Rayen Avenue. And they were hiring people and it was one of my mother's independence little things she did. She used to just have a problem. My dad sometimes, my dad was a little bit too, too *macho* for her sometimes. In order to put him in his place, she would, you know, withhold meals or, you know, yeah, it's just to, just to mess him up a little. But not make his lunch for him, you know, and things like that. They'd have little squabbles. Well, I remember one time she would stomp around, she was going to work at the tile supply place. He just laughed, you know, well, that, you know, but he didn't like it one bit, because as far as he's concerned, no Mexican woman works. Her job was in the house. He told her, quite frankly, "your job is to take care of this house and to take care of your son and me." You know. "I'll, I'll supply all the money." You know, and very typical male *macho* Mexican guy. But she was there for about a week, maybe even two weeks and yeah, I think he actually forced her to quit, you know. He, he kept harassing her about it so she was a, she was a homemaker and that was her job. She did quite well at that. Of course there was only one of me, so she didn't have too much to, you know, too much to handle.

S – It was your job to give her as much work as possible.

F – She said that, that she had been pregnant once before and uh, and had a child that was born, uh, dead. Stillborn. So, and all that, and was buried here in town. I remember going to Calvary to look at his tomb, there's now, there's no marker there. There's just a number, I couldn't even find it now. I don't even know where it's at. But it got her, very rarely that she, that she would she go there. And his name was David. His name was David. I always thought that was pretty nice that they did that, all that, remembered it. So I... Probably a sad period for her...

S – I'm sure.

F – But to have that...

S – So you grew up in the Brier Hill neighborhood.

F – Yes.

S – And what was that like at the time?

F – Oh, it was great. It was a, it was a United Nations, as I, as I told you before. Uh, the doors were open, you could go to anyone's house to eat, you could also get spanked by anybody, you know. Or taken home, someone holding your ear and all that. And all us youngsters got along fairly good. Of course, there was the bullies in the neighborhood and there were the good kids and then were the nerds and, you know, that type of deal. Everyone did look out for each other. No real hooliganism, although there were still the gangs. There were little gangs of kids, you know, you didn't go to Tod's section, you stayed in the Brier Hill section. You didn't go down to the Monkey's Nest section. You didn't go over to the Westlake section, either, you know, the projects, unless you were in a group of people. But it was really no one really bothered any, anything at all. And then we the, um, we had a mobster that lived in the neighborhood and he sort of took care of us, you know. If you needed to go to the hospital, he had a car. If you needed to go, you know, you know, it was, it was so typical neighborhood that we didn't even know he was a mobster. We could care less who he was, you know. It was just, just someone that, that you looked at, Mr. So-and-so. And go see him if he, he could help you and all that. And everyone there had some kind of trade. One guy was a mechanic with this police department and another guy sold insurance and he knew someone at the hospital who was a nurse. And, ah, you know that, everyone was, it was just interesting. And there were stores. Almost everybody block had its... a little store where you go get milk and bread and you know, and the, the Ciccone's had stores there, and the Finesilver's had stores, and everyone had...you didn't have to go downtown too much and if you did, you got a bus, of course. Everything was there, everybody knew everyone's business. But uh, you know, that was, that was just part of the, that. And there was a few Mexicans that were, wouldn't... we didn't all live on one block. There was a couple blocks away, there was one family and another block away was another family, and all that. And my, my house, my family's house at 1712 Oakland, there, was sort of a meeting place. I can remember many nights, a lot of Mexicans would walk down there. And my parents would set out chairs in the yard by the garden. And they would sit there and have a beer, a drink, or have some lemonade and sit there and talk. And you know what they would talk about? Old Mexico. They would talk about the Revolution. Who fought on what side. Who was really the good guy and the bad guy. One guy claimed to be, he was one of the drummer

boys for the Revolution and all that. They would talk about Pershing and how they fought him off. The Mexicans always won every battle, see, as far as they were concerned, you know. Things like that and... it was interesting. And I would sit there, just, and I love history and I like that kind of stuff, I would sit there just glued to the chair, you know. You know, just, I wanted to hear everything they had to say about, I remember these names like Cárdenas, who was a great leader and a president, and talking about him and a guy talking anti-Cárdenas. Says, "ahhh, if you were in Mexico, the *federales* would arrest you for talking against the government." You know, and it was just a, no big arguments, just a lot of, a lot of talk. But my parents loved it because it was all in Spanish, you know and they could, you could talk like that.

S – So that means, I'm guessing, that you grew up speaking both Spanish and English.

F – Yes, exactly. I'll tell you a little about that. I was uh, primarily speaking Spanish all my life until about the kindergarten era, of course, and then going to kindergarten, pretty much, in elementary I could not speak in English and the teachers were having a difficult time with me, I'm sure they were. And, I think they told my parents that they, my dad, somehow they got to find a way to teach me English. I ended up going to the first grade at St. Ann's Parochial School there, not very good in English yet. And I remember that they were not going to let me progress on to the second grade, until I could, let's say, improve my English so whereupon my parents got somebody in the neighborhood, a young, youngster, maybe ten, twelve, thirteen, I don't know who it is, and could make me talk English. And he was sort of like my bodyguard. I think he was probably going to St. Ann's at that time, also. He would pick me up and take me to school and bring me back. And meantime, we started talking. But you know how it is among young people? It doesn't take long for your attention span to focus. I had to learn how to... chair, you know, foot, jeans, tennis shoe, you know, you start learning these words real quick and I'm sure that by the end of the second grade, uh, I was back to being the, real quick... because, you know, you have to continue on to the third and fourth grade in English. So, self taught but, God bless the Ursuline nuns, like they've also, 'cause I'm sure they, they had the ruler out to make sure that I did speak right.

S- (laughing) So you started out at St. Ann's, uh, did you end up at Ursuline for high school?

F – Yes, right, right. Went to Ursuline, of course we didn't have too much money to... for tuition. At that time, I have to laugh, it was \$150. You know, you know, I sent my son to Ursuline four years and I think it was like \$3500 for each year that he was there. I had to laugh at that. Anyway, my parents worked out a deal. Mom's vision in life for me was to become a priest. Dad, nahh, you know, didn't real care, you know, it was going to... He'd... one thing he taught me, he told me for sure was "you're not gonna work in the mill. You will never work in the mill. You're gonna do something 'cause you're not going to the mill." So anyway, I, I come from a very religious connected to St. Ann's parish here on the North Side. So, um, she worked out a deal with the pastor that I would help clean the church if they would pay my tuition at Ursuline High School. So for performing duties like cleaning the church, running errands, doing, taking care of the telephone while Mrs. Gary, the housekeeper, was gone on her days off, and just being the general boy who, boy there, I got my tuition paid for four years. And, and I'm very grateful to St. Ann's, at that time, Monsignor Dunn, for doing that for me. So that's how I got that far. But I remember going to Ursuline and I was totally, I, I, I was not ready for high

school. And I remember walking those halls and oh my, all these kids and they're wearing uniforms and they, this and that, and what is going on here? I remember taking Latin and things like that, and I said, "oh my goodness." I couldn't understand what they were talking about, I'm taking Latin. And algebra was... I remember my elementary school, I thought it prepared me but I really wasn't prepared because maybe I should have prepared myself better when I was in elementary school like we all should have, of course. So, um, I was very shy, very backwards, and all, didn't participate in too many things. I, I did, I did a couple sports things. Of course, was in the Spanish club, that type of deal, but sort of a, a laid back four years of high school, not really doing anything that, too exciting to get me out there, you know. But of course, parents continuously preaching, "you're going to go to college. You're going to go to college." And I kept saying, "well, exactly where do you think I'm going to get the money to go to college?" I remember thinking about how you going to college?

S – So what happened?

F – Well, what happened was, um, I, I was, I was given a job at a retread shop. I worked for Firestone Retreads on Meridian Avenue. A good friend of parents' got me a job there. One of my, one of my role models, a fellow by the name of Doctor Hernandez, Dr. Raul Hernandez from Cuba, a role model of mine, I'll just tell you a quick story about him. We used to go out on house calls to the east side and the south Side of Youngstown. He would get paid in chickens or rabbits, things like that, and bring them home. My mom, of course, would kill the chicken and we'd have something like that. So he never forgot that and he, and he was always one of my benefactors and all that. He's always sort of stood behind me, a definite role model. Helped me understand that I wanted to be like him, sort of like him, you know and all that. Well anyway, we, he got me a job at Firestone Retread shop and I worked there for about a year. Wasn't goin' to school or anything like that. So I did enroll at Youngstown University, it was called at that time. It was 1964 and I took some classes. You know? Um, I guess I don't think, a typical male, wasn't ready for college. I felt like I was being forced into it. Really wasn't studying, really. You know, "I don't need this. I'm going to work at the mill," type of philosophy which most males had here in the Youngstown area at that time, and all that. Of course, the Vietnam War was going on, and I kept my eye on it, I guess, maybe, you know. There I was, getting drafted, my friends and their exemptions, or didn't have exemptions and all that, and I wondered, "what the heck am I going to do here," you know. And I, I did get a draft letter saying that I was, and not only eligible, but probably going to be drafted in the next set of drafts. And, I'm thinking to myself, "wait a minute. Wait just a cotton-pickin' minute, here." I'm very patriotic, I want to... but I'm not sure if I want to be a soldier's soldier. So I ran out to the Air Force base and I tried to enlist in the Air Force and of course, they laughed at me and said, "We're filled up. You're not getting into the Air Force." You know, well of course, I remember talking to somebody out there and I said, look, I said, "why don't you give me your test. If I pass your test pretty good, pretty well, will you reconsider me in the Air Force?" Well, I aced the test. One of the very few tests I ever aced, you know, I was highly motivated. And they called me. They said, "you know, we've got a spot for you in the Air Force Reserve here. We'll hold this open for you if you'll enlist right now." So I thought about it. Thought, while I was thinking about it, I get a letter from the draft board saying that I had been drafted. So I ran out there real quick and enlisted in the Air Force Reserve. Now I'm thinking, okay, I'll be at the base here and I'll duty maybe once a month and all that and I'll be fine and dandy. Well, I didn't realize what being in

the Air Force Reserve meant at that time. I no sooner was there than thirty days later, I get a letter from the Air Force saying that I've been now put on active duty and I'm to report for basic training. So, uh, I would, I would, I went to that and of course, interesting, interesting military career that I had. But, but the portion of that, the education portion of that is I had the GI bill and all of a sudden, I realized, "Oh, wait a minute. I have a way of paying for a college now. I'll be fine soon as I get out of here in four years." And all that, and that's what happened. When I, when I returned back off of duty in 1970, I immediately enrolled. Matter of fact, that was the reason I got an "early out," they called it, they said. I enrolled in YSU there and was able to leave two to three months early because I had enrolled in that, and studied back in school, was more motivated this time around, based on my grades (laughing).

S – (laughing) And when you finished school, what happened?

F – Well, let's see. Finished school. Um, during this time, I don't know how this all happened exactly, I had, I'd gotten a job at Packard Electric which is now Delphi Automotive. And right after that, Firestone tire job, I was able to go to, to Packard. Now, I wouldn't choose to do that either, because, to me, it was just enough to buy a car 'cause I still had the military thing in the back of my mind. And my very first job there, I thought I was going to work like a conveyor line, or a, I don't know what I thought I was going to be doing there. They gave me a mop and a broom and said, "you're now on the labor gang and your job is to clean restrooms, bathrooms, and to wash the floors in the administration building." So I, ahhh, I took that job of course at tremendous pay, I don't know what the pay was back then. It was good. Five bucks an hour, probably. And, I...so I did that, on midnight turn, I was a janitor in a drama, I used to call myself. Sort of a demeaning job. Mom and Dad were not too happy about that, because they thought, "you're over their cleaning bathrooms and you should be going to college," and that kind of a deal, you know. I said, "well I won't be a janitor too long." Of course, then I enlisted in the... in the armed forces. When I returned, they gave me my job back. Well, by this time, I'd turned into somebody a little bit different. I turned into being an extravert and a leader and um, "I'm not going to be doing this kind of job. I don't want this job. I want a job." "Well, what have you got, some kind of education and all that?" I said, "well, I've been in the military, I did this." I was a staff sergeant and I had a platoon of men. I ran my portion of the base. I was involved in some top-secret stuff. I, I, you know, I, you know I feel that I need, I want a salaried job. Well, they all laughed even more. Said, "we don't give anybody salaried jobs here unless they have a college education." Oh, okay. Well that was a better motivation for me to get back to school. In the meantime, they put me out in the plant and gave me a job where, you know, it was more of a male type of job where I was actually a repair type of guy and all that so I learned that kind of trade. And I went to night school continuously for the next, um, four or five years there till I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Business, and majored in marketing, minor in accounting. And I went so far as, that I took some graduate classes and I, like I tell my son, I could kick myself. I didn't finish my graduate degree. I, somehow, I, I was already in the salaried group and I was getting promoted. You know, I thought so, why do I need an MBA? You know, I'm, I'm going to spend the next thirty years here. I don't need an MBA and, you know, I'm going to get certain levels. So I never did finish and I'm sorry I didn't do that. But, um, so, after that, of course, I met my wife at work. That was an interesting story. She would walk around and I thought she was laughing at me and she was giggling and all this kind of stuff, she was with a girlfriend. And I thought, what is going on here? And I, finally I approached her.

I said, “are you laughing at me? There’s something you don’t like about me?” She said, “no, no, no, that’s not it. I don’t know why we’re, I just laugh when I see you.” And of course, she thought I was Samoan or Hawaiian, or something like that. She thought, you know, she would get to know me and maybe we’d end up in Hawaii somewhere. That’s a big joke around the family, but, you know. And all that, so we, uh, we, we carried out, of course, a relationship, and got married there back in ’73 and just as soon as I graduated. I graduated in ’72, we got married in ’73. And, that was interesting and then, of course, moved to Austintown and, and uh, started up, well, we only have one son, started a, a son at that time and all that. So, I eventually put in, oh, did I say thirty-eight years or something like that at Adelphi Automotive and retiring in my, in my fifties. Retired in a sense. I’ve devoted my life now to volunteer. I do an awful lot of volunteer work. I belong to a lot of organizations. One of the ones I’m really proud of is the Hispanic organization here in Youngstown called OCCHA. I’m on their board of directors. I’m their treasurer also and I love doing something for the Hispanic community. I really don’t care whether you’re Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Hondurian or whatever it is. I really think that it’s something we do there and I love helping people, or at least being a part of that stuff but I’m very proud of that, that fact. So, I always wanted to give back, see.

S- So you’re saying in that way you are in some ways carrying on your father’s involvement in forming the Mexican club. Tell me about how that got started.

F – Well, it got started because I think a number of Mexicans came here and not being able to read or write or converse or make some intelligent decisions, they decided they should band together in some kind of organization. They started meeting and, in different people’s homes which turned out to be, I guess, a little party and the women, the wives, would have the food and the guys would have the beer and they would actually have some kind of informal Rules of Roberts type of organization. They wrote things down. I don’t know where those archives are. I know where some of them are, but not all the way back in the thirties and forties, whenever they did this. But um, they, they were very adamant about someday having some dreams about having scholarships for your children, having a formal hall or a meeting place, even owning a restaurant, you know, for the benefit of these scholarships and giving back to their own youth and things like that. So, when I, when I was discharged from the military back in the ‘70s, in early ’70, my dad, uh, very strong little man, said, “what are you going to do now?” And I told him what my plans were, to go to school and all that, and then he says, “but what about the Mexican Club?” And I said, “well, what about it?” He says, “will you join now?” I says, “well, um, no, I wasn’t going to.” He says, “oh no, you join now.” He says, “they need president. They need help. They need all that.” Well, I ended up at least serving some terms as a president. Over the years, my dad was very proud of the fact that, that I continued that and I think, that was his way of making sure that the Mexican Club did continue to go on at that time, you know.

S – Well, it also, it seems, ensures not only that the club continues on but that you continue a connection with the Mexican community. Then, I wonder about how, how much... what roles the club has had for you and for your family and for your friends in maintaining that sense of Mexican-ness, whatever that word means to you.

F- Yeah, I think, that’s a good question. Before, um, this onslaught of Mexican restaurants appeared here in the last ten years, the only legitimate place to go get a Mexican meal was either

Taco Bell or the Mexican Club. And the Mexican Club, of course, had the homegrown meals there and people would come there, of course. There would come the Anglos, would come there and eat the food and we had a cultural room upstairs where we had our little artifacts and, and dishes and things from Mexico and all that. We had tours, we would bring a great bunch of kids through for tours and all that. And, I guess, behind the whole thing was that I was trying to perpetuate this idea that we should advertise who we are. So I remember many times, not just myself, now, the Mexican guys would get together and we'd join parades. We were in the Irish parade. We would, we would have our own parade with the St. Rose of Lima when they would have the Puerto Rican parade, we'd have a float. We would bring music in from... see there are large Mexican communities in Cleveland and Detroit and Lorain and Elyria, large enough that they had their own Mexican music that's homegrown, the *mariachi* bands. So we would bring them here to put dances, and of course, we would advertise all over the community and all that. We had quite a turn out. Well, I'm sure we had three, four, five hundred people at times at these dances. And then me, my heart would burst with pride because we would have our Mexican food, our Mexican music and people enjoying themselves and at least getting a piece of the culture. And of course, many people would say, "ah, I just got back from Acapulco," or "I just got back from Mazatlan, and here, we're going to have, you know, 'maracas' and all that," and of course, I just roll my eyeballs sometimes at the mispronunciation of words and um, oh, the stereotyping of Mexicans which, which really, which really annoys me sometimes to no end. I had a hard time getting over this movie, the *Three Amigos*. I had hard time getting over that stereotyping there. I'm okay with it now, because I think I'm over about, you know, and all that, I understand the comedy in it. But that stuff bothers me and the stereotyping, I, I... ask me. You know, ask me what the real Mexico is about. I could tell you, you know, what little I know. I went half a dozen times back and I spent many times back there on business even, so. I even taught a class at Delphi ...excuse me, at Delphi Packard uh, on how to assimilate yourself in the Mexican culture and which was well attended. And I got a teacher's award, Teacher of the Year award for that, for that particular class that I had.

S – Have you been back at all to visit your family there?

F – No, I have not. And, um, there isn't very much family. They're all deceased and any family that I would see now would be maybe some cousins and all that. I'm not sure where we're connected although there's one cousin. Last night, as I was going through my, a, had a bunch of stuff upstairs, I started reading a letter and got a little misty-eyed. And I remember this one letter from this one cousin of my mine, a girl. And I remember that she came to the United States twice to visit us, and probably about my age now. And the last time, this letter was dated 1984 and I'm very tempted to, I don't know how, how good that address is. I'm very tempted, now, I just might do that, to write her a letter because she's a connection, uh, that I remember more than anything else. And maybe, I'm thinking now, just myself, if the connection is made, I might go there, or she might come here. You know, like that kind of deal. So then I'm looking forward to something like that. I'm, just, I've talked myself into doing that pretty soon.

S – That's good. I wondered, too, about your parents. We had talked earlier about the fact that your parents went back to Mexico around the time that you were born.

F – Yes.

S – Um, they went for a while, is that right?

F – Yes, my dad apparently had a six-month visa from the United States and he was classified 4A by his draft board. It was toward the war now and we were running out of men and I'm almost sure, at this point, he was going to be drafted whether he was a citizen or not. And, uh, it was a terrible war, of course, and I think they went back there to have me born in Mexico. My parents were very nationalistic. Don't get me wrong. They loved the United States for what it was and what it stood for but as far as they were concerned, there was no other country except Mexico and their lives. They had Mexican blood. And I think my mom, uh, strong willed as she was, decided, "he's going to be born in Mexico." The ramifications, I don't think she understood it would have been better for me to have been born here. At least I could have been president.

S – Right. (laughing)

F – At least they weren't thinking about that. That bothers me. But anyway, the ramification of that was, she wanted me born there. Plus, her mother was there and other family and they could take care of me and all that. Well, as it turns out, from what my mom tells me and other people tell me over the years, I was not a very healthy... I was very much premature, didn't weigh very much. Touch and go for quite a while. So Dad, of course, I think they knew that too. I think, from a hospital point of view, even though the medical service is better here, they wanted to be able to speak English, or Spanish, to doctors and nurses and things like that. Uh, interesting thing is that they, um, if you notice in the papers that I gave you, there's no, there's nothing in there from me to cross the border. So I crossed illegally and the story that my mom tells...

S – At six months.

F – At six months. What my mom tells me is, very sick, very jaundiced and things like that, and all that. They were on a troop train, they get me across then... interesting story, getting me across. They told, there was, there were, the Mexican armed forces helped the United States immensely during World War II. Um, but also, not only fighting but also part of the supply things and all that. So they were on a troop train and they either bribed or coerced or asked or begged or prayed that these guys could get me across the border while they went on the regular train. And that's putting a lot of faith in things, and all that. As it turns out, it worked out well, of course. So Mom said that the, a couple soldiers agreed to do that. So they put me up in like a compartment and had a, you know, drew the curtains up there and prayed that I would just be quiet which, really I was, for a period of time. Maybe they gave me enough tequila, I don't know.

S – (laughing)

F – And the train crossed the border and my mom says, you know they were already there and they ran to that train. My mom ran to that train right away, 'cause, you know it's, it's putting a lot of faith in humanity at that point, and all that. And they took me off that train and brought me in there. That's how I crossed initially into the United States which leads us back to 1955 when I become a citizen.

S – Right.

F – There was no proof that I was here.

S – Right.

F – Never, never until that time, which is what happened downtown. (laughing)

S – Right. Yeah, tell me that story.

F – I'll tell you that story. Um, there was a lot of urgency going on and I remember I was probably about nine, ten years of age and I remember going downtown and we went to see this attorney, a fellow by the name of Attorney Hanni. I... a big burly man and my dad and him were having a conversation and I just remember something about, you know, there was an exchange of money. I remember seeing that and I, and something, Bob would tell my dad, "don't worry, Pedro. I'll take care of this. Tomorrow I want you down at City Hall. I want you to see Judge whoever-it-was." Well next thing I know, the next day I'm a citizen, just like that. So, you know, so that's how that happened, and, uh, so, I'm an official person. But up until that time, uh, I could've probably been caught and deported just like anybody else without any proof.

S – Because you had no papers.

F – Right.

S – Because your parents became citizens after you were born. Right? So they, when they took you, when they went down to Mexico for you to be born, they were not yet citizens. But they already owned a house here and...

F – Yes.

S – ...and your father had a well-established job.

F – Right, right, right. I don't know what the rules were for... the rules change on immigration and all that. I...it's interesting, Dad and Mom didn't hide. How can I put it? They didn't go off and go to change their name. Many people change their last names when they come here and all that. They didn't go hiding anywhere. They were out in the open. He had a job. He'd been working there for years already, and she was obviously established now. And they had a house and all that, so, so apparently they, they, they had every intention of doing the right thing and they were up on immigration. Apparently they were up on it. They knew if they got a card that said U.S. Government, they read it and they would take it to someone else to read it, help them read it. You know, they made sure they, they, no one was going to knock on their door and pick them up and take them somewhere they didn't want to go to.

S – Or pick up and take you somewhere. (laughing)

F – God bless ‘em for that.

S – Um, the Mexican Club still exists. It... you’re not as active in it as you once were but I think, my sense is that, that feeling that Mexican identity connection with other Mexican people, that still matters to you.

F – Yes, it does.

S – This sounds like a dumb question, but why?

F – Why...well, I need to belong to something. I think we all need to belong to something. I feel that I’m Mexican. I know I’m Mexican. Uh, my parents said Mexican blood runs through your, through all of our veins if you’re born in that particular country, and all that. Um, my... the love I had from my parents and the love that they had for Mexico has transferred to me. Mexican culture is very important to me. The Spanish language is very important to me. The advertising of that, and I’m so proud of what I am, and what Mexico is, that I want to set things straight as much as I can among people who don’t realize what the Mexicans are, or what they can do. I’ve also noticed in my son, uh, sort of was anti-Mexican for a few years, early, but as he’s gotten older and especially in his teenage years and into his adulthood, now, he’s more Mexican than I am. You know my wife is Scotch Irish and um, as far as when people ask him what nationality he is, he says, “I’m Mexican.” Matter of fact, his name, and this is another curious thing, but we’re both referred to as Frank but that’s not our legitimate name. Our legitimate name is Francisco. He’s called Francisco now and has insisted upon that for years. He’s, he writes his name as Francisco now. He, you know he, but this, uh... he’s more Mexican than I am sometimes.

S – What do you think prompted that?

F – I don’t know. I don’t... I think me. I think that’s, you know, me, and all that. And, uh, you know? It’s nice to be a, little bit different, don’t you think? There’s an allure to it.

S – Um hmm.

F – Whether you’re Hawaiian, Samoan, or Mexican, there’s a little allure that you’re not just... There’s something mysterious about you. There’s a, there’s a, there’s a past behind you or there’s a just something that maybe, that makes you different, you know, whether you’re Palestinian or Irish or Mexican, it’s something. So I think he likes that notoriety, he likes being said that.

S – You know, there’s that, uh, at least potentially always, a flip side to that, which is the possibility of discrimination and I wonder if either you heard from your parents or in your own life or in your son’s life, has that ever been an issue?

F – Oh yes, oh yeah, yeah. Ah, whew, it... I didn’t know you were going to touch on that but that’s, that’s interesting. I, um, my mom and dad thought, although they were out in the open and all that, we were always aware of the fact that they were different because of their language

and because my, my dad was very dark and Mom was not. But Dad was very dark and I think that bothered him a lot, uh, that people didn't know what he was. Was he from the Middle East or was he, you know, from the Caribbean Islands and things like that? So, yeah, he did that and I, and I remember listening to things and you're probably could run in to some of this, this when you talk to other nationalities. In the mill, there was discrimination against Italians or Poles or Spanish speaking people. There was this... or even blacks, you know. There were just, this uh, you lump, got lumped all of them together one time, like that. I noticed it when I was in grade school, late in grade school when I was at St. Ann's and I was definitely darker, probably the darkest kid in my class and I thought, wow. But I'm not like the guys that live over there down in the Monkey's Nest or over at the projects. There's something different about me so I'm Mexican, and all that. So I made sure people knew that. Never really ashamed of any of that. I remember one, one, one time that it really bothered me I think. A girlfriend of mine, ahhh, got me a job at a restaurant on the North Side, off the, off Belmont Avenue, a Jewish restaurant. So I went to work there as a dishwasher. Like in high school, the t-shirt with the rolled up sleeves and all that, so I went there and I uh, I remember even the second or third day or fourth day, whatever, the owner comes up to me. He says, "ahh, we can't use you here anymore." I said, "why, am I doing something wrong?" Yeah, I think I'm a pretty good worker. I've never been a lazy buck. "No, we just can't use you, son. That's all. It's just we're going to be hiring some other people here." So I left there bothered, it really bothered me and I, I thought, I thought about it so I asked her 'cause she knew, her family knew the owner. And she said "they found out you're a Mexican." Boy, did that break my heart and that really bothered me more than I ever... the fact that I'm even telling you about this, you know, cause I, I told my son about this also. That really bothered me and I, I told him, I said, "don't let things like that bother you because those are people who don't, who don't get to know you. They don't know who you are, you know, things like that. So I, um, that was the first time I thought about that and that really knocked me back. You know, that probably contributed to me being an introvert for a while. Knocked me back. And then the fact that I was always thought like I had to compete harder because everybody was somewhat smarter and, and had things that I didn't have. So I was not a very good student. I can be honest with you. I was an average student. So I had to read each chapter four times when some people had to read it once, you know. Or I had to, I had to apply for a job fifteen times when some people had to apply for it one time, you know, those type of deals. When you get to the military, things change a little bit because you're all on the same footing. Depends on how many stripes you have, at that point.

S – Yeah.

F – So that really got me out of my, my, my shell and all that but still there were some instances, you know even, even there, here and there and I kind of laughed them off to the point where they, they don't bother me like they used to bother me. So, one of my attempts to set, to set the record straight. My son does the same thing, too, I think. He, he, he notices that, too, and I, you know, I think he's adamant about that. He says, "you know, Dad, well we had a kind of..." And this thing, I'll tell you something that happened just recently. When he and I and my wife were at the Chevy Centre, now the Covelli Centre, the boxer that came in to fight against Kelly, uh, Juan Rubio, uh, Marco Rubio, Mexican, well, we were sitting there among them, for the press conference, my wife, my son, myself. And this gentleman behind me, he starts saying some derogatory things about Mexico. "Go back to Mexico. Get the hell outta here, wetback." Ah,

you know, you know, all kinda stuff like that. And I, and I don't even do this because I... I turn around, and I says, "you know, this guy's, he's a, he's a guest in our country. You should treat him with a little bit more respect." I think, I know I said that. He says, "what are you talking about?" And I, then I stood up and I said, "well you know, I'm Mexican, too. I don't like the way you're talking." Well no sooner do I stand up, my son stands up, too and he's starts taking his coat off. So we're gonna obviously, you know, he, he'd had enough of that, too, and my wife was grabbing...she's grabbing both of us, like this (laughing)...just grabbing both just like this and this guy was with about three or four guys that were sitting there. And I thought, okay, we're gonna have a little problem here with these three or four guys, then we're gonna have a little problem. I may be sixty-seven years old but I'm, I'm not going to let this pass by. Well I noticed that all three of those guys, they all looked the other way. They wouldn't even look at me or look at him. They all looked at him like this and he was like looking for some, uh, verification with his buddies. There was none there. He sat his butt down and my wife and, and my son and I, we all sat back down again, you know. He wouldn't look at me the re..., or even say a peep the rest of the thing.

S – Yeah.

F – But that's what boils me. He doesn't know who that guy was. You were just, he was just gonna fight Kelly. He's a guest here. He's here for a sporting event and I met this guy personally. He was a very nice...this Marc, but I met him very person... but, loved being here. He loved the opportunity and all that. And all he wanted is, is... giving you the opportunity to know somebody, that doesn't happen to have this. But I, and I've heard, and I, and my son has gone into some situations also, so he's, he's also, I think it bothers him to the point where he's, he don't like it. But he likes being who he is and he'll, he'll, he'll defend his nationality.

S – Really, I only have last question which is the wide open one which is, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think we ought to be sure to talk about?

F – I just, uh, express my, my love for my parents. The fact that they brought me here is so important to me. I actually have upstairs the basket they brought me in. It sends chills up your spine.

S – Oh, yeah.

F – You know my wife, you know, she won't throw it away, you know. And I say, "aw, we gotta get rid of that." She says, "nah, we can't get rid of that thing." So to me, that's...here in the land of opportunity. Now, ahh, sometimes I think I'm not a very good Mexican in that I don't live there. You know, if I lived there, I'd, you know, what person, what type of person would I be, you know. Would I be a real radical, 'cause you know, it's not a democratic country. It is a dictatorship run by a political party and, and so you have to be careful what you say and how you say it. I got relatives there that have been arrested and imprisoned and uh, told they gotta behave themselves because they were speaking against the government. I don't know if I can do that. I, I would probably be thrown in prison, myself because I'm, I've learned from the United States what democracy means. You know, and I, and, and they don't have that there in Mexico so I, I, I long to see that happen, you know. Someday it will. You know, maybe they,

they'll get a better opportunity. Now their government has improved, don't get me wrong now, it definitely, definitely has improved. So these are the kind of things that, that, that, that motivate me as far as what my country is, is and all that. The Mexican Club is a great motivational fact. I eventually will join, sooner or later. It's just, it's just the fact that, I'm just, I'm just being a little stubborn about the whole deal. But, uh, well, you know, I think, you know, I'm anxious to have grandkids and I manage to, to make them Mexican, see what happens. You know, that type of deal, you know, so.

S – (laughing) You have a line and you can carry this on.

F – Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, that's from, I think, in males it's very important to carry on their life, they do it. Their immortality is by their offspring and in Mexican males, it's very important to have offspring. They continue on. They, they, they, they understand that it's part of faith, I guess, how they look at things in their culture. It's interesting to be part of both cultures, to understand both cultures as much as you can.