

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project

Candelario Gonzalez Oral History

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Location: Unknown

Length of Interview: 01:30:40

Interviewer: MS – Unknown

Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: The first question is very simple. Please say your name and spell your name.

Candelario Gonzalez: Letter by letter, C-A-N-D-E-L-A-R-I-O.

MS: Good. Your last name?

CG: G-O-N-Z-A-L-E-Z, Gonzalez.

MS: Good. So, could you say that name please? Say your name.

CG: Candelario Gonzalez.

MS: Great. Candelario, wonderful. Perfect. Could you tell me the year you were born? What year were you born?

CG: My mother told me, and some papers second, that I was born on the second day of February, 1906.

MS: Wow. So, you're 101 years old?

CG: A little more over [laughter].

MS: A little more, yes. Where were you born? What town were you born in?

CG: I was born in a little town in the state of Zacatecas, Mexico.

MS: Could you tell me, what did your father do? What was his work, your father?

CG: I'm thinking of the word, but I don't think I'm able to. But I will tell you as close as I can. His work was fixing up soles.

MS: Shoes.

CG: When they cure and then they dry it out, whatever, to make the soles for the shoes.

MS: For shoes for people?

CG: Yes. Well, whatever, leather.

MS: He was a shoemaker?

CG: Yes. Como se dice curtidor?

Female Speaker: Oh, he curated the leather.

MS: Oh, cured them, a leather worker. CG: Yes.

FS: Yes.

CG: [foreign language].

FS: Then he sold it.

MS: He's a tanner.

CG: Yes, he used to sell the leather. That was his work.

MS: Could you tell me, when did your family come to the United States, and why did they come?

CG: Well, as far as I can understand and the best I can tell you – I'm talking about myself. Most of the time it is for better conditions of life.

MS: Do you know what year they came here?

CG: Yes. They granted us permanent permission to live in the United States the seventh day of June, 1920.

MS: Did your family come to San Pedro?

CG: We immigrated from Nogales, Arizona on the day that I already mentioned. June 7th was a Monday. Then from Nogales, Arizona to Tucson, Arizona, there used to be a train only once a day. That train used to leave at 3:00 p.m. We were in the immigration office between 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. So, when we got the papers, we missed the train. So, we had to wait until the eighth day of June to get the train at 3:00 p.m. We arrived at Tucson, Arizona at 5:00 p.m. We waited for the El Paso east-bound train to get the train to Los Angeles. So, we got the train the eighth day of June in Tucson at 6:00 p.m. Then we are arrived in Los Angeles, the ninth day at 1:00 p.m.

MS: Wow [laughter]. So, why did your father want to come to Los Angeles? Did he have family here?

CG: Yes.

MS: Why did your father want to come to Los Angeles?

CG: Oh, my father passed away when I was three years of age. It was her brother. We had her brother over here. He learned that we were in bad condition because my father passed away, and we were very poor. So, hardship, bad condition, so it was like not living. He invited us to come to the United States. He was the one responsible for us to be here in this country.

MS: It must have been very different for you to see Los Angeles. Was it an unusual place? It

must have been so big and unusual. What was Los Angeles like?

CG: Oh, well, I was born in a little town, but I was raised in a little larger town on the West Coast. My birthplace is Mexico, Reynosa. Then from there, we moved to a place close to the coast, the state of Nayarit, when I was four years of age. Then we stayed there. We came to United States when I was fourteen years of age.

MS: When you were fourteen and you first saw Los Angeles for the first time, what did you see? What did it look like? What did you think?

CG: Well, with me, I got surprised because in the first place, I was riding a train. Before that, I was working, riding a bullock. There was a difference riding a bullock and riding in the train. So, that was a great event when I crossed the border. Then when we arrived in Los Angeles, we saw a large city, a lot of people walking, not very many cars, but there were some cars and whatever, wagons and whatever. Generally, I got surprised.

MS: Now, you didn't speak English then.

CG: Nowadays [laughter].

FS: [laughter]

MS: But now you do. Oh, no, more than that, I would think, this –

CG: Just a little bit.

MS: Now, was it difficult, with so many people around you speaking English, you couldn't understand what they were saying?

CG: Well, let me tell you, in one way, I was not too lucky. But on the other way, I was very lucky and thank God. I had no difficulty whatsoever. No difficulty. We arrived here in San Pedro, Beacon and 1st Street. Pardon me, Estela.

FS: [laughter]

MS: [laughter]

CG: I was telling my daughter the place where we arrived when we came from Mexico, 1st and Beacon on the northwest corner. When we arrived, it was on Wednesday afternoon, between 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. Then the next day was Thursday. Then my brother, he went to register in the schools. So, we went one block from here. Right here, this is 4th Street and (Palsvaris?). The school was on 5th and Center, one block west and one block south. It was around the corner. So, the principal said, "The school is going to close classes next week. So, better wait until September. No use to register now with only one week." So, we did the way she said. So, I started to work one week after.

MS: What kind of work were you doing?

CG: Those days, as far as I remember, there were many farmer places around. One person had two little grocery stores, some more grocery. At the same time, he had a truck to peddler. So, he hired me as a helper. He paid me \$1 a day and room and board [laughter].

MS: So, you were fourteen and driving a truck?

CG: No, I was just helping him. But we practiced with whatever he'd – yes. But he was so kind to me that he showed me how to drive. It was a 1914 little truck, pickup, with a little compass and – yes.

MS: So, what were you delivering? When you arrived here, what was here? What did you see? What did it look like when you first came here?

CG: Well, just like I said, the town was different than it is now. Very different it is. So, we used to live, just like I said, on Beacon and 1st. There was a hill that started from right here at Front up the hill. It goes down towards the end on 1st Street. So, where we were, we couldn't see nothing because it was a hill. I only stayed a week. I didn't see very much because I went to work not in this area. I went to – now it's Paramount. At the time, it was Hynes. They changed the name. It was Hynes. So, we went to live in Hynes. So, what I saw, we got a lot of farming. Cattle, there were a lot of dairies.

MS: What did Beacon Street look like? What was on Beacon Street?

CG: Well, just like I said, Beacon Street is down on 4th Street. The business started and there was a theater around the corner of 4th and Beacon, very small theater. From 4th to 6th Street, 7th was nothing. After they started building it. But when I came here, it was only two blocks from Front Street to Mesa. But there were businesses to Center, from Center to Mesa [inaudible] on the south side of the street, because the school was across on the north side on 6th and Center and 5th. The school came from 5th to 6th. They used to have an entrance on 6th Street, entrance on Center, and entrance on the 5th Street.

MS: Now, on Beacon Street, did you see many sailors? Who were the people who were walking around Beacon Street? Who came to Beacon Street?

CG: What kind of people?

MS: Yes, what kind of people?

CG: Mostly working-class people at the time and sailors. Because the Navy used to be here. Their home was here. The Navy landing was on 5th Street. So, a lot of traffic on moons and sailors and working-class people working all over. Because at the time, as far as I remember, you can see where people worked at lumberyards, ship buildings, shipyards, and canneries. That was more the lumber boat building and cannery. That was the main thing.

MS: You started to tell me that work was really important. You started to work right away and work was important to you. Tell me about that work was important to you. It was important to work.

CG: When I got out of school?

MS: No. You were talking about once you arrived here, you started work right away because work was important. Tell me about why work was important.

CG: Why?

MS: Why work was important.

FS: Porque el trabajo importante para usted?

CG: Pardon me. Earlier I said my father passed away when I was three years of age. Then my mother was a widow. She had to work in order to support us. So, I used to help her. I was a babysitter when I was four years old until I was seven. Then I started to work in Mexico when I was seven years of age. I worked over there until I was fourteen when I came to this country. When I came to this country, one week after, I started to work as a helper. Then I went to school, one semester. Then I went to work right away. I think I went to work for Southwestern Shipbuilding Corporation when I was fifteen years of age. I came in June, and June I started to work. When I was fifteen years, I worked.

MS: What did your mother do? Did your mother come with you?

CG: Yes.

MS: What did she do?

CG: We were, my mother and my two sisters and I, four persons.

MS: What did your mother do for work when she was here?

CG: She worked in a tannery. She had to work. My fifth brother, he passed away seven months after he brought us. He had an accident at work. He got killed.

MS: How did he die? Tell me how he died.

CG: He got killed. He used to work in an [inaudible], Benning Docks. A few of them used to work there. Just like I said, we worked in one way and the other way. So, just like I said, but we got to take it where it comes.

MS: Well, how did he die? How was he killed? What happened?

CG: He used to work on the cranes, lowlander in the cranes. I worked for twenty-two years

after that thing. Those days it changed everything. There used to be a crane driver who operated the crane. There was a hook tender with cables. He put cables around lumber or whatever. But we used to work lumber. Then we used to call them lowlanders, the person that get the logs and put them in place. So, he was a lowlander. The boom broke off. So, he jumped off the car, and he landed head down. No chance. He broke his head.

MS: Now, when you began to go to school, you didn't speak English. How did you learn to speak English?

CG: Well, we stayed one semester. But the room where I – they used to call the room – I don't know how they call it now – ungrade room. No grade. Ungrade room. The classes were, "These are my eyes, my nose, my mouth, my hands, my fingers, the table, the chair." That's all. But no conversation. So, the time went by, and I didn't learn. Do you understand me?

MS: Yes.

CG: Just like I said, it was very hard to learn English. Very hard. Some of the persons, I don't say, "Oh, the person." Some of the person, they don't realize that the time is different. Those days you were used to work with the mouth shut, no talking. You understand what I mean?

MS: Yes.

CG: We had to hide when we saw the boss. If we were talking to each other about something, when the boss come, we have to put a clip in it, no talking. My partner was like me, an immigrant from Mexico. He didn't speak English like me. How can we learn English when we speak in Spanish to each other and then no time to talk? The time went by and went by. The years went by, and we had no chance to learn. That was very hard.

MS: How long did you stay in school? How long?

CG: One semester from September to June.

MS: You didn't come back after.

CG: I went to work right away.

MS: Right away.

CG: Yes, right away.

MS: But everyone around you was speaking English. So, could you hear them and learn from listening?

CG: Just like I said, I was so lucky. My first yard was in the shipyard. Then I went from then to the cannery not talking either. Not talking. Then from the cannery, I went to the lumberyard, Hammond Lumber Company. I worked fifteen years. When I was sixteen years of age, I started

to work for a lumber company. Then I worked in 1935. Then from 1935 to [19]42 – when the war – Second War – I worked at [inaudible], the same job.

MS: The first job with a ship company, what did you do? What was your job?

CG: I had a friend, he used to work there. He knew that I needed work because I worked to keep on living. He told me what to do and say. So, I went to this place. They were going to call whatever they needed from passers, carriers, boiler ups, drillers, riveters, whatever. When they said passers, we were just to get in. So, I was fifteen. So, young kids are trying to get to the door. You understand what I mean?

MS: Yes. You were pushing through, yes.

CG: People getting into the door. Then when they said passers, I went in. Then they asked how old I was. I said eighteen. "You are nineteen, are you?" Pulled me out. But I didn't go away. I stayed by the door. Then they kept on calling. Then when they came back and called the passers, I went again. Then they said, "Go back." So, the third time probably, he said, "This guy he's –" So, he gave me that card for doctor examination. So, I passed it, no throat. I had nothing. That wasn't my first job as a passer.

MS: Now tell me what that job is. What did you do?

CG: Do you know a panel? Put a liquid and then just water, I would put in a bottle or something, a panel just like you're playing ball. I never did play ball in my life. Never. So, here he hit the rivets. Then he put to the passer, and the passer catches it. The passer put in the hole. Then the hole will clear up. They hold it up. They hold the rivet. Then the riveters are outside. Then one is holding the rivet and the other rivet. Then the passer put the rivet in the hole. That was my job. So, I put the rivet in the hole. But it was hard to learn to catch the rivet.

MS: Did you catch it like a glove almost?

CG: Yes, like catch a ball. So, that's why the rivet, they keep them falling, and it burns out. It's how it works.

MS: So, you had never done anything like that before? You never played baseball, obviously. You said it was just all new.

CG: No. The fellows around there said, "At noontime, when the whistle blows, don't waste no time. Don't go. No lunch for you. You practice, throw it up and try to catch, throw it up and try to catch it." Then they're flying consequently. When you get it, put it down, don't put it up. When you put it up, it burns out. So, I learned and learned. Then they throw the rivets. So, I learned with the cold rivets. Not hot rivets, cold. So, a little bit of riveting [inaudible] me. Then I learned how to catch the rivets. That was my first job.

MS: So, you practiced during lunchtime?

CG: Lunchtime, yes.

MS: So, how long did you have that job?

CG: Three months.

MS: Three months. What happened? Why did you leave that job?

CG: Huh?

MS: Why did you leave?

CG: No, they finished the boat. I'm telling the truth. I'm not used to lying. I'm a liar, but I don't like to lie [laughter]. So, the boat has to go on the ocean to try it out. Just like I said, I was so lucky. The game, the one I was working, was the one they choose to go with the boat. But I didn't want to go on the boat. So, I quit.

MS: You didn't want to go because you were afraid of going or –

CG: Yes [laughter]. I had never been in the water.

MS: Tell me that again. That's a good story. Repeat to me that they had to try the boat out, but you didn't want to go because you were afraid. You have to tell me that story again. Ask him to repeat it again.

FS: Que repita la historia porque no se pone en el barco.

CG: Oh, que porque no?

FS: When they finished.

CG: I was afraid to go on the ocean. I didn't want to go. I didn't know how to swim. No, nothing.

MS: But they were going to try the boat out to make sure it was okay.

CG: Oh, yes. They must.

MS: Tell me that again. Have him repeat that.

FS: Que se puede repetir cuando ya termina el barco, what happened next? [foreign language]

MS: It's okay to repeat it.

CG: No. I told you I quit. Believe it or not, they gave me a good recommendation letter that I was a good worker and so on. I didn't go out to try it. I quit. So, then I went from there to the

canneries.

MS: Well, tell me about that job. So, how did you get the job in the cannery?

CG: Well, it went just the same as – people, they used to get there at the door and the boats or whatever. They would come out and pick up the person's car. The look on their faces [laughter], you'd see how lazy they were. They'd like to pick up them, go get servicing them. Maybe these guys were better than these other guys, whatever, the looks, stronger, or whatever.

MS: So, again, you pushed yourself to the front and made yourself look big?

CG: Exactly right. That's very, very true.

MS: What was your job in the cannery?

CG: I had a very good job practically doing nothing. I'm telling the truth. They were exchanging the cans. There were two lines, getting to one line, two lines to get into one. Then sometimes they get two together can go. So, the can starts to jump off. Well, then they knew they had to have a man or anybody to watch those things. Be busy. That was my job. Just lucky.

MS: You were like a traffic cop, right?

CG: [laughter]

MS: You made sure they didn't crash together.

CG: Yes. Then after you finish, clean up the cannery and the place where we were working. Not all the cannery, the place where we were working.

MS: So, how much money did you make? Let's start with the shipyard. How much money did you make at the shipyard?

CG: When I went to work for the men, \$1 and room and board. Then at the shipyard, 52 cents an hour. Then when I went to the cannery, 35 cents an hour. I quit the cannery. Then I went to work for the lumber, and 50 cents an hour.

MS: So, tell me, what were you doing in the lumberyard? What was your job there?

CG: Well, that was a very, very hard job for all the beginners. Those days, they used to sort the lumber. The lumber came together in different lengths from 8, that's the shortest, to 22 and 24 feet long. Then they had to sort it. There was one lead there. They called that length the size of the lumber. Then we had to get on there, put it up, and whatever rack – we called it racks – put the size. That was my job.

MS: Your job was to pick up the lumber and put it in the right place?

CG: Oh, literally stuck one end of it and then name the length, 10, 12. It's all gone, whatever. Then the man carried the lumber to the rack and stand it up.

MS: So, it was very hard work to do that?

CG: Very, very hard.

MS: The lumber was heavy?

CG: Very hard work.

MS: So, when you finished your job, were you just so tired even if you were – what was it like for you on a typical day? Would you hurt? Would there be pain or were you just tired?

CG: You have to work all day.

MS: I'm sorry?

CG: You have to work all day, loaded all day. They'd wait and work all day. Yes, it was hard work.

MS: How many hours a day did you work?

CG: Eight hours. Sometimes they meet because it was different days. The boats, they had no cranes. Everything was by hand at the time. They used to have two-wheeled trucks and pulled out with the horse. Not truck, the horse. When the boat comes, they have to let them in because they unload the boat first for three or four days. But all the lumber has got to be sorted, pile it up good. But I only worked one year. I just started the eighteenth day of March, 1922. One year only working the other [inaudible]. Then the next boss picked me up for a different job. It was hard and dangerous, and I didn't know the work.

MS: What was the new job, and why was it dangerous?

CG: The second job? Loading cars with a steam crane. Just like I said, lowlanders. We had to fix the lumbers and the flat cars in [inaudible]. Hard job. Very hard job and dangerous.

MS: Why was it dangerous?

CG: Why?

MS: Yes. Or what was dangerous about it?

CG: Well, I'm going to explain to you. See, the cars are 40 feet long and about 6.5 feet or 7 feet wide, no more. So, they used to lift up and carry a load about 5 feet high and about 5 feet wide, about 5,000 pounds or more, the load. The car is only just like 740. The first load, they put on

one load on each end. So, you have to be there. When the crane driver starts to put it on the load, we had to catch it to put it where we need the load. Very dangerous. What about the second load? The car, we put one load one side on this side. Then we put on this other side like this. One person has to work one load, only one, not two men together. Cannot work two men together, only one. One man works one load and the other man, you got to speed it up. We had to load four cars today, two men. Four cars, two men, two in the morning, two in the afternoon. We have to load one car about 10:00 a.m. and the second about 12:00 p.m. and then 3:00 p.m., four cars. One hand doesn't get a lumber to him, two men.

MS: Did you see anyone get hurt?

CG: Oh, yes.

MS: When people got hurt, what did you see?

CG: There are many ways to get hurt, many different ways. Sometimes when we used to pile up the crane driver and knock him off the pipe, we go down. Yes, very, very dangerous.

MS: Did you see someone die that way?

CG: No.

MS: Did you see someone die that way?

CG: No. They right away knew if they get hurt, they took them to the hospital later. But they hurt very bad.

MS: Did you ever come close yourself to being hurt? Tell me about that.

CG: More than one time.

MS: Tell me the story.

CG: Yes. Well, one time, I was going to be knocked out of a pile. But I didn't know what to do. The load was about this high. Then I thought if I was on the load, (Franky?) dropped it on me. Can't think fast enough. So, the only thing, I went to the end and gave her the lumber. So, the load was – and I was mounting when it happened there.

MS: You were holding on.

CG: Yes, holding on. Then the crane driver saw. Then he started to cut the swing. They knew how to do it. That's their job, putting that kind of pile. Well, more than one time.

MS: Tell me another time that you were almost hurt.

CG: Another time, they sent me for work for a few years. First, I'd load and then first I'd put the

sticks in the cart, the sides. That's what you have to do. So, I was putting on the sticks, and the boom broke up and fell down. But they didn't bother as much. They thought they got me. I was short. I only heard a loud boom. But I didn't see nothing. I was busy working my job.

MS: So, you didn't even know you were almost hit?

CG: They thought when they saw the boom go right straight to me, they –

MS: So, when you began to work in the lumberyard and in San Pedro, you began to make new friends? You met new friends?

CG: A fellow working, yes. Yes, because in the lumberyard we were about two thousand persons working there in the different branches, in the mill. But I was working the cranes. I worked on the cranes since 1923 to [19]44. Hammond Lumber Company, I worked from [19]22 to [19]35. [19]35, I came to the other Hammond, back and forth, until [19]42 when the war broke off. Then I went back because I was not American citizen. In order to work over here, must be an American citizen because they were handling war supplies.

MS: Before the war, when you were working in the lumberyard, any particular friends that you made? Any new friends?

CG: Well, yes. Fellow workers, not too close friends, just like hi and so on.

MS: Now, you were working so much. But did you ever have any time for fun? Did you do anything for fun?

CG: Just like I said, the only school I had is over here, the one semester. But when I was working at the shipping yard, I had a friend, the one that told me. He used to belong to a Mexican society. Then he invited me to join. So, I said, "I don't know how to read. I don't know how to write. What do I write?" "Oh, that's why it's good for you." Then he explained to me that they will not allow anybody underage. Must be an adult. That means from eighteen on. But he said, "I'm going to give you an application. You fill it out, you sign it, and then I text it. Then I know they're going to accept it because you're working." We were eighteen years, just like you said over there. Then I was a native, and that was my first – but I was only fifteen.

MS: So, how much did it cost to join the Mexican society? How much?

CG: Those days it was cheap. Probably about \$1, I think \$1 a month at the time.

MS: So, tell me, what did you do? When you went to the society, what were the activities?

CG: Inside?

MS: In the Mexican society?

CG: Do I belong to any society?

MS: Is it the same?

CG: Huh?

MS: What was it like? What did you do?

CG: No. But I'm asking you, do you belong to a society, the same?

MS: Did you have dances?

CG: Oh, yes. They were the same.

MS: Meetings.

CG: Just like they're planning something and then they must have an election, must vote. The president sets motion for this. There's a motion they're going to paint the building. All in favor say aye or whatever. Then when somebody says, "How are you going to pay? You've got money?" "Well, ask the treasurer." "About how much is it going to cost?" Then the discussion between them. Then I joined the Masons when I was twenty-three years of age. I still belong to it.

MS: Now, in the Mexican society, as a young man is that a chance for you to meet young women? Did you meet at dances? Did they have dances?

CG: Yes.

MS: Tell me about the entertainment. What kind of fun things did they do, the society? Did they have dances and picnics? What did they do?

CG: Yes, just dances and picnics or whatever or trips. Yes. Or do something for the building or whatever. Social also.

MS: Now, again, you weren't working. But did you have a chance to meet any young women, to be able to see anyone?

CG: I was very lucky, thank God, very lucky. When I was seventeen years of age, I felt myself an old man. When I was seventeen, no pleasure or nothing. Work, work, work, and more work. I liked to work. I'm over a hundred and still I like to work, but I cannot do it today. But I like to work.

MS: So, you weren't interested in getting married or anything like that when you were young?

CG: Well, that's natural. I got married when I was twenty-one years of age. I've been married two times. The first marriage was about seventeen years, the second marriage about over fifty.

MS: So, how did you meet your first wife?

CG: In the society.

MS: That's what I guessed [laughter].

CG: Yes, society.

MS: Tell me how you met her. Tell me the story of meeting her. Tell me the story of how you met her at the society.

CG: Well, we were members and used to exchange words. Finally, well, we decided to get married. We met each other in 1925, and we got married in 1927. We were two years apart. She was sixteen, and I was twenty-one.

MS: What was her name?

CG: Her name, Beatriz.

MS: What kind of person was she? Was she quiet? Was she loud? Was she big? Small? What was she like?

CG: Well, fifty-fifty [laughter].

MS: This is a continuation of the interview with Candelario Gonzalez. Welcome back. Among the many things you did is you had some restaurants.

CG: Yes.

MS: Tell me about the restaurants. Where were they and what kind of food and what were their names?

CG: Well, in the beginning [laughter] I used to work for Hammond Lumber Company. My nephew, they used to work on a peach cannery in Wilmington. Some way or the other, they – not me – they were like, "Do we get into business?" So, they bought a lot and built a building. They had in mind to work in grocery store. But finally, they changed their mind from grocery store to [inaudible]. So, they had to make a restaurant. So, while I was working in the lumberyard on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sunday, I used to go there and help him, just a helper kind of person. Then it went on until 1944. I decided to quit the lumberyard and work full time with them as a partner. He owned the restaurant, and his brother and I run the business. So, equal shares; three-three shares. So, that was how I got in the restaurant. So, I worked there.

MS: Where was the restaurant? What was its name?

CG: Pacific Hotel in Watson Avenue. It was on the northwest corner. So, I stood with them until the end of [19]52. Then my nephew and I started a business in 1122 West Anaheim.

MS: What was the name of the first restaurant?

CG: Cinco de Mayo.

MS: You have to tell me. Say to me, "The name of the restaurant."

CG: Cinco de Mayo.

MS: Repeat my words, "The name of the restaurant was."

CG: Oh, I beg your pardon. The name of the restaurant was Cinco de Mayo Restaurant. Yes.

MS: So, when you started your own restaurant, what was the name of that restaurant?

CG: Gonzalez Restaurant.

MS: The name of the restaurant was?

CG: Gonzales Restaurant.

MS: No, you have to repeat what I say.

CG: Oh, pardon. I understand. The name of the restaurant was Gonzalez Restaurant.

MS: What kind of food? Tell me about the food.

CG: Mainly Mexican food. But we used to serve both American food and Mexican. Mostly Mexican food, but both.

MS: Tell me about the kind of people who came to your restaurant.

CG: Well, it was not a first-class restaurant, but it was a decent place to eat. We had customers from the Rolling Hills, some other cities. I cannot explain myself what kind of person, decent people.

MS: The people who worked in the harbor, did they come?

CG: People who work in the harbor and business –

MS: I'm sorry, I was talking. Start again. Go ahead. I was talking when you were talking, so start again. Who came to the restaurant?

CG: People that worked in the harbor and the businesspersons, doctors, and whatever. Many people, even movie actresses.

MS: Well, tell me about that. Who were the movie people who came?

CG: There were a few famous from Mexico and some from Hollywood. I just cannot recall. They were more than one. Even the mayor from Los Angeles came to the restaurant and big actresses.

MS: So, this was a very popular restaurant.

CG: In a way, you understand, not too popular.

MS: Tell me, what was the menu? What is the food that people like?

CG: May I show you a card and then you advise me how to explain?

MS: Sure.

CG: Let's see if I have it and then you can –

MS: So, tell me, how many people could you serve in the restaurant?

CG: Well, we had capacity for two-seventy. But that doesn't mean those were there all the time. Some of the time, were more than two-seventy. Well, we could figure it out.

MS: Now, when you got into the restaurant business, did you have any training in this?

CG: No, not at all.

MS: So, how did you –

CG: Not at all. Yes, the willingness, that's all. Not at all.

MS: Did you know how to cook?

CG: No.

MS: Did you get involved with cooking?

CG: I learned there a little bit.

MS: You learned?

CG: Yes.

MS: So, tell me about that, how you learned to run a restaurant.

CG: By looking at the cooks, pay attention to what they did. Then I became the guy that used to

tell them what to do. I learned the food business. So, I was a coach [laughter].

MS: What was your favorite dish? What did you like to cook? What was the most favorite for you?

CG: You mean what were more the – but I can tell you [inaudible].

MS: Tell me, please.

CG: Yes, because we sold tacos, enchiladas, Chile relleno just like [inaudible]. Almost all the people liked everyone. We served according to the taste of the person. They said, "Oh, put my enchilada this way, put my beans." So, we did try to please the customers. Not us, the customers.

MS: Most of your clients, were they Mexican, or were they Anglo? Who were the people who came? Were they mostly Mexicans coming, or were there also people who were not Mexicans coming?

CG: Three-fourths, American people; one-fourth, Mexican people. It's very simple because the Mexican people, they eat Mexican food in their homes. So, we had customers from Rolling Hills all over here.

MS: How many years did you have the Gonzalez Restaurant?

CG: We start that place on Thursday, March 26th, 1953. We quit December 1990.

MS: That's a long time.

CG: Thirty-seven years.

MS: That's a long time. So, that was your main job for all those years, running that restaurant?

CG: Yes.

MS: Why did you decide to close the restaurant?

CG: Why?

MS: Why, yes.

CG: Well, I got old. Then I was a little tired in a way because I had another business. I had a combined liquor and groceries and had to take care of two places. So, I decided to quit the restaurant and take care of the store. That's why. Finally, in 1992, quit everything for good.

MS: Your restaurant and your store, they were in Wilmington?

CG: Yes, on the same street.

MS: Tell me again, where were the restaurant, the town, and where was it found?

CG: The restaurant was located 1122 West Anaheim, up about two blocks and a half from [inaudible]. It was on the side of the street.

MS: Describe what was Wilmington like when you first opened the restaurant in the 1950s? What was the town of Wilmington like?

CG: 1953, well, according to the building and according to the population, the people were not very many. Not very many persons at the time. It is four times more as it was then. We have to understand that from 1950 to 2000, the population of the world doubled. From 1950 to 2000, the people doubled. So, you're talking generation of how many people in Wilmington. Divide it little by little more people, more people. The city was enlarging and getting bigger and bigger. Then we saw more people on the streets, more people to talk about things, more banks, more stores. When I came to this country, Anaheim Street was the main road, Anaheim and Canal, what is now Abalone. Those days it used to be Canal Street. Afterwards, they changed their name to Abalone. It was Canal Street. Canal was from E Street now to the ocean. The main town was on Eleanor now where the B Station used to be. There was to be the tiered market post office right there on one block. It was nice.

MS: So, has it gotten better or worse since? In those years from when you first came here to today, is it better in that community, or is it worse? How has it changed?

CG: Well, it is very simple for me to say that it's changed for the better. Everything was improving every day. Every day was improving. You see new things every day. When I mean new things, some people are working in this part of building or house, some people being old, whatever. What's the difference? I do remember on B Street, when I came in 1920s, the dredges in the canal, they were making them deeper. All the water and sand, they put it on B Street. The people were working on getting shells and the screening on the B Street. That's kind of –

MS: That's interesting.

CG: Yes.

MS: How did the harbor change from 1920 to today? What is the difference there?

CG: Great difference. Because I do remember when I used to work for Hammond Lumber Company, I used to live over here in Elberon and Gaffey. We bought a lot and built a house over there, 1923. So, I used to walk from the hill up. I used to get the ferryboat on 5th Street. They were digging the canal. There was only one big warehouse at the time. Then they built two that closed. There were the fishing canneries. Right across on 5th Street, there was a fish cannery. Then it was the start. Then there were three, big warehouses; thirty-one, thirty-two, and thirty-three. Then it was changing little by little. The ferryboat was on 1st Street. 1st Street was San Pedro Lumberyard and the main dock. The lumber on the north and the dock on the south.

Benning was.

MS: How did the cargo change? Mainly lumber in earlier, but it changed. What was the cargo when you first came here and how did it change?

CG: Well, I worked in the boat longshore in 1923. There were a few boats, not very many boats, some wood boats and some steel boats. Then some were lumber boats and then cargo boats. They used to get the nurse in that room, man. They called them booms and the winches to take the merchandise there to the lumber and the freight. They used to make clothes on the woods, and they'd get it out. They used to call inshore means close to the dock, outshore to the ocean. The midships were in the center [laughter]. They called them here inshore, midships, offshore. They could freight. The big net, they put the mesh nets in there, and they'd get that with nets. There was something that they used to put cables around to take it out. But the small merchant, they put in nets to get the nets out.

MS: So, over time, there's more machines to help you, right?

CG: There's not very many. The machines started when people were in 1924. Because in the lumberyard, they used to pull the lumber with horses and then later on, with a jeep, little trucks, tractors to pull them, two-wheeled trucks. That was funny.

MS: Now, San Pedro is a town. When you weren't working, what was the town like? Did you go in the town?

CG: Well, there were only two main streets. Beacon from 4th Street to 6th, and Front. First you have Front. They used to call it Front Street, Beacon Street, then from 6th to Mesa. That was then. Then from Mesa West, those were the living quarters. But Mexico East was the start. Mainly on the South Side Street on Mesa from Front Street.

MS: What was Beacon Street like in the 1920s?

CG: It was a busy street, Beacon Street and Front Street. Because in Front Street there are working men passing by and so on. There were stores with two entrance, one entrance on Front and Beacon. They go from one street to the other most restaurants and clothing stores.

MS: I understand they had bars and cafes on Beacon Street.

CG: When I came, it was dry. There was no liquor. The liquor was sold in 1933 when Mr. Roosevelt took office. It was dry from [19]18 to [19]33.

MS: That's right. I forgot about that, Prohibition.

CG: There was Prohibition, yes.

MS: Now in 1923, there was a big strike. Do you remember that strike in 1923?

CG: [19]34.

MS: That was a bigger strike. But there was one in [19]23 too. Do you remember either one of those strikes?

CG: Oh, yes.

MS: What about the 1923 strike? What do you remember about that?

CG: 1923, I cannot recall exactly. It was very quick. People did not know us because they began to build a union, but it was like that. But in [19]34 –

MS: Well, tell me about the [19]34 strike. What about that?

CG: Well, the first to form a union were the lumbers, so mill workers, then the longshoremen and then the canneries next. But the first were the lumber workers and then the longshoremen and then the cannery workers and then the hotels and everything.

MS: Did you join the union in 1934?

CG: Yes.

MS: Tell me about it. There was some violence, some shooting, and things.

CG: That was not on the longshoremen.

MS: Was it tough becoming a member of the union in those days?

CG: Yes.

MS: Was it hard becoming a member of the union in those days?

CG: Well, that was in the beginning. They were forming the union first. They wanted men to join. That was not right. They were asking for help.

MS: But there was opposition. People didn't want the union.

CG: Oh, the companies. Sure, the company, they didn't want no union. So, there was opposition then. That was hard.

MS: There was some violence and fighting. Did you see any of that?

CG: Not very many over here. There were some in San Francisco. But San Pedro, yes, a little. Some person got hurt. Not very many got killed, I think one or two. But it's natural.

MS: What did you think about the union? Were you in favor of that, or what were your ideas?

CG: Well, it is through individual way of thinking. Some persons, they think the union is good, and some persons, they say it's no good for different things. Because the people that had no opportunity to join the union, they said they wanted the union because they had an opportunity to join. But the people that were in the union, they said because they'd get better condition, better pay. If you get better pay, you get better condition on living, natural see. You get more money; you can spend more money. You get more money; you can buy things. So, I think unions are okay. I don't know. I cannot say for sure because I don't know, just like the way people think. Right at present time, many people are in the union. But people that are in the union, they want the union. That's why they've come.

MS: Was the union good for you when you were working?

CG: Well, I worked for the union until [19]44. Then I started to work for myself in [19]44. Sure.

MS: What was it like in the harbor during World War II? That was very active, all of the activities going on. What was it like in World War II in the harbor area?

CG: Most of the activities that I noticed were ship building. Because they were building boats all over around the harbor in San Pedro, Wilmington, Terminal Island. They had a big shipyard. Then there'd be a lot of boats, over hundreds. On B Street, there was a shipyard built from (Figaro?) up to – close to (Al-Alon?). They were building a boat.

MS: Now, there are also many sailors and soldiers who came, and they were everywhere, right?

CG: There were many, many, many soldiers, yes. They come and go and movement, working men and military. Military and working people, you got big travels. The restaurants are full, yes. What's nice in a way was not nice in another way because no lights at night. There were no lights at night. We used to get candles. Or if you get electricity, you've got to get dark, goodness, so, no light goes out of the house. The automobiles, they cut the light. The catboats have only light down like they're doing it right now, only the road.

MS: In 1943, there was a big excitement. They thought that the harbor was being attacked. Do you remember that? It turned out to be nothing. But do you remember that?

CG: I saw that first year of the war, 1942, right here in Wilmington.

MS: Tell me about that.

CG: Not [19]43, [19]42.

MS: Yes. Tell me about that.

CG: Yes, [19]42. They thought they were over here. They were shooting up. Oh, people were scared.

MS: Do you remember where you were? Did you hear the shooting and everything?

CG: Yes.

MS: Tell me about that.

CG: It was at nighttime. I was in bed when people got excited. They were shooting, running up. They thought they had some airplanes on top of us over here. So, they started shooting.

MS: But it was nothing.

CG: No.

MS: Do you remember what it was like on December 7th, 1941 when Pearl Harbor – where were you then? Do you remember what that was like?

CG: It was on Sunday about 8:00 a.m. when they attacked Pearl Harbor. I was in the house when some people, they were talking. One of them was a person that used to work with me together. He said, "We're on war." That was the first. "We're on war." "What do you mean we're on war?" "They attacked Pearl Harbor."

MS: What did you think?

CG: It was no good. This is my way of thinking, if people are going to fight, if they win the battle, it's no good. If they lose the battle, it's worse because everybody becomes a loser. Nobody can win it. They win the war, but they lost a lot of lives in order to win the war. So, they're a loser too. They win something, but they lost something. So, there's no winner. Better no war [laughter]. That's my way of thinking. I don't know.

MS: Did you lose friends in the war who went to the war and fought?

CG: You mean the way they went to service and then –

MS: People you knew.

CG: Oh, yes. Even in my family, they went. We lost three.

MS: Do you remember the day that the war was over?

CG: No. Huh?

MS: The day the war was over, what was it like?

CG: But I cannot recall exactly, but I think it wasn't a long time between May and June 1945. But I do have books. Whenever I want to find something, I go to a book. It's right there

[laughter].

MS: [laughter] So, during the war, you were still working in the lumberyard?

CG: Oh, yes, until [19]44.

MS: Right. Well, actually, before the war was over, [19]44 is when you started the restaurant.

CG: Yes, working full-time. But I started to work on the restaurant in 1939 part-time.

MS: So, many soldiers and sailors, I think must have come there.

CG: Oh, yes.

MS: But how many of them ever had Mexican food before?

CG: [laughter]

MS: Is it a new thing for them?

CG: Well, I'll tell you the honest truth. As far as I remember, not very many people that liked Mexican food. Only they start to when the family are getting together, so they exchange food. So, then they start to like it. But I think if you give them the water, they'll start drinking anyway because people have to eat. We must live to eat, and we should eat to keep living.

MS: Did you have any entertainment in your restaurant?

CG: No. On either one, no, no entertainment, only music.

MS: So, you had musicians who were there. Mariachis or –

CG: No. How do you call it? Record player.

MS: A record player.

CG: Record player on one place. Then another, we just radio, soft music. Just soft music.

MS: No Mexican music.

CG: Yes, Mexican music.

MS: Or both.

CG: Both. But over here in Gonzalez Restaurant, mostly American music because we had three-quarters English-speaking people. So, we have to please them more over the less.

MS: So, when you finally retired and closed the restaurant and you kept the grocery store, how long did you keep the grocery store?

CG: I bought the liquor store in 1986, and I closed the business in 1992, from [19]86 to [19]92. The restaurant, from [19]53 through [19]93.

MS: So, when you came here as a very young boy, did you ever think that you would own a restaurant and a liquor store and be a businessman? What did you think your life was going to be like when you first came here?

CG: Well, if I'm telling the truth, I didn't think nothing. But I was willing to work because I did it since I was four years of age. When I say I started to work when I was four years of age, some people or many people –

MS: Hold on one second. Tell me again when you started to work.

CG: When I was four years.

MS: Start again. I'm sorry. Go ahead. When you said, "I started to work when I was four years," and repeat.

CG: I started to work when I was four years of age, and I kept working until I was eighty just like a bullock. Only one year when I went to school in San Pedro, one semester from September to June. In Mexico, I think I went to school about four months in different places; two weeks, one school, another two weeks in another. Now, this way, sometime two weeks and maybe another occasion whatsoever.

MS: We're almost done. This is great. So, tell me again, when did you start working, and what did you do?

CG: I started to work when I was four years of age. I don't want to explain to you how I did it. My father passed away when I was three years of age and used to work hard for a living. He had no trade. He was a laborer in a way. He passed away. He left a widow and orphans then. So, my mother had to go to work. I had some two sisters. So, I had to take care of these sisters. So, I was a babysitter. That's worse than working in some places. Some people would say. So, I used to take care of my two sisters.

MS: You were four years old.

CG: Four years old. So, one cry, the other two cry. We were three, and we were left alone because my mother had to go out and work. So, she'd keep us in the house. So, then I was a babysitter until I was seven years of age.

MS: You were fourteen when you came to –

CG: Yes, I came when I was fourteen. Then when I became seven years, then I tried to help her

the other way with money before I help with all my doings, taking care of my sisters. That was hard work, very hard work. We used to look at each other us three [laughter]. So, when I was seven, I started to work. I used to sell pumpkin seed, peanuts, whatever. I started to sell oranges, whatever. Until when I was about nine years old, I started working in a bakery shop. Then my mother wanted me to learn a trade. So, I went to learn how to make shoes. But I didn't like the trade. Then from there, I went to a barber shop, but I was really small. So, I ran. So, then I went to a bakery. So, I stayed there in the bakery. Then from the bakery, blacksmith's shop, that was when I came to the United States.

MS: So, you said you were working in the bakery, and then you worked at a blacksmith's shop.

CG: Blacksmith's shop, yes. So, that's when I came to the United States when I was working at the blacksmith's shop. Then when we arrived in this country, I went to school. But we came to San Pedro the ninth day of June, and the schools were about to close after one week. So, the principal of the school advised my brother, "No use to register now. You wait until the end of the semester," which was in September. So, then the next week, I started to work with [inaudible], spending \$1 a day, room and board. I worked until September. Then September, I went to school. Then in June, I started to work at Terminal Island, Southwestern Shipbuilding Corporation. I worked there for a little over three months. Then from there, I worked in the Van Camp Seafoods and Cannery. Those days, before, this was Nelson and Kettle. Then after, they changed the name to Van Camp. But it was Nelson and Kettle when I was there. Then from there, I worked at Hammond Lumber Company until 1935. Then in 1935, I worked out of harbor on *Blackman Wharf* until the war. Because I was not an American citizen, I was not allowed to cross. Because they were handling war supplies. So, they don't want people to see they are not citizens. It's not true. So, then I went back to Hammond. Then I worked there until [19]42. Then after [19]44, I started to work for the restaurant.

MS: Right. Good. We have the whole story then. I think we've got the whole story. Is anything else you wanted to tell me? Any more stories you wanted to share?

CG: Well, whatever you say.

MS: Is there anything else that you think it's important for history that we know about?

CG: Well, you didn't ask me that.

MS: Well, I was going to ask you a question about community. Do you know the community that was here in San Pedro called Mexican Hollywood?

CG: Yes.

MS: Well, tell me, what was Mexican Hollywood?

CG: Well, Mexican Hollywood – before we go there, let's talk first. When I came over here, I think I didn't see it, but I think was a big hill over here where we are now to the water. Then they cut it from the street. So, one part was left on this side on 1st the street. It was a hill. So,

there was a permit to work on the hill. Then on the west was one big hill over here until Mesa. There were cutting the hills over here. Then they worked on a little train, the steam shovels, load it in the little cars, and the train pulls them out. There was a big hill up here. There were some persons living on top of the hill on Beacon and Front started up hill on Beacon and Front up to First Street. So, there was a family place. Then San Pedro on the yacht was from Perch. But I told you there was a hill on this side. So, they carved another piece of hill on the north side, and they had a backend place all over it. So, with the lumber mill, those days, they used to waste a lot of lumber. Then some of the nice young fellows pick up the lumber and then start building. There's a TV [laughter] without permission. They call it Hollywood because of your imagination that they are houses wrapped in wood – not wrapped in wood, but I mean scrap things. Then they compare it with Mexican Hollywood.

MS: So, they're making fun of it?

CG: The way they leap, that doesn't come seriously. You know how it is, the rich and the poor [laughter]. So, they call it Mexican Hollywood [laughter]. That was the beginning right there.

MS: What about Las Rambla? Las Rambla, was that where Mexicans lived too?

CG: Las Rambla?

MS: Las Ramblas, I think, was the name of it.

CG: Las Rambla, huh?

MS: Yes. Was that another neighborhood?

CG: That started another neighborhood.

MS: But where do most of the Mexican people live?

CG: Mexican Hollywood.

MS: Mexican Hollywood.

CG: Then they scatter all over.

MS: What about Wilmington? Was there an area in Wilmington?

CG: On the area of Wilmington, the beginning for the Mexican people, they used to live in Terminal Island. So, they were using the city lane. So, they build their own tracks or whatever they call them. Then the city, they started to tell them they must move out of there because they were going to use the land for different things the city needs. So, they started providing that problem. There were fields on the east side of Wilmington. So, that's why the Mexican came over here on the east side.

MS: Did that have a name? What was the name?

CG: No, East Columbia.

MS: Was it Columbia. Is that what you called it?

CG: No name. Only East Wilmington. No name, just Los Angeles. They named it East Los Angeles or whatever they call it. Just named the places.

MS: Where did you live in the [19]30s and [19]40s?

CG: In the [19]30s and [19]40s, I used to live on Elberon Street. I bought a house there. I built a house in Elberon and Gaffey in 1923. Then I got married when I was twenty-one. Then I bought a house down in Wilmington. Then the Depression, the Crash of 1929. Then I came back to San Pedro, bought a house on Elberon and Gaffey. So, I lived there until the war.

MS: Was it really hard times in the Depression? Was it really hard to live during the –

CG: Thank God, the reason was the best for me.

MS: Why is that?

CG: Huh?

MS: Why?

CG: That's the way it is. It was best for some persons not to work for another, and very good for me [laughter] and somebody else. This is the reason. I explain the reason, so people understand. I might be a big mouth, but then I think before I talk sometimes, not all the time [laughter]. I was buying a house in Wilmington. I paid \$3,500 down and \$35 a month. It was 1928. Then my first son was born, same place, new place, [19]29. That was when the Crash started. So, then whoever was paying for their homes, was not able to keep on paying. So, they lost everything. What I mean, lost business, whatever they had in there. The equity of the business. So, I started to rent a house \$8 a month. Then by that time, I used to belong to the Masons. I joined the Masons in 1932 on the Mexican side, not the American side. From the Mexican side, Mexican lodges. So, one of the brothers, he went to my house and said, "Candy –" my name is Candelario. They call me for short Candy or Joe. So, he went, "Candy," he said to me, "Candy, I'll sell you my house." "How can I buy your house with no money?" "I'll sell it to you cheap. Because I found a job in Los Angeles, and I must move from here." He wants to use that money, so he may be able to buy a house. Because the houses are no worth because no money. They thought they'd lost their home, and the banks they want to get something out of it. They don't care how much they paid for it. They want to sell it and get rid of it. "So, how much?" "I'll sell it to you to for \$700." [inaudible] two bedrooms, a front room, and a dining room and a kitchen, only one bath, 700. I knew the house because he invited me more than one time, not to see the house, but as a visitor to him. I said, "What is the 700?" It was a lot of money, 700. Lots of money, 700. I told him, "Wait, I'm going to see what I can do. Give me one week." So, the

week I was asking my parents, "Hey, how much money –" I went to my mother and said, "How much you've got saved?" Some \$25, \$15, \$20. Then he said, "I could sell it to you for 7. You give me \$350,000 down. Then in six months, you give me the other three grand." So, I gathered the 350 borrowed money. Then I told him, "I'll buy the house." So, that's what the start of the house. I gave that 350. Then I kept on borrowing money for the six months. I was so lucky that I didn't buy the house. My friend bought the house for me because they loaned me their money. You understand me what I'm saying?

MS: So, wait a second. You borrowed the money for you to buy the house.

CG: Yes, I borrowed the money. I used so much people's money, just like the banks using the customers' money to buy.

MS: But you had to pay them back, right?

CG: Huh?

MS: Didn't you have to pay them back?

CG: Obviously sure.

MS: How did you do that?

CG: But it is not the 75 bucks and \$15 for this person, pay 15 to pay the 700 at one time.

MS: Oh, I see.

CG: So, I had to pay them all. But if it wasn't for my friends, I had no chance to survive because they loaned me their money. So, I said though my friends bought the house for me, they get their money. But the word is that because it wasn't for nothing. Then about a year later, I sold it for 900. Because a neighbor, he asked me, "Hey, do you want me to buy my house?" "How much?" "\$1,350." Then I told him, "If I sold my house, I'd buy it." Because the other house was a better house, better looking, better build. In other words, better build. He got it raised and everything. So, I sold mine for 900 and then bought the other person for 13. Then later on, really there's no income, "Your neighbor wants to sell the duplex." "How much?" "1,600 almost, very cheap." I got no money, so how can I get money? How can I buy it? Then about three, four months, he came to my house and talked to her. Now she wants 1,800. But I'll still buy it. It's cheap for 1,800. I got no money. "How much do you owe on your house?" "I don't owe nothing." "You just paid for it? You don't have to worry. I can get you a loan on your house and get your loan on the apartment if it's \$2,000, \$1,000 on your house and one time the apartment." You ran the apartment and the apartment paper for free and the whole thing. That was the beginning again. That's why it was the best for me during the Crash.

MS: The best for you because you were smart. You were a businessman.

CG: [laughter]

MS: Well, this is great. I think we're going to have to bring it to an end. But I have really some wonderful stories. Thank you for your time.

CG: Okay. Well, anything I can do for you.

[end of transcript]