

Interview of Alfredo Santos in San Marcos, August 7, 2019

Chuy: You know that's what we need in this business. You know that, *¿verdad?*

Alfredo: Yeah. It's rare to come across something like that.

Chuy: *Es raro alguien que quiera. Yo de volada noté.* Today is August 7th.

Alfredo: *¿Mande?*

Chuy: Today is August 7th?

Alfredo: Yep.

Chuy: Today is August 7, 2019, and we're here with Alfredo Santos. Alfredo has just driven down from Austin to San Marcos. We're at the Mexican American...

Alfredo: Centro Cultural...

Chuy: Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos.

Alfredo: *Ándale.*

Chuy: Alright. And we just met the director here. Thanks for coming, Alfredo, really appreciate it. Let me tell you what I'm doing here.

Alfredo: *A ver.*

Chuy: About two or three years ago, I embarked on trying to put together as many recorded recollections of people who have been intimately involved in one way or another in what we generally call the Chicano Movement...

Alfredo: Um-hmm.

Chuy: ...which is that period of time—mid-sixties to—some people bookend it at the late 70s—the last time that Mario Compean ran for Raza Unida.

Alfredo: Yeah.

Chuy: You know, I don't necessarily end it there but I'm looking for people who were very active during that period of time.

Alfredo: Okay

Chuy: Recording them—we're going to find a place for all of these recordings in a library—in a public library or a university library. And what I'll typically do is I'll do the recording, I'll get it transcribed, we will get it back to you for your corrections, comments, and so forth.

Alfredo: Okay. Thank you.

Chuy: *Tantas gracias.*

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Woman: Unintelligible.

Chuy: And then, that does two things: one, it allows us to put it into the archives and two, it allows me to reference it in a piece that I am working on.

Alfredo: Um-hmm.

Chuy: Actually, I'm working on several pieces but the latest piece I'm working on, which is coincidentally related to some of the stuff you were engaged in in Uvalde.

Alfredo: Um-hmm.

Chuy: And that is, I'm working on the Edcouch-Elsa student walkout.

Alfredo: Um-hmm.

Chuy: 1968, and other walkouts, in Uvalde, San Antonio and then, Houston—the big Houston walkout. Ah, I understand that you've been working on Uvalde and documenting and so forth so, maybe this will add to your own material.

Alfredo: Okay.

Chuy: So, I'd like to go ahead and start. Your name is...

Alfredo: Alfredo Santos.

Chuy: Alfred Santos. And, Alfredo, how old are you?

Alfredo: I am 67 years old.

Chuy: Okay, *chavalito*. *El chavalón*. And where were you born?

Alfredo: In Stockton, California.

Chuy: Stockton, California! Why were you born in Stockton, California? How did you get up there? How did your parents get up there?

Alfredo: Okay. So, my grandfather, Juan Santos, was born in 1886, in Uvalde, as far as I know. And, he got into the sheep-shearing business. And he also was an entrepreneur. In 1934, he built a rock building, a cantina, which is still there. And he was also one of the first five guys in Uvalde to get a beer license when prohibition was lifted in the 30s.

Chuy: Late 30s.

Alfredo: Yeah. But he was in the sheep-shearing business. He owned *trocas y máquinas y tenía unas cuadrillas*. In late May, you know, they'd take off for Montana, Colorado, Wyoming.

Chuy: He had to do with a crew—a sheep-shearing crew.

Alfredo: Yeah, yeah.

Chuy: They migrated around?

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Alfredo: Right. They would all go up north—late May. They'd come back late August. And so, during WWII, *se dio cuenta de que necesitaban trabajadores* in the canneries in Stockton. And one of the stories is that *el hermano de su esposa*, my grandmother, had come back from the war on furlough and he's the one who told my grandfather "*necesito (necesitan) muchos trabajadores allá. Porque luego la gente de Stockton, they went to work in the bay area in the shipyards porque pagaban mejor. So, my grandfather somehow made contact. Anyway, the first pedido fue for a hundred people for one of the canneries there—Flotel, Heinz or Del Monte—no sé cual. They wanted seventy-five men and twenty-five women. And so, my grandfather put out the call.*

Chuy: What year? This is the late 30s?

Alfredo: No, this is during the war.

Chuy: During WWII. Okay.

Alfredo: Probably '44, '45, *algo así*. Most probably about '44. And so, he put the word out in Uvalde, "*¿Quién quiere ir pa' California?*" *Y pos, "¡Yo! ¡Yo! ¡Yo! No estoy haciendo nada. And so, llevó cien personas en las trocas que tenía. Ya tenía las trocas. So, they got there, camped in tents outside the cannery because everything was on rations, I guess. And then, the cannery said, "Hey, can you bring another hundred?" So, he went back and took four hundred, total.*

Chuy: These are people from the Uvalde area.

Alfredo: *De Uvalde. Yeah. Son de Uvalde. So, my grandfather and my grandmother—they liked it so they decided to relocate there. Y compraron una casa—compraron dos casas—in—in—it had to have been...*

Chuy: In the Stockton area.

Alfredo: Yeah, but in the late 40s, before 1944—early '45. One house was for them, on San Joaquín Street and one house was going to be for Antonio, one of their sons. My grandfather was married four times. And so, Antonio was away in the European theatre. Antonio was coming back from the war in '45 and he made it to New York. Then he got sick—what do you call it? I don't know—mosquito (malaria?)—like a typhus—I forget the name of it. And my father had also come into port, but they had no way of knowing that they were each in different ports.

Chuy: Where did your father serve?

Alfredo: He was in the Merchant Marines. But they were both in New York.

Chuy: But was he in Europe?

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Alfredo: I don't know where he was at. In the European theatre somewhere.

Chuy: Okay.

Alfredo: So, Antonio died in New Jersey...

Chuy: Ooh, no.

Alfredo: ...in November and they didn't get him back to Uvalde until December. And so, my grandparents still owned property and had houses in Uvalde and all that. In fact, they were in Uvalde when they received word that Antonio had died and—am I going on too long?

Chuy: No.

Alfredo: My grandmother—I recorded her extensively over the years.

Chuy: What was her name?

Alfredo: Anita Santos. *Le decían “La Chula”*. She was born in 1907.

Chuy: And she was the last spouse?

Alfredo: The last spouse—yeah, right. *De la familia*, she was the most religious. She would go to church every Sunday, ¿verdad? *Los otros, de vez en cuando*. My grandmother says in the interview that we did many years ago, that she was in church—and also my uncle—I interviewed my uncle, one of my *tios* that was home at the time—but the phone rang Sunday morning and she asked for Amelia Santos *que era la esposa de Antonio*.

Chuy: Antonio was married then.

Alfredo: Yeah. And that's the story also. And so, Ernesto, my uncle Ernie, he went and called Amelia because she was living with them during the war. *Vino Amelia al teléfono*, “We're sorry to tell you blah, blah, blah.” And of course, she broke down and all that. And so then, my grandfather who was at home also, picked up the phone and received the rest of the message about Antonio. So, my grandfather put on his coat and drove to the Catholic Church in Uvalde—Sacred Heart—'cause my grandmother was at church. *Y Juan Santos no era religioso. Juan Santos era cabrón*.
(Chuckles)

Chuy: Your grandpa?

Alfredo: My grandfather. And so, he went inside the church. And my grandma always sat in the front. And he went inside and got to the front pews where she was and tapped her on the shoulder and signaled her, “Come with me.” And so, they walked out of the church and in the foyer in the back of the church is where he broke the news. And they were

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devastated.

Chuy: Sure.

Alfredo: When my grandparents were making a transition to California, after the war—so they were in California in 1947 and they came back because my Uncle Ernie, *muy chiflado*, insisted on graduating from Uvalde High School.

Chuy: Now, let me ask you this: Where was your dad?

Alfredo: My dad in '47, he'd come back from the war. He was doing sheep-shearing with my grandpa.

Chuy: So, the sheep shearing was seasonal?

Alfredo: Yeah—was seasonal.

Chuy: Okay. Now, your grandfather was an entrepreneur who had a crew of sheep-shearers. Now, the ranches around Uvalde, were they owned...?

Alfredo: No, they did not sheep-shear in Uvalde.

Chuy: None?

Alfredo: No, *se iban pa'l norte*.

Chuy: Because I understand around the Uvalde area there was also sheep and goat (raising).

Alfredo: The crews came out of Camp Wood, Uvalde and Del Rio.

Chuy: But there was not sheep and goat-raising?

Alfredo: Yes, there was but for some reason, they didn't shear sheep locally.

Chuy: Okay. Okay. Interesting.

Alfredo: Yeah. *El dinero era del norte (se ganaba en el norte, estaba en el norte)*.

Chuy: And so, in the Uvalde area, those ranchers who owned sheep or goats, were they Anglo or *mexicanos*?

Alfredo: Anglo.

Chuy: Anglo, primarily?

Alfredo: Yeah.

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Chuy: So, by that time, the *mexicanos* had already sold off their properties or they no longer had them?

Alfredo: Yeah, they no longer had them.

Chuy: And so, the people who went to California with your grandfather, were they primarily *mexicanos*--Texans or were they *mexicanos* from Mexico?

Alfredo: No, they were from Uvalde.

Chuy: They were *Tejanos*. And they were native-born?

Alfredo: Most of them, I think so. I've been interviewing them.

Chuy: Have you?

Alfredo: What I do is I read the Uvalde Leader News Obituaries and I read the obituaries of the Stock and Record, right? I've been doing this for the last ten years—well, since the Internet because every once in a while, I'll catch “survived by”.