

**Interviewee:** Ruben Cantu, Jr.

**Interviewers:** Alyssa Aparicio, Arturo Cortez, Ryan Lanoy

**Date:** October 2, 2012

**Location:** Border Studies Archive

**Transcribers:** Alyssa Aparicio, Arturo Cortez, Ryan Lanoy

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The interviewee was Ruben Cantu, Jr., the son of Mr. Ruben Cantu. The interview crew consisted of Alyssa Aparicio, Arturo Cortez, and Ryan Lanoy, with each in charge of a group of questions. The interview was held at the Border Studies Archive located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the UTPA Library. The primary topics focused in this interview consist of garbage, architecture, plants and animals.

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**Ruben:** What am I looking at, or who am I looking at?

**Ryan:** Umm, you're gonna look, you're gonna look at me right now.

**Ruben:** okay

**Alyssa:** You can look at anyone

[Arturo says something undistinguishable]

**Ruben:** All right

**Alyssa:** Is the camera? Yeah.

**Ryan:** Uh, we were just curious, where, where was your trash put out?

**Ruben:** My trash?

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Growing up?

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Alyssa:** Yes

**Ruben:** It was, our house was about maybe a hundred-fifty yards away from, from the road

[**Ryan:** Yeah] so we would take the trash, I mean, the city would come pick it up [**Ryan:**

Yeah] but we'd have to drag it out a hundred, a hundred-fifty yards to the road.

**Ryan:** When did the trash truck arrive?

**Ruben:** Once a week. It was, it was every, I wanna say every Tuesday or Thursday [**Ryan:**

Yeah] and it was about maybe eight or nine at in the morning.

**Ryan:** Ok

**Ruben:** Yeah, so we would take it out. Usually, my dad would've been the one to take it out.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** I was getting ready for school.

**Ryan:** Oh ok.

**Ryan:** Do you know what's in the area now? Do you know what's there now?

**Ruben:** Right now, uh the house we built is still there. Cause we went ahead and built a home there [**Ryan:** Yeah] and then we moved in to the city, to the city limits.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Uh so there now, is the house that we built and whoever's in there now, they remodeled it.

**Ryan:** Oh okay

**Ruben:** Umm the neighbors are still there.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Uh the neighborhood of [cannot distinguish this word] homes is still around the area, [Ryan: Yeah] Edinburg North high school is in the area still.

**Ryan:** Oh okay. Umm, what did you, what did you all do with your garbage, I mean did you, did you ever recycle it or burn it like once in a while?

**Ruben:** No, not really. Uh, we just took it out for the city to take care of it.

**Ryan:** Okay, how often would you have to take out the garbage, around what time was it taken out? Isn't that like the second one?

**Alyssa:** Yeah, it is

**Ryan:** Yeah, the second one, okay.

**Ruben:** Uh, it had to have been, we would, well I remember if it wasn't me most of the time it was my dad. We would take it out the night before so [Ryan: Yeah] we wouldn't, he wouldn't have to rush to get it out early in the morning.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** So around nine at night or so we would take it out.

**Ryan:** Would you also throw glass bottles away or, or recycle them?

**Ruben:** Uh, no we really didn't, never really recycled, [Ryan: Yeah] we just uh, we just threw it away.

**Ryan:** Oh okay

**Ruben:** Uh, we didn't really have a lot of glass bottles.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Umm, it was just Domino's boxes, Whataburger stuff [Everyone laughing] you know.

**Ryan:** After a meal, were there any bones thrown away with the garbage?

**Ruben:** Yes, Church's Chicken.

**Ryan:** Yeah

[Everyone laughing]

**Ruben:** Stuff like that.

**Ryan:** Was there anything that was considered garbage but was not thrown out with the rest of the trash, like something that

**Ruben:** Me, I'm, I like to hang onto stuff.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Yeah, umm, old clothes that for some reason I kept meant something to me.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Uh, that, old pictures I mean easily could've been thrown away but I kept them cause they just meant something to me.

**Alyssa:** My section is human waste

**Ruben:** Okay

**Alyssa:** So, I know, umm, basic question: indoor plumbing, yes, no?

**Ruben:** Indoor plumbing, yes. Well, we first, growing up, my whole elementary, all my elementary years [**Alyssa:** mmhmm] and junior high, so pretty much all the way up to eighth grade we lived in a mobile home, and uh, we had, well there was indoor plumbing there too. But uh, after that, we well yeah, we built a home still had indoor plumbing.

**Alyssa:** So you never had like any experiences with outhouses?

**Ruben:** No

**Alyssa:** Do you remember umm your dad saying anything about that like his experience with an outhouse?

**Ruben:** With an outhouse, no. Maybe, maybe at our, at our shop [**Alyssa:** mmhmm] slash farm. Pretty much.

**Alyssa:** Guess that moves us on to architecture.

**Ruben:** Ok

[Arturo says something undistinguishable]

**Arturo:** Uh, what was each building used for?

**Ruben:** Each building, uh, each building, which buildings are we talking about?

**Alyssa:** Your family home, how many buildings did ya'll have, was it just your house or did ya'll have separate buildings with it?

**Ruben:** Umm, where we lived it was just our home [**Alyssa:** okay] and uh we would have, I mean, yeah like I said we lived in about a 15 acre block [**Ryan:** Yeah] I guess and it was all farm, for farming.

**Arturo:** Okay

**Ruben:** Umm, at my grandma's house that's where we had our farm slash shop where we would have our tractors. At some times, we have some cattle, uh a bunch of roosters and that was at my grandma's house over on Jackson road and uh you know we would have our tractors there, the trailers, they're still there.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** We would just, we don't uh own anymore cattle [**Ryan:** Yeah] or roosters, the, I mean, the city pretty much told us do away with wildlife or animals like that, of that sort.

**Arturo:** Okay. Were there any buildings that used to be on the property that aren't there anymore? And why were those buildings taken down? =

**Ruben:** Uh as far as I can remember they're still there. Umm there might've been, where my grandma's house is, there's another, there was another home just on the other side, not across the street but across, uh parallel to my grandma's home. That's where their first home was, and that's not there anymore. Uh, I guess just to make space, they, they widened the road Jackson road uh over the past four, five years I think it's been. And uh, I guess they, I'm pretty sure they knocked it down for that reason.

**Arturo:** Okay.

**Ruben:** So.

**Arturo:** Uh have any of the buildings been worked on or expanded in any way? Why were they, why were they worked on?

**Ruben:** Umm they've been worked on, uh to some extent, to some, uh, yeah, extent. Not too much, maybe just tweaking here or there just because now uh the past couple of years

we've been having more family get-togethers. For new years or uh, family reunions, we, I know we had a couple. One, we had one there this past year and uh just other people that have come to see the property for whatever reason we've had to do some fine tuning around the place.

**Arturo:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** So...

**Alyssa:** Are uh...

**Arturo:** Did uh...

**Alyssa:** Sorry to interrupt, but like were storms, hurricanes, has that had any effect on the houses, like did ya'll have to, like, were tiles blown away or something?

**Ruben:** Actually, uh, no. I mean as far as I can remember, uh, our shop's, uh farm has always been there. Hurricanes have come and gone and they've really hasn't done anything to it.

**Alyssa:** Nothing real bad?

**Ruben:** Maybe some, some pieces of sheet metal. I can just count maybe one or two off the top of my head that my dad and his workers have had to replace. But other than that its' been standing strong, I don't know how much longer it'll stand you know, but.

**Arturo:** OK. Were there any new buildings built, why were they built?

**Ruben:** No, no new buildings were built. Not that I can recall.

**Arturo:** Ok, that completes this section.

**Alyssa:** [giggles]

**Ryan:** Now, now we're gonna talk about plants.

**Ruben:** OK

**Ryan:** Umm what types of plants were there on the property, are all those plants still there today?

**Ruben:** Plants, uh, if we're talking about crops?

**Ryan:** Like, cr ... crops.

**Alyssa:** Yeah, crops.

**Ruben:** Okay, well umm, I mean crops we harvest them.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** So obviously at a time they won't be there.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** But, my dad would always, I remember growing up he would always, uh, he would uh grow grain and corn.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** Sometimes he, growing up I remember watermelon. There were some times where he would do uh cherry tomatoes.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** Ummm, what else? I don't think, he might've done cotton, once, a long time ago.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** But that was way back, I don't really remember.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** You know he doesn't do that anymore.

**Ryan:** And they're, and they're still there today?

**Ruben:** As of today, yes, he's, he's still growing them.

**Ryan:** OK

**Ruben:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** All right, were their orchards or mesquite trees on the property?

**Ruben:** Uh, definitely mesquite trees.

**Alyssa:** [giggle]

**Ruben:** Yes.

**Alyssa:** They're everywhere.

**Ryan:** Were any of these plants used for specific, something specific, or were they descortative? Example, Alee vela?

**Ruben:** Aloe Vera?

**Alyssa:** Aloe Vera.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** Umm really they were just used for uh harvesting.

**Alyssa:** Mmhmm

**Ruben:** The grain and then corns would go to uh, umm sheds, elevators.

**Arturo:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** I guess, like uh here on I think it's, I don't know if its Chapin or 17 ½, there's this uh place called Maseca.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** It's a big corn place. And uh sometimes we would take corn over there and from there that's when they're, where they were distributed or goes to cattle or wherever it goes to.

**Ryan:** Did you have any vegetable gardens, and what kinds?

**Ruben:** Not so much gardens

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** uh, just we would always plant them as crops [**Ryan:** Yeah] in ten acre blocks.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** Uh, we would plant, uh, maybe cucumber, [**Ryan:** Oh okay] ummm.

[A phone goes off with an incoming text message.]

**Ruben:** I don't really remember anything else. Vegetables, you said?

**Ryan:** Yeah, vegetables.

**Ruben:** Oh cherry tomatoes. Oh, tomato's a fruit I guess.

**Alyssa:** [giggles]

**Ryan:** Did you ever sell the vegetables?

**Ruben:** Actually, yes. Uh, my grandma has a stand [**Ryan:** Yeah] uh, right out, outside, right outside her house [**Ryan:** Yeah] next to the street and uh we would take stuff there [**Ryan:** Yeah] and she would sell out.

**Ryan:** Oh okay. What types of trees were on the property? Are they all still there today?

**Ruben:** Yes, as far as I can remember all the mesquites are still there and if I'm correct oak trees are still there.

**Ryan:** OK.

[Papers shuffling]

**Alyssa:** When ya'll would harvest, did ya'll have workers that would harvest, or would...

**Ruben:** Depending on the crop.

**Alyssa:** mmhmm

**Ruben:** Uh let's say it's grain. Uh what cuts the grain is the combine. So, we didn't have a combine, but we would know other farmers that did. So, my dad would, would hire that, the combine driver and pay him a certain amount uh to cut our, our crops, the grain or the corn, or whatever it is. And uh, loaded up onto our trailers, then take the trailer; go dump it to wherever it needed to be. Umm, with other things, maybe like the cucumbers and squash, now that I remember that we did squash, uh the shed that he would take 'em to, that shed would already have people assigned. So my dad really wouldn't, I don't think for the most part, he wouldn't pay them, the shed would pay the workers.

**Alyssa:** Oh okay.

**Ruben:** So, and there was maybe crews of like twenty people.

**Alyssa:** Ok, how long would it take though? From like, just to harvest a certain crop?

**Ruben:** Umm, I know with corn it takes about [A phone goes off with an incoming text message] maybe four months. So, like right now he's got corn in the ground, just, he just planted that, so, October, November, December, hopefully by January if there's no freeze going on

**Ryan & Alyssa:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** It should, uh, should produce.

**Ryan:** What other types of vegetation was on the property, is it still there today?

**Ruben:** I can't remember what else, what other type of vegetables, as far as the cucumber and the squash.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Umm maybe, no, I can't remember anything else.

**Alyssa:** Besides the mesquite tree, did ya'll have like any other shrubs or cactuses?

**Ruben:** Actually we did. We had uh cac, some cacti out there. Uh, it was just one, one or two cactus, that, that were there.

**Alyssa:** Do you remember what kind it was?

**Ruben:** Not really, it wasn't, it was just a big old [Alyssa: Just a regular one] cacti. It wasn't one of those standing up ones [Alyssa laughs] you see in the desert.

**Ryan:** Yeah, yeah.

**Ruben:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** Have plants, vegetation patterns type changed over time?

**Ruben:** Yes, with, uh with the weather changes going on [Ryan: Yeah] and uh, the, I mean, sometimes it just depends on the rain.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** You know if it rains, the crop will produce. If it doesn't, well, good luck.

**Ryan:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** You know.

**Ryan:** Has the weather in any way had an effect on any plants, trees, or other vegetation you had during the winter, were any plants or trees susceptible to freezes?

**Ruben:** Yes, sometimes they will freeze uh when, sometimes it'll mist [**Ryan:** Yeah] in the winter and I know that might act as a blanket [**Ryan:** Yeah] towards the leaf of the plant.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** So that sometimes saves it. Uh, sometimes the, I remember one time when it snowed uh, a lot of the crops were frozen over.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** But one block that he uh he planted he did late. He planted late for some reason [**Ryan:** Yeah] and it wasn't out of the ground yet.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** So the snow didn't really affect it that much and actually I'm guessing it helped it with the melted water maybe.

**Alyssa:** Was that in 2004?

**Ruben:** Yes, I believe so.

**Alyssa:** I remember that.

[Undistinguishable noises]

**Ruben:** That was the only time I've ever seen snow.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Alyssa:** I was a freshman in high school

**Ruben:** Yeah, ok, 2004, I might have been a sophomore, yeah

[Ryan says something undistinguishable]

**Ryan:** During the summer, when there was a lack of rain, would any plants or trees die?

**Ruben:** I'm sorry, repeat the question.

**Ryan:** During the summer when there was a lack of rain would any plants or trees die?

**Ruben:** Definitely. Umm this past summer was uh was uh proof of that. Umm he had, he just farmed some uh maybe like I don't know 250 acres out in San Manuel.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Uh that was the first time he did that type of block and he got some good rain out over there, but even with the rain the heat was just too much for it during the middle of the day.

**Ryan:** scorching

**Ruben:** Yeah, so.

**Ryan:** Would storms such as hurricanes or floods have an impact on your vegetation?

**Ruben:** Yes, they would. I mean they would produce uh for the most part we haven't had any tragic winds, gust of winds that would just knock 'em out of the, out of the ground.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** So the rains that come with it pretty much help. Sometimes they would, if we did I mean it would not go over maybe uh some grain or corn, that's just yay high, [**Ryan:** Oh, yeah] not to strong at the base I guess.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** You know, so.

**Alyssa:** [Coughing] Sorry, did ya'll have any uh livestock on your property?

**Ruben:** Yes. Uh, growing up on, where we lived umm we would have we only had maybe might've been a total of four at a time. Umm on our farm, we had eh maybe, if I remember correctly, maybe a total of twenty [**Ryan:** Yeah] at one time and then sold those, and then later on got another twenty or so.

**Alyssa:** What sorts of animals were they?

**Ruben:** Uh cattle. It was cows, bulls for the most part. We had, I don't know how, a deer ended up on the place.

[Everyone Laughing]

**Ryan:** Oh wow

**Ruben:** Yeah, a little baby deer.

**Alyssa:** Wow

**Ruben:** So we caught that. We kept it in the pin you know, [**Ryan:** Yeah] but I guess it got out. I really don't know how it got there.

**Alyssa:** Did you ever show any of these animals like in high school?

**Ruben:** No, uh now that I think about it, I mean, I should have. I never did any FFA things. I maybe took an Ag class once. But I was uh, I knew I never wanted to go into farming after seeing my dad go through all the hardships he did. I respect him a lot for going through it and keeping on doing it to this day.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Uh, but it's what he loves doing. I mean he pretty much I guess you can say feeds America

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Arturo:** Yeah

**Ruben:** You know uh, and doesn't get really much recognition or enough to show for it.

**Ryan:** No

**Ruben:** Especially down here, where the farmers down here in the Rio Grande Valley. But I guess to get on topic, no I really, we really didn't show 'em at all. I never was in FFA I was always doing athletics, going a different route [**Alyssa:** Yeah] trying to get away from agriculture.

[Everyone laughing]

**Alyssa:** It's okay. Now you mentioned the farm with 20 or so animals, did you have people that were hired on to take care of them, or?

**Ruben:** Yes, we always had a person. I don't know, my dad and my uncle were always good at finding uh workers and uh they would always I mean if for some reason they weren't there I mean my dad and my uncle were always there. So the animals were always fed. But for the most part we always had workers feeding them in the mornings, late in the evening.



**Alyssa:** Umm I gotta ask. Were any of these animals slaughtered? That you know of?

**Ruben:** To my knowledge, no.

**Alyssa:** Okay.

**Ruben:** I mean we sold them, so they might've been slaughtered elsewhere.

**Alyssa:** Yeah.

**Ruben:** So that might've happened.

**Alyssa:** But you're not sure.

**Ruben:** I'm not too sure. The, I know my aunt did play a prank on me one time. The time when we had, I don't know why I remember it but I do, uh the time where we had that deer. All of a sudden we didn't see it anymore, and then we had a big barbeque [**Alyssa:** Oh no] one day. And then here comes my aunt Norma saying, "you know, you know we don't have a deer here anymore and we're having a barbeque". [**Alyssa laughs**] Makes ya think, so.

**Alyssa:** Oh wow.

**Ruben:** But no, I mean I've never really witnessed [**Alyssa:** Yeah] that.

**Alyssa:** Umm besides the deer, did any other animals come across your property, like did you ever see any snakes? Err those..

**Ruben:** Oh yeah, there were snakes [**Alyssa:** Oh okay] all the time. Uh, umm, there were always cats and dogs.

**Alyssa:** Yeah

**Ruben:** Uh snakes you'll see for sure maybe three or four times a year. My dad would see them more, he's there everyday.

**Alyssa:** Yeah

**Ruben:** You know, I'm not there everyday.

**Alyssa:** What about those umm, I don't know if it's the horned toad frogs or something, lizards, I don't know.

**Ruben:** Uh, yeah, we would see frogs. I would see uh some toads now and then especially when it would rain.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** They would come out. But uh lizards were always there [**Alyssa:** Yeah] but they were, it was nothing you know, they were there and its like just seeing a cat or a dog.

[**Alyssa laughs**]

**Ruben:** It's really no big deal.

**Alyssa:** Yup. Oh, another one I wanted to ask, back to the animal question. Whenever an animal died of natural causes, what would ya'll do with it? Would ya'll just like bury it or send it off somewhere?

**Ruben:** As far as I can remember, with the cattle, umm I don't remember one dying of natural causes. They would always, we would always sell them before anything would happen. As for cats and dogs, yeah we would, I, we would bury them.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** You know at least give them a proper burial,

**Alyssa:** Yeah, you have a little pet cemetery going on?

**Ruben:** Yeah, I mean if you walk on that place, who knows you might be walking on someone's burial, some animal's burial.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Alyssa:** Sparky's

[Can't distinguish what's said here]

**Ryan:** Did you ever use cattle as [cant' distinguish this either]

**Ruben:** You mean plowing?

**Ryan:** Plowing, yeah.

**Ruben:** Uh, no cause we always had our uh tractors going, so thankfully.

**Ryan:** Yeah

[can't distinguish what's being said]

**Alyssa:** Umm that's it for me

**Ryan:** That's it for me

**Alyssa:** Umm do you have any information you wanna share with us, that you can think of?

**Ruben:** uhhh

**Ryan:** That just crossed your mind

**Alyssa:** Can we relate it to the topics, it doesn't have to?

**Ruben:** A lot of it has to do with farming, so I mean going back, I guess farmers down here really don't get a lot of recognition and [Ryan: Yeah] I don't know if the words credit, but uh, are not taken advantage of either, but they go through a lot of hardships down here especially when the weather has a mind of its own.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** You know, or God just decides to say, "I'll let it rain today"

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** you know, umm

**Alyssa:** We did get rain today

**Ruben:** Yeah, yeah the weather's been, well the weather's changing.

**Ryan:** Yeah

**Ruben:** So hopefully nothing drastic comes our way [Ryan: Yeah] but some good rain, that's pretty much it.

**Alyssa:** All right, well thank you for your cooperation and for being our test subject.

**Ruben:** Yeah, no problem.

**Arturo:** We appreciate it.

**Ryan:** Thank you very much for being here.

**Ruben:** Yeah not a problem, gets us back home to the Cowboys.

[Everyone laughs]

**Ryan:** Do you need help getting...

[Recorder was turned off]