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Rebolledo, Luis Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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My name is Luis Rebolledo

What is your date of birth?

December 5, 1945.

Where were you born?

I was born in the city of Tecalitlan, Jalisco, which is a state of Mexico.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had two brothers and two sisters.

Are they in the states now?

Two are here in the states, I have a sister who lives in Chicago, and my brother lives in Orlando, Florida. The other two live in the city of Guadalajara, in Mexico.

Did your brother and sister come over at the same time as you?

No, they came about a year later, I was the one that was here legally, or regionally, and I was able to bring my brothers through my permanent residency, so they came about a year later, after I did.

When was it that you came to the US?

We went through the border of San Antonio, and then ended up living in Chicago.

Why did you come to the United States at first?

At first was because I was interested in traveling, you know. I was young and wanted to see how the culture of the United States was. Prior to that, I was at a seminary, I was going to become a priest. Because I couldn't get married, I left the seminary in 1964, and then between 1964-1967, I traveled extensively through Central, and South America, and Mexico. In the summer of 1967, I came to the United States and just wanted to see how it compared to the other places that I was, and to see if I could maybe stay here and work, and try to just have fun. Back then, my idea of coming to the United States, you know. I didn't know how long I was going to be here, or if I was going to be able to succeed or any of those things.
KF: How old were you?

LR: At the time, I must have been around twenty, twenty plus. I was a season traveler, because I used to work for this company that sold insurance, and gave me the opportunity to travel all over, you know, Mexico, the Southern part of Mexico, Central, and South America. It was really nice, you know, it made me a really enlightened person, and I just wanted to try the United States. I met a friend that summer, you know, the summer of '67, and she invited me to Benize, California. We spent a few weeks there, and I liked it very much. Then I went back to Mexico, and later on that summer, that's when I got done all my paperwork through the American Counsel in Guadalajara. So, I decided to just come back again, because I remember how impressed I was the first time that I came to the States. It was just like a dream come true, and I decided to well, I can stay for as long as I want to because, you know, I am a legal resident. So I decided to try it. I didn't know anybody here. I didn't have any friends. I didn't speak any English, or anything like that, but I came, I came to Chicago.

KF: What were your first impressions of the United States? Were you welcomed in?

LR: Oh, it was awesome. I personally have never experienced discrimination on a personal level, or anything that discouraged me from staying here. I know that this sounds corny sometimes, because I know people that have experienced discrimination, and segregation, and those things you know. But I personally was a go-getter, you know, very aggressive, very assertive, and although I didn't speak any English, and didn't have any friends, and that, I was used to those kind of things. When you go through Central and South America, you don't know anybody, but yet, I was able to be there for three years, and I had all kinds of fun. So when I came here, actually, I didn't see that as a negative thing. It took a few days to settle down, to find an apartment, to talk with people that directed me to a place where I could get a job. I sort of went to the Mexican neighborhood in Chicago, because I knew that there were people there that I could talk to in Spanish. So, I didn't think that it was going to be bad, and it wasn't. It was a very enjoyable stay. I found someone right away in a restaurant that offered me his house to stay, so I did. Then he said, are you looking for work, and I said yeah. you know. He said, I know a friend of mine that could send you some place, and he did. I ended up working at a huge place called Brogno World Wines, in Chicago. I was just dusting up the bottles, and making sure that the bottles that people took were replaced. Kind of an inventory thing, you know. So, it was really really enjoyable from day one, we have been very grateful, I personally have been very grateful to the American people because of the opportunities that are here. I took them, and I am glad that I did.

KF: I am just going to go back a little bit, back in Mexico, what did your family do for their employment?

LR: My family is a very close-knit family. It is a small family according to Mexican standards, just five of us, you know. Most Mexican families are huge. I meant there is twelve, thirteen, even twenty-some kids, is not unheard of. We were from an agricultural background to begin, we were a little. That soon changed when my dad started working
for the sugar-cane industry. He was sort of a chemist engineer, you know. He did manufacture sugar-cane and industrial alcohol. In the city of Tecalitlan, there are several distilleries, huge distilleries. He worked at three of those distilleries for several years. He was offered a job on the city of Tequila, which is about forty some miles from Guadalajara. He was going to go there to take care of the Mexican drink that is called Tequila. We have a very specific brand that is sold all over the world, it is called Tequila Sousa, and he was in charge of that. He did the Tequila Sousa factory for about thirty-five years. My mom was just helping in the house. She was a seamstress, she used to teach people how to do their clothing and stuff. She is always very fashion-oriented. She is now 73, and still you don't see her a day where she doesn't wear something that she made. She is always in with the fashion models and stuff. My brothers and sisters were just going to school at the time. I went to the University of Guadalajara to do my high school. Right after high school, I went to this place for, it is a seminary, it's called St. Joseph Theocican Seminary. And it's where people that want to be in the priesthood would go and prepare themselves for. So I went there, and stayed there for about five years. I got a BA in humanities and a minor in religion there. But I wanted to be a priest. We were Catholic, and so that was something I wanted to do so bad. It didn't work out because of the celibacy situation. I graduated in 1964, and I left the seminary that year. That was when I got hooked up with this company to Auslow, it's called, to sell life insurance and car insurance, and all those kind of things. Back then there weren't many cars because it was the early 60's. I mainly focused on people who had pick ups and trucks, and the industries that had large fleets of cars and stuff and life insurance.

KF: When you were younger, what did you and your brothers and sisters do for fun?

LR: Well, when we were in tecalitlan, and in this agricultural environment, there wasn't much to do except with what mother nature does. We had a big farm, and we used to have animals, all kinds of animals, dogs, pigs, chickens, cows and all that stuff. We used to have trees that would give tropical fruits like guavas, huajavas, sugar cane, plantanes, all kinds of things. We used to spend time helping mom and dad around the house, and the people that worked for them around the house. Then when we went to Tequila, it was more of a smaller town. What we used to do for fun was go to the movies. Back then there were no tv's, we couldn't afford one. We used to listen to the radio. One thing that I used to like to listen to were the fights. The boxing fights. Basically, just getting together with the kids on Saturday, going out around the stores of the places where you could go and have a pop, or an ice cream or something like that. Then on Sundays, we would go to mass in the morning, then have dinner in the day. Then at night, we have a tradition in Mexico, which is you go to a plaza, for example like Centennial Park. In the middle there is a kiosk, something like the dome that we have there at Centennial Park. There would be a band playing there for hours. People would go around, I'm talking thousands of people. I am talking a wave of women going this way, and then the wave of men going the opposite way. The object of it was just to check people out, you know. Teenagers were looking at the girls, and the girls were looking at the guys. We have traditions of giving roses to them, or throwing confetti at them, or serpentines, which are things that we use in Mexico. It's a very romantic thing that we do there. And just around your friends. There weren't many things that you could do there. If you were
poor like we were, you didn't have many things that you could come up with other than just hanging out, just like now. Back then there weren't many things that you could do, or many amenities, many youth centers or anything like that. That wasn't heard of. Most of us in fact, from a very early age were already working to help mom and dad with the obligations of the house, taking chores very seriously. If you didn't do them, well you had all kinds of trouble you know, with your parents.

KF: Did the festival that happened on Sunday night happen every Sunday night?

LR: Every Sunday night, yeah. And you were looking forward to that, you know. Because if you wanted to date somebody, that was the only place that you could publicly go and do it. Because the parents usually sit on the benches, or they are also in that parade. It is a lot like a parade. It never ends, you've just got people going around and around and around, and it goes for hours. Some people would be in that thing just socializing with friends for two, three, four, five hours, until the whole thing is over, then they would go home. It started sometime around seven, and it ended around ten or eleven. In between there were masses, so people went to the church, or there were festivities or festivals where you saw all these fireworks and stuff. It was the most exciting thing. We didn't have malls, or we didn't have any facilities where people had electronic games, or anything like that. I mean, that wasn't the stuff that we grew up with. We grew up with people, around people, dating, just getting with your friends together. Guys used to get together with groups of people, all your chums from school, from high school or whatever. You would go up the plaza and look for them. When you were together, you were six, seven, five, ten, twelve, twenty, thirty, you know, and you would just go row of five or six, and then right behind each other, and all you do was just have fun you know. You were going around and around checking out the girls, and blowing your money on confetti, and candy, and flowers and stuff. Sometimes when you date, the way to do it is you check a girl out, and then you give her a flower, and it they accept the flower, that means that they want to talk with you. One of the girls in that row would drop down, and give you her place so that you would be next to the lady, and you would be talking. Of course everybody would be watching you, including their parents. Every time that you went by them, they would check and see what you were doing. They would be interested in you not touching the girls or anything, just talking and stuff. It was fun though.

KF: Did you like school?