

Ethnic Oral History Project, 1977-1978

Fresno Historical Society

Ralph Castillo

Ralph Castillo was interviewed on August 25, 1977 in Pinedale, California. Castillo was born on May 2, 1933 in Hollister, California. Castillo shares that his longest place of residence was Malaga, California where he lived for about fifteen years. Castillo explains how most of the population in Malaga consisted of Mexicans, and he talks about how there was not much to do there for fun when he was young. Castillo says that the "pachuco fad" did not affect him while he lived in Malaga as a teen. Castillo also explains what being a pachuco meant in his own words. Castillo says that the Mexican communities in towns like Selma, Sanger, and Fresno would often get in a lot of fights against one another. Castillo used to go to Shafter and Wasco to pick various fruits, vegetables, and cotton. Castillo states that he went to school until tenth grade, and then he had to drop out so he could go to work.

Castillo served in the Army from 1956 to 1957 and was stationed in Alaska. Castillo explains how the Mexican community has slowly been changing. He mentions the United Farm Workers' Union and how workers are making more money than he used to in the past. Castillo talks about the work he took up in attempt to stay out of the fields. Castillo compares his generation to the current generation and claims that the new generation wants everything handed to them, rather than work hard. Castillo finishes by saying that Chicano people need to become more educated so they can be more successful in life.

Interviewer: Ben Garza

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FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

INTERVIEW WITH MR. RALPH CASTILLO

AUGUST 25, 1977

Today is August 25, 1977. I, Ben Garza, am interviewing Mr. Ralph Castillo, a Spanish-Speaking man from Pinedale, California.

GARZA: Mr. Castillo, when and where were you born?

CASTILLO: I was born May 2, 1933, in Hollister, California.

GARZA: Where is your longest place of residence?

CASTILLO: My longest place of residence is Malaga.

GARZA: How many years did you live there?

CASTILLO: I lived in Malaga about fourteen or fifteen years.

GARZA: Have you seen changes in Malaga?

CASTILLO: Yes, I have. I haven't been out there in a long time, but the times I go there there's a lot of changes in Malaga. It's grown. It's a lot bigger then what it was. They have more things then what they had, more houses, the school is bigger. In fact they have two schools. I used to go to school in a cabin in 1944.

GARZA: Malaga is known for a lot of Mexicanos.

CASTILLO: I think the majority of people are Mexican.

GARZA: What kind of things did you do in Malaga when you were young?

CASTILLO: I spent my summers just roaming the streets. There wasn't anything out there. Now they built a

swimming pool. We didn't have anything like that, all we did was bum around. All we did was walk the streets, because there was nothing much to do there. There was no theatre. Nothing. They had two grocery stores. A couple of bars, and that's about it.

GARZA: When you were a teenager in Malaga, the pachuco fad was in. Did that affect you?

CASTILLO: No, it didn't affect me, I just went along with the style. I used to go out a lot. The closest entertainment was in Fresno. That was about the only thing. We had to catch the bus. If you went up town you had to catch the bus, or if someone you knew had a car. It didn't affect me that much. There was a lot of pachucos on the westside.

GARZA: What was a pachuco to you?

CASTILLO: He had long hair, they had these real tight bottoms [pant legs]. Now they're using the bell-bottoms, but before the Pachuco style was the tighter the better it looked. When there was a lot of pachucos a lot of the towns didn't get along with the other towns. Like Selma, Sanger and all those towns. Everybody used to go to Fresno. They used to get into a lot of fights.

GARZA: Was it a thing of town against town, or gang against gang?

CASTILLO: More or less it was town against town. In fact, when I was younger I used to come to Pinedale

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and I got chased out of here quite a few times, now I'm living here (laughing).

GARZA: What kind of work did you use to do in those days?

CASTILLO: In those days we used to do a lot of fieldwork. Every year we used to go to Shafter or Wasco to pick potatoes, then come back and stick around the valley to pick peaches. We used to go to the coast to pick apricots, plums, tomatoes. Then we used to go to Corcoran to pick cotton.

GARZA: How big was your family?

CASTILLO: I'm the oldest. There are four girls and five boys. I went to work when I was going to school. We used to live in ranches and my dad would lease them. We would have to do the work. I used to get up in the morning and go to work before I went to school. I had to walk to school. Then after school, I had to work till it was dark. I worked most of my life in the fields until I got married. I started working in other things. I worked in the cemeteries. I worked for the government. I worked for the schools. Now I'm working in a liquor store.

GARZA: When you worked in the fields, do you remember your wages?

CASTILLO: When I worked in the fields, I worked for as low as 25¢ an hour, around 1949.

GARZA: Did you go to school?

CASTILLO: Yes, I went up to the tenth grade. I had to quit school to go to work. My dad used to be a labor contractor. When I got older, I used to drive a truck and haul people to different ranches. We used to have a boarding house in Malaga and we used to transport aliens back and forth for about two or three years.

GARZA: Did you ever go into the armed forces?

CASTILLO: Yes, I did. I was in the army for two years. I was stationed in Alaska, from 1956 until I got out in '57. It was a nice place. I enjoyed it very much. It's cold. I imagined Alaska all year round as winter, but it's not. In the summer it is a beautiful place up there. In the winter, if you like snow, it's the place to be. Where I was, it got down to 20° or 30°

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below zero. I was planning to stay up there. I already had a job picked out, but later I decided to come home.

GARZA: Was Alaska booming then?

CASTILLO: It was quite. It was just like a regular town. It was open. Everything was opened 24 hours a day.

GARZA: You came back in '57. Did you get married then?

CASTILLO: I got married in 1958. I came back. We lived in Madera, then we moved to a ranch. We moved from Malaga to a ranch from 1950 to '52. We worked in the ranch and everything and when I came back I worked in the ranch from 1958 to 1960. Then I moved to San Jose for two years. I used to drive a taxi. I even drove an ice cream truck.

GARZA: Do you see changes in the Mexican community here in Fresno?

CASTILLO: The changes have been slow. Like now in the field with all this union, their wages are a lot better then when I was working. I understnad that they are getting three dollars an hour. That's pretty good and they got benefites, which we didn't have then. I think they're progressing. I think that they're starting to take notice that we're here!

GARZA: Do you believe that discrimination exist?

CASTILLO: It exists. I don't believe in it. I've seen it. I think we'll always have that.

GARZA: What happened when you came back from San Jose?

CASTILLO: I started working in the fields again. I worked over here in Fig Garden, in the fig orchards, I did irrigation. In the harvesting time I used to drive a forklift. In other words I tried to get out of the filds as much as I could. My first step of getting out of the fields was when I worked for the cemetery. Then I worked for the government about six years. I went and took a civil service test and I went to work for the government. I think if I had a better education I could have done better. Then I went to work for the State for three years, which was in the schools. And now I'm working at the liquor store where I have been working for three years.

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I can't see myself working in the fields no more.

GARZA: How long have you been living in Pinedale?

CASTILLO: We've lived in Pinedale about five years now. It is going to change. There's a lot of new houses, and there's a lot of them that they're improving. The city is coming in, and there's going to be a lot of changes. It's inevitable, the city is already surrounding us. I think it will be for the best.

GARZA: How can the incorporation of Pinedale to Fresno help the Mexican people in Pinedale? Do you think it will help them?

CASTILLO: I don't know. They're a lot of old people here and they're set in their ways. I don't know if it's going to help them or not. I think it would help the younger people. But there's a lot of people who didn't know the freeways are going around here in Blackstone. They just don't want to believe it. I guess the old people are just set in their ways. I think it will be better for the young kids. I guess it's going to be tough for them. I guess no one likes for anyone to take over their town. That's progress.

GARZA: How do you compare your generation with the generation now?

CASTILLO: Well, my generation used to go out to dances and hung around the streets. To me we seem different. We don't seem like we were as mischievous as now. We didn't have as much free time in our hands like they do now. They don't want to work. I don't know why. But in our times, we had to go out to work and make a living. This generation to me, seems like they want everything handed to them. We had to go out and hustle for what we could get.

GARZA: What is going to happen to all of these little towns in Fresno County?

CASTILLO: The little towns are going to be swallowed up by the bigger ones. We just have to live and find out what is going to happen. All this ranches are going to disappear. I can see it around here in the fig orchards. I've seen town grow up on Herndon. I remember when all of this was fig orchards and now they are nothing but houses. On the Eastside all of the farms have

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CASTILLO:

turned into suburds. You go out towards the Westside and pretty soon there is not going to be fieldwork. Even in Madera I can see it, because I worked over there and I go to some of these ranches and the industry has taken over. They keep going and there is not going to be any fieldwork. I don't know what the people are going to do unless they get an education and start working in machinery.

GARZA: O.K., Mr. Castillo, sure appreciate you talking with us.

Is there anything else you want to say?

CASTILLO: No, just hope that the Chicano people get educated, because they are going to need it the way things are going now. If you don't have education there's not going to be no way of living. That's the way it's going to be!

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"BY MY SIGNATURE, I MAKE THIS TRANSCRIPT AVAIBLE TO
RESEARCHERS IN THE FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL
ARCHIVES."


MR. RALPH CASTILLO, NARRATOR

11-15-77
(DATE)

MR. BEN GARZA, INTERVIEWER

(DATE)