

Felix Lopez/Dana Echohawk Transcription

Transcriber: Hannah Wilson

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DANA: Today is January 10th, 2011 and we are meeting with Felix Lopez. My name is Dana Echohawk and I would like you, Felix, to introduce yourself.

FELIX: Okay, my name is Felix R. Lopez and I live in Conejos County, south part of Colorado. I've lived there most of my life except for short periods of school that I attended at Trinidad State Junior College and also a couple of years at University of Colorado in Boulder. And then I returned back to the valley and then I started my employment there with USDA, with what was called then the Soil Conservation Service Leader. The name was changed to Natural Resources Conservation Service, which is a Federal agency under the Department of Agriculture.

DANA: And how long has your family lived in the valley?

FELIX: My family has lived there in the valley for several generations. We can probably go back four or five generations in the San Luis Valley.

DANA: Okay and where do you live in the San Luis Valley?

(1:21)

FELIX: In the San Luis Valley I live in a community, the outskirts of a small community called Romeo. We live in a farming area where a lot of agricultural products are produced like alfalfa and small grains and back in the early 1950s and '60s, there was a lot of rural crops that were produced there as well like lettuce and there were some carrots and some sugar beets that were raised at that time. But as far as lifestyle goes, most of the livestock that was raised in Conejos County I believe, would have been sheep and then also some cattle. And then in my family, my grandparents, Pablo F. Lopez and my grandma and my dad and his brothers and sisters, they grew up on a dairy

farm as well. And they started, my grandfather started with a few head of sheep that were willed to him and then from there he got started, I believe he got willed approximately thirty head of sheep or ewes and then from there he got his start to where they developed into a milking operation as well. So that's kind of my background, my family history.

DANA: When you talk about sheep, how did sheep people and cattle people get along?

FELIX: Well, they weren't the best of neighbors, I guess. Sheep people, you know, they had a different way of pasturing the range and cattle had another set of rules that they used to graze as well and sometimes they were always in conflict with each other. And basically, I think it just turned out to be different types of livestock rivalries that farmers were involved in.

DANA: Did sheep graze or did you need to feed them.

FELIX: As far as maintaining the herd, we used to raise our own crops; alfalfa and small grains like oats that we used to use to feed them through the winter months. In the summer time, we used to take them up to **THE ALAM**, for a short time and from there up to the higher country, New Mexico, Northern New Mexico, and of course the National Forest. We used to remain up there until the 15th of September and then we used to drive the herds back down to **THE ALAM** and private lands here in Conejos County. And we used to stay there until the first part of November and then after that, we used to call the lambs from the ewes and then send the lambs off to market and get the herds ready for winter. We used to rotate the herds in different pastures that we had on the private property.

DANA: When you were in the high country, did you camp? And what would a typical camp setup be like?

FELIX: The typical camp set up would be, we would go up and set up camp, we weren't allowed to bed our livestock in one place for more than a couple of nights. We always had to rotate our beddings for the livestock so they wouldn't damage the environment too much. And the forest service was pretty cognizant of that so they gave us the rules and regulations to operate under so that we didn't damage the environment too much.

DANA: Were there quite a few other sheep herder families or operations?

FELIX: Yes. My father and his three other brothers used to herd the, bring their flocks together and then we used to run as one, well, two different operations up in the Carson National Forest. The area that we used to graze was Los Brazos and the area that two of my other uncles used to graze was called Rincon Bonito. And at the end of the grazing season up in the high country we used to bring the flocks together and then we would drive the herds from the high country onto private land.

DANA: So when you say you raised your own crops to feed them, how much acreage did you have?

FELIX: We used to have about two hundred acres of ranch land and cropland in which we raised enough hay to feed the livestock through the winter months.

DANA: Was it irrigated?

FELIX: Yes it was irrigated. We used to flood irrigate our crops.

DANA: And where did the water come from?

FELIX: The water came from the Conejos River system, our watershed. And we used to divert the water out onto the **cannot understand name of company** Northeastern Delivery system, which is a ditch company that we have shares with and the water is distributed according to shares in an hourly time-frame on a rotation basis.

DANA: Who maintains the ditch?

FELIX: The ditch company maintains the ditches, the delivery system. But a lot of ditches on the private land that we farm, we maintain the ditches.

DANA: What other industries were in Conejos County?

FELIX: The other industries are basically cattle industry, some farmers used to produce crops like potatoes, mostly. And like I mentioned earlier, in the 1960s and '50s, they used to produce a lot of lettuce.

DANA: And how would they transport the crops out of the valley?

FELIX: They would transport the products out of the valley on the railway and also on a trucking system.

DANA: Do you remember the Southern San Luis Valley Railroad that went from Blanca to Jaroso.

FELIX: No, well, I know of that stretch of railroad but when I started working in Costilla County, that leg of the railroad wasn't in use anymore. So that must have been used earlier, probably in the '30s, I suppose.

DANA: I think so. People who worked in the valley, were there always enough jobs for them or did they find that they would have to leave the valley to find careers and livelihood?

FELIX: People would have to leave the valley because there weren't enough jobs to go around for the young people that were growing up and needed jobs. So they eventually if they wanted to make a career, they needed to move out of the valley into the Denver area or Pueblo.

DANA: What type of jobs would they go to, most likely? Were they involved in mining or railroads? What other types of things might they go to work in?

FELIX: People that moved from the valley to work outside the valley, like in Pueblo for instance, they worked for the CF & I Corporation. There's a lot of people that work for that corporation.

DANA: And what is CF & I?

FELIX: CF & I is a steel mill there in Pueblo and they produced iron there. And other people would come to work here in Denver like myself in the early '70s. One of the first jobs that I landed over here was working for Rocky Mountain Prestress and I remember going for a job here at that company and the guy asked me where I was from and I told him I was from the San Luis valley and he said, "you're hired, you can report first thing in the morning at eight o'clock". So, that made me feel pretty good *[laughs]*.

DANA: That was pretty lucky.

FELIX: Yeah.

DANA: How long did you stay?

FELIX: I didn't stay there very long. I probably stayed there for about three months because the work was very hard. To me it seemed like they wanted to make me or break me the first day I worked because they had me hauling **REBAR** all over the place and that stuff is pretty heavy and I wasn't very stout at that time, I didn't weigh very much, so it was pretty hard on me physically.

DANA: So did you go back to the valley after that?

FELIX: Yeah. After a short time up here in Denver, I became unemployed, I believe it was in 1975, and I was unemployed at the time and I remember getting a call from my father saying that there was a job waiting for me in the valley if I wanted to go back. And I really didn't want to go back because I didn't think the opportunities were that great in the valley but I was on, I believe, my last week of unemployment here in Denver, and he said, "well, what are you gonna do without a job?". And I finally decided to go back and see what was waiting for me in the valley and I took that job and I finally ended up retiring from the U.S. Department of Agriculture after thirty years *[laughs]*.

DANA: So while you were at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, tell us a little bit about what you did. What were some of the responsibilities you had and issues that you got into.

(12:29)

FELIX: The Soil Conservation Service as it was called then, there was an agency that provided the technical assistance and cause sharing assistance to farmers and producers or agricultural producers like ranching. We used to provide technical assistance as far as irrigation, water management, and we also implemented a lot of structures for water control. And at that time, sprinkler systems was a new system that was being introduced to the valley for applying irrigation water to the crops which unfortunately did away with a lot more labor in the agricultural industry in the San Luis Valley. And we also as part of our service, we used to write contracts with producers as far as

implementing conservation practices on their farms. And we helped them with coming up with cropping systems and rotations to maintain the soil tilth and maintain the productivity of the soil.

(13:50)

DANA: What percent of people involved in agriculture in the valley would you say are Hispanic?

FELIX: Well, I would say a large percentage of Hispanics that were involved in agriculture, especially in the labor part of it in the 1950s and even earlier than that, a lot of the labor was hand labor, stoop labor like picking potatoes in the fields and doing the flood irrigation on the fields and putting up of hay as well. Now there is a lot of machinery that has taken place of the farm labor, which made farming a lot more efficient.

(14:37)

DANA: What would an average wage have been, say when you were a young man, say when you went back after being in Denver? What was the wage hourly wage that would have been common?

FELIX: Well, my first job that I was working for the neighbor and what I did for him was irrigate during the day. I would put in eight hours of irrigation for him and after that, I would do the irrigation on our farm during the evenings and through the night. I would try to squeeze in as much sleep as I could in-between what we had to do on our own farm and my job with the neighbor and when I first started working for him, he paid me a dollar an hour, which is quite a bit different from today's wages.

DANA: That is. Did it seem like a lot at the time?

FELIX: For me it did because it was my first job that I got compensated for.

DANA: Tell us what doing irrigation means. What would you actually have to physically do?

(15:46)

FELIX: Well, you have to pack a shovel all the time. You need to take the water out of the main ditch and then get it onto the field. And at that time, what we used to call a landing between ditches where we ran the water out of the small ditch onto the field. And we would just move the water on down the field until we covered all the acreage with water, irrigation water.

DANA: Okay. Let's back up just a little bit and talk about your childhood. When you were a child, what are some of the things you remember about Christmas time when you were a kid?

FELIX: Well, when I was a little kid, my parents weren't all that economically well off so a lot of the toys that I had, we grew up knowing that we wouldn't expect very much for Christmas. So what we used to do as young kids, we used to create our own toys. We would pretend that a piece of 2x4 was a little pick-up or something like that. Another thing that I did when I was growing up is I would take these cans where I would take and put holes in the sides of the can and then run some string and I would use those like, we used to call them *patinas* in Spanish.

DANA: What were they?

FELIX: We would get those cans and put them on our feet and walk around in them.

DANA: Make you taller?

FELIX: Yeah, make us a little taller, yeah.

DANA: Do you remember any of the Christmas's from when you were a kid?

FELIX: Yeah.

(17:54)

DANA: Would you want to tell us about one?

FELIX: Well, what I used to like about Christmas was the foods that were prepared at that time. We used to make *empanaditas* and other things like that and that was a fun time for us.

(18:17)

DANA: What are *empanaditas*?

FELIX: *Empanaditas* are stuffed bread that were prepared during Christmas time.

(18:29)

DANA: What did they have inside?

FELIX: They used to be prepared with meat and raisins and *piñon* nuts.

DANA: What other foods do you remember, when you were a child, that maybe your grandmother made?

(18:47)

FELIX: Another thing that I used to enjoy a lot were *biscochitos*, they were sugar cookies. We looked forward to those a lot.

(18:58)

DANA: How is the food prepared down there different than what they call Mexican food up here?

FELIX: Well, it has a different flavor to it. We use a lot of green chili and we prepare that with meat or ground beef and also with pork. And some of the foods that we prepare over there are sliced potatoes and then also beans. We used to boil beans and that would be basically our meal. And then also tortillas, we used to make fresh tortillas all the time, our mother and grandparents. So that was, well we still do that and we still eat *posole* from time to time and menudo.

DANA: And for the record, what is menudo?

(20:05)

FELIX: Menudo is boiled tripe and we used to make that with hominy.

DANA: And tripe is?

FELIX: And tripe is stomach from the livestock that can either be beef or mutton.

(20:25)

DANA: Was Easter an important holiday for your family?

FELIX: Yes.

DANA: What was important about it?

FELIX: Easter was important in that we used to start with Ash Wednesday and we used to go through a fasting every Friday and a lot of people would give up things during Lent as a penance. And the best part probably about Easter was the celebration of resurrection of our Lord. And then also I remember going to some of the penitent prayers that they would have on Good Friday. And we would partake of the processions that they would have from the church on the way to the *Morada*. I always found that very uplifting spiritually.

DANA: Which *Morada* did you go to?

FELIX: The *Moradas* that I participated in, the processions are the ones in San Antonio. There's a *Morada* there in San Antonio.

DANA: Tell us a little bit about the SMPDTU and what does that stand for?

FELIX: The SPMDTU stands for the *Sociedad Proteccion Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos*.

DANA: In English?

FELIX: In English, Society For the Protection of Labor I guess, would be the closest translation I could come up with.

DANA: And what function did that serve in the valley, for people down there?

FELIX: The function that organization served in the valley was to bring Hispanics together. At that time, there was a lot of discrimination that took place in the area of employment and they came together to form an insurance

to provide insurance to the members and also to provide assistance to family members when they were to lose a breadwinner in the family. The family would come together and assist in any way that they could financially and also with other materials. And that was the purpose of organizing the organization.

(23:43)

DANA: And are you a member?

FELIX: Yes, I am a member of that organization. I joined that organization approximately five or six years ago.

DANA: And how does it vary today in what it provides as far as function and service as to what it did years ago?

FELIX: The function that it provides now, we try to maintain an awareness of the culture, the Hispanic culture. Maintaining the language is one of my big things because if you lose the Spanish language you start losing the Hispanic culture. Because once you start losing the language, you're no longer going to be listening to Hispanic type music or Mexican music. You're not going to be participating in traditional events because you're going to feel that you don't fit in. And that's what I would like to see happen in our community, is to maintain our cultural values. And make our young people aware that their ancestors had good cultural values to share with younger generations and the younger generations should be proud of what their ancestors handed down to them. That is there for them to take up.

(25:08)

DANA: Are the young people maintaining the language and speaking Spanish or is that slipping away a little bit?

FELIX: Its very difficult to maintain the Hispanic language here in the valley because as I remember growing up, I was told when I was in elementary school, probably second or third grade, that speaking Spanish on the school grounds was not allowed. And that made me feel pretty uncomfortable and sad. And I guess my father noticed that experience that I went through and he asked me one day what had happened and I told him what had happened and

he said, “well, just think about this: whoever speaks more than one language is actually worth that many individuals”. And to me that sounded very, very encouraging and so I made sure that I never forgot my Hispanic roots and language. So every opportunity that I take I communicate in Spanish if I know people can communicate in Spanish as well.

(26:23)

DANA: Tell us a little bit about politics in the valley.

FELIX: Well, politics is very interesting because there is always two sides to an issue and the thing of it is that when politicians are running for office, they need to realize that if they want to get elected, they need to ask for that vote. And people sometimes take it personally if you don't ask them for their vote. If you don't ask for their vote, they may think well maybe he doesn't want my vote. So therefore maybe I'll vote for the other guy.

(27:13)

DANA: So you're talking about coming out and asking you personally?

FELIX: Yes. I think some politicians assume that the vote is there because maybe if the candidate happens to be Hispanic, he may think that since he's Hispanic he's going to automatically get the Hispanic vote. That is not always the case. As Hispanics, we are as individual as anybody else. And we also look at the issues. Who's going to do the best for our interests in office? So it's not really, politics shouldn't be looked at as being something leaning too much, having it skewed too much towards being of the same origin or race or something like that. It should be based on issues.

(28:19)

DANA: We all know the Salazar's came from the San Luis Valley outside of Manassa which is probably not too far from you. Are you familiar with the Salazar family?

FELIX: Yes I am. I'm very familiar with the Salazar's. Ken Salazar was in the Senate for a while and John Salazar was a congressman, a representative for our district. And I think they did well for us while they served. Ken, personally

I think he probably should have stayed a senator instead of taking on the leadership for the department of interior. However he has done well in the Department of Interior, I think. But I think for the constituency that he was representing, I think it would have been best if he would have remained a Senator.

(29:26)

DANA: He was a senator, what did he give back to the valley? How did he influence change or things to improve in the valley from his position as senator?

FELIX: Well one of the things that he brought to the valley, he brought the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area. And I think that wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for him and also for John because they both introduced those bills in Congress and in the Senate, which eventually became a law in 2009.

DANA: What does Sangre de Cristo mean?

FELIX: Sangre de Cristo means the blood of Christ. And according to legend or history, a Spanish priest, when they were in that area, during the sunset the Sangre de Cristo range turned red and that was his first thoughts that came to him was Blood of Christ and that's why they named that range the Sangre de Cristo.

(30:46)

DANA: Okay. Getting back to a little bit of labor and industry, what about mining in the valley? Has there been any mining?

FELIX: The mining operations that I'm aware of in most recent times are the Perlite Mines in the Tres Piedras area. And that's about twenty miles south of Antonito. There's the mining operation there in Antonito where they bring in the perlite and they process it there and then they load it onto the railway and move it on out.

DANA: And do they employ a large percentage of Hispanic people from the valley?

FELIX: Yeah. It seems to be an employer there of which a substantial amount of employees work there.

DANA: Okay. What other industries are in the valley?

(31:47)

FELIX: Other industries are basically the big employers in the valley are local governments and county governments and the school districts and the college, Adams State College in Alamosa. Those are the major employers in the San Luis Valley.

DANA: Is there very much entrepreneurial-ship, small business, mom and pop business?

(32:13)

FELIX: Yeah there are some of those. We have a lot of non-profits as well. So I suppose you might look at that as an industry as well, the non-profit industry.

(32:33)

DANA: What do you see as the future of the valley as far as young people staying and making a life or leaving? What is going to be the future of the valley?

FELIX: Right now as far as employment, I don't see things changing very much. The San Luis Valley is basically an agricultural community and of course the technology has taken over a lot of the labor jobs. I know the industry that's coming into the valley looks like it's solar energy. But as far as the solar energy is concerned, that will only bring temporary jobs and the temporary jobs would be setting up the solar systems. But after that, there's very little need for employment as far as maintaining those solar systems as far as I can tell. Unless we were to bring some kind of manufacturing industry into the valley I don't see the employment situation changing very much.

(33:44)

DANA: I know that one of the bio-fuel companies have gone down and built a plant in Alamosa hoping that they could use the canola from the valley. Did that go anywhere?

FELIX: The Costilla County has a canola bio-diesel operation that they developed and as far as developing it as an industry that I believe would bring jobs or improve the economy around that, it seems like the price that they would get for the bio-diesel or bio-products would be not as competitive as people might think because of the inputs that would be required to come up with the bio-diesel. And then being able to market it in competition with regular diesel at the pump, I guess there would be a break-even point at which they would have to compete against. In other words, if the price of diesel goes down, well, bio-diesel is not going to be very attractive.

(35:08)

DANA: What about women? What did women do for the valley? Are the mainly homemakers or did they have jobs and what did your mother do?

FELIX: My mother used to work for the Headstart Program. She was one of the first employees at the Headstart Program, employed when they came into the valley. I don't recall what year that was but probably around the 1970s or something like that or maybe even late '60s. And she was employed as a teacher's aid. But she enjoyed that very much and that was a second income for us in the household and that's what a lot of families there in the San Luis Valley depend on. Usually another member in the family will get an outside job, usually the housewife, to be able to maintain a household.

(36:14)

DANA: I have heard that Costilla is probably one of the poorest counties in the state of Colorado and yet Bob Green who used to edit the La Sierra Newspaper made a comment once that stuck with me and that is that nobody goes without a roof over their head and nobody goes hungry. How does the community come together to help one another?

FELIX: Well, they come together... in the '40s and '50s, people used to come together to help the neighbor put up their crops. They would all pitch in. It

was kind of like a community type effort. They would go from farm to farm and put up the hay and stuff like that. And that's one way that they helped each other out. And then it was more of a community type effort when there was something that needed to be done.

(37:20)

DANA: Was there a lot of reliance on the government to help or was it more of a community reliance?

FELIX: Well, some families didn't have very many economic opportunities. They'd have to rely on social welfare systems. And I think for the most part, people want to be able to have a job. I think they prefer to have a job than to rely on government dependence.

(38:05)

DANA: Do you remember in the '70s when the United Farm Workers came down to Center?

FELIX: Yeah, I do, a little bit.

DANA: Do you want to tell us what you remember?

FELIX: Well they used to have boycotts on the lettuce. At that time they used to grow a lot of lettuce in the San Luis Valley. And they used to stage boycotts. At that time I was up here either at University of Colorado in the Denver area and I remember the great strikes as well.

(38:40)

DANA: The Gallo wine...What about civil rights. What are you familiar with as far as civil rights in the valley or even here in Denver?

FELIX: Well, during that time, minorities- Blacks or Hispanics or Chicanos we used to call ourselves back then, became aware of our civil rights. When I was growing up, I remember my dad saying, "don't be a trouble maker or don't be instigating stuff, but if anybody wants to trample on your rights, make sure you defend them". So I grew up with that sentiment and when I moved up here to the Denver area and the Boulder area with college, we spent a lot of

time demonstrating down here in Denver and also in Boulder and it was regarding basically civil rights at that time. Minorities felt that they weren't being treated the same as non-minorities. So that was the big issue then.

(40:31)

DANA: Was there a name for the movement or the groups that you were involved in?

FELIX: The group that I was involved in was UMAS in Boulder and that stood for United Mexican American Students. And another issue also that was big at that time was the Vietnam War. A lot of students felt that we shouldn't have gotten involved in Vietnam for various reasons. I remember my father saying that that was an unnecessary war. That we, a lot of the propaganda back then was that if we let the Communists take over Vietnam, the next country that they would take over would be the United States. And a lot of people at that time believed that. However, others like myself did not believe that. Because how could a small country like Vietnam half ways around the world take over a country like the United States? That just did not compute with me at that time.

(41:57)

DANA: So did you protest against the war?

FELIX: Yes, we did.

DANA: And with the student group, who were some of the leaders at that time in the Boulder/Denver area of those organizations?

FELIX: The people that I remember at that time were Corky Gonzalez. Another leader that I remember at that time, he was from New Mexico, and that was Reies Tijerina. And then there were also some other students here at CU Boulder that were I suppose, called leaders too as far as the Chicano movement was concerned. That was Kiko Martinez and others that I can't recall their names right now, but there were others. Ricardo Falcon was another one. I believe he was killed on a trip back to his hometown in Texas I

believe. And there were some others here in the Boulder areas that were students that were also involved in the Chicano movement.

(43:12)

DANA: And as far as the Chicano movement, what types of activities would you engage in or put together? Were they mainly meetings or protests?

FELIX: They were mostly just meetings and protests, going to demonstrations. I remember coming to Denver one time and marching down Champa Street. I remember that because I remember seeing the police officers along the side with their dogs and their shields and I guess basically back then, they used to call it riot gear. *[laughs]*

(43:57)

DANA: Was there ever any violence?

FELIX: I wasn't in anything that turned out to be violent. Just mostly peaceful type marches that we tried to have...

DANA: Just to build awareness.

FELIX: Yeah, just to build awareness. It wasn't something that we organized to destroy property or anything like that. It was just to make people aware of the issues that were at the time, controversial.

(44:32)

DANA: And what were some of those issues.

FELIX: Well, one of the issues was education. Minorities didn't have the educational opportunities that non-minorities had. And that was one of the things that CU at that time was trying to change. They had a program that I was a part of where I transferred from the Trinidad State College to the University of Colorado because they had very few Hispanics at that time. At that time they only had I think five or six Hispanics in the whole student body of CU. So that was the program they had put together to see if they could get more minorities enrolled in Boulder.

(45:26)

DANA: You had mentioned Chicano. There are so many names. There is Hispanic, Latino, Chicano, Spanish, Spanish-American. Give us a little bit of your thoughts on those names and who used them to identify themselves.

FELIX: Well, it seems like different people within the Hispanic community want to refer to themselves as Chicanos or Mexican-American or Latinos but it seems like the more popular terms to use today are like Latino or Hispanic. As far as I am concerned, I don't get too hung up on labels because I think what identifies a person's background or his character are his cultural values. I feel that I grew up with cultural values that are not too different from anybody else and any other ethnic group. The only difference is that our origins are somewhat different than from some other non-Hispanics. For example, people migrated from the West to the East and we as Hispanics or Mexicans or Chicanos, well, we migrated North from the South. And after the war of 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the border for us, moved South. And a lot of people that I've spoken to think that we're all immigrants from Mexico when actually, we have a seniority here as Americans because as a foreign language, Spanish is one of the foreign languages spoken here before English. And it's probably been spoken here at least a hundred years earlier than English was spoken on this continent. And a lot of people are not aware of that. So folks that migrated west from the East, they assume that the United States started with them *[laughs]*. So when I was in school, one of the things that kind of struck me was that in the history books, I found it kind of funny that the people that I saw like the fathers of our country, that we refer to, George Washington and so on, I used to see those individuals in the history book and I would ask myself, "if these people are the fathers of our country, how come none of them look like my parents". *[laughs]*

DANA: That's a good point.

FELIX: So that's always remained with me and now that I'm older, I know why. Because it's a perspective of how people see things, from their point of view. Another thing that I used to feel also when reading the history book was it seemed like civilization moved in from the East to the West when actually

there was already a civilization in the West. And it's just different cultures that eventually came together and we tried to make the best of it.

(49:23)

DANA: I like your thought that you came from the South to the North. What do you think of Borders? The border between New Mexico and Colorado on a map it's a line but what is your thought on the borders between the two states.

FELIX: Well, as far as borders between states like that, it seems like people that moved in from the East, they like to have straight lines and corners whereas in Hispanic culture, they like more curvature in their boundaries. And you can see that in their art as well. That's one of the things that sticks out in my mind that is different between the cultures. And then on our Southern border and the Northern border of New Mexico, it's a deliberate straight line. It really doesn't follow any cultural type of boundary because I think people in the San Luis valley for the most part, that are Hispanic, feel like they are in line with part of New Mexico than part of Colorado.

(50:42)

DANA: And is there still a lot of interaction back and forth between people living in New Mexico and Colorado, culturally?

FELIX: Yes. There is. When I was growing up I remember referring to people from New Mexico coming into Colorado to sell their fruits as *comerciante* and so we maintained that closeness to Northern New Mexico because we used to trade back and forth. They used to come up to the valley and trade potatoes for their apples and chilies. And that's how we maintained ties with New Mexico.

(51:23)

DANA: And is that still going on?

FELIX: Not as much today as it used to be thirty or forty years ago.

DANA: I've skipped all over the place with your interview and there are so many things you've mentioned that I'd like to go into more detail but I was torn to make sure we covered everything at least a little. Is there something that you would like to talk about or tell about that through the interview has come to mind that I didn't cover with you?

(52:02)

FELIX: Well, one of the things that come to my mind is the Treaty of Guadalupe and also the land grants like the Conejos Land Grant was never recognized. The Conejos Land Grant comprised of two and a half million acres. It took in all of Conejos county and part of New Mexico from San Antonio mountain and all the way north to La Garita and Saguache County and to the Continental Divide on the West side and La Rio Grande on the East side. So it's a very large stretch of land and that's why in Conejos County, at least sixty percent of the land is Federally owned by the Forest Service or the BLM and along with state properties. That's why I believe Conejos County is also one of the poorest counties in Colorado and also in the nation and I think it's because of that, because a lot of the real estate in that county is owned by the Federal Government. We have a payment in lieu of taxes but that is not, I believe, compatible with real estate property values. In other words, payment in lieu of taxes, payment we receive from the Federal Government as if it was private property but I think there's a disparity there and then also the local government does not determine what that money is going to be. I believe that is now determined at the Washington level. So depending on the availability of funds at the Washington level determines as to what funds we're going to receive locally. But it's still better than what we used to have before payment in lieu of taxes enacted. Before that we didn't get any as far as tax revenues, from the Federal Government.

(54:22)

DANA: The payment in lieu of taxes, was that a result of contesting the land grant status? Is that when that came to be?

FELIX: I don't know that it was a direct result of the land grant or not but it was something that I believe that one of our county commissioners was

involved in, in getting it implemented at the Washington level. That we had all this real estate in accounting that we wanted to benefit from tax-wise to support the local services.

(55:01)

DANA: Well I know over in Costilla they have the communal land usage that just went through the courts not too many years ago. Is there still communal usage in Conejos? Of the Federal lands or even the BML?

FELIX: No, it's not based on inheritance or anything like that. It's based on, more or less, their leases that come up from time to time, that agricultural producers can apply for, but as far as I know, they're not awarded based on land grants or anything like that.

DANA: The leases, how many years are they?

FELIX: The leases I believe are for ten years at a time.

DANA: Anything else?

FELIX: No I can't think of anything else.

DANA: Okay well thank you for having us here and taking your time while you are in Denver and when we come down to San Luis we may ask if we could come and see you and ask if we could get some other footage you. We'll see what our timing is.

FELIX: Okay

DANA: Would that be alright?

FELIX: Yeah, that would be fine.

DANA: Okay, thank you.

FELIX: Okay and I think you for considering me for this interview.