



FRANK BARRIOS 1942 - 2023

Honored as 2023 Historymaker
Master Storyteller, Social Activist,
Water Conservationist



The following is an oral history interview with Frank Barrios (**FB**) conducted by Norma Jean Coulter (**NC**) for Historical League, Inc. and video-graphed by Leonardo Buono on May 1, 2023, at the Center for Positive Media in Phoenix, Arizona.

Original tapes are in the collection of the Arizona Historical Society Museum Library at Papago Park, Tempe, Arizona. The interview has been edited for clarity.

NC Good morning. My name is Norma Jean Coulter. I'm interviewing Frank Barrios, and the date is May 1, 2023. Good morning, Frank.

FB Good morning Norma Jean.

NC It's delightful to talk to you. I know you have really deep roots in Arizona. So, let's begin with you telling us about your grandfather and your early days in Phoenix.

FB My parents were Alfonso Barrios and Dolores Barrios, both of Mexican American heritage. My mother's side is the part that I have the history and the legacy of here in Arizona. My mother's father was born Martin Slater in Brač, which is an island off the coast of Yugoslavia. Came to Arizona in 1878 and got into the freighting business. He had, I think, 20 mules like you see in the Death Valley commercials and he freighted all over Arizona, moving material around. I always found it interesting that he was in Tombstone, Arizona, when he filed for U.S. citizenship in 1882. That was the same era when the Earps and the Clantons were there. My grandfather died long before I was born, but I would've loved to have sat down with him and talk to him about what he saw when he was in Tombstone, Arizona. But then my grandfather, Martin Gold, changed his name. He was born Slater, and he changed his name to Gold. I understand Slater in Slavic means a man who works with gold.

But anyway, he came to Phoenix, married a Hispanic woman named Dolores Martinez. She had

been married before to a doctor from the Civil War named George Wheeler Schofield. And they had one child who died, and Schofield died soon after the child was born. Supposedly he was a personal friend of Ulysses S. Grant, so his child was named Ulysses. So, the one son was Ulysses Schofield. But when my grandmother met my grandfather, she was a widow with a single child. My grandfather married her and had five children, two boys, three girls. The two boys died very young-- one was one and the other was two years old. The three girls lived to maturity. My mother was the youngest of the three girls. My mother was born and raised in the downtown Phoenix area where Chase Field is today.

My grandfather, originally when he stopped the freighting, bought a ranch, almost a full section of land around 24th Street and the Salt River bottom, and farmed. Then he sold that, came to Phoenix, and bought a home where Chase Field is today. He also bought the Lemon Hotel and converted it to the Gold Hotel. And then in later years he would tear it down and built the Ramona Theater. My grandfather was a large business owner of land in downtown Phoenix. He was very successful and it's interesting because my grandfather came from a very poor background. Never went to school. Any documents I have, there's an X for his signature. He couldn't read or write, yet he spoke eight languages and was a very intelligent man that succeeded very highly. And, he was very, very pro the Mexican community. The area where he built his home below Chase Field was a Mexican American community. My mother grew up there. Her first language was Spanish. All the people in that area there in the early 1900s were Spanish speaking. And my grandfather, spoke English and Spanish, two of the eight languages that he spoke.

I guess I could touch a little bit about my father's side. My father was born in Redlands, California. He was raised in Mexico and went to high school in Los Angeles. His parents were both Mexican citizens. My grandfather's name was Francisco Barrios. In fact, I'm named after both my grandfathers. Francisco is Spanish for Frank and Martin is my mother's father. So, I was named Frank Martin Barrios, after both grandfathers. Towards the end of my grandfather's life, he ended up with a large grape ranch just west of Tecate, Baja California, Mexico, which is right on the border with California. I remember visiting my grandparents many times in Mexico on their farm where they grew grapes. Wonderful memories of time that I spent with my grandfather on my dad's side.

NC What did your father do?

FB My father worked for the State Liquor Control. He started with liquor, but there was a section of the state of Arizona Liquor Control that dealt with narcotics. The value of my father was that he was perfectly bilingual. And he actually at times went undercover to bust some of the narcotic rings that were coming in from Mexico. He spent the vast majority of his career fighting illegal narcotics in Arizona as a part of the Liquor Control. When he retired from the Liquor Control,

his last job was with the U.S. Marshal guarding prisoners as they were moved from place to place. But my father also was very involved in the Hispanic community of Phoenix. He was the Alliancia Man of the Year. He served on the SER (Society for Ecological Restoration) board, was on LULAC, (League of Latin American Citizens) board and a member of Post 41 (American Legion). My dad served in World War II and so was very well known in the Hispanic community.

NC Let's talk about school now. Could you tell us about your first experiences with school?

FB I went to St. Mary's Catholic Grammar School, next to the basilica. I was raised in 809 N. 7th Street; I still remember the address, which was right in downtown Phoenix. I went to McKinley School for kindergarten. And then when kindergarten was completed, my mother took me to sign up for the first grade at St. Mary's. Unfortunately, she was told that, "Well, you have a Hispanic last name. You have to go to Immaculate Heart School. You can't go to St. Mary's." It was a bad decision. It was segregation at its worst. Eventually I was allowed to attend St. Mary's. But overall, I have to say that the Franciscans did a lot of good for the Valley. We all make bad decisions. The Franciscans, when it came to race, there were a couple of areas they made bad decisions. But they also made very good ones. Father Albert Braun, Father Emmet McLaughlin, Father Wasson, opened a school for the Gila River tribe, St. John's Indian School. St. Vincent de Paul, which I've worked with for 30 years and am the immediate past president of, was started at St. Mary's. Today it's the largest, most successful St. Vincent de Paul in the world. They're in 150 countries throughout the world. So, the legacy of the Franciscans is basically positive with a few bad decisions that were made historically.

NC Then you went to a Jesuit school, Brophy?

FB I went to Brophy College Preparatory. I graduated from Brophy in four years. I went from Franciscans to Jesuits and then I went to Phoenix College. I graduated from Phoenix College and then Arizona State University. At ASU I graduated in civil engineering, became a registered professional engineer and a registered surveyor. Then I had to choose after I graduated. The reason I got into civil engineering is because, even while I was going to school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. But civil engineering is probably the widest area of engineering, and I could choose many areas. I looked around and at the time they were starting the planning on the Central Arizona Project. It was the most important project to affect Arizona, maybe ever. It was one of the largest water projects ever undertaken in the United States, next to maybe Hoover Dam. It was a big thing. They weren't paying very well. They paid \$5,000 a year, but I started working with them. They had a training program and for one year they would train you and you would learn different areas of the Bureau of Reclamation. Then you could choose which area you wanted to concentrate on.

NC So you went to work for the Bureau of Reclamation?

FB Right. I worked for them almost ten years. It was a great experience, and I did planning on the Central Arizona Project. We did a lot of work on the CAP before it was authorized for actual construction. And then towards the end of ten years, I was looking to elevate my career. Unfortunately, with the federal government, you have to leave Arizona if you want to advance. And I did not want to leave Arizona. I was offered a position to head up a planning unit with the Arizona Water Commission which would later become the Department of Water Resources under Wes Steiner. And the job there was a state program to see if they could expedite the construction of flood control dikes to protect farmland in Arizona. It would be paid out of a different fund than the CAP because the CAP, you and I pay for that with our taxes. Well, we pay for it all; but it was under Central Arizona Project while Civil Conservation Service was a federal program assisting farmers. So, it came out of a different fund. We expedited the planning. I was the head of a planning group that had an engineer, a geologist and an economist. We put together a plan to protect the farmland of Harquahala Valley and Queen Creek. We expedited the planning. That project got built and that same flood control dike also protected the Central Arizona Project Canal which would go right out the base of that flood control project. I worked for twenty some years with the Water Commission and its predecessor, the Department of Water Resources. I've held just about every position - chief of flood control, planning, and Colorado River. Then in 1983, we started the Ground Water Management Act by Bruce Babbitt, which was one of the first attempts to try to control our groundwater usage. I was the Pinal AMA director for Pinal County. I also was the Phoenix AMA director for the Phoenix area.

NC AMA is...?

FB It was the Active Management Area. There were certain areas where we were gonna take CAP water that was over-burdening the groundwater use. So, the idea was to put a plan together to replace or lessen the effects of groundwater depletion. We would do that to show the federal government that we want the CAP Colorado River water, but we're doing something to try to solve our problem of groundwater overuse. We regulated groundwater use, and it was controversial. Even today nobody wants to be regulated by the government. And in those days it was no different. But I think there was a general understanding, if we didn't regulate our groundwater use, there wouldn't be any groundwater left for the future. The CAP was coming in, but we had to do something about our groundwater as we took on the CAP. Unfortunately, what we're finding out today is that there were droughts and whether or not this is gonna be standard or is this an unusual situation, only God knows. But in droughts – we are basically in one right now- there's more water going out and being used, than comes in. And we've got a serious situation on our hands.

NC Early on, before the Central Arizona Project actually was in use, were there other issues that

came up in that area about water? Controversies?

FB Keep in mind the Active Management Area before the Groundwater Management Act, was only in those areas that were taking CAP water. It did not address the groundwater overdraft problem in the whole of Arizona. Every city, almost every city in Arizona, is on groundwater. There's a reason why we call Arizona an arid zone. We're very fortunate in the Phoenix area that we have the Salt River here. The Salt River Project provides a lot of water that helps resolve our problems. But the rest of the state does not have a Salt River. Even the Gila River, which provides a lot of water to different communities, is minimal. Every community in Arizona depends on groundwater and the issue is, what do you do when it's gone? Just like copper. Everybody knows about Jerome, Arizona. Copper mines built a beautiful city. Everything was great. But it was based on the copper that was there. When the copper was gone, it became a ghost town. How many cities in Arizona are gonna face the same end when the groundwater is gone? Almost every single city in Arizona, other than the Phoenix area, is dependent on groundwater that's a one-time source. When it's gone, it's gone. Along the Colorado River, they have Colorado River water, surface water which hopefully renews. During the drought it does not. But Yuma and the Phoenix area are two that have a good supply of water. But Flagstaff, Prescott, Kingman, Payson, are all areas that are on some form of groundwater and potentially there's a serious issue here.

NC If you were active in planning today with water in Arizona, what direction would you go?

FB Well, I think there are no more unallocated waters. Right now, there's very few laws that control groundwater use. You might say, if you want to go somewhere outside of the active management areas, in what they call irrigation non-expansion areas, there's no control on water use. So, you go in there, and you put a well in, you can pump until it's dry. That's one of the areas that needs to be controlled. But on the surface water, it's already allocated. Somebody owns it. You can take it away from somebody and give it to somebody else and that's in the planning stage. Many of the tribes are looking to sell some of their water and others also are looking to that arena. But that's when you turn around and hire attorneys. Because all of a sudden you're taking water from one area and taking it to another. There'll be quite a few attorneys suing over that process. But the only unallocated water that is being looked at, and I think is probably the answer, is ocean water, desalinization. You take ocean water, desalinize it, and bring it into the state. But the problem with desalinization is it's very expensive and there's a lot of issues. What do you do with the salt? Huge amounts of salt come out of that process.

NC Did you work on any of the agreements with the tribes over water?

FB That's correct. I was in two – from 2003 to 2006. Governor Janet Napolitano appointed me to the Central Arizona Project Board of Directors. Probably one of the most controversial things

that came before that board during that time period was the settlement with the Gila River tribe. The tribe had a legitimate claim on the Gila River. But unfortunately, back in the 1800s, Safford, and the farmers in Florence, Eloy, and those areas, took water upstream and the Native American farmers, the Gila River tribe, had been taking water from the river since the Hohokam era. All of a sudden the river ran dry. They had a legitimate claim to water. And it was very controversial because there were many people that did not want the tribe to have any water. I voted to give the tribe water and there were others with me that voted for that. But there were others who thought we had made a mistake; they were very passionate about not giving water to the tribe. I always remember after I voted, one of the attorneys from the other side came to me and pointed his finger at me and said, "A hundred years from now, people will spit on your grave for giving our water to the Indians." I said, "Let 'em." *[laughs]*

NC You did what was right and that's been important to you in your life, hasn't it?

FB It has. I try as much as possible. Sometimes doing what's right, will do something that's wrong also. Sometimes it's a balancing act. You try to do what's right, but just watch your politics and you'll find out how few politicians are doing what's right, while others focus on what's winning and losing. And sometimes, you have something like the Gila Decree, a decree that governs the water use of the Gila River. There are things in that decree that are directly opposite one or the other. That was put together by attorneys. But yet, they're in total contradiction within one decree. So, it's just the sort of thing about which you can go to court forever. I take this part of the decree and I'll fight for it. I will take the other part of the decree that's directly opposite that and fight for it: they're both in the law. And in things like that, right or wrong isn't necessarily always a black and white issue. Sometimes, it becomes gray. But you try as best you can to do what's right, what's right for the state of Arizona, which I love from my heart deeply. My family did. Many of the people that I considered mentors, such as Wes Steiner and Jack Pfister, loved this state, and what they tried to do regardless of politics, was what was right.

NC All right. Let's shift away from water and talk about your outside activities. Now, I know you were into hiking, even in high school. Tell us about some of the places you hiked while in high school.

FB Well I hiked all over Arizona. Towards the end of my hiking period, I concentrated on the Grand Canyon because I had a group of hikers that I would hike with. Interestingly, I have to say this, they were all married, but they shared their vacations with their wives. They would tell their wives, "I'll go anywhere you want to go with half my vacation. But the other half is in the Grand Canyon." We were addicted to the Grand Canyon. But, believe me, if you see some of the sights that are in the canyon, it's easy to become addicted to the Grand Canyon. But there's so many hikes I took. I always remember one time we hiked from Horseshoe Dam, crossed over the Verde River at the dam, and went all the way over the top of the Mazatzal Wilderness and had a

car waiting for us on the other side on the road to Payson. And we did that in one day. We actually hiked across the Mazatzal Wilderness.

But the Grand Canyon was our big thing. We went to just about every corner. I've been to Keyhole Natural Bridge. No trail to it. It was bushwhacking. We did the Indian Hollow. Again, we had ropes to try to get down in areas, but we saw sights that were fantastic. The Native Americans that had been there had left behind carvings, the paintings. Some of them done before Christ. They were in the Grand Canyon living there. It's a unique place. It's not hard to understand how you can become addicted to the area.

I just would mention one I hiked with, Harvey Butchart, the most famous of the Grand Canyon hikers. Basically, according to the books I've read, he left his wife for the Grand Canyon. She very seldom even saw him because any time that he had, he was in the Grand Canyon hiking. He treated her well, but he had found another love, not another woman, but the Grand Canyon.

NC Tell us about some of your adventures in the canyon.

FB Well, there were many.

NC You hiked with Harvey, did you not?

FB Oh yeah. Just to give you an example, water was always a big issue. We would go out for four or five days. If you couldn't find water, you'd die. And so, the leader of our group used to call Harvey up because we knew Harvey had already been there before. Harvey had been to every single corner in the Grand Canyon. And we'd ask him about the water. And it's interesting. I'll give you two examples of the kind of issues that occurred. There was one area where there was a small spring of water, and it would take a day to get there. So, we'd be out of water when we got there. But the water was almost pure salt. But we drank it. And then the next day, according to Harvey, and Harvey was right, we found a spring with good water in it. So, we had to count basically that we would drink the salty water and then the next day we got to good water. Another one I remember was a spring when we went to Keyhole Natural Bridge. But there were wild horses down in there. The horses had crapped in the water supply. But it didn't matter, we had to drink it. So, what we did was we skimmed it, boiled it, and as I was drinking the water, all I could think of is the horses crapping in the water. Then there were other areas where there were actually trails such as the Nankoweap on the North Rim. You go like seven miles above the red wall. Half the time you're holding onto the edge of the cliff with a full pack. You fall, you're dead. There were so many areas like this. One of the things I found interesting when we went to Keyhole, was that very few people have ever seen it.

NC What part of the canyon is that in?

FB You have to cross the Havasupai and Hualapai tribes to get there. We had to get permission from the tribes to cross their land to get into the canyon where this was. It's on the western end of the canyon. It's basically an interesting natural bridge. You come down into a creek and you follow the creek down. All of a sudden there's this huge hole in the ground, huge. And you look down into it, and you see several cottonwood trees growing inside the hole. And about 30 feet above this hole is the natural bridge made of stone. When there's a flood, the water pours into that area, builds up in this big hole, and then pours out the natural bridge onto the other side. And on the other side is the Colorado River. We wouldn't go down in the hole 'cause it was all cliffs, but you can look down on what you see. And we found a place where there was a stone monument. The few people that had gotten there put their name on a piece of paper and folded it and put it into a plastic deal and stuck it in there. So, my name is on that plastic bag that's down there. I don't know how long it would last, but very few people ever see Keyhole Natural Bridge.

There are so many sites. The guys I used to hike with would go on forever. I was very good at hypnotizing myself through bad areas. But there were limits on what I would do, but some of these guys were like Harvey. They knew no fear. They could go crawl up a cliff without a rope that I would've called suicide. So, I always would carefully pick which of the hikes I would take with my group. But one of the things that group would do that I never did was they would carry rubber rafts with them. And they would go down to areas on the river that nobody had ever been. They would fill this tiny little raft up and then they would cross the river to the other side and then they would go into areas on the other side that were remote that nobody could get to.

NC Wow. Now on more hiking, tell us about hiking in the Gila River riverbed and some of the things you found there.

FB Most people don't realize the Gila Wilderness is in New Mexico and it was the birthplace of Geronimo. Geronimo was born in the wilderness area there. But anyway, there's cliff dwellings back in there. It's a beautiful wilderness area with high pines. I hiked twice in the Gila Wilderness. Once I came up through Silver City, up through Pinos Altos and up to where the Gila cliff dwellings are. We parked and then we backpacked for four days into the Gila Wilderness from there. The other trip I took, I think it was three days. We came in from Morenci/Clifton and crossed into New Mexico until we came into the upper end of the Gila Wilderness. And there are lot of springs in there. We didn't have trouble with water. But we only went in there for two or three days. So those are the two experiences in Gila Wilderness that I did. Now, I also did a lot of hiking in Aravaipa Wilderness, which is where the Power brothers had the shootout in the Galiuro Mountains. I spent three days back in there one time, hiking all over the place, but there are no roads. You have to hike to get back in there. We spent three days one time hiking throughout the Aravaipa Wilderness, a beautiful area. We went to visit where the shootout occurred. The cabin has been semi-restored. But as you look at the cabin, the bullet

holes are still in the cabin from the shootout. The Power brothers were miners and had a mine nearby they actively mined. The Power brothers always said that the reason the sheriff came after 'em was to try getting their hands on the mine. But it was the people from Safford including the sheriff who wanted them for draft dodging. In middle of the night, (I'll tell you a little bit of the story) their father woke up and the sheriff was outside. The father hollered, "Who's out there?" and they said, "The sheriff." The whole Power family were hill folks. He said, "Go to hell." And they shot him and killed him. His sons woke up and found their dad lying dead, so they grabbed their rifles, shot back, and killed the sheriff. And of course, the biggest manhunt in Arizona history occurred and they were finally arrested and put in jail. But later because of the situation, they were freed by Governor Babbitt, I believe. The two remaining brothers died outside of prison.

NC Wow. I know you also in high school were hiking down around Oatman Flats around the where the Gila River bends.

FB Oh, the site of the Oatman stage post.

NC That's the hiking I was talking about.

FB Near the Fortaleza Ruin.

NC I wanted to hear a little bit about that...

FB Okay.

NC All right, tell us about some hiking in the Gila riverbed when it was dry.

FB Right, below Painted Rock Dam on the Gila River, is a stage stop that was there for many years. And unfortunately, I'm told that it was on private land and the owner decided to tear it down. Well, I was in high school and again, I went to every corner of Arizona, and I wanted to see this stage stop. And it was very intact. The fireplace was still there. It was all adobe. And there were some graves outside of it. I took lots of pictures of that site. And then later on I find out that the owner didn't want anybody stopping him from farming, so he tore it down. So, I may have the only pictures of that stage stop that are out there. And, of course, the location of that stage stop is right there where they had the Oatman Massacre where the Indians killed the Oatman family and captured two little girls, quite a sad story.

NC And you picked up some artifacts out there?

FB Yes. What most people don't realize, the Hohokam developed all of the area of not only the Salt River through Phoenix, but parts of the Santa Cruz River. They came down the Gila River past Gila Bend. And if you go to Gillespie Dam, that whole area was covered by Hohokam sites. The Hohokam basically were even up on the Hassayampa. The Hohokam were very advanced. They came up from Mexico with a culture that had found a location in Arizona that met with their irrigation needs. All along the Gila River and past Gila Bend, almost to Yuma, you'll find signs of the Hohokam.

NC Okay, let's shift now to some outside activities. I know St. Vincent de Paul is near and dear to your heart. Would you tell us about your early interest and your activities with St. Vincent de Paul?

FB I've been with St. Vincent de Paul for almost thirty years now, over thirty years probably. And I've found something that is near and dear to my heart because one of their unwritten goals is no form of charity is foreign to St. Vincent de Paul. If there's a need and people are suffering in poverty, we find a way to provide them with assistance. I'm also the immediate past president of St. Vincent de Paul. I wrote the book, *The History of St. Vincent de Paul in Phoenix*. And again, St. Vincent de Paul here in Phoenix is the largest, most successful branch in the world. St. Vincent de Paul is not just a U.S. phenomenon, it's all over the world. We're in 150 countries throughout the world and the most successful in the entire world is here in Phoenix, Arizona.

NC How is it funded?

FB It's funded many ways. Part of it is through donations by people. But also, major companies donate money. I don't know if you know much about the funding that comes from the large companies, but they're very careful who they fund. And if you provide a service that's effective and reaches the people and does what it says it's doing, you can get corporate assistance. St. Vincent de Paul has been very effective. A good part of our success has been Steve Zabilski who was CEO of our St. Vincent de Paul for many years. And now his replacement is Shannon Clancy who is carrying on the legacy of Steve. Again, if they look at things like how much are we paying the director? We would try to increase Zabilski's salary. He would refuse to take it because he was so dedicated to what they were doing and wanted every cent to be spent on helping the poor. We used to be known for feeding. But today because of the homeless crisis, we're getting involved in actually housing many of the poor. Many people like to say they are holding money for rainy days. There are no rainy days with St. Vincent. Today is a rainy day and we have the money. We use it and we spend to help people.

NC What do you think about the idea of Phoenix cleaning up the area downtown where the homeless are? Taking out their tents and cleaning out that area.

FB One of the most difficult issues in Phoenix is the homeless. And I wish I could go into my pocket and pull out and say here's the answer. I don't know what the answer is. But people who have sued the city say it's hurting their business, which it probably is. They have reason to sue. But then again, what has a homeless person done that you can just arrest 'em? You can't. So, what do you do? What St. Vincent de Paul is trying to do right now is save lives, maybe renting hotel rooms, getting people out of the heat, giving them water. Those that maybe have income, but it's not enough to survive, find 'em a home that they can afford. Those without work, find jobs for 'em. We are in the process of doing that; but also in that group are addicts, and people who don't want to get off the street. So, you've got this conglomerate of different types of people that are out there. If you were in Nazi Germany during World War II, I can tell you what would've happened. They'd be dead within an hour of being homeless. But that's not what we do in the United States. We try to find a solution to the issue and it's difficult. It's very difficult. We've got some good people, including St. Vincent de Paul, that are working to try to help those that can be helped. Those that can't be helped, maybe keep 'em alive somehow.

NC I know that through your work with St. Vincent de Paul, you became really interested in the Kino Border Initiative?

FB Correct.

NC Could you tell us about that?

FB Kino Border Initiative is run by Jesuits Internationally. Mexicans and Americans came together, and the Jesuits put it together. Basically, it started as an organization for when the United States catches undocumented immigrants. They take them to the border and drop them off into Mexico. They enter Mexico without money, without food, without anything. Kino Border Initiative is a service to provide them with food and medical attention, and to provide a woman's shelter for women who have been raped, women that had to leave their children back home. Again, I'm not the only one, but there were several of us that came together when we found out about Kino Border Institute, and we went to help them as best we could. We did a fundraiser here in Phoenix for them. And got them quite a bit of money. They just recently finished a brand-new facility in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico to provide everything under one roof. Where before you had the clinic, the feeding center and the women's shelter all in different locations, now we just finished the building in Mexico that houses all three services under one roof. Of course, the immigration problem continues in so many ways and it's not just an Arizona problem, it's a worldwide problem. And again, I wish I could say I have a solution, but I don't. It's poverty. The high cost of everything is driving people who used to be able to take care of themselves, into trying to move from one country into another.

NC And how is the initiative funded?

FB Their head of the program is a woman right now, Joanna Williams. But before that it was Father Sean Carroll. I often make a comparison to of him to Father Kino on horseback except the director is in a car at every waking hour trying to find funding for their programs. They go all over the United States. They give presentations at Catholic masses, and other facilities. And then they have fundraisers. They have one in Phoenix and in Tucson and they actually have one in Mexico to try to get funding to allow them to continue to do what they're doing.

NC Another one of your interests I know has been Pioneer and Military Historical Park. What made you get interested in that?

FB: Well, again, my interest lies in history of Arizona. And I've recently found out I have relatives buried in the Pioneer Cemetery. We often poo-poo cemeteries as those people that are dead. But that's our history. Those are the people that founded Phoenix or part of Arizona, and many of our founders are buried in the Pioneer Cemetery. The City of Phoenix owns two cemeteries. They own the Pioneer Cemetery and what they call Cementerio Lindo; both of them are off of 15th Avenue. One is at 15th Avenue and the Interstate. The other is 15th Avenue and Jefferson, which is the Pioneer Cemetery. But one of them is the indigent cemetery –the one on I-17. But keep in mind these were poor people, but they contributed to Arizona. They were part of the history of Arizona.

NC Tell us about how the park is organized. There were small plots, small blocks of cemeteries that came together?

FB Oh, yeah. We find out there's a lot of cemeteries out there that are unregulated and not taken care of. There's Crosscut Cemetery on East Van Buren in which I think there's 40 bodies buried there. Nobody takes ownership. There is a fence around it, but we have trouble trying to keep it clean. We just recently came across what they call the Sotelo-Heard Cemetery, in which are buried 308 bodies of Mexican Americans, workers for the Heard Cattle Company. Heard had a big cattle ranch in South Phoenix. I've been working with Pioneer Cemetery Association trying to protect that cemetery and get some of the respect that these people deserve, as well as research names of the buried bodies. Right now, you could go out there and it looks like a vacant lot, no headstones, no nothing. But yet these were people that were part of the history of Phoenix. We're trying now to get a fence around it and protect it because of the heritage that these people provided for Phoenix.

NC But back to the Pioneer Historical Park, comprised of several family cemeteries and the Knights of Pythias?

FB There were seven different groups that are buried there. What was done at the early turn of the

19th century was, you belonged to an organization, and they would say, “Okay, you pay your membership, and when you die, we’ll bury you.” It was an early type of burial insurance. Knights of Pythias was an example of one. Today we have Knights of Columbus and other groups. Back then these groups liked to wear uniforms and hats like the Masons. Masons are another group. And they all had secret ceremonies. But they also provided – if you were a member of the Masons, Knights of Pythias, and other similar organizations, and you paid your dues while you were alive, then when you were dead, they would provide you with a grave in their plot. Many of those graves at Pioneer Cemetery fall into that category of these private organizations. The Masons were one of the most popular.

NC Some families, too. Weren’t there some large family plots that were taken into the cemetery?

FB Right. There were two general cemeteries there that were open to the public. It is interesting that in these general cemeteries, in death there was segregation. If you go to some cities in Arizona, blacks were not allowed to be buried with whites. But we have a black buried in one of our cemeteries at Pioneer. We have a lot of Chinese that are buried there. In fact, many of the headstones are written in Chinese and you have to bring in somebody who understands Chinese. But some of ‘em are in symbols that are no longer used. So even some of the Chinese have trouble translating the name that’s on the grave. But in general, the organization such as the Knights of Columbus, Knights of Pythias and the Masons kept more detailed records. But in general, you can go there, and you see the Chinese headstones and one black soldier buried there. We have a military area also, with many of the confederate soldiers that died. They buried ‘em in the military cemetery.

NC That’s a good protection of history. Now on a different subject, the community has honored you many times, I know, with many, many awards. Is there any particular award that stands out to you?

FB Well, there’s a couple. I think Hon Kachina Volunteer Award was a big one. The Valle del Sol award for Profiles in Courage, I think it’s called, just occurred last year. And there was another history type – I can’t think of the name of it. They identified a hundred people who were all involved in saving the history and culture of the state.

NC Culture Keepers?

FB Culture Keepers, that award. And, of course, the award I’m getting today is very high up on my list—Historical League’s Historymaker. I am very, very humbled to be selected, probably the most important award I’ll be getting.

NC That’s nice to hear. Now, what motivated you to write books?

FB I did a contract with several entities. City of Phoenix let three contracts out on properties that were important to minorities. One was properties that were important to the Hispanic community, one that was important to the Oriental community, and one that was important to the black community. I put in with several scholars to do the contract for Hispanic services or properties. It took about a year, and we collected pictures. We collected data. We collected a lot of things. When it was done, I said I've got all this data, and they've signed off on the use of this property, why not put out a book of what I've collected? And that's what I did. Plus, my family took a lot of pictures in 1915 of the Gold Alley area which was a Mexican community.

NC It was right downtown, too.

FB Right where Chase Field is today. Right where you pay your ticket to go into Chase Field, right there is where my mother was born and where she was raised. And that was a (they didn't call it a barrio) Hispanic area. And then, of course, the railroad came in and it became very commercial from that point forward. So, I put it together; but at the same time, I had two other scholars that did the same thing for other parts. Dr. José Burrell's for the Mexicans of Scottsdale and Dr. Santos Vega did one on the Mexicans at Tempe. And I did the Mexicans of Phoenix. And we put the three books out together. The last book I just finished in probably the first part of 2022, was a history of the Phoenix St. Vincent de Paul. I actually wasn't planning on doing it; but the problem is with any organization and its history, as you're sitting there, people are dying and there goes their history. Why not do something while they're alive and you can interview 'em, find out what occurred and put together an accurate history of what occurred? I was trying to get somebody to do it and I had trouble; so finally, I said, the hell with it, I will do it myself. And I did. I sat down and I had access to all the records of St. Vincent de Paul and the people there helped me. I interviewed many of the people that in a few years probably will be gone. And many of 'em are gone. But that's important. Ten, twenty years from now, I expect St. Vincent de Paul will still be here, but there'll be very few of the old timers, the people that started it, still with us. I also did another book with Dr. Vega. It isn't actually a book. It was more like a pamphlet. It was called *The History of Chicanos Por La Causa*.

NC Were you active in Chicanos Por La Causa?

FB No I wasn't. But my father was very active with LULAC and with other organizations, but not with CPLC. CPLC is a genre of people that are all about the same age that started CPLC. Ronny Lopez, Joe Eddie Lopez, Chris Marin, Alfredo Gutierrez, Art Othon, those people were all going to school at ASU when they started Chicanos Por La Causa. A small group of them started it and the only one that fell out of sight of the student group was Terry Cruz. She was an older woman that just loved what they were doing, and they even named one of the buildings after her. She just passed away a couple of years ago.

NC If someone were to write a book about you, what would you like the title to be?

FB “One of Many.” So many people die every day that really gave their all – that did wonderful work. When you have a spotlight and you pick one person, which is appreciated, it always is a good thing. But you’re putting the spotlight on one person. But just know that there’s a whole array of people out there that are also doing good things that they will live their life and die and there’ll be no spotlight on them. So, I like to think yes, I am very appreciative, humbled that I get the spotlight put on me. I also tell people no. There’s a lot of people out there who never get that spotlight and deserve recognition for the good work they’re doing.

NC Your 15 minutes of fame. *[laughs]*

FB Exactly.

NC What kind of future do you see for the Mexican community in Arizona in general? Because our state is becoming more and more populated by Latinos.

FB I make this comparison. Diversity, diversity, diversity. It’s important because too many people want to go back to days before diversity. Well, look at Arizona. There’s an example of diversity. You have the high mountain peaks, the pine trees, Ponderosa Pines, you have the low deserts, the canyons, the waterways. Arizona is fantastic, probably the most beautiful state in the union and it’s because it’s diverse. I always remember, there’s a time of the year when Arizona used to have the hottest and coldest spot in the nation, in the same state. That’s because of its diversity and its all of the things that were part of the diversity. Well, it works with people too. Look at the Native Americans. They don’t necessarily get along with each other, but you have all these different races of Native Americans. You have the blacks. You have the Mexicans, and Mexican Americans. You have the Oriental. But that is the strength of Arizona. They can come together, and they all contribute to what can be the state of Arizona. Instead of burning crosses in front of their lawns or something, we ought to embrace diversity and whether you like it or not, that is the future of the world. Just look everywhere where you have people crossing borders all over the place. Didn’t used to be that way, but today with all the things we’ve got, we’ve got to learn to accept diversity. May not like all of the things that diversity brings, but it is coming. And it could be the benefit of all of us to accept it, rather than say, no, only my people, my way is the only way. That will lead to disaster. Look at Adolf Hitler and the Jews. There’s an example of what not to do. But yet, diversity, diversity, diversity. I think 20, 30 years from now, we’re gonna be a very different community, a very diverse community and there’s nothing wrong with diversity; both in the scenic area, but with people also. It can benefit us.

NC That’s a good statement. What do you have as advice for future generations?

FB Well, the very thing I just said is that future generations are gonna look a lot different than it does today. And it can be a positive thing if you embrace it and respect people for who they are. They may not agree with the way you do things, and they do things a little different. But respect ‘em for their culture and who they are. I always would give an example. Again, I always go to history, but the Yaqui Indians came from Mexico. They were being put upon by the Mexican government. The United States gave ‘em land here in Arizona to live; the place was outside of Tempe called Guadalupe. I always remember as a kid, the Yaquis were Catholic, but they also embraced their culture within Catholicism. And every Good Friday, they would tie a straw Judas to a pole, and they would burn him. Sort of an Indian tradition. But again, many people said they shouldn’t be burning people. That’s wrong. But again, people would come from all over the Valley to see this, what would you call it?

NC Re-enactment?

FB Re-enactment of their process. And what’s interesting, too, is their kids don’t necessarily follow that. The one thing I’ve always found out is that once you have a change with people and different cultures coming in, that next generation is gonna be different from their parents. Finally, the final generation usually in the United States, means their first language will be English with respect for the legacy of their family. But they have created a new genre, a new culture. And that’s not bad. That’s not bad and we gotta embrace that as we go forward.

NC As one last statement, what do you feel is your legacy? What would you like to be most remembered for?

FB Well, I probably more than anything, my love of Arizona. If I’d have been married, I wouldn’t have divorced my wife over the Grand Canyon, but my love of the state of Arizona is really strong. I go back to being one of many. I’d like to see people be more accepting of people that do good work and not just always try to find something negative when people are trying to do something good. I’ll give you an example. How many people out there when they see a homeless person, tell ‘em to get a job? Well, there’s a million reasons why they don’t have a job. But maybe look into it and find out. Often if they could, they could get a job. But there’s no job that will pay enough to keep them off the street, things like that. But again, I like to think that each of us can take a humorous look at things positively and try to change the world, if you can, in a small way. I’m not gonna make big changes out of Washington or anything like that, especially now where I’m old. But you like to think that every day you live, you can enact – do something that helps change the world a little bit. And always keep that positive attitude. Negativity takes you down a dark, dreary road that nobody wants to be on.

NC Thank you, that’s a wonderful way to sum up.

[END OF RECORDING]