

Albuquerque Museum Oral History Project

February 10, [2003??]

Charles Aguilar

This interview begins with the subject talking about his knowledge of and involvement in the Matachines dances done in the Town of Bernalillo, New Mexico. Mr. Aguilar also talks about his long involvement with Bernalillo Public Schools and the local government. There is no information identifying the interviewer or the date. Based on Mr. Aguilar's comment that he had entered his fourth term as mayor "last March," the presumed year of the interview is 2003.

*Keywords/topics:* Matachines, Town of Bernalillo, santos, Filimon Aguilar, Charlie Carrillo, San Lorenzo, Town of Bernalillo water and sewer system, Bernalillo Public Schools, Carlos Aguilar

Interviewer: "It's February tenth, and I'm here with Charles Aguilar. Take it away."

Aguilar: "Okay. My name is Charles Aguilar. I was born in Bernalillo. (coughs) And I've been fortunate enough to live my whole life in the Town of Bernalillo. I had a family—my mom and dad, and I had a brother, and then we were blessed with my grandfather living with us. And so that's how, I guess, the tradition of San Lorenzo developed in our family because from the very first time I remember seeing my grandfather, he was participating—he used to play the music for the Matachines dance that is done in Bernalillo in August. The celebration begins the first Sunday of July, and practice starts every Sunday in July. And then the novena starts August first and goes through the ninth. Then on the ninth is the vespers of the feast because the Feast of San Lorenzo is the tenth, and we celebrate that with dances, with a Matachines dance on the ninth, tenth, and eleventh. And so, from the earliest recall that I have in my life, I grew up with that tradition of San Lorenzo in August. The other thing that I grew up with is the tradition of celebrating the feast of Saint Anthony at the Pueblo of Sandia, and uh, I would travel, or walk there with my grandfather. It's about a three mile walk to the south of Bernalillo, and we would walk there and participate in the feast of Saint Anthony on June the thirteenth. And my grandfather played violin, played trumpet, and played guitar, and in his life he visited a lot of communities to play for baptisms, weddings, and so that was the other way that I visited Sandia Pueblo because he would provide music for some of their celebrations for First Communions, baptisms, weddings. And then of course the June thirteenth. But anyway, at the age of eight my grandfather decided that I was old enough to start learning to play the guitar because his plan was that I would learn to play the guitar and accompany him in playing for the San Lorenzo fiesta. And so every day after school, when I'd get home from elementary school he would make sure that we practiced every day. And so, by the time I was eleven, that was my first year that I played for the San Lorenzo fiesta, and I have been playing since then. I'm fifty-six right now, so (laughs)"

I: "Wow."

A: "It's been about a forty-four, forty-five year tenure playing for San Lorenzo. So now I play violin. I started out with guitar. But because of his failing eyesight, when he was about 80, he needed cataract surgery, and we had a problem because the procession for San Lorenzo on the ninth and on the tenth goes through the main street in Bernalillo, which is Camino de Pueblo, and we would take the saint in procession from the center of town to the church, which is about a two mile walk, and uh, he couldn't see to walk, so he could play, you know, the tunes while sitting, but the procession was going to be a problem, so I told him that I had memorized by watching him, how to play the music for the procession, and so we practiced that for a few days and around 1965, sixty-eight—around there—I started playing violin for that procession. And then later on, until his death, we took turns playing violin and guitar for the practices. Because when I got tired on the guitar, I'd give him the guitar, and he'd give me the violin, and we were able to play together for, oh, a good, well since fifty-eight, but to be able to exchange instruments, a good fifteen years. Because, um, he passed away at the age of eighty-nine, and he played all the way till, uh, that time, till eighty-nine, he was able to play the violin. So, uh that's been my involvement with the Matachines. I've also been very lucky to have been able to go to the Folk Life Festival in Washington, D.C. [5:00] In 1992, in 1991, the Smithsonian came here and recorded the fiesta and went back to, um, to put together a display of and a— We were chosen to go and be part of the Folk Life Festival of 1992, and we spent two weeks there participating in the, in the festival. And then I've been lucky enough to go back three other times. The last project is the, uh, the Smithsonian display—it's going to be a traveling exhibit that's going to talk about the Rio Grande, the Rio Grande, Rio Abajo, Rio Bravo area, and it extends from Mexico City, or from Mexico all the way to Colorado, where the Rio Grande originates. And what it's covered is all the customs that are along the Rio Grande, and the Matachines were chosen as one of the dances that is performed. In many communities it used to be, but right now I think there's only about three or four communities that have them on a yearly basis. Some of the pueblos have them, but they're just for special occasions, and uh they're not done every year, so— And Hispanic communities—and like I said, I think there's about three or four that are still doing that, so."

I: "Can you tell me about the history—"

A: (coughs)

I: "Can you tell me like why is, why is San Lorenzo the day that's celebrated? Like can you tell me—"

A: "Well—"

I: "—the history of that a bit?"

A: "The history in the community is that um, when the Pueblo Revolt in 1680 took place, the Hispanics that were living here were—they got along well with the pueblo people that were living in the area, and before the revolt took place, they had set eleven days for the revolt to start, and they were being counted on a rope with eleven knots on it. And every day that went by they took another knot off the rope. And just before the revolt was to start, where there were a lot of Hispanics—" (phone rings in background)

I: “Okay.”

A: “So, um, the agreement among the pueblos is when they got to the last knot on the rope then the revolt would start, and people in Bernalillo area were warned that there was going to be a revolt, so a lot of the people went south and went to a place called Isleta del Sur, and um, there in Isleta del Sur they celebrate San Lorenzo. And then a few years back I was talking to one of the parish priests that we had here, and he did some research through the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, and it was discovered that there was a Mass said in Mexico City for the safe return of the people from New Mexico that were in Isleta del Sur, so we think that the people that came back after the Pueblo Revolt brought with them the celebration of San Lorenzo. Not only that, the Pueblo Revolt took place August ninth, uh, August tenth.”

I: “Mm.”

A: “And so with the, uh, their safe arrival at Isleta del Sur and living there with the Feast of San Lorenzo being still celebrated there, we feel that they brought that back from there, but there’s a big question, or uh, there isn’t anything to document where we got the dance from. And um about four years ago there was a family from Spain that were visiting here, and um—let’s go back a little ways. In the life of San Lorenzo—San Lorenzo’s a martyr. He was one of the first seven deacons of the Roman church. He was born in Huesca, Spain, and uh, how he got to Rome and became a deacon, I don’t know, but his assignment as a deacon was to take care of the poor and the widowed, and um, so, anyway. In Huesca they still celebrate the Feast of Saint Lawrence on the tenth of August, and a few years back there was a family [10:00] from Spain in the area because their son was going to school at UNM [University of New Mexico] and they met our parish priest, and he told them there was going to be a celebration for August the tenth, and since they were away from Spain, they wanted to celebrate the Feast of Saint Lawrence when they got here. And they saw some of the costumes that are worn by the Matachines. There was so much of a resemblance of what they do in Spain and what we do here that they went back and told people about what was going on here in New Mexico with the celebration of Saint Lawrence. And um, so their son came back and took pictures and went back, and they did a photo comparison of the two feasts, of the two celebrations, and there’s a lot that seems to be, uh, from Spain. And this individual that just called me on the telephone, he is from that area of Zaragoza, which is by Huesca, and uh, he knows of the Feast of San Lorenzo in Huesca. And so we’re trying to research some more and find out, you know, just exactly what, uh, how it could have traveled to this area. The other thing that he’s—he’s not only studying musical instruments, but there are some words that are still used in New Mexico that some New Mexico people call it slang, but they’re the old Spanish that have survived in New Mexico, and it’s survived by word of mouth because it is not written. You can probably find it in a lot of the books that were written by the Hermanos del Nuestro Padre de Jesús, which a lot of people call the Penitentes, but it was a society—a brotherhood—of men that led communities in prayer when there were no priests in the area because the Pueblo Revolt—a lot of Franciscans died, and so the church was out of here for a while. And then they came under the, under the direction of the French, and then uh, we had more priests, you know. And Bishop Lamy, which was our first archbishop for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe—when he came, he was against the Hermandad because there was a lot

of superstition and a lot of fallacies about just exactly what the Penitentes were. But the Penitentes were just a group of people that led their community in prayer when the priests were absent.”

I: “Mm-hm.”

A: “The Matachines—let’s get back to the Matachines, and in Bernalillo there is a well-known tradition that if you want to participate in the Matachines, people that participate in the Matachines have made a *promesa*, which is a commitment to San Lorenzo to dance, to be a participant in his fiesta for—some people make the commitment for five years; some have made a commitment for ten years, twenty years. So people are allowed to fulfill those commitments, those *promesas*, by the *majordomo* because the *majordomo* system is something also that came down from Spain. It’s a system whereby people are not elected to be *majordomos*, they ask for the privilege of being the one to take care of the santo. And so the *majordomo* is the one that’s in charge of all the function, which starts on August the eleventh, when the santo is taken to their home, and in song the santo is given to the family for the following year, and so they accept responsibility of um, having the Rosary every tenth of every month in their home. They open their home to the community for a Rosary at seven o’clock. That’s another thing that I do, is lead that Rosary, and that devotion for San Lorenzo in the community. So that happens every tenth of every month except August tenth when we have the Mass and the feast day. But, so they make a commitment to open their homes on the tenth of every month. They also make a commitment to organize the ninth, tenth, and eleventh to make sure that those three days—that the observance of the feast takes place, and what it entails is they arrange for a Mass on the tenth. They also, on the ninth, they have the dances at the home, which um, the Matachines consist of eight dances that are performed at the home. And then after the performance of the Matachines dance, [15:00] the saint is taken in procession, in a walking procession, to the church and then vespers takes place around seven o’clock in the evening, and then, um, the next morning Mass takes place at ten—nine thirty or ten—and then the procession back to the home of the *majordomos*, uh, will follow. And then the *majordomos* will feed anyone that is there at their home. On the ninth, tenth, and then on the eleventh they have what we call the *entrega??* which is a ceremony that’s done in verse where the people that have participated in the fiesta are given back to their families because they have completed that year of their promise. And so I usually prepare all the verses. An *entrega* will take anywhere from an hour to an hour and forty-five minutes, and it’s sung, all the time, accompanied by violin, guitar. And everybody that has participated is brought up to the front and everybody acknowledges them. A verse is sung and then a verse giving them back to their parents, to their family, is sung, so each one gets two verses, and we have like thirty-four people that volunteer to do the dance and then we have the four or six little girls that play the part of the Malinche, and then we have two Monarcas—”

I: “Play the part of what?”

A: “The Malinche is a little girl that dances on the side of the Monarca. And she has to be real, uh—between six and nine years old, and her part is to do parts of the dances with the Monarca, and then there’s one that’s done by herself: La Paseada de la Malinche. But, the little girl is about six or seven. And um. So there’s like four little girls that are allowed to be Malinches because for

the procession, they dance from the time they leave the home until they get to the church because we have two groups and when one group is resting the other one's dancing. So the Malinches are moving constantly and so, they get tired at that age—they're not very strong, so the Malinches are given back to their families and then all the other participants—the Abuelos, the Toro, uh, we even sing verses for the cooks who provided the meal for the participants. And then of course there's verses for those that kept the order because we have men that are assigned the job of being Oficial, and they keep order among the crowd. And uh, so, all in all, I would say that you have about sixty some people that are given back to their families in song. After the *entrega* then there's a dance that night on the eleventh, which ends the fiesta. The dances—you have *La Entrada*, which is like the presentation of the group. Here in Bernalillo there's so many people wanting to participate, we have two groups dancing at the same time with the same violin playing. But uh, there's two groups, and uh, the first one is *La Entrada*—the presentation of the group—and then the second is La Cruz. And then the third is *La Moranza??*. *La Moranza* lasts anywhere from eighteen minutes to twenty minutes without stopping, and it's a real confusing dance because the Monarca mixes them all up and then straightens them all out, and then they mix themselves up and straighten themselves out. And so all that time that they're doing that, the violin and guitar are playing, so it's about eighteen minutes without stopping, and then *El Baila?? de la Malinche* is the next one and that's where the Malinches are taken by the Abuelos around the dancers, and then the next dance is *El Baila?? del Toro*, and that's where the bull is faced by everybody—all the participants—and then we go to La Cruz again and then *La Tendida* and *La Patarita*. And the whole performance is a play between good and evil, the Malinche being good, the symbol of good because on the feast day they have to dress in white and they prefer that they dress in white all three days, but, you know, sometimes they want to dress in blue or pink, [20:00] and uh sometimes the *majordomos* allow that on the last day. But usually the ninth and the tenth they're dressed in white, pure white, from head to toe, so that's the dress of the Malinche. The *Danzante* wears what we call a *cupil*, and uh it's a—the front of it has a picture of their favorite saint, their patron saint. Could be San Lorenzo, it could be any saint that they've chosen to be their patron saint. And then the back—there's a lot of ribbons that hang down the back, and then there's a cover for the face because at the time that the Matachines are dancing, their faces are not to be seen by the public. So there's a cover for the eyes, like frill, where they can see out, but you can't see their eyes. And then the face is covered by a, by a, like a handkerchief, a bandana-type thing, so you can't see their faces, so all the time that they're dancing they're not supposed to—you're not supposed to be able to tell who they are because they have made a commitment to the santo and they're fulfilling this commitment. And the *cupil*, if you look at it, it's—it's equivalent to praying hands because it goes to a peak, and then the bottom is where the head fits in it, and the *cupil* is worn by the *Danzante*. The Monarca wears what we call a corona, and there is no saint's pictures or nothing, the corona is made out of just flowers, and—sometimes there's a flower that sticks out of the center, but mostly it's all, it's just round, and that's the corona for the Monarca. You have the other people that I mentioned—the Abuelos, and they carry whips and they dress like older, old men—abuelo means 'grandfather'."

I: "Mm-hm."

A: “But the Abuelos keep order among the dancers, and they have been known to use the whips if people don’t mind what they’re telling them. And they also make sure that people don’t leave the dance and go into the crowds as we’re going in procession. If they get tired, they have to get behind the saint and walk the rest of the distance, but they can’t just jump out of the procession and get in a car and go home or, you know, take off. So, the Abuelos maintain that control there. And then they’re also responsible for the wake that takes place on August the tenth. After the dances, after the Mass, the procession, the dances, and the procession around the old part of town takes place, then all the dancers are assigned an hour to spend with San Lorenzo all night, until the sun rises, and then when the sun rises, *mañanitas* are sung and people can go home and rest for about two and a half hours because the sun rises about six and we start again at eight thirty with the *entrega* festivities, so. So the tenth is a long day for all the participants, then, the eleventh is mostly a celebration. There’s a farewell done at the people that have had the santo. There’s a lot of crying because San Lorenzo’s leaving, and then at the other home there’s a lot of rejoicing because San Lorenzo’s arriving. So there’s a lot of celebration at both after the *entrega* takes place at the old *majordomo*’s home then it’s all, uh, culminated by the dance at night. Because of the *velorio* and because of all the dancing the three days, the dance on the eleventh is not well attended, because everybody’s kind of tired. But there’s people that are dancing, that have been dancing for, some for twenty years, you know? And uh, their participation is vital because some of them know the dance, they can teach the younger ones. And like in most communities a lot of traditions are dying.”

I: “Yeah”

A: “In Bernalillo we have so many kids that want to participate that we had to make up a rule, we had to make up rules to govern just not anybody being able to participate. Because what we did is, um, in order to dance the entire dance, you have to have participated in the, in the procession to the church three years, and you have to be at least fourteen years of age [25:00] because we have enough people I think to get three squads going, but it would be a very big load on the *majordomos* to feed all those people and to provide for everybody it seems. But one of the things that still survives in the community that is kind of unique is that that first Sunday in July not only signals the beginning of the practices, because we have two santos in the community—one of them is a little statue, and the one that moves from home to home is a, is a picture of San Lorenzo. And when the statue and the picture are united on the first Sunday of July, it signals to the people that the *majordomos* will start going to their homes asking for *la limosna* de San Lorenzo. *La limosna* in Spanish, uh, in English, means ‘alms’. And since San Lorenzo was a deacon and gathered money for the poor and the widowed, we gather money to put on the fiesta and so, that’s one of the biggest commitments the *majordomos* make, is that they have to go home to home, and when people answer at the door they just state that they’re there collecting *la limosna* de San Lorenzo. And if people want to donate, they donate. If not, they don’t have to. But most of the people in the community have gotten used to that routine, so they know that the *limosna* will be collected during the month of July. And hopefully it’s all done by the end of July, and that way the *majordomos* can concentrate on the, on the nine nights before the fiesta because they have to have practice every night for the first seven days. And then the eighth day, everything is prepared for the vespers on the ninth, so. But um, it’s a, it’s a real big activity.”

I: “And, are you always playing the instruments? You’re never dancing or do you sometimes—?”

A: “I’ve never danced the dance. I have a, my youngest son is dancing right now.”

I: “Yeah”

A: “I’ve never danced, I’ve, um, I’ve played either guitar or violin.”

I: “Yeah”

A: “All the time.”

I: “All the time, yeah... And, so tell me about, tell me about your children, passing it on to your children.”

A: “Well, like I said my oldest son—he’s thirty-six—and, uh, he learned as a, as a young kid. In fact, the first year he played was in 1979. But we had an uncle that used to dance monarca for the Matachines. And that summer, we were practicing on August the fifth, and my son was playing and stuff, and this uncle suffered a massive heart attack and died. So my son didn’t play from 1979 until... two years ago. And he decided that he would go play the violin again. So now he’s playing the entire, the entire nine dances. And uh, but I don’t know why he didn’t play—I mean, I guess you go through that growing period where you don’t want to be a part of these things, but now he wants to be very much a part of it. And my youngest son three years ago decided that he was going to dance, and he had somebody make him a *palma*, which is a, uh—they use a *palma* in a *guaje??* and the *palma* has three points, it has to be made with three points. And I guess the *palma* is like a shield, and it signifies the three persons in one, the um, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

I: “Mm-hm”

A: “And so the *palma* was made for him, then we went to Old Town and bought a *guaje*. And then he had someone, uh, make him a *cupil*. And, uh, there’s several women here in town that know how to make the *cupiles*, so he had one made, and he danced three years ago. And so, this coming—not this year but the following year—my cousin gets the santo, and he’s going to dance the entire dance, so he’s put in his three years, or would’ve put in his three years, and so he’s all ready for dancing the entire dance. But we have so many young kids that want to participate, and we’re very strict with them because, if they’re not at practice, if they’re not following the guidance of the Abuelos and the people that are teaching them, they either get whipped or they’re sent home, and they can’t participate. So, uh, the only, the only thing that I think is being affected is the language. I’m making an effort to uh, every time that we have the novena, I’m making an effort to translate and get them [30:00] to read it in Spanish. But that’s one of the things that I think the Hispanic community’s losing is the language. As far as the tradition of the San Lorenzo observance and all that, that’s not going to, that’s not going to die out any time soon here because we have so many participants.”

I: “Mm-hm”

A: “My niece also plays the music. She’s about two years younger than my oldest son. And uh, she’s been playing since the eighties, but she’s been playing every year, but she only helps me out the ninth and the tenth. She doesn’t go to the practices. She works and she can’t make the practices, but as long as I—I’m there, and Claude learned to play the music in Washington, D.C. Uh—”

I: “He learned *in* Washington?”

A: (laughs) “Yes.”

I: “He didn’t learn here?”

A: “No. I’ll tell you how that happened—when we were taken to Washington in ninety-two to be in the folk life festival, I asked the Smithsonian if they would pay for a guitarist to go with me, and they said, ‘Oh no, we’re going to have all kinds of musicians in Washington. I mean, there’s all kinds of guitar players—anybody can accompany that music.’ And I said, ‘I don’t think so. But, I’m not going to argue.’ So we went to Washington, and um, they [audio cuts out momentarily around 31:20] He told me right off the bat, he says, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know how to accompany it.’ So I went to the people there at the Smithsonian, I says, ‘You know, Mr. Trujillo, he says he’ll help me out for a couple days, but he really doesn’t know how to accompany it.’ So, so then they asked another guy that was from southern New Mexico, and he listened to the music and he said, ‘No, I don’t know how to accompany that.’ So finally they said, ‘Well, we have another guy.’ And it was Claude, and so I said, ‘Well does he play guitar?’ ‘Yeah, he plays guitar.’ So we met in my room there at the Marriott, and um, I said, ‘This is the music, and this is how I accompany it.’ So, Claude’s been a musician for many years, you know, so he looked at how I was accompanying it, and so he picked up the guitar and uh—. And so he was the one that accompanied me the rest of the time there in Washington. And then when we got back, he said, ‘You know,’ he said, ‘this thing sort of grows on you.’ He says, ‘Could I um, could I be a participant in this in Bernalillo?’ And I said, ‘Sure!’ I said, ‘I’ve got no problem with that.’ Because I have, like, twenty people that go and take their guitars and accompany. But there’s only, well, four violins now. And then Claude said, ‘Well I know how to play violin. Do you mind if I brought a violin and try to pick up some of the tunes?’ I said, ‘No, I don’t have a problem with that.’ So um, he brought his violin and again, like he did the guitar, you know, from hearing and watching. He’s been able to pick up the music. He doesn’t have the time—when I’m absent, when I have to be at a council meeting or for whatever reason, or someone dies in the community, and I have to go do the wake service, he will play for them, and when I come back the next day they say, ‘Hey, we’re glad you’re back because we were going a hundred miles an hour last night because Claude doesn’t have the time, so, but—. So we joke about that, he says, ‘I work them out for you.’ But um. No, he learned from, you know, that association in Washington when he came back, and he’s been participating ever since, since ninety-three.”

I: “Um (pause). Tell me about the other tradition that you were talking about, the wake.”

A: “Okay, in the Spanish community, um, when someone passes away, they have a Rosary, and I’ve been doing this since nineteen...sixty-three. It just so happened that I was a junior in high school, and um, we had a priest that was not—he was not in good health. And so someone

passed away in the community, and um, they needed somebody to lead the Rosary, and so they asked me, and I said, ‘Well, I’ve never done this before.’ There were other people in the community—you probably have heard of Prospero Huaca?? who was a—. He’s considered the last poet of New Mexico. He used to write a lot of songs, ballads, and he used to lead the prayer here in the community for people when they passed away, and then later on there was a man by the name of Francisco Mora. And, they passed away, or they were very old at that time—well, Prospero died in, like, 1960, and Mr. Mora didn’t die until about sixty-eight or sixty-five, but anyway. They were elderly and not doing well, so, they asked me to lead the Rosary that one night—it was in 1963—[35:00] and it was at a home because the Spanish used to have the mortuary, you know, fix them up, and then the wake would be at the home. And then the day of the funeral the body would leave the home to the church for Mass, and then to the burial. And so I did that first Rosary and ever since, people have been calling me to do Rosaries, not only here, but I go to, uh, Peña Blanca, to San Ysidro, all of Sandoval County, Albuquerque, you know. So I’ve been leading the community in prayer for wakes since that time, so, that’s another thing that, that’s part of my life, so. Then a lot of people think, well, ‘Why do you do these things? You’ve been doing them since sixty-three; are you even playing the Matachines since fifty-eight?’ But if those things weren’t part of my life, I don’t think my life would be complete. Because that’s what I’ve known all my life, see? So that’s what makes them, I think, unique and things that I want in my life, you know?”

I: “And how about your, your (pause) role in Bernalillo politically? Could you talk about that?”

A: “Well, I had never gotten involved in politics.”

I: “You were a teacher, you said?”

A: “I um, I taught—well, I started out with the Bernalillo Public Schools, cleaning the buildings in the summer and getting them ready for the kids to go to school, and I was a junior—sophomore in high school—when I started that, but when I graduated from high school, they had a job at the learning materials center and we were responsible for providing all learning materials to Native American students. We used to pass out paper, pencils—anything that was needed. The government would buy these, um, big amounts of learning supplies, and we were to distribute them. So, I went to work with the Bernalillo Public Schools in sixty-four as a learning materials clerk. And at the same time I would go to school during the day, and we would work part time in the evenings and even on Saturdays to put in the time. But anyway, after a year, that program closed, and uh, nothing was available in the district except school bus drivers, so. I had already gotten married, and so I said, um, in 1967 when I was married, I said, ‘I gotta get a job somewhere,’ so, and I wanted to go on to the university, and my wife was working as a beautician. I said, ‘Well. Let me go take the test.’ So I took the test for bus driver, and so that I did for the next nine years.”

I: “Hm”

A: “I drove a school bus, taking the kids to school, and then when I take them to school, I would go to school. Then I’d come back and take them home, and then I would come and have supper, and then I would take the activity bus, which was a bus that would run from Bernalillo to every

pueblo in the district. That route took about three hours in the evening. And so I drove that for nine years, and then after those nine years I graduated from the University of Albuquerque, and I went to teach at the high school. And I taught—I started there in seventy-four—and then um, I had been there like five months, and the superintendent called me and asked me to be the assistant principal for the high school because the assistant had been transferred somewhere. And I said, ‘Well you’ve got other people that have been working here for years. Why not put one of them?’ He said, ‘No, we want you to help us out for a few months. Or maybe it’ll be just a month, but anyway. You’ll be the assistant for a month or whatever time it takes to find somebody.’ So I was assistant for about a month and a half, and then they hired another person. And then later that year, they transferred him somewhere else, and they put me back in as assistant. And um, so anyway, after that stint there as assistant, the board—some of the board members—said, ‘Well, if you go get your administrative credentials, we’ll get you into administration.’ So I went part time to school, and by 1979 I had my master’s in educational administration from UNM. And I came back, and I was appointed assistant principal at the high school, and I was assistant principal until 1982. In eighty-two they asked me to take the mid school, as principal. So I was principal there from eight-two until eighty-six. No—eighty-two to eighty-eight, principal at the mid school. And then in eighty-eight they had a [40:00] new board election and so forth, and the board asked me to go back to the classroom. So I went back to the classroom, and then in 1991, they went and asked me, ‘Well, we’re going to reopen this other site that had been abandoned by the district.’ There was nothing but old buildings and everything was falling apart and everything, and they said, ‘Would you go back there and help us get the staff involved in the remodeling and everything? We want to start a K through two program there. Would you be willing to be the principal for K through 2?’ I said, ‘Sure.’ So in 1990 I—no, about ninety-two—I went to work as the principal at Roosevelt, and in ninety-six I retired, after thirty-two years with the district.”

I: “Wow.”

A: “So, but then uh—I had never gotten involved with city politics until 1990 because in this area where I live, we didn’t have city water or wastewater—there was no, uh, sewer lines, no nothing to this area, so. In eighty-eight, eighty-nine we started asking if they would consider getting money from the state to put the sewer and water to this area because there was so many more homes. See, when I was a kid, we were like, there was like three homes on this side of the tracks, and the rest were alfalfa fields and little farms that people would work here in the area where I’m at, we only had like three homes. And then in sixty-three, the property that was south of us, which was used by the Bond?? or Bonn?? brothers to raise a lot of feed for cattle—they would plant sorghum, and they would plant corn, and all that would be ground up for silos for the winter for animals, and they decided that they would sell that piece of land because they weren’t that big into the cattle raising and sheep raising. And so they sold it and subdivided it, and they started putting trailers there. And everybody had a septic tank, and I mean, it was getting contaminated in the area, so—”

I: “Mm”

A: “We went and asked if they would consider, you know, getting some money from the state to put in the sewer and so forth and then finally in ninety I decided, ‘No, I’m going to run for the council then I’m on there, then I can get something.’ And so, in 1990 I ran for the council, and I was councilman until 1994. But from ninety to ninety-four we got a sizeable amount of money—two million dollars to put the water and sewer to this side. But the first, the first amount that we were given wasn’t enough to do the whole thing, so we were going to phase it. And the mayor at the time who was my cousin said, ‘No, no, no, I’m not going to phase it. I don’t want to do it for one group and not do it for the other group.’ And I said, ‘We don’t have money to do it for everybody, so let’s phase it.’ And he said, ‘No.’ So there we were sitting on some money that could be used for the wastewater and water on this side. And he wouldn’t move on it because he didn’t want to make enemies with one group and then so forth, so in ninety-four, I decided to run for mayor. And I went and I told him—because he was running again, he was the incumbent. I said, ‘I’m not running against you, but I’m running because this needs to be done, and you’ve been sitting on that money—we’re going to lose it.’ And I said, ‘So, uh.’ He said, ‘Fine, go ahead and run. I’m the incumbent, and I don’t think you can beat the incumbent.’ And so anyway, there was five of us that ran for the position of mayor, and I came out on top with 500 votes, and uh, that was a lot of votes for that position, there being five people running. And so anyway, in ninety-four I became mayor, and I’ve been mayor—this is my third term, I just won last March.”

I: “How many—what’s the population of Bernalillo?”

A: “We have about seven thousand two hundred people. But—”

I: “And what was the population when you were growing up?”

A: “Well...I would say that it was probably under two thousand.”

I: “Hm”

A: “It was a very small community. Actually, the Town of Bernalillo underwent major, uh...destruction, and I’m going to say ‘destruction’ because I didn’t agree with it, but I was in high school, I didn’t have a, a voice, you know, and uh. But anyway, the Town of Bernalillo was a two, two one-way, uh, street. (pause) It was the old highway, it was just one lane going in one direction and one going the other direction, and it wound through the town, and uh...there was a number of cottonwood trees along the way? And all the buildings that you see now have been cut back like, [45:00] uh twenty, well maybe about fifteen feet. But all those buildings were—they stuck more into the road and they all had *portales*; you could walk from one end of town under these *portales*, you know.”

I: “Ohh”

A: “And it was like a little Western community—”

I: “Ohh”

A: “—on both sides they had, like, *viga* extensions and there was *portales* from one end of the, the business area there from the little standard station to the light, it was all one big area there.

And the leaders at the time thought that if they widened it to four lanes, that it would bring a lot of the people from the interstate into Bernalillo, but it never has, you know. I think our biggest attraction in Bernalillo right now is the Range Café downstairs—downtown. And so, uh, we get a lot of people for the, for La Casita when it opens—it's open Tuesday through Saturday. And then Abuelita's is open every day. But, uh, the biggest draw is the Range, and um. (pause) But we used to have a, um, a clothing store where the hardware store is now—that used to be clothing, hardware, and groceries. And that was run by the Seligman family. But it just started drying up. The other thing that was a real big driving force here was the sawmill because there used to be a lot of logging that went on in Jemez area, and all the logs would come in to Bernalillo, and they would be cut, and all the lumber would be piled and uh—we even had a pond where they would drop the logs, and then they would be moved by men into the mill so they could be cut and sawn, you know? So in the late sixties that dried up too. The Gallaghers?? decided to sell out, and so the lumberyard was gone, and so that took about a couple of hundred jobs that people had that lived in the community, worked there, they never left town, you know? So—”

I: “A lot of people now that live out here, do they work in Albuquerque?”

A: “Well, uh, in the late fifties, after the war, when Sandia Base, Kirtland Base opened—Kirtland was the first one, in the late fifties. Even my own dad went to work as a security guard at Kirtland, and uh, most of the people here went to work either as custodians, guards, in the commissary as meat cutters. A lot of people from here went to work at the base. And then after Sandia Base opened, well then, they transferred over there, a lot of them transferred to different technical jobs. So, we really don't have any industry in the town. We're getting a couple of people that are—there's the Martinez trailer manufacturing, they're in a new little industrial area off of the interstate, and that has a few jobs. We have Syntex?? They put out a lot of board, you know, for building homes and stuff, but if the building industry slows down then that slows down.”

I: “Mm-hm”

A: “So—”

I: “Are there still a lot of—is there still a lot of farming going on?”

A: “Very little farming. I have the, the three acres in the back—I raise alfalfa for, you know, for sale here to the local people that still have their horses they ride. And on Sunday—or some of them have ranches out in San Luis, Cuba area, but they need a horse to go check on the cattle and stuff. So I raise, um, about a thousand maybe, eight hundred to a thousand bales in a summer, and sell them right here locally. I don't even have to go out and pick them up, I just have it cut, baled, and people come and pick it up themselves, and it's gone. But my grandfather used to raise a lot of vegetables. We used to have fruit trees, and that's what my son and I are working to do is to put back an orchard.”

I: “Ohh”

A: “Because we used to have our own apples and cherries and quince and, you know, pears—”

I: “Wow”

A: “But those trees, they were from the late, well, the early fifties is when they were planted, and they don’t last [50:00]—they’ve started dying off, so we’re cutting them up and getting rid of them because they’re too old.”

I: “Do all of your—I don’t know how many kids you have—do they all live here still?”

A: “Well, I had three boys. I lost one in a car accident.”

I: “Oh”

A: “But I have two, and one of them works for UPS [United Parcel Service], and he lives up on a piece of property I have up at the top, right next to the property that we’ve lived in for, um, my entire life. He’s living there, and my other son bought a trailer and put in there too, so.”

I: “Oh, okay, so that’s—”

A: “But my other son works at the casino at Sandia. He’s a craps dealer, so, he’s the one that started doing the, uh, the wood carving.”

I: “Mm-hm. Yeah, tell me about that a little bit. How did that evolve for him?”

A: “Well—”

I: “How old is he?”

A: “He is twenty-six.”

I: “Oh okay, so there’s a big—”

A: “But two years ago, um, two years ago he, after the fiestas in August, he came and he said, um—because we have a cousin Filimon Aguilar who is famous for his carving—but here’s another guy okay? Let me tell you about my cousin first. He spent his whole life as a beautician, cutting hair, fixing hair. And then, um, he’s going to retire, and the kids ask him that Christmas before he retires, ‘Dad, what do you want for Christmas?’ ‘Oh,’ he says, ‘get me an old buck knife. I think I’m going to start carving.’ And they thought, you know, That’s a great joke, you know. I mean, this guy has been cutting hair all his life—what is he going to carve? So they said, ‘Are you sure?’ ‘Yeah, get me a good buck knife. I want to start carving.’ So, he went, he retired, and then he started looking at different woods, and he had been reading about the different people that did santos in northern New Mexico, so he went and visited a couple of them, and sat with them, and found out how they made their natural paints and everything, from flowers that they found out in the open and stuff and the—. So, then he started making a crucifix, that was his first project. And, so then after that, he just started carving all kinds of things, and I didn’t even know he was a wood carver until I went to Washington in 1992, and they set up like a little miniature Old Town on the Mall. And they had santeros, tin workers, saddle makers, boot makers, all kinds of weaving and um—they had all this set up over there, and Charlie Carrillo, who you’ve probably heard of, in the state, I was introduced to him when we got there, and he says, ‘How come you didn’t bring your *primo*?’ I said, ‘What *primo*?’ He said, ‘Your *primo*, he’s

famous for santos.’ I said, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know who you’re talking about.’ He said, ‘You don’t know Filimon Aguilar?’ I said, ‘Yeah! He lives right there in Bernalillo.’”

I: (laughs) “He lives right here! [somewhat hard to understand]”

A: “He’s famous—. He lives right here, and I hadn’t gone to his house to see his santos or anything. So anyway, two years ago my son says, ‘Dad, you want to do me a favor?’ I said, ‘What, what do you want?’ He says, ‘Well, would you go with me to my cousin Filimon’s, to my uncle Filimon’s? To see if he’ll teach me how to do some carving?’ I said, ‘Well he’s not your uncle.’ I said, ‘He’s your cousin, and uh, why—what do you mean carving?’ He says, ‘Yeah, I think I can do carving.’ So I said, ‘Well, let’s go!’ You know, so I said, ‘You call him and ask him if we can go talk to him.’ So sure enough we went over there in the afternoon, and my cousin, he’s very direct, you know, he—and he’s always on task, and so he told my son, he says, ‘Sure! I’ll help you,’ he said, ‘as long as you don’t waste my time, because I don’t want to waste my time. I want to do work, and I do work here every day, and I don’t want to waste my time. If you’re coming here just because you think it’s fun, it’s not fun. It’s a lot of work, but if you’re willing to do this, I’ll help you. I want to teach people how to do this. So my son said, ‘Sure!’ you know. So he told him, he says, ‘You order this set of knives, and when you have all this, then give me a call and we’ll get started.’ So my son came home right away and called a number and ordered the carving knives and everything, and by September he called him, and he said, ‘Okay, I’m ready.’ And he says, ‘Well what date can you come?’ And he says, ‘Well, I’m off on Thursdays.’ He said, ‘That’s fine! Thursday’s a good day.’ So he went for, well, he started in September, and uh, went September, October—I lost my dad that October the thirteenth—and by December he had made his first santo.”

I: “Mm”

A: “And so my cousin says, ‘You know,’ he says, ‘this kid really doesn’t need me. I don’t know, I mean, I sit with him, and we work on things, and I tell him about a book; the next thing I know, he has the book, he’s reading it, you know?’ So anyway, he um, [55:00] my son heard of a—here at Sandia, because my kids go with me to Sandia for a lot of functions there. In fact, I do their wake services too. And that’s very—”

I: “What is that relationship? Is that a relationship between Bernalillo and Sandia or a relationship that has to do with *you*?”

A: “Me”

I: “Okay”

A: “Yeah”

I: “Because you’re, are you, you’re... could you explain that to me?”

A: “Well, the relationship is uh (clears throat), goes back a long time. As I told you, when I first started, my grandfather used to play violin over there for different things. Well, they also dance Matachines there but on a very limited basis. So, I used to go with my grandfather, we played Matachines. So when my grandfather passed away, they also found out that I did the wake

services here in Bernalillo. So in 1965, this girl that I knew died in a car accident, and they asked me to go and do the Rosary there, and I said, 'Okay, I'll go.' So I went and since then, every time somebody passes away at the pueblo, they call me, I go in the evening, do the Rosary, go in the morning, do a Rosary. And then, they don't believe in keeping bodies. If you die today, when the sun rises tomorrow morning, you're buried. And so that's the relationship I have with them. Also, I've been praying for their feast days, Saint Anthony. I know the hymns for Saint Anthony. I know the hymns for San Lorenzo, and I lead them in a procession from the church to the plaza. And so it's a long relationship that we have. So anyway, my son heard—because he works at the casino—that they were building a new church and he said, 'You know dad, I'd like to um, because you've been, you know, working with Sandia for long,' he said, 'I'd like to make them a santo, to give them when they open their new church.' He says, 'Would you go with me, and um, meet with the sacristan?' who is the one that's in charge of the church. I said, 'Yeah!' I said, 'Why don't you give him a call and tell him that we're going, and I'll go with you.' So I went with him, and we met with the sacristan, and he told him, 'I'd like to donate a santo for your dedication of your church.' And they said, 'You're going to make a Saint Anthony?' He said, 'Yeah.' So, he started on that in January, and they had their, their church was finished by the thirteenth of June, and we went over there, and he presented them with a statue of Saint Anthony. And then last Monday he sent a statue of Saint Lawrence to the Smithsonian."

I: "Wow"

A: "So that's his, he has—and then he made this for our thirty-sixth anniversary, and he just came in and presented that to us, and—. I mean, I saw him all the time he was working on it, but uh, he's just really progressed, and my cousin told me, he said, 'This guy doesn't need me to help him anymore, you know?'"

I: "Mm-hm"

A: "And last, when was it? Day before yesterday, I stopped by the casino to see him, and he's presently working on a statue of San Lorenzo for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. Because they're going to ordain sixty-six deacons in July?"

I: "Mm-hm"

A: "And so they asked my son to carve a statue of San Lorenzo. It's going to be eighteen inches tall, and uh—so he's presently working on that. And then he has another contract with another guy that has a statue that's been in their family since the seventeen hundreds, of San Lorenzo—"

I: "Wow"

A: "And he wants a replica made of it because it's really deteriorated. The, uh—it's not wood, it's a plaster of Paris or—. I don't know what kind of a—because I don't know if they had that in the seventeen hundreds, but it's a material that's falling apart. Anyway, he brought the santo, and Carlos measured and took the pictures, and the guy took it back home because Carlos said, 'I don't want to be responsible for keeping it. I'll just call you at different times.' The guy's a professor at Arizona State, so he comes to visit his mother here in Alameda off and on, so, they meet once in a while, and he shows him the parts he's made, so he's duplicating that."

I: “Why do you think that, like, the Matachines and the santero crafts are so strong but the language—why do you think the language is being lost?”

A: “Well I think it’s our fault. I married—my wife is Anglo.”

I: “Oh”

A: “She has lived in the community here [1:00:00] all her life. She can understand Spanish, but she won’t speak it because supposedly I make fun of her, you know? Because of her accent or whatever, but anyway. So all the time that my kids have grown up with us, she won’t speak Spanish to them, and, you know, as a dad, you’re out teaching, you’re out working—”

I: “Mm-hm”

A: “You’re not around the kids that of—that much, you know? Where, in my situation, when my mom and dad married, they both speak Spanish, and my grandmother on my dad’s side said to my mom, ‘You should teach them English because that’s the language they need to function in society.’ And my mom said, ‘No. First they’re going to learn Spanish, and then they can learn English at school.’ And so my mom was very strong on learning to speak Spanish. And with my grandfather being around, I learned to read and write, you know? And so, in Spanish. And so today—I do a lot of readings at the church and stuff—I feel more at ease reading in Spanish, and the Bible in Spanish means a lot more to me than the English, even though I have the English because of having to do readings and stuff in church. But I think it’s because we don’t use it enough, you know?”

I: “Mm-hm”

A: “And I think that’s the fault of everybody who’s losing the language. In fact, some of our pueblos, I know for a fact that Cochiti Pueblo has got a permission from the state to teach their language at the elementary school. And they’re making an effort to reinforce it in the pueblo, when the kids go home. Sandia is starting the same thing because they know they’re losing it.”

I: “Yeah”

A: (clears throat) “Their present governor can’t communicate in his native language. But I think that it’s because, you know, he went to Saint Pius High School and was out of there, and again, people thought—and for a long time a lot of the teachers, I mean, when I took over the mid school, there was people in there telling our kids that, ‘C’mon! Welcome to America! You can’t be speaking Spanish.’ And I came down really strong on that. I said, you know, ‘If they want to speak Spanish out on the playground, when they’re together,’ I said, ‘that’s their business, you know? As long as they do the lessons, I think they need to keep their language.’ But a lot of people were told, like my dad’s generation, that it should forget about Spanish.”

[Recording ends at 1:02:21]