Jose Esteban Ortega
Oral History Memoir of
La Cucaracha and the Chicano Movement

Interviewed by José A. Ortega and Anselmo Ortega
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Colorado State University-Pueblo
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ORTEGA_JA: Okay, you ready, Tio? So, we’re going to focus on La Cucaracha today. That’s all we’re going to talk about. So, let me start with my little thing I have to read here first and then we’ll get into the questions. Okay?

ORTEGA_JE: Sure.

ORTEGA_JA: Okay, this is José Antonio Ortega. I am interviewing José Estéban Ortega on April 6, 2016. This interview is taking place at CSU-Pueblo in Pueblo, Colorado. The interview is sponsored by CSU-Pueblo University and Special Collections and is part of the La Cucaracha oral history project. I wanted to confirm that Mr. Ortega understands that this interview is being recorded and this recording will be preserved at CSU-Pueblo University Archives. CSU-Pueblo University Archives retains the rights to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use the recorded interview. This includes rights of publication in electronic form, such as placement on the internet and accessed by that medium. Do you agree?

ORTEGA_JE: I agree. [Holding up two fingers as in “Scouts Honor”]

ORTEGA_JA: Alright! Okay, well, thank you for being here, Tio! What is your full name?

ORTEGA_JE: José Estéban Edwardo Ortega.

ORTEGA_JA: And when were you born?

ORTEGA_JE: August 6, 1942
ORTEGA_JA: I’m going to jump into the *Cucaracha* right away. How did you come to start working with the *Cucaracha*?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, I started out working with other publications, Chicano publications, for a while. *La Cucaracha* wasn’t developed yet and I was part of the development. So, I immediately—it was my friends, some of my good friends that were in *La Cucaracha*. They were experienced journalists and I was not an experienced journalist, but I immediately started working—writing, and selling ads for the newspaper: *La Cucaracha*. And [I] just became totally involved. I delved into it immediately and became part of the crew and worked diligently on it [*La Cucaracha*]. At one point, I became a spokesman for *La Cucaracha* and to the Chicano community at a radio station in Pueblo called KAPI. So, I used to give regular programing there. I used to come in and report on that week’s *La Cucaracha*, what was in it and what have you. I was explaining what the *Cucaracha* was, on the radio, on a weekly basis. So I enjoyed that and I enjoyed preparing for that, every week. I had a few friends with me that didn’t always participate at the *Cucaracha* el periodico and the interviews. I used to interview people. So anyway, I did that for a long time and became accustomed to reporting over the radio and I would prepare ahead of time, for that week’s presentation. And so, I did that and I worked in the *Cucaracha* itself and helped develop it. I also wrote for *La Cucaracha* and the radio program was just in addition to that.

ORTEGA_JA: So were you here for the first issue? Were you part of the first issue?

ORTEGA_JE: Yes.

ORTEGA_JA: What do you remember about the first issue and how it came together?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, I remember it well! But I was not a journalist, like the rest of the guys were. They were actual journalists. But I wrote immediately for the first *Cucarachas* and continued on for years. Then in the meantime, I became a spokesman for *La Cucaracha*, for the radio station KMRX, for a number of years, with regular programs.

ORTEGA_JA: What would you do for those programs? You would announce what kind of things?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, *La Cucaracha* was coming out on a weekly basis at that time, and so, I would recap the *Cucaracha* for that week on the radio: “This is what’s in *La Cucaracha* now.” We would do it in Spanish and English—an overview of the paper that week and other things about the *Cucaracha*: how we developed. I did that for a long time on the radio station KMRX.

ORTEGA_JA: How would the issues come together? Was it a week long process or would you guys come together on a certain day to put it all together? How did the whole process work?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, it became a weekly, it had been monthly or bi-weekly, and it became a weekly. So, every week, I was there at the radio station and I was the only announcer for *La Cucaracha* su periodico Chicano de confianza [the Chicano newspaper of trust].
ORTEGA_JA: Right!

ORTEGA_JE: That’s what I used to introduce it as.

ORTEGA_JA: Where was La Cucaracha located?

ORTEGA_JE: On Elm Avenue, in Pueblo, up in Bessemer [south side neighborhood].

ORTEGA_JA: Was it a house or a building?

ORTEGA_JE: Yes, it was a house.

ORTEGA_JA: It was a house?

ORTEGA_JE: Uh, huh.

ORTEGA_JA: How many floors?

ORTEGA_JE: Gee, I don’t remember the floors, but we eventually started working out of a building and it worked out good. Most of the people were journalists. I was not a journalist, but I became part of it. I had regular radio programing and I wrote regular stories for the Cucaracha. All my friends, they were journalists: Juan Espinosa, Pablo Mora, David Martinez, and Rita Martinez. We had quite a crew. We’d come in and we’d work day and night producing it every week. And we became a weekly so, it’s a lot of hard work.

I interviewed quite a few people and notably an Independentista [activist for independence] from Puerto Rico, who came in. He had heard some of our programs and he came in from Puerto Rico to meet me. I interviewed him in La Cucaracha newspapers itself and the book, because there’s a book about La Cucaracha publication, during that time. He was an Independentista from Puerto Rico who had fought for independence of Puerto Rico all of his life and served 11 years in Marion [Illinois] prison for his radicalism and belief in independence for Puerto Rico. That’s all he was in for. Those interviews weren’t recorded and some of the interviews were written in the Cucaracha. There’s photographs of him and my interviews with him. And the recordings—I’m thinking—are still in the archives somewhere. When I interviewed him, he was a Spanish speaking person, but he also knew English and studied it. He was a very famous man. In the encyclopedia, there’s stories about him and his life. His name is Juan Antonio Corretger. He had spent like 11 years in Marion Federal Prison, for his activity. He was also always fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico from the United States.

ORTEGA_JA: How do you spell that last name?

ORTEGA_JE: C-O-R-R-E-T-

ORTEGA_JA: And what else? What other things do you remember that you had done?
ORTEGA_JE: Well, I interviewed somebody every week and on the radio station, what was then called KMRX, in Pueblo. I used to go interview people every week, on the weekly program. One of the biggest persons that I had interviewed was Juan Antonio Corretger, an Independentista and he was a writer. He wrote many, many things. He was a poet [and] he was well known in the Encyclopedia Britannica, for his life. We were good friends and we corresponded. So, that was one of my highlights, because he had served like 11 years in Marion Federal prison, for fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico, from the United States. So, he was quite a man! And in the Cucaracha publications, there’s photographs and interviews of myself with him. In the La Cucaracha newspapers. Juan Antonio Corretger, so that was a highlight.

ORTEGA_JA: Did you work on any of the land grant stuff?

ORTEGA_JE: Oh, yeah!

ORTEGA_JA: The land rights?

ORTEGA_JE: We wrote a lot of stories about the land grant that was one of our regular stories. [We wrote] about the land grant movement in Nuevo Mexico and Colorado [and] their history. At the time [of] the land rights struggle, we had some of our people that would work with us on a variety of positions, and what have you. With them I joined the land rights movement in Colorado and Nuevo Mexico, so I devoted a lot of my time to the land grant movement.

My friend, Ray Otero, he was the publisher of the Land Rights Council Newspaper, and he worked with La Cucaracha. We distributed all over the state. We had a whole group of people. We would publish and they would run to Denver. They had routes in Denver, Greeley, and all over the state. We would deliver La Cucaracha when we were publishing it monthly and then we went to weekly and so it was a lot of work all the time. I mean that’s all we did, was write, edit, and go around the country, this part of the country, seeking out different activists for the [purpose] of declaring liberty and independence from the United States. We would publish everything related to that [like] we took over some land grants in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado. We had a Land Rights Council [which we] did for a number of years, to inform the people about the land rights struggle, about how we were ripped off from the land, and the history behind all that. I was an editor for La Cucaracha. I was a writer and a translator for the newspaper and the radio station that I used to do a weekly program [for] here in town.

ORTEGA_JA: Do you remember when you all first started the Cucaracha [if] you had any opposition from any other Chicano groups or anybody else, like the Pueblo Chieftain or anything like that? What was the opposition to the Cucaracha?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, it was pretty well accepted in the Chicano community. We attempted to do it all the time, bi-lingual, bi-cultural, so that it [could be] distributed throughout Nuevo Mexico, Texas. We used to send bundles to California, to different groups out there. In Pueblo we eventually obtained a weekly, and so it was a production all the time, working day and night.
to write it, to put it together, to distribute it throughout the city. And people would take bundles to Denver, bundles to El Paso, and to Northern Nuevo Mexico. So it was a pretty good publication, because the people we were working with were journalists. I wasn’t a journalist. I didn’t take that journalism in school, but you know, I winged it.

I was the director of the parent program called, Producciones Estrella Roja: Red Star Productions. Another newspaper called *Terra y Libertad* and that was for Pueblo [and] Denver, along with *La Cucaracha*, but also all the way into Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. We distributed and wrote stories about the land struggle, because that’s what we basically were doing was informing the public, about the land that was ripped off from us.

We became a weekly, eventually. Then we had several publications all around the land rights and there was an organization in San Luis called the Land Rights Council and we were affiliated with them. Our good friend Ray Herman Otero, was the leader of that portion, of the land rights struggle. So, we had our crew always writing about the land rights struggle every month, how it happened, how the land was ripped off from us, and we informed a lot of people. [We] eventually went to a weekly publication. We had a crew that would print them out, bundle them up; and they would run them to Denver or Greeley, to San Luis and other parts of Northern New Mexico. The *Cucaracha* went to California [and] Texas.

So, it was a well-known newspaper, a Chicano newspaper. We tried to do it bi-lingual; I was one of the bi-lingual, Spanish interpreters, and writer for *La Cucaracha*. The other guys were journalists. All of them were journalists. I wasn’t a trained journalist, but I wrote a lot of stuff. But they were trained journalists out of C-Boulder. So, they were advanced journalists: Pablo Mora, Dave Martinez, and Juan Espinosa. There were women that participated: Rita Martinez. That was in productions, producing the paper. And we went to a weekly and we stayed as a weekly for a long time. In coordination with that, I would go give every week and we would publish and go to the radio station here, to the Spanish radio station and review *La Cucaracha* in English and Spanish and that was my job. And we’d drive up in a car and we’d have bundles of newspapers. They’d give me a couple and I’d go inside the station and report on what was in *La Cucaracha* that week, to the public of Southern Colorado including Pueblo and Denver.

**ORTEGA_JA:** So, why was it important to do the newspaper bi-lingually?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Well, bi-lingually, there was all these people that were looking for bi-lingual material and we did Northern New Mexico. Like I said, we did Denver; we had people take it up to Denver and Greeley. We covered the state quite a bit and we had a distribution program. We would finish publishing it; we’d wrap it up, the bundles, and people would go throughout the state, who were living throughout different places in Colorado and Northern New Mexico. We would send bundles to California and Texas.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Was there opposition to people being bi-lingual at the time, or what was the reasons for highlighting the Spanish aspect of it?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Well, because a lot of our people were Spanish readers and some were primarily Spanish, particularly in Texas and other places. We’d send bundles to Mexico too,
California and a lot of Spanish speaking states. And we would publish monthly and then we went to bi-weekly, [and] then we went to weekly. So, we were busy writing, editing, developing the layout, and the distribution. From the tip to the original articles and the distributing of the publication. We had several Chicanos on our team that were journalists, graduates of CU Boulder and other universities; so, they were very well written. I would do a lot of the interpretation of their English writing. So, that was one of my main courses, and I did some English stuff. I did interviews with the people that were coming from New Mexico, from Northern Colorado, and everything based around the Colorado Chicano and the South West Chicano community. And we had distributed to California, Texas, everywhere. That newspaper went everywhere. We had bundles every week. We had a crew that would come in; and when we would publish the paper, they would bundle them up and bind the numbers that could be sent to Grand Junction. All over the state—

**ORTEGA_JA:** Would you deliver?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes we delivered—

**ORTEGA_JA:** You personally?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Where would you take them to?

**ORTEGA_JE:** All over the state.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Oh, really?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Uh huh. I didn’t go all over the state all of the time, but we had a whole crew that would [go] to Denver. We had all the places to take them to and they were always waiting for them, for the Cucarachas.

**ORTEGA_JA:** What kind of places would take the Cucarachas? Where they just mom and pop shops? Were they bigger chain establishments that would allow you to put the Cucarachas there?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Both! We had the schools, for example, in Denver we had all the Chicano schools and many of the high schools that had mostly English speakers. When we did bi-lingual that was my job, because one of my principal jobs was to interpret the Cucaracha. I would just transfer in English or in Spanish what was written, but rather interpreted and give the meat, through an interpretation kind of model. So, we went to Denver, to Wyoming, to New Mexico, and we had a crew when they were published. We would wrap them up, tie up the bundles in certain numbers and certain numbers would be delivered to the different places: to California universities, to universities in Texas.

We were well known, not nationwide entirely, but we were all over the place. Along the line we ran into a man who started to read the Cucarachas in Texas. I had become a friend of his, and he had come over here. He was a long time Independentista for Puerto Rico and he had been
fighting for 11 years, in Marion prison, for being a fighter in the independence of Puerto Rico and it was an armed struggle. His name was Juan Antonio Corretger; he was a poet, a writer, all on the independence of Puerto Rico and other countries that were countries under the power of the United States including: Puerto Rico, Cuba, and in Nuevo Mexico towns and cities that had been imposed on by the United States.

We had distributions in California, Texas, Mexico, particularly Northern Mexico and all the way up to the northern border and east. It was quite a deal, it took us a while, but most of the people in La Cucaracha were journalists with master’s degrees out of CU Boulder: Pablo Mora, Juan Espinosa, and David Martinez. So, it was quite a chore and we eventually went to a weekly, we did a bi-weekly, but initially we started out with every three months, then eventually went to a monthly. And free! We didn’t charge for it.

ORTEGA_JA: So, the newspaper was free? Then where did you get your funding from for the newspaper?

ORTEGA_JE: From advertisement.

ORTEGA_JA: Just from advertisements?

ORTEGA_JE: Basically yes. Initially we had some money from the Campaign for Human Development [A national anti-poverty and social justice program of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)] out of Washington DC, and other areas up that way along the [East] Coast. So, we had people that would send articles from up there. We even developed books, hard bound of La Cucaracha and they are now held in different institutions, libraries, and I’m supposing even here. They were hard bound books that we put together.

ORTEGA_JA: Yes, we still have them. So, would you guys receive grants, other grants, or anything like that?

ORTEGA_JE: We started out with a grant from the Campaign for Human Development out of New York and Washington D.C. and along the Atlantic seaboard. We received cheap grants from the Campaign for Human Development, which was a Catholic foundation and they accepted our material, even though we were pretty radical. Our orientation was independence from the United States government and not be under their heel. So, we printed some things that were very, well considered by some, radical to some people. But we were always based around the truth of what went on to our people: the educational system, the police system, police brutality, and everything that was related to our life being. And our oppression is what we wrote about.

We distributed to a good part of Texas, a good part of Nuevo Mexico, all of Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Arizona, and we sent bundles to California to the universities there. We had a pretty good thing going and we worked hard. I mean it was day and night trying to publish, because we were doing it monthly, then bi-weekly, and then weekly, so it was continual productions and writing. Some of the guys that were with us, were journalists out of CU Boulder and out of other Northern Colorado universities and New Mexico too. And they were actual
journalists. Some of them you may know; Dave Martinez, Juan Espinosa, and Pablo Mora. Then we were able to recruit other people from Pueblo that were interested, but they were on the production side. They were the artists that would put it together. They’d go take photographs and bring them back in. Then the editors would put them in certain pages, you know, like Paul Mora, Juan Espinosa, David Martinez, Abron Sandoval—all these guys would have different assignments. A lot of it was use of the camera and we had purchased a camera, an old camera to take the pictures of the articles as we produced them, then wrote them up and edited them into columns. They would then take pictures of them, then they would produce them.

We went from very small thin three or four pages to many pages. We would send them to Puerto Rico and one of their very famous authors and writers, an independentista, a man that was dedicated to the independence of Puerto Rico from the United States. He had gone to serve 11 years in Marion prison for sedition, and what have you. His name was Juan Antonio Corretger. I ended up getting his address and we started sending him publications. So, it got throughout the whole Eastern Seaboard, Florida, Texas, California, Northern Nuevo Mexico, and Northern Colorado. So, it went all over and even some overseas countries that we would send a bundle to. And they would request more.

And it was all free! We did it by selling ads in the newspaper to pay for it. We had a grant initially from the Campaign for Human Development, a Catholic charity, to give us a boost in starting our publication. And we would send them bundles [to show] what we were writing. So, it ended up being almost self-supporting.

We had another branch, which was a parent of La Cucaracha, called Producciones Estrella Roja: Red Star Productions. They were the ones, who held a part of the organization that published La Cucaracha. La Cucaracha had the writers, all volunteers who were out of CU Boulder, with journalist training education. There were some that were journalists in the higher levels of journalism and they were some of our editors: Juan Espinosa, David Martinez [with] Masters and doctorates in writing. I was—I guess you can call [me] the principal interpreter. I would have to interpret the newspaper into Spanish—what’s the other term for it, not interpretation word for word, but interpreting it—

ORTEGA_JA: So, like summarizing it?

ORTEGA_JE: Yes, we would do most of it through interpretation and I was the chief interpreter. So, they would write the stories in English and I would interpret, not a word for word kind of thing, but interpret them into Spanish. That was one of my jobs. Then we had a whole distribution crew, and a whole distribution network to California, Texas, Kansas, all over the place.

ORTEGA_JA: Were there other people who would support you, like community members that weren’t particularly involved with the Cucaracha? I mean I heard a story about somebody that would take you guys food when you were making the Cucaracha. Was there things like that that happened?
ORTEGA_JE: There were groups of people.

ORTEGA_JA: Really?

ORTEGA_JE: Especially when we were on production. We were writing and writing and then getting close to the editing, and then into the actual printing—not printing, but putting it on the computers that we had. We were able to get some old computers through the Campaign for Human Development, a Catholic charity out of Washington. And we got grant funds to be able to publish, because it was a lot of money to publish. We started out with three or four pages, then went on to 16 pages, and eventually we got hard bound copies—to put the issues in hard bound covers, you might have some here.

ORTEGA_JA: Yes we do. So, when you were putting the newspaper together over the weekend, do you remember like a particular story that happened that was either like funny or something that sticks out in your mind, on one of those days that you put the paper together?

ORTEGA_JE: Funny?

ORTEGA_JA: Yes, anything! Anything that you remember about one of the particular times when you were putting the paper together.

ORTEGA_JE: Well, one of the regular editions or regular contributions came in from Puerto Rico, from our friend that we had developed there. He was a journalist and an independentista and he was for the Indians and the independence of Puerto Rico. He served 11 years in Marion prison. We had started to send La Cucarachas everywhere, our saying was, “Una Cucaracha en cada casa!” [Laughing]

ORTEGA_JA: And what does that mean?

ORTEGA_JE: A Cucaracha in every household! [Both Laughing]

ORTEGA_JA: Right? [Laughing]

ORTEGA_ANSELMO [brother to Jose Esteban]: So, when you guys were working in the office, because I was there a few times.

ORTEGA_JE: Yes.

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: So, when you guys were there do you remember anything, like something that would happen, that would crack you guys up, or little things that would break the day up?

ORTEGA_JE: Continually!

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: Yes!
ORTEGA_JE: I mean, we had people coming in and out. Some people would come in to hang around the heaters—all our Chicano friends from the community. They weren’t writers, they weren’t anything. Some of them were distributers. We had a whole crew of distributers that were friends and they would just come and hang around the office. You know? It was disturbing!

ORTEGA_JA: And what would they do?

ORTEGA_JE: Hang around the heater! [Laughing]

ORTEGA_JA: They would hang around the heater doing what?

ORTEGA_JE: Just hanging around and then they would leave for a while and they would come back and just hang around in the office. It was the only thing going on in the whole town. They would just come around and bother—not bother, because they wouldn’t mean to bother or disturb in a way, interfere.

ORTEGA_JA: In a good way or bad way?

ORTEGA_JE: Oh well, not in a bad way, because they didn’t have bad intentions. It’s just that they were there. And then they would want to read the paper ahead of time. You know? Then ask a question! So, it was like a very difficult job, because typically your office is just the writers and the editors and the people in production that were putting it all together. And then the camera, we had bought some old cameras. You know big production cameras, where you roll it down and take a picture of the page. Then we had some old machinery that people would type it and then get it on to rolls of—I forget what they called them—but it was white plastic paper and then we would transfer. We had old production cameras, where we would get all the long lists and pages after they were laid out. It was several processes. Then they would snap a picture of it, and that went to the printer. We would take a print of that material, which was a big page of plastic like that [holding his hand out to show arms width size] to Denver, and other places around the state, so they could be printed. Then they would print them on the newsprint. They would fold the newsprint and then deliver it to us in bundles. Actually they wouldn’t deliver them to us; we’d send people to Nuevo Mexico to pick them to up, from Texas. We would go pick up our bundles and distribute them out there. We had distribution outlets in California [and] Arizona. You know? We would just send them a bundle.

ORTEGA_JA: And who were the primary people that did the formats and the typesetting and stuff? Who would do that?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, we had a lot of people that would come in and do the typesetting. The writers would write it up double spaced and then it would go through the editing process. There were three or four different editors, three or four types of editors. Then we had our artists who would take photographs, and bring in photographs from around the community. They would all be branched out and they would all have different territories to go photograph different things, people, then write articles, bring them back in. Then we had an old production camera that
would take the pictures of them and transfer them into—I forgot the terminology—but into like a—what do you call them? Black—

**ORTEGA_JA:** Carbon? The carbon copies?

**ORTEGA_JE:** No, not the carbon copy. The actual photographs.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Oh, a negative.

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes, negatives and stuff. And we had old material, I mean, our cameras, our printers, and everything was just old. And we had got a grant from the Campaign for Human Development, a Catholic charity. That was part of our thing. Then we would send them copies of the newspaper, so they could see what we were doing. Then we ran into one of the most famous producers of newspapers and media as a whole. He was a Puertorriqueño—I think I mentioned him—Juan Antonio Corretger. He had written books and he had articles and materials in the encyclopedia. He was a poet, a writer, all about independence for Puerto Rico. That’s what he used to write about, independence from the United States. So, he became a good friend of ours. We have pictures of him at our office, at our little office up in Bessemer. You know, just little cubby holes where people used to sit.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Is he still alive?

**ORTEGA_JE:** No, he passed away.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Oh, when did he pass?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Jeez, a few years ago, but he was already an older man then.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Where did he pass at? Was he in Puerto Rico or?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Yes. And did he come to live in Pueblo for a little while or was he just here to visit?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes, he was here to visit. He came a few times to visit.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Oh, okay.

**ORTEGA_JE:** It was like, a 20 or 30 hour plane flight. He used to come [even though] he was old. We brought him down here and went to St. Leander’s and had a rally full of radical people from throughout the United States, and he was one of them, one of our main speakers. We have photographs of him and those meetings that we had at St. Leander’s in the gym. We had people from Mexico come up. We had quite a group of people. Our papers went to California, Arizona—everywhere we could think of, we would send them a bundle.

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** When did you guys move to Union, to the office on South Union?
**ORTEGA_JE:** It was sort of in the middle of when we were out of space, because we were in an old house. We were in a house in Bessemer—upstairs, downstairs. So Jesus, it was a zoo. And a lot of the people would come in every day of the week, any time day or night. They were all our friends, but they would always hang around and be in the way. But they would be there to support us. That was the headquarters for all of us—for all of La Gente.

**ORTEGA_JE:** Right near the river.

**ORTEGA_JA:** And where was it at on Union?

**ORTEGA_JE:** On east of the library down the hill, but before you cross the bridge, on the left-hand side.

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** Right south of the Union bridge was a white building. It had an upstairs and you had to go upstairs to get to the main office.

**ORTEGA_JE:** Right near the river.

**ORTEGA_JA:** So, did you get paid to do the Cucaracha?

**ORTEGA_JE:** No, we had to pay for the Cucaracha, for the printing and all the other costs. There were a whole bunch of costs we had. We had our own production cameras, but they were all old. You know? So, we had to deal with that—and old printers—but we put our sheets out on a special kind of paper. [Then] we would burn them with the cameras, old fashioned cameras. We got a grant from the Campaign for Human Development.

**ORTEGA_JA:** So, you never got paid one cent for doing all the newspapers that you were involved in?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Well, we also had a parent corporation, because when I went there I did a development of several different corporations, so we wouldn’t have one big giant one. We would have separate ones for separate businesses and purposes. I set them up, the different corporations [that] were all non-profit. There was a couple that were for profit. That’s how we tried to make money to put back into the agency.

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** Were you ever salaried?

**ORTEGA_JE:** We had some grants from the Campaign for Human Development and yes, we were salaried. But it was my job to do that and I said, “Just give the people—the workers—some vouchers” or we would sell an ad up in Bessemer. With that we would come back and give them free tickets to go to this restaurant or that restaurant. We would go all over town to go eat off of the Cucaracha. And then the parent corporation called Producciones Estrella Roja: Red Star Productions and it was named after a big famous Red Star Productions, out of the East Coast. So, that was our money maker. We did photography. We had photographers and they would go photograph people, photograph events all over town. Whatever we could find, we would photograph to get some money back. I got the money back, so to speak, but everybody got back their sort of share—all the workers, the writers, the editors, the photographers, and it was quite a deal. We were in a house in Bessemer and it was crowded—I used to hate for so
many people—people would come in there just to hang around the heater and talk and disturb, but we did it.

**ORTEGA_JA:** How many “fire drills” did you partake in?

**ORTEGA_JE:** A few.

**ORTEGA_JA:** A few? Do you remember the “fire drills” that you used to have over there?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes, we used to have a “fire drill.” Everybody would vacate and we would go out to the side where we had a little lawn around the *Cucaracha*, but we would turn it in to a session, a discussion of what we were going to do next week or who was going to get [which] assignment. We would go to Marco’s tavern and cool off. And all over in Bessemer we had all kinds of places, where we would go into different restaurants and they would feed us and we would give them *La Cucarachas*, or we would give them some ads. It was all Communism! [Laughing]

**ORTEGA_JA:** Well, Juan Espinosa told me about your “fire drill” sessions. You guys would go outside and call it a “fire drill” and go— [Obvious unseen marijuana smoking gesture] [Laughing]

**ORTEGA_JE:** Well, yes it was every evening about 4 o’clock! [Both Laughing] In the shade.

**ORTEGA_JA:** So, you were partaking in a lot of “fire drills?”

**ORTEGA_JE:** Oh, yes! I was the “Fire Chief!” [Laughing] We had a yard with a big tree and we would go outside and sit and talk about the paper. That’s all we would talk about—what we were going to do, and it was our meetings, actual staff meetings. I had to try to feed about 20 people that would be just delivering one paper and I would try to give them some money to have a little bit to eat. You know, we didn’t have money? There was no salaries, even though I was the one who gave out salaries. It was all broken up and they never knew how much was earned, anybody Paul Mora, Juan Espinosa. I gave everybody a certain share.

**ORTEGA_JA:** What amounts do you remember that some of the checks were, from the money that you gave out?

**ORTEGA_JE:** The total?

**ORTEGA_JA:** No, like how much did you give to each person? I know it wasn’t a set price, but do you remember like, a round estimate of how much each person would get?

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes, I tried to give out like 150 or 180 dollars a week or every week and a half to the principal workers. You know there were a lot of *Cucarachas* that were just there hanging around. They would come and hang around the heater, disturb us, talk, laugh and joke. They thought—they were our friends—but they were really interrupting. But, hey, they were our friends and they were more than friends. They were the ones that would deliver the newspaper.
They’d come in on a certain day and they would be out there—Abron [Sandoval]—I would give them money for their cars and they’d go all over town and then they would deliver me down to KRMX radio station, so I could deliver the “Noticias de La Cucarachas” at the radio stations every week, on the radio. I would have to write the article, or interpret the article in Spanish and then take it down there, then do it all in Spanish. It was a chore! I carried a lot of stuff, but every week—then we started going more than once a week to the radio station and it was accepted. All the people would come in their cars and they would be outside, in their car listening to me. [Laughing]

ORTEGA_JA: How long was the run of La Cucaracha?

ORTEGA_JE: Gee, I don’t know. Many years.

ORTEGA_JA: And how did it finally end?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, in the meantime, we got to the point that we were binding them [La Cucaracha] in hard bound copies, hard bound books. Eventually that’s what we had and some of us got them. Most of the Cucarachas—there’s some Cucarachas books in it imprinted with gold letters printed on it with Cucaracha. Have you seen that?

ORTEGA_JA: Uh huh.

ORTEGA_JE: The principal workers and everybody got one. Rita Martinez, she was one of our best producers for layout. The layout of the paper—she got trained—and then we had old Olivetti machines [brand of printing press] that would be the ones we would type into. Then they would be printed on a long roll and it was old fashioned stuff. [Shaking his head]

ORTEGA_JA: So, did it become just too hard to keep producing it? You just didn’t have enough money, because the funding went out or was it that everybody was just tired of doing it? How did it end?

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: What was the demise?

ORTEGA_JA: Yes.

ORTEGA_JE: The demise—I hate to even think about that—but let me just mention a couple of other things. We also published Tierra y Libertad and that was out of San Luis. Our friend Ray Otero, he would bring in copies from down there and we would rewrite it and put it on the machine that would print the columns and all that. Then our production crew would come in and cut ‘em, paste ‘em, edit ‘em, and proof read! Proof read! Proof read! But we published a paper for them called Tierra y Libertad, for the Land Rights Council. Then we had some other people in California that we would send bundles to, and do some printing for some people out of Texas, Wyoming. But some of them weren’t Cucarachas, but they had their own papers. They would sell ads in Wyoming and we would do it for them, bi-lingual and bi-cultural. So, it was a lot of work and I’d be there day and night, typically.
ORTEGA_JA: Were you there at the end or did you leave before that?

ORTEGA_JE: I’m trying to think of the end. At the end we ran out of money [and] we splintered off. We were doing some publications up in Greeley and some of them were, not the Cucaracha, but they were all oriented Chicano. We used to deal with universities up in Northern Colorado and they would do a publication of theirs, under our tutelage. Most of our editors were out of CU Boulder and that’s where I had met them before: Juan Espinosa and Pablo Mora. David Martinez had a master’s in journalism. I mean we had—we were a rag tag band—but we had a lot of people that were well educated and actual journalists. They had done some journalism in Boulder, when they were up there. We had publications in Boulder too.

ORTEGA_JA: So, what kinds of things would you do, after the Cucaracha was done? What did you do after that?

ORTEGA_JE: Me?

ORTEGA_JA: Uh huh!

ORTEGA_JE: Well, I continued doing publications out of Rocky Ford and La Junta in Despierte—it means “awaken”—we did publications out of that. Those went all statewide too and we sent bundles to California and Texas. So, I did that for a good long while and it was all a labor of love. You know? But I published a lot of newspapers out of Rocky Ford and distributed all the way down to Kansas and Texas. So, I’ve got ink in my blood and in my brain.

ORTEGA_JA: So, even though you didn’t take any class, you became a journalist. But what did you do after that, I mean how did the Cucaracha influence your career? I mean I know you went to more printing, but did it enable you to do other things? Was it a catalyst for anything?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, it was a catalyst for writing. I mean I wasn’t even a fair writer when I joined them [La Cucaracha], but I became a writer by the time I left. And I started a newspaper in Rocky Ford and the Arkansas Valley called Despierte, “wake up,” and other publications in Rocky Ford—local publications. I have to stop and think of the names of them, but yes. Delivered all the way to Kansas. And with ourselves we would find a publication in Texas and we would send them bundles and they would send us bundles of theirs, so in California, Arizona. It was great, because we were getting publications—they were good publications—out of UCLA and—

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: Were you working at the clinic and at La Cucaracha at the same time or was that after?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, at the clinic I was working—I think I was working out of a publication called Despierte as I mentioned and I published it out of there [Rocky Ford] and Lamar.

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: How about the Pueblo clinic? Were you doing both at the same time when you were working with Richard [Dr. Rivera], over here at the—
ORTEGA_JE: Well, we used to publish the paper, but it was more informative, more about the clinic and what we were doing, with photographs of the doctors, photographs of the nurses, and photographs of the patients. We had that whole building there, on Hudson. We had it full of people and some of them were—like Virgilio [Dr. Virgilio Licona] was there too and he was a writer. And we wrote—we had a health care newspaper, for a long time.

ORTEGA_JA: What was the name of that?

ORTEGA_JE: I’ll have to stop and rattle my brain, but we did that. Almost all of our stuff we put in a binding, bound them into books. And—Salude—something like that. But most of those guys were doctors and they could write too and wrote a lot of health stuff. Then we had our portions for the community stuff, because we were always keeping it up in the community, so the community would support us. We hardly ever sold any. You know? It was almost all free. But there were periods that we would sell some, out of Pueblo, out of the health centers, on Hudson. People would buy them, but it wasn’t much money, just enough to keep us in suit. So, it was an upward, straight up, struggle and a lot of people would come in there just to hang around at the Cucaracha. Disturb us, looking over our shoulders, criticizing, “Ah you guys this and that! Look at that article, it’s fucked up!” Or this and that. I didn’t care. It didn’t bother me, because they weren’t worth a shit! [Laughing and drinking coffee]

ORTEGA_JA: So, what was the—what do you feel was the overall impact of the Cucaracha on the community and/or the Chicano Movement?

ORTEGA_JE: It was an awareness kind of thing. People were waiting for La Cucaracha to come out. They knew when it was going to be distributed, all the commercial places in Pueblo, man, all of them: Bessemer, all of the east side, all the stores, small stores, big stores, all got it. And they’d be waiting for it. And, man, they’d grab it right away, sit down, open it up and start going through it, because then we had a lot of ads from them, that type of a business in Bessemer, like throughout the whole city. And not of it all Chicano business either—it was regular businesses! And they would read it. Then my job was—my additional job was interpreting it or translating it. So, we would always have a Spanish translation into it, so all the Mexicans on the farms [could read it]. And it was all stupidly free! [Laughing]

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: You guys would also handle a lot of the stuff that the mainstream media wouldn’t cover, constantly, like the land grant thing, Kiko [Francisco “Kiko” Martinez], [and] Los Seis [Los Seis de Boulder – The Boulder Six]. You guys kept people up on the things that the mainstream media wouldn’t keep up.

ORTEGA_JE: Yes! Police brutality, the educational system. Now our part was to fill in the gap that the newspapers didn’t, the regular newspapers. It went through Texas and California, like I said, but we had another branch called—a newspaper called Tierra y Libertad—out of San Luis. And Ray Otero did that. He wasn’t a publisher—I guess you could say he was a publisher—he didn’t write, but he used to go around getting articles from the people, and ads from San Luis and that area, all the way to California. We would get articles from all over, and
they were some really good articles. Some of them weren’t really good articles, but we would bump them up, and publish them.

They would look forward to getting their bundle of Cucarachas in San Luis, Texas, and you know. We would send [people] with them all over. I think I told you a while ago what our—on the newspaper I would have sayings read, “Una Cucaracha cada casa!” [Laughing]

Then we had this one famous journalist—he was in the Encyclopedia Britannica, with him as a writer. But he always wrote about independence for Puerto Rico, revolution and stuff. But he was a journalist, a poet, all kinds of stuff. Juan Antonio Corretger! And he was in some of our publications too, his photograph. And he came down to visit us at the Cucaracha. And he loved the Cucaracha. He came down from Puerto Rico to here, 1500 miles, as an old man. That’s all he had done with his life, was [be] a publisher, a radical publisher, for the independence of Puerto Rico. He had served like 11 years in Marion Federal Prison, for sedition and all kinds of stuff, because he was fighting for independence for Puerto Rico. He was an older man, and he got older—he was in his 80s when I last talked to him, in ‘87 or ‘88. But he was a total and complete rebel.

So, we had people from all types, we had poets. A lot of people that were Chicano poets came out of the woodwork. It was unbelievable how many Chicano poets came in the state, everywhere, in the schools. It was like crazy—there was just a lot of poets. [Laughing] Chicanos became poets and didn’t know it. [Laughing more] So, I mean it was a tremendous impact. So there’s still some Cucarachas floating around. You know? And you’ve seen ‘em, you’ve read ‘em. So, it was a pretty good publication, considering the fact that we were all just amateurs and stuff. And it went throughout the country.

ORTEGA_JA: Yes, I remember reading the article that grandma was in. They had an article about grandma and the stove.

ORTEGA_JE: Remember that? Mom? [Shaking his head and smiling at Anselmo.]

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: Yes, La Corina!

ORTEGA_JE: Yes, La Corina was the name of the stove. We had named it La Corina, because it was all black and we had a commadre—my mom and dad had a commadre that was very dark. A Chicana woman, but very very dark, so we called the stove La Corina. [Laughing] My mom and dad had names for everybody, nicknames of sorts. You know? So, La Cucaracha was read—you know—all the Chicano people, the elder people, they could read. So, we used to distribute it throughout the city, man. They’d be waiting for it, the stores. You know? We went to all the stores on the east side, west side, south side, and everywhere. We would put them all in little bundles. We already knew how much to leave them. Sometimes we would only leave them 10 or 15, but they would sop them up. We’d go back and they’d be gone. It was better liked than the Chieftain, but free! We gave it free!
ORTEGA_JA: Why Pueblo? Was Pueblo chosen for a reason or was it just because everybody moved here at the same time? What was the reason that it came to Pueblo or started in Pueblo?

ORTEGA_JE: It was a group of journalists, Chicano journalists. They had been to school in Boulder, including myself. I wasn’t a journalist, but I did writing up there. We produced a paper up there. Right? [Looking at Anselmo and laughing]

ORTEGA_JA: And it just— everybody just happened to be in Pueblo and it came about that way?

ORTEGA_JE: Well, a lot of us people [who] came out of Boulder too, they were from Pueblo in the past, or not from Pueblo in the past, but grouped up over there. We had a paper up there. What was that called?

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: El Diario!

ORTEGA_JE: El Diario de La Gente! We started that up there in Boulder and we all got into it. We did everything too [for El Diario]. Juan and I would have to go about 20 miles out of town to get the bundles from a printer, way and the hell out there. We would go out real early in the morning on the day of printing. We would go out and pick up all these bundles, go back to the office, sit down, and get a cup of coffee and start looking at it. One day we went out, like 30 miles out. We went out there and came back in with our bundles to the offices up there. It was called El Diario de La Gente. We would put the bundles on the table, look at it and we would all put our feet up and just start drinking coffee. Got a paper and we’d open them up and all of a sudden, “WHAT! WHAT!” Juan got up, pissed off, because in the middle of the paper, Paul Mora and these other jackoffs had put a cutline on this picture of Chicano students, “And here are all the stupid Mexicans, worthless,” this and that. And all kinds of stupid shit. Well, they were writing it, being stupid, but it got put into the camera and got put into the paper. So, shit, Juan and I had just started on a cup of coffee and, “WHAT!” We had to go all over campus picking up all the papers we did, taking that section out. [Laughing] Pissed off! Because Pablo Mora had pictures of Chicano students and it said, “See all of these stupid baboons!” You know? Oh, God! So, we had to go pull all [those] pages out and had to go rerun them and redo them all. Those guys were just jacking around and they got into the paper and we had to take them out. [Laughing] We threw out a lot of real serious errors from time to time. A whole headline that was incorrect. So, it was a chore, but it was a labor of love.

ORTEGA_JA: The whole process, everything you did was a labor of love for?

ORTEGA_JE: For the community and for our particular work, for our labor, we loved it! I mean we all had ink in our blood, you could say. I wasn’t at Pablo’s level, at Juan’s level, or at Dave Martinez’s level, they were all trained journalists. We had a lot of journalists that were trained, it wasn’t just anything. The paper was well read, well liked, and people would be waiting for it. When it was time to come out, we had—we’d take a bundle into a store and we had all the stores in town, Mesa, everywhere. I had a route and we had all these volunteers
They’d get their bundles and they’d take off to all over town. By the afternoon everybody would come back full of weed and they had all distributed. Then I would go to radio KRMX and read the *Cucaracha*, the main articles, to the radio community in Spanish and in English. Not all of them [the articles], but the main ones. “La Cucaracha su periódico Chicano de confianza, presenta noticias de *La cucaracha!*” [La Cucaracha the Chicano newspaper of trust, presents news La Cucaracha!], on the radio. Those guys would go take me down there. They’d skid in. I’d jump out of the car, and I’d run to the mic and start going! Remember that? [Turning toward Anselmo, laughing.]

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** Our uncle worked there.

**ORTEGA_JA:** At the KXRM?

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** At that point it was called KAPI. My Tio Emilio; granpos brother, baby brother, he was an announcer!

**ORTEGA_JA:** Really!

**ORTEGA_JE:** No my tio Ernesto.

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** Right!

**ORTEGA_JE:** Not Emilio.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Not Emilio he said.

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** Oh, Ernesto.

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes, Ernesto, he used to do Spanish and there wasn’t a lot of people that could do Spanish. I couldn’t do Spanish until I got some criticism from some of the guys that were there before [at KRMX], a guy named Reyes. What’s his name?

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** Henry.

**ORTEGA_JE:** Henry Reyes! I couldn’t speak Spanish well, which was my problem. So, he right away started calling me down. You know? Just saying that I wasn’t doing it right. Of course I was doing Chicano program, but, you know, rather than the more formal. He was an accomplished guy. He had been there for years, but he had been a Spanish speaker like I was. But he had developed his language and other people. But the owner let me in there. So, every week I had a program and sometimes twice a week. So, I was busy writing, rewriting, and going from the English in the *Cucaracha* to the Spanish. And I used to say, “La Cucaracha su periódico Chicano de confianza, presenta noticias de *La Cucaracha!*” And all these guys used to take me—these marijuana’s would take me in their car. They’d skid into there, it was right on time, and I jump out and run inside. [Laughing] I’d go up to the mic and start going. [Laughing]

**ORTEGA_JA:** And you would just do your thing, right then and there! [Laughing]
ORTEGA_JE: [The marijuana’s] they’d be outside listening on the radio to me, but we had a lot of *Cucarachas*, and all volunteers. I got a little bit of money, because I had to live. Pablo Mora, Juan Espinosa, David Martinez, and Abron Sandoval—we were all workers. I used to, from the ad sells, feed out [gesturing as if dealing card]. Everybody got like, communism money. Everybody got a certain share and they all accepted it. They didn’t ask me any questions about, “I got more, he got more,” but everybody got the same. [Laughing]

ORTEGA_JA: Wow!

ORTEGA_JE: Totally communist! [Laughing] Socialism! But nobody would question me, because we all had a pot from selling ads. That was the only income we had, because we didn’t sell any *Cucarachas*. It was stupid, but we did get to a point where we did do some sells. But it was—what do you call it when you order one all the time?

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: Subscriptions.

ORTEGA_JE: Yes, some subscriptions and stuff. We’d send them to California, Texas, and all over the damn place. And Mexico, Puerto Rico, Wyoming—we went all over. We had people going up there and they’d take a few—all of them typically went to universities, colleges, and then community centers. Greeley! We had a cool—were *Cucarachas*. Una *cucaracha* en cada casa! [All laughing]

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: I remember a lot of mainstream people didn’t like the *Cucaracha*, because of the content, because it went against the establishment and—

ORTEGA_JE: Criticized the schools. What the newspapers wouldn’t do, we would—the dropout rate, the schools, the teachers, the curriculum, everything that was wrong. We were on the opposite side of the fence. Because the newspapers would always color it up and write stories about this and that. You know? We wrote stories that wouldn’t be published by other people, but our subscribers—they loved the *Cucaracha*. They’d be waiting for it! They’d be waiting for it, and we would go to all the bars, all the restaurants—the Chicano restaurants around town, in Blende and all those areas. We did it all! Bundles to San Luis! We had a friend that used to come up from San Luis and we’d have the bundles ready for him, Ray Otero. Then we started publishing a publication for him: *Tierra y Libertad*. So, he would take the *Cucarachas* and *Tierra y Libertad* and we’d would go to Texas, California. So, it was quite a work, but it was a labor of love! Because there was no money!

ORTEGA_JA: So, do you remember anything else, any other stories from there that—

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: That created any problems?

ORTEGA_JE: Yes, anything like that.

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: The ones that I remember—some of the ones I remember the most were the ones about Kiko, because that was one thing that the mainstream wouldn’t touch. You guys [*La Cucaracha*] always had updates almost every day. Every issue you guys would
have an update, with what was going on with Kiko, his trial, and him being in exile, because of—

**ORTEGA_JE:** Self-imposed exile.

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** Right!

**ORTEGA_JE:** And then when they caught him on the border and crossing. Kiko Martinez was our hero, our leader. He did it, he suffered. He went into exile, to Mexico, where nobody could find him. “Kiko vivé y asi,” that’s what we used to say. He lives and continues! Then he got caught crossing back across the border.

**ORTEGA_JA:** Were there ever any articles in the *Chieftain* about you guys? About anything negative?

**ORTEGA_JE:** About *La Cucaracha*? No, they would never mention it! Now and then we would send an article in—not an article, but a noticia or comments about it, but no they didn’t like us. We were on the radical side; we were on the opposite side! Totally opposite side, but they read us. Not that they liked it, but they read us. Because it was a good journalistic paper! We had all journalists, Chicano journalists. They were out of CU Boulder and other colleges. We’d get articles from California, Texas, and New Mexico. Then we would import—there would be all kinds of papers coming into us, that they would send us when they published, out of California, Texas, and up north. School papers, a lot of Chicano papers out of schools. So, we had an extensive library and education. And we would use some of their articles to report on what’s going on down there.

**ORTEGA_ANSELMO:** On Kiko—these guys would write, “This guy was set up by this guy, by this judge,” this, that and the other. You know? Pushing the issue! Pushing the issue that he was innocent—and then it all comes out. He was set up, you know, by these people and he got off. I mean, they had to drop all federal charges, everything. The reason why they had to drop all the charges, because of everything that the *Cucaracha* was saying. You know? They were following up, “This Judge was prejudiced! This Judge this, this, and this! It was illegal—” And those were the exact reasons why the government dropped their charges!

**ORTEGA_JE:** Yes, all of them, completely! And he had been in exile for—I don’t know—seven, eight or nine years, but we always kept him up. Kept him alive! “Kiko, vivé y asi”—that’s what our saying was. But we were throughout, California, Texas, I mean all over the place, the *Cucaracha*. And we would exchange papers with them—they had some radical papers all over, in Texas, all these Spanish speaking places. And there was a lot of them English, through our whole effort. And then we did have a radio program where we would reach all kinds of people in Pueblo. People would be waiting for the Noticias to come out in the afternoon on certain days. I would be on the radio telling them the *Cucaracha* was out and go to this location for the *Cucaracha*. All the time, almost all the Chicano businesses would have them. The *Cucarachas*—they would have to have them—people would come in demanding them. All over
Bessemer! All over the east side! All of them! They had to have them, because they would come in demanding them. And it was free, it was so stupid! [Laughing]

**ORTEGA_JA:** Well, tio, thank you! Thank you so much for the interview! It was great!

**ORTEGA_JE:** Did you record it?

**ORTEGA_JA:** Yes, we’re done so, thank you!

**ORTEGA_JE:** You’re welcome and it was my pleasure. Anytime, not to be self-serving, but I have a lot of info, in this peanut of mine. Not only about *La Cucaracha*, the Chicano Movement, but just in general, about Chicano life here in town. I was raised in Smelter and went through a whole series of things there, going to the old schools, like they used to say, like, Hinsdale and Riverside schools. I just remember the old schools and having to walk from Smelter all the way downtown in the snow, to school. It’s not like it’s something I did alone. Me and all my cousins, my women cousins; we all used to walk from Smelter to school downtown in the snow and everything else. And all my cousins on the other side of town too. Juan Ortega, he went—we were all poor. We were all poor, all of us, and none of us were even getting food stamps. [Laughing]

Our whole family were categorized as poor, but my dad always worked. He never missed work. He always brought food. Mom always made that food stretch. She would give a pot of beans to the neighbors, around our little area there, Smelter, to everyone around. There were poor people there. And it’s worse—I’d be going with a pot of beans to a certain neighborhood. The peanuts, the cacahuates, they were a poor Chicano family there. And it was nine kids or something like that. Fuentes was their name, and they were dirt poor. They were the poorest ones in Smelter and everyone else in Smelter was basically poor.

We lived down at the bottom of the hill by the railroad track right next to them. So at that time we were in poverty, us ourselves too, and living in a poverty stricken community. On the top of the hill there were Chicano people, but they had a little nicer house and they might have a car. The other side of the hill was Goat Hill and it was all poor: My Tio Juan—they all lived there. My Tio Vidal lived on the other side of Smelter were the real smelter was. The rock wool, blowing out bits of fine dust, wire, little wires like that [making a pinch gesture], curly wires blowing up on—it was all rock wool going on top of the Smelter hill. So, they used to have that shit on all the window sills and the doors. They couldn’t keep it out because it would come in. So, we were—our parents struggled for us. But we were never without beans, my mom always had beans going. Then I’d be—I was the oldest—so I would be the one who’d haul up beans, almost every day to my Tio Luciano, up on top of the hill. He was my mom’s uncle. Luciano Aguilar! He used to work at the PAD [Pueblo Army Depot] and that was an excellent job in those days. But he would come home every day and they had car care vans for people that would ride and my mom would send me up with a pot of beans at a certain time in the evening. When he would get home, I would take him a pot of beans. So, it was just like it was always supposed to be. Right? [Looking at Anselmo] You always took care of your Tios and what I’m relaying is who we are.
ORTEGA_JA: Right!

ORTEGA_JE: Where we came from and where we still are, because a lot of people are on the verge of poverty. And while we don’t know it, we’re poor. You know? We don’t have a new car! We don’t have a lot of things! We struggle to present ourselves in school! When I was in school I’d wear “clodhoppers” and torn knees. At one time I grew a—I had a sore on my knees. Before I knew it, it popped up on my nose. So, I had to go to school and I had a crust on my nose, on the tip of my nose. My mom put mentholatum on there and then on top of that she put [Malbas?]. Little things and they scrunched them up and put them there. I went to school with all these green little weeds sticking from my nose. The teacher said, “What!” She told me, “What are those?” I said, “Malbas!” And I forgot what they were in English. My mom had put it on there with a little bit of Vicks and then on there. And it was two or three days later, “clink” it all came off and the tip of my nose was pink. [Laughing] The teacher’s like—because they—we were just plain poor Mexicans to them and we all were, but that’s what my mom did. You know? I had some on my knees and that’s where I got them originally. I don’t know how in the hell it came up to my nose!

But all the time, scuffed up, old clothes, old shoes, but I feel the better for it. And I think you feel the better for it too. We had good—my grandma Anselma, she cured me one time, because I had that one time on my nose and on my elbows. I had those things and my dad took me down there sort of in the middle of the night—not in the middle—but late at night. He took me down there. We didn’t have a phone, so we had to pop in and I showed my grandma what I had on my elbows. You know? I had some sores and she just sat down there with a cigarette. [pretending to have a cigarette hanging just from the tip of his lip.] She had roll-your-owns. And [she] sat me down and got out her little bottle and swish, swish, swish, swish [pretending to open a screw top.] And [she] did it here and did it there and this and that [pointing to his elbows] [She] prayed over me, the whole bit, and in about two days later, “clink” it all fell off. All of it just fell off! My grandmamma Marina was her name, my dad’s mom. She always had a cigarette. She used to smoke roll-your-owns and she was working on me with her cigarette burning. [Laughing] Dad took me down—

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: Tell him about when your arm got twisted.

ORTEGA_JE: Well, that was the time!

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: And well, she went down there and she messaged it and she—

ORTEGA_JE: Well, I went down there. Dad took me down there. I had wrestled with this guy down there where I lived and my whole arm got twisted and my whole muscle went around like that [holding his forearm] and it was terrible. It had been—he got me in a—we were just wrestling. We were always wrestling, because what else was there to do? Anyway, it went around and I showed my mom and she looked at it and my dad looked at it. It was terribly sore and it just turned around. So, my dad took me in the night down to her [grandma’s] house. She lived on the lower east side and we didn’t have phones and stuff. So, I just—we popped up and he showed her what I had. She got a little bottle of this, a little bottle of that and sat me down
again. She used to chew gum. She didn’t have very many teeth, but she used to chew gum and also she used to smoke roll-your-owns. Well, she looked me over and that and went and got the bottles and everything. It was killing me, because my muscle was literally turned around to the other side. Yes, I was wrestling with this guy and my arm got twisted. Anyway, she sat me down there and my dad was there, and she started to look it over. [Then] she got a bottle of this, a little bottle of that, rubbed it on there. And she—about two hours I just sat there and, “Oow oh!” It hurt! You know? Before I knew it, my whole muscle had come back around and all of a sudden it—woow! It went away! It just like went away, man! My dad and I walked home that night and went home and showed my mom. Whew! And mom could do all kinds of stuff too. She could whip you into shape!

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: [She would say] “Now do it again!”

ORTEGA_JE: She could whip you into shape! [Laughing demonstrably]

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: Yeah, she used to give me the thumb all the time. I used to get it, yep!

ORTEGA_JE: Va sa ver! [You’ll see!]

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: Aye! Yep, I remember that! [Unseen gesture]

ORTEGA_JE: What, you mean the twist?

ORTEGA_JA: No—the thumb.

ORTEGA_JE: Where? Oh, there! In the side and sometimes—I don’t know if you ever got the bite [motioning to his side], but that’s how she kept us straight!

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: She always gave me the thumb! I was like—uht!

ORTEGA_JE: Yeah!

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: And you knew better than to say anything! You too? You would just take it!

ORTEGA_JA: Like I said, everybody would—if you cried, you got another one and I used to tell everybody, “Well, I always got another one!” Because she would always get me and—you know? She would always tell us, “Don’t look back church or you’ll see the devil!” And so me, I’d be like, you know, trying to look and the next thing I know, I’m paralyzed. And oh, I was like that, then, “boom” I’d get another one. Yeah, I always got another one! [All Laughing]

ORTEGA_ANSELMO: It would kill me when she would do that to me and uh! She was like, “Oh, that didn’t hurt!” [Laughing]

ORTEGA_JE: Or get you like that and—eeee! [motioning to his side and twisting his arm] She knew the exact spot!
ORTEGA_JA: The ones that would hurt were when you’d get hit, but you wouldn’t feel anything immediately. You’d just feel the hit and you’d get that internal pain and you’d start going! You’d feel like your muscles twisting! And you’re like, “AAAAHHHHH!” [Laughing] Alright Tio!

ORTEGA_JE: Well, you know, thank you!