

INTERVIEW WITH ARMAND ORTEGA

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At famous El Rancho hotel – name Armand Ortega, born 1928, Holbrook, AZ – raised in Lupton – opened store 1946 – stores on 66 – involvement with El Rancho – old ambience of El Rancho – casino – wanted silver dollars – third or fourth generation in area – father, mother, siblings – birthplace of family members, Spanish history of NM and AZ – grandparents and great grandparents – Grants, NM – father saw 66 come – construction – graders – road in 1941 – before freeway – traffic – California-bound cars – Dust Bowl – good people – people from Oklahoma – oil – acres of land – Spanish/Indian ancestry? – growing up with Navajo – demographics of NM and AZ – differences between playmates – inspection station AZ – Max Ortega – shifts - \$150 a month coming in – owned house – criminals on the road? – breaking down on 66 – trip to Cali? – farthest I’ve ever been – Topock AZ – 1936 summer – Okies coming back – inspection station Topock – Topock different from Lupton – California side inspection station – what did Topock look like? – demographics of Holbrook – high school – one African American – Leonard Saunders – spelling, “teaching” – 1948 first store Gage – ’51 – Tuscon – Hopi House trading post – opening store 1946 – driving schoolbuses – Deming NM – first \$10,000 – Deming road people different? – noticing tourists on 66 – Depression – petrified wood – 1940 – Okies broke? – Kachinas/Indian craft – jewelry, Navajo rugs – who bought? Movie stars in Packards? – middle class – “bought big” – where getting Navajo jewelry? – rug-making process – working for four months on rug – contact with Indians – tourists going straight to Indians to buy – jewelry changed? Better craftsmanship – good eye – the stamping, the stone – stabilizing – local mines – Santa Fe mine – the freeway ’51 – traffic – airlines – chairman of highway dept. – hotels by the wayside – little towns – business comeback? – Route 66 new interest/activity – closed 66 – local traffic – still surviving hotels? Three giants of the southwest – the bar named top 50 – any stories of customers? – Why Gallup? They stop all over – Gallup is enchanting – no discrimination – hotel history 1936 – El dorado in Albuquerque – Hilton – film stars – Ronald Reagan – John Wayne – Humphrey Bogart – Hedy Lamarr – calvary and Indian movies – Navajo \$300 shot – movies stopped being made – awe – the pride of Gallup- local historians – Tom – Sally No

DAVID DUNAWAY All right, we're sitting in the lobby of the famous El Rancho Hotel and next door to the motel, and I think we could just start by you telling me your name and where you were born.

ARMAND ORTEGA My name is Armand Ortega, and I was born in Holbrook, Arizona.

DD May I ask the year?

AO What –

DD What year?

AO 1928.

DD How long had you lived and worked on Route 66?

AO Lived and worked on Route 66... I was raised at Lupton on the reservation, right at the state line. And then I started working at 13 years old. Had some friends of mine that had a gas station – little trading post. I worked there two or three years. And then, later on, I got my dad to open a little store and we opened it in 1946. And after that I went on my own in 1951. And bought a trading post church place, not on 66, but on the southern highway. But then, a few – 3 or 4 years later – I came back to 66. And I've had stores on 66 ever since.

DD And, how did you come to be involved with the El Rancho?

AO The El Rancho? I was in here when I was 13 years old in 1941, and I came with those men that I was working for at that little station. And I came in here and they had a casino in that big banquet room, and – they had two dice tables, two twenty-one tables, a roulette wheel, and they had 16 slot machines in the middle. And the slots machines, 12 of 'em were 5 cents – three of 'em were ten cent machines, and one for the big-shots. (One 25 cent machine.) You put in one nickel at a time or one dime at a time and one quarter, and you pull the handle. There

was no three or four. And all – I came in here and drinking the coke ‘cause I couldn’t go into the gambling place. I sat down, right there, I don’t know, that’s not the same couch, ‘cause I’m (inaudible).

And I wondered, and I looked around and I says “oh, boy.” You’re 13. You don’t have real friends, and you’re not married. So you think, “for your mother.” I wish I could build something like this for my mother someday. You know? And really, what I wanted to do was go back in that casino and get some of those silver dollars they played with, real silver dollars, not just chips, real silver dollars. They put three dollars on the table and shake the dice. Every dollar, or two dollars, they put down three dollars was a lot of money.

And so I couldn’t get over not being 21, because I sure wanted some of those silver dollars and I thought I could get some – win some. That’s plain thinking for ya.

DD So, you grew up in Lupton, and – I understand that you’re the fourth generation of persons – family members – from this area. Is that correct?

AO I’m the – let’s see (counts, lists). Well I’m the –

DD Third generation

AO Third – fourth – third generation. Probably fourth, but third for sure. My son is fourth. One of my sons. His son is fifth generation. They’re all in the business.

DD Tell me a little bit about your family. How long have they lived in the Lupton area? In – up here?

AO Okay – they’re both gone now. My dad and mother. But my – and my brothers, most of which were younger than me – are gone. And there’s one young one left, and the one sister a year and a half older than me, she’s still doing good.

DD When did your family first come to this part of the world?

AO Well, I don’t know. Dad was born in Arizona. My mother was born in Arizona. My grandfather was born in

New Mexico. My great-grandfather, my grandfather was born, my great-grandfather was born in New Mexico.

DD Where were they born, may I ask?

AO Their parents were born in Spain. And they came here with a queen or the king of Spain gave 'em land out here. To keep control of this property. You know? It was under three or four different countries. It was under Mexico, Spain, France, and England and the Spanish wanted to control it, so they send all the Spanish people in.

DD And what part of New Mexico were your parents and grandparents living in?

AO My grandparents and great-grandparents?

DD Grandparents and great-grandparents.

AO They were by Grants, but north of Grants and east of Grants. San Mateo. San Rafael. Cubero. San Fidel. And all those different places.

DD So, your grandfather probably lived to see Route 66 arrive?

AO Yes he did. He sure did.

DD Did he ever tell you any stories about the arrival of the highway and what it was like?

AO My dad did. My dad, when the highway first started in the 28 – early thirties, he knew there was a lot of construction going, and a lot of people had jobs to fix the highway. And at one of my trading posts I have now, the original things that were used to cut up the road to blade it. And –

DD What was that? What did they use?

AO Well they used like, they use in farming, you know the two mules pulling the –

DD Plow?

- DD I'll ask you later on about when they closed down the freeway. But for now I'd like to get any kind of vivid memories you have when you were young about what the traffic was like.
- AO Well the traffic was, was pretty good. There was a lot of poor people coming through. I remember from the Dust Bowl days, thousands, thousands of Oklahoma people moved to California. And also, from Northern Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma... Oklahoma was the most. They did, in their old trucks... even in the late thirties. All the way up before the war ended. World War II. 1945.
- DD Would you stand by the side of the road and watch traffic come through?
- AO No. I seen 'em the same every day. They had the tubs on there, their mattresses hanging, and they were all fine people. They used to stop by and buy the cheapest gas there was to get to be able to get to California. And the funny thing about those 66 days, is that they went to California to work, because they were very poor and the Dust Bowl had wilted their farm crops and they had no money, but they were great people. And I remember them wanting gas and I remember the guys I worked for, even my dad and I, at the store, we used to give 'em some baloney and cheese, and bread and says, "No. Some day you'll come back and buy a lot of things here." And a lot of 'em did.
- DD Is that right?
- AO But you helped as much as you could, you know? Cause they were good people. And, the funny thing is that they come back years later and say, "I stopped here." And in fact, when I bought this place, twenty-some, twenty-two years ago, the people from California that were from Oklahoma used to meet here half-way between Oklahoma and California here, like eighty, ninety, a hundred people. And they were, a lot of 'em were related, cousins and stuff. Some of the young boys had never seen their cousins before. Okay, here's what happened.

The ones in Oklahoma that were too poor to come to California, they had a lot of oil around their properties in the 40's and even 50's before they went to California. They made a lot of money. A lot of 'em. And half the people that went from Oklahoma to California went to work for these big farmers buying the great yards and whatever it was, and the landowners owned sections of land. So they said 'you do good work I like you, I'm gonna share you on credit.' Ten acres of land. Next year another two, ten acres. A lot of 'em ended up with a hundred, a hundred and fifty acres, prime California land. Those acres are now worth like \$200,000 a piece each.

And in land, they became rich too. Even when they only had eighty or a hundred, or a hundred and fifty acres. So God works in plenty of ways. It worked both ways that time. Not all of 'em, but I'd say at least half of 'em that stayed there, and the half of 'em that went to California, they went to California working the shipyards, they went to work on the farms, and they... did you ever see that movie, The Grapes of Wrath? Okay, that's just like it was. Just like it was. And – but they were all nice people, you know?

DD Before we leave the subject of your family, you have a Spanish last name, Ortega. Is there any Indian... ancestry in your family?

AO I don't think so. I don't think so.

DD And Lupton was just off the reservation, I think, wasn't it?

AO No, it's deeded land inside the reservation.

DD So you grew up among Navajo?

AO Oh yeah. I can speak fluent Navajo.

DD And what was that like, being a Spanish boy growing up around...

AO There was a lot of Spanish people here. There's always been Spanish people in Northern Arizona, Southern Arizona, Northern New Mexico, Southern New Mexico.

There's always been a lot of Spanish people. In California, you know. So it didn't make any difference. The Spanish people seem to be, at that time, [chuckles] this is bad to say, like above the native people. The white thought they were above the Spanish people. See what I mean? Something like that. But it was – everybody played together, everybody had fun together. And, it didn't make any difference. As kids, you don't know the difference. You know?

DD When did you first begin to get a sense of the differences among the classmates and playmates that you had?

AO Never got it. Never got it. I could – I was always accepted any place I wanted. I mean, or the head of it, my school, my high school. No, never had no problem.

DD What was it like in Lupton at that time? That's also a Route 66 town.

AO The inspection station going into Arizona was like the, the inspection station where they used to check the trucks for their permits and stuff, and the cars that go through and, and my dad was an inspector for State of Arizona right there.

DD What was his name?

AO Max Ortega.

DD Max Ortega. He was an inspector at the Arizona port of entry?

AO Yup.

DD And what types – did he ever tell you stories about what kind of strange or unusual events happened to him that he would find on the road?

AO No.

DD 'Well today I saw...?'

AO No. Well I guess there were a lot of things he told me, but I can't remember really.

DD Okay.

AO Any stories that I would really, really remember. Probably could, if I thought back enough, but I just don't remember.

DD And what was his job like? Did he go to work at 9 – was it a 9 to 5 job?

AO Different – they had different shifts. There were 3 or 4 inspectors and they had different shifts. Every three months they'd change, one takes the night shift, one takes the morning shift. Whatever, graveyard shift, or whatever.

DD Did he like his job?

AO Oh yes. Well at that time it was during the Depression, and \$150 month, coming – I think it was every two weeks – yeah it was probably every two weeks. Coming in was a lot of money.

DD So you had your own house?

AO Yes.

DD And was it on 66 or was it a little way off?

AO It was just a ways north of 66.

DD Okay. What was his job like as an inspector?

AO They would just have to inspect – like I told you – the invoices, the people, the permits, the – you know – different things, I can't remember the whole thing, but probably a hundred different things, you know?

DD And did everybody have their permits and –

AO No, some of 'em didn't. They had to hold 'em there a day or two 'til they sent the money to buy the permits.

DD Were there any, say, criminals, that would go through that road?

AO I guess they went through every road, criminals, you know what they do. I don't remember that much.

DD And did people ever break down. I think –

AO Yah. The worst place that they broke down on 66 was near Topock, going into California, in the needles where the desert was 122. At that time the radiators weren't built to carry all the heat. They'd start boiling. And – a lot of trouble then, you know? And most of the people had water bags, so they could put it in the radiator.

DD Do you remember making that trip to California?

AO No, I didn't.

DD When was the first time you did make it?

AO In those days, those Depression days, the first, 'til I was eighteen, the furthest west I ever went was to Holbrook, Arizona, seventy-five miles. The furthest east was to Gallup, New Mexico, 38 miles. Now the kids go to Europe, Hawaii.

DD But at some point you must have made a trip out to California?

AO No, I... my dad, at one time he was an inspector at the other side of the line. At Topock, Arizona.

DD Oh, that's fascinating.

AO Where the little Colorado River runs in. And it was the hottest thing in the world.

DD Did you live there then?

AO Yes. During the summer.

DD And what year would that be?

AO 1936.

DD You spent the summer of '36 there.

AO Yes.

DD And was it – were the people traveling on the road different in Topock than the ones here?

AO No, the same people. They had to go from one side to the other and come back.

DD And were they coming back in 1936? This is a question that some people wonder about. Whether those Okies came back?

AO Oh yeah. Yeah. I would say that a third of them came back to Oklahoma. The others, because it was good times, and they'd made a lot of money, they stayed there and got jobs and they done all right.

DD What did the inspection station in Topock look like?

AO Just a little shed, a little station, at that time Arizona built those things. Little, like a little house, and then inspection station... you know?

DD And that summer of 1936, I know it's a long time ago, you were in Topock. Your mother was there too?

AO Oh yes.

DD And did you have a little house, or... Where did you live?

AO We lived in a house. I don't remember who owned it, or what, but I'm sure we rented it.

DD Did it feel different living there, than in Lupton?

AO No. The only thing, it was hotter.

DD It was hotter. And, I understand on the other side, on the California side, there was also an inspection station. And I heard a story that for example, the Los Angeles police, had a presence at the California stop. Even though Los Angeles was, way far away.

AO You know, I don't remember that at all.

DD Did you ever go over onto the other side? You didn't cross over?

AO No. Needles. Just five miles from Topock was the furthest I went. In those days. But later on I went, you know, it was all freeways, and I went all over.

DD What did Topock look like in –

AO A little old, little village.

DD Spanish people, or?

AO No, it was everything. Anglo, Spanish, whatever came.

DD Any Japanese?

AO No. Not that I remember, no.

DD African-Americans?

AO One in my high school.

DD That was in Topock?

AO No, that was in Holbrook.

DD Oh, I'm sorry.

AO No, I didn't go to school in Topock.

DD That was only in the summer.

AO That was only the summertime, yeah. One all my life, we only had one.

DD And what became of him? Or her?

AO I think he's dead. I think he's dead now.

DD Do you remember his name?

AO Leonard Saunders.

DD Saunders. Like the town?

AO S-A-U-N-D-E-R-S.

DD So, like the town?

AO No. "SAN" S-A-N "DERS" D-E-R-S is "Sanders."
"Saunders" is S-A-U-N, "SAUN-ders."

DD Thank you.

AO You got it.

DD And ...

AO I'm an old schoolteacher. You know, you pronounce it right and most kids can learn how to spell.

DD That's right.

AO Just say the word, and they can't learn. But if you pronounce, you know, "yes" "ter" "day" the kids will all learn, you know? But if you say "yesterday: spell it" they can't.

DD When did you teach and where did you teach school?

AO No, I didn't teach school, I'm just saying that.

DD Oh okay.

AO I teach three hundred people now in my stores.

DD I'm sure you do.

AO Every day.

DD Okay.

AO And the older I get, the less they know.

DD Now, I'm going to see if I can be more precise: which stores you opened and when? I think you said 1948 you opened your first one?

AO Yes.

DD And where was that?

AO That was Gage, New Mexico on the southern highway.

DD On the southern highway. And then you came back north?

AO Yes. Came back to where I lived.

DD '51 was it?

AO No. I was on the southern highway and then I went to Tucson and had stores on Tucson, then I came back up north.

DD And where did you land when you came back up north?

AO Well, in my territory, and then the stores that were for sale, and I bought one.

DD Where were –

AO The first store that I owned was Hopi House Trading Post, west of Winslow, Arizona. Then the second one... well the first store, my dad and I were at Lupton. That's where we started. I ran the store because I had experience. I finished high school in 1946. I was seventeen. I was eighteen when we opened the store. Seven days after we opened the store. We opened it June 21st 1946. And then in September, he got a job driving school buses for twenty miles to Sanders and back, to make ends meet. So that really helped. And I ran the store. After five, six years I'd saved up, between my wife and I, we'd saved up \$5,000, and the guy wanted \$5,000 down for that trading post West of Deming New Mexico. And I bought that. After four years I had the inventory paid for and the first \$10,000 in the bank that I didn't owe anybody.

The first \$10,000 is the hardest thing to make in the world. The next hundred is second hardest. From there on you go. Easy. But that first \$10,000, my God you –

DD Maybe someday I'll learn those lessons. I haven't learned them yet. Tell me... were the people traveling on the Deming road, on the southern highway, did you sense a difference? Were the same as those who were...

AO Same people. Good people all over the world, you know? Now all over the United States. Same people. And you get some that are hot and bothered and they're kinda mean. But you talk to 'em nice and by the time they leave they're a little bit nicer.

DD Now, here's a question for you. At what point did you begin to notice tourists traveling on Route 66?

AO Oh, I noticed that a long time ago.

DD Well, I'm trying to get a sense for when. Because in the Dust Bowl era, it's people who don't have a choice by and large.

AO But a lot of people – during Depression, a lot of people still had money. Not a lot. But one out of every twenty had money. Okay? And I used to stand outside the house, before I got a job, and I got petrified wood, it was all over, you know? And I'd put up pieces like that, 50 cents each, 25 cents, I used to make a dollar, dollar and a half a day selling petrified wood to tourists.

DD Now, when would that be?

AO That would be about 1940.

DD So there were actually tourists –

AO Oh yeah, sure.

DD People who were just going to visit.

AO That's why all these motels were built in the 30's and 40's. And the restaurants and stuff. Diners and stuff.

DD They weren't for the Okies?

AO The Okies would buy something too – not all of 'em were broke. I mean, 6 out of 10 were broke. But four out of ten could buy stuff, you know?

DD And what would they buy?

AO Well, they'd buy candy, pops, they'd buy groceries, just everything that you and I would buy.

DD And, at what point did you find people buying – like – your petrified wood?

AO At what point?

DD Well, by 1946 I imagine a lot of them were buying... tourist stuff.

AO No, they were buying '39, '40, '41. Oh yeah, there was a lot of tourists. And not like there is now, but –

DD Alright. The things like kachinas, and the Indian craft, when did you start selling those things?

AO '81. Jewelry mostly, and Navajo rugs. Pottery. Kachinas didn't really get started 'til about 1970's.

DD And who would buy these? And what were they looking for in the early days?

AO Different people would buy them, the ones that liked them and could afford them, they'd buy them.

DD Did you see people roll up in Packards with chauffeurs and things like that?

AO Maybe once a week you'd see a movie star with a big car and stuff like that, yeah. See, there was no airlines. There was airlines but you didn't use airlines in the 30's and 40's. Maybe one out of a thousand would take an air trip. You know? They had to come by car.

DD And that brought them right to your door.

AO Yes.

DD Were there any people traveling in the '40s? Like '46 when you opened after the war?

AO Oh, yes.

DD Who were middle class, you might say?

AO I would say, yes.

DD And what would they buy different than the poor travelers?

AO The poor would buy, if they had money, the same things as anybody. They wouldn't buy none different. In fact, the ones that really had the money either bought big or they were – they'd cry because a candy bar was six cents. The rich ones. That's why they were rich.

DD And when you say "bought big," what would be a big buy for you, or a big sale?

AO At that time? Eighty dollars, 60 dollars, 40 dollars.

DD And what would that be?

AO Would be a piece of jewelry, a nice Navajo rug.

DD And where were you getting your jewelry and your rugs?

AO The Indians brought it in and sell it.

DD Now, these Navajo exclusively? Or more –

AO Mostly Navajo. Mostly Navajo.

DD And what other tribe?

AO Some once in awhile Zuni, once in a while Hopi. But not much.

DD And what the Hopis and the Zunis bring that would be different than the Navajo?

AO The Zuni jewelry. But, it was limited. Zuni jewelry has always been limited and Navajo jewelry has always been a lot. The Navajo multiplied making jewelry because it was a good livelihood.

DD Could you give us a sense of how the Navajo jewelry and the Navajo rugs have changed since you first started selling them?

AO Yes. I would say that they're 300 percent finer made. Finer made than they were in those days. They were

more crude in those days. Now today they're beautifully crafted and the rugs are beautifully tied. They were kinda loose in the old days, you know? Oh yeah, they've improved.

DD Now, in later days, they probably used a commercial dye and thread.

AO Now they do that.

DD In the old days, they –

AO They sheared the sheep, they washed the wool, they carded the wool, they spun the wool, they set up their own loom, they'd weave about a half-inch every day if you worked eight hours. If only four hours you'd only weave that much a day (indicates a distance).

DD An eighth of an inch. So, how long did it take someone who was working pretty hard to make a Navajo rug?

AO Well if they worked an average of four or five days, it would take a rug this big, would take 'em three to four months.

DD Three to four months for say, 4x6 here. Okay. And were some rugs better known, or considered more valuable than others?

AO Some areas were better rugs, yeah. Like they are now. But it doesn't make any difference, if you get a beautiful rug, you get it from any area.

DD Of course. And how did you make your contacts with these Indians?

AO Well, you have a trading post, and they know the trading post buys rugs and jewelry.

DD So, just like today, they would just show up, and say 'I have some rugs'?

AO Well, 'I have one rug.'

DD Or, 'I have one rug.'

AO They don't have a lot of rugs.

DD Of course.

AO And some of the tourists think they can go over there and buy their rugs from the Indians. If they hit it one time out of a thousand they'd just finished it. Yeah because the day they finished it, they sell it the next day, but it takes three or four months to finish it. It might be this big (indicates) so they're not going to buy it when... They got different ideas, you know? They think they're going to the reservation to buy it.

DD And how about the jewelry. How is the jewelry changed?

AO Better. Better workmanship. Well see, it was harder to make it then. They used to make it with slugs, one ounce sterling silver slugs and hammer it and spread it out. Now it comes in shapes. They got the design, they cut it out and they bend it and hammer it and then they put the sodder and the bezel and a lot of work to it still. But it's a lot finer work.

DD And when you say 'finer' what exactly do you mean?

AO Better. Better.

DD You have, no doubt a very good eye for... jewelry –

AO Well, everybody thinks they have good eyes, but you know...

DD I have to ask you then, what makes a fine piece of Navajo jewelry then and now?

AO The eye. What I can see.

DD Is it the fineness of the lines, or...

AO Yeah. The stamping, the stone in it, what quality stone it is. Yeah.

DD When did they start stabilizing the turquoise, would you guess?

AO 19 – I'd say about 1975, 1980. Remember this, diamonds are stabilized too, to give them a better color. Did you know that?

DD I didn't know that.

AO See, a lot of people don't know that. So your diamond has been stabilized to give it a good – better color in it. Yes it is. Look! Stabilizing means making it better and harder. It takes a little time.

DD And, were the stones mined locally?

AO Well the stones were mined in copper mines. The turquoise came out of copper mines such as Morenci, Bisbee, Arizona. The old mine near Santa Fe. The mines in Nevada. Kingman, Arizona. All over.

DD Were any of the stones local?

AO Local from where they came from. Yeah, it's where they came from. But there's been a lot of beautiful turquoise from out of Persia. They won't let it come out no more. Out of Iran. They won't let it come out any more.

DD Okay, let's get back to Route 66. You have this great starting point in 1946, where you're opening your first store, really along Route 66. No, that was the first store, wasn't on Route 66, it was in the south, it was 1951, so, when you were first opening. When you came back north did you notice the road had changed any?

AO No. Nothing. The same roads.

DD Same thing.

AO They didn't start building them until 1965, and right through here, didn't open until 19 – 1978 or '80, 1984 I think, '83.

DD And you're talking –

AO The freeway.

DD The freeway, yes. Have you, over your time on Route 66, have you noticed any change in the road itself, in the

traffic on it? I'd like to get a sense for the evolution of the road.

AO No. There's no traffic on it. I mean somebody wants to go on 66 they go off on it, but you tell 'em right over here is where it was.

DD I mean, between the time when you came back and say 1984, what kind of shifts did you see in the road? Was there more traffic? Different traffic?

AO No. A little more maybe. But, it gained every year. Every year. Every year. Every year. And every year it's gained.

DD Now you talked about –

AO If it wasn't for the airlines, now this road would be so – you wouldn't be able to – to pass anybody from here to Albuquerque.

DD Okay. Let's talk about the closing of the road in 1984. You were here, right, when they –

AO Oh, yes.

DD Do you remember the day that they shut the –

AO No, I do not remember the date. I remember closing Arizona north of 66 because I was state chairman of the State of Arizona Highway Department. I was the chairman. When we closed it. The minute we closed it, the next day there was no traffic downtown. All the traffic came through here – tons of cars – the day we closed it and opened it here, they were all here, and nothing over here. All those stations, restaurants, motels had a hard time.

DD What did they do?

AO They just tried to hold on, try to rent some – some of the people get off the road and come down to 66 to see if they can get a motel. And then they went little by little by little they went by the wayside. You know? You can see it all the way from Texas and Oklahoma and Texas, Amarillo, those little towns are – Tucumcari, Santa Rosa,

all through, those little towns they were hurting bad.
They were hurting bad, real bad.

- DD When did it start to turn around?
- AO Turn around?
- DD When did business start to come back on 66 after 1984?
- AO It didn't come back.
- DD It never came back?
- AO It never came back. Maybe if you were right by an interchange. You've got a motel room... Otherwise, it just don't come back, you know? They get a little if the other motels are filled up, the new one they built, they'll try to find something else, but nobody's come back. But it's been more active lately. Route 66. And there've been more people interested in it.
- DD When did you start noticing that? How long ago?
- AO Oh, years ago. Right after they closed the highway. When they closed 66. They didn't close it, and the freeway was opened, I noticed that.
- DD So, when it closes down, there's nobody coming through downtown anymore, but then at some point you begin to have people coming back.
- AO Well in the evening they come find a motel, or to find a restaurant. But during the day, it's like a ghost town. There's not any more local traffic, now, you know?
- DD Well outside your door here, there is a fair amount of traffic going back and forth.
- AO It's 90 percent local. They're all New Mexico cars, or Arizona cars.
- DD Okay. And are there any old businesses – were there – on 66 – who have stuck around?

AO Most of 'em are gone. But there's still a few that, little motels still surviving, you know? They run 'em by the month or something.

DD Do you remember the names of any of these –

AO No I don't.

DD What part of town are they in?

AO Right there across the street, and then the west side of town.

DD West side of town.

AO Right there, those two. That's what they all looked like. It was all these little motels through here, and then there was a big giant sitting in the middle. There was three giants in the southwest. One was the Adams Hotel in Phoenix, the second was the El Rancho Hotel in Gallup and the third one was the La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe. Three giants in the thirties, forties, fifties.

DD When you say "giant," you mean a lot of people were there –

AO No. (Speaks to someone out of earshot.) Jewel of the desert. I don't mean just a little motel with a little room. I mean something exclusive that you see and you love, you know? The dining room, the bar, the bar, we named top 50 in the United States, you know?

DD What year was that?

AO Just about six months ago.

DD Oh, okay. It's still here. Do you have any stories about tourists that you've either sold jewelry to or that you've rented rooms to that come to your mind?

AO No. In renting the rooms I've just been too busy, I can't – I listen to them you know and I go 'oh yeah, oh yeah.' Wish they'd take off.

DD How about in your stores?

AO I remember a lot of people that came back, you know, and things, but I can't really remember any incidents that were – I probably could remember – I'll remember as time goes by – but right now I can't think of any.

DD There's a chance that I can come back through here, in about a month, and maybe if you've thought of some new things I might just call and see if you have any stories you want to add to –

AO If you tell me – if you let me know – I'll spend another thirty minutes and I'll try to put something down. I'm gonna think of about twenty things after you're gone, too.

DD I know, it's always that way, isn't it? Always that way. Today, you get Route 66 tourists coming in here. Why do they go to Gallup, New Mexico? The Route 66 tourists.

AO Because it's a traveled highway, they've gotta come through here, and if the time gets right they've gotta get a motel or get something to eat, or they gas up.

DD What do they want?

AO They just want to stay, they want to get a room, they want to get a meal, they want to –

DD Well I understand that, but why – there's a lot of places they could stop, why do they stop in Gallup?

AO They stop all over. And not only Gallup.

DD No, I understand. But, why Gallup? What does Gallup have to offer that other places don't?

AO Gallup is really a place where – it's enchanting – it's a place where – one Mexican sits here, one Italian here, one colored guy there, and one Slav over there, and Texan over here, and other guy over here, and they all talk about the football game, and they all agree, and they're buddies. They've been buddies all their life. No discrimination in Gallup. No. It's one of the best things. And all good people.

DD Great. Tell me a little, finally, about the hotel itself.

AO A little what?

DD Tell me a little of the history of this hotel.

AO It was built in '36 and it opened in '37. And it was the only big thing in the country. Otherwise you had these little motels where you'd park your car in front and maybe they had a restroom and maybe they didn't. This hotel had restrooms in each, each – it was the elite of the three – like I told you – the three elites that were here. And then in the forties they built the El Dorado in Albuquerque. The Hilton.

DD El Dorado?

AO The Hilton hotel and now it's called something else. That pretty hotel when you go into Albuquerque.

DD Yeah. And so all over the lobby there's pictures of film stars.

AO The original ones stayed here.

DD Tell me the names of some of these people.

AO I can't remember. Let's start with Ronald Reagan who stayed here 8, 9 different times in his life. Two or three months at a time. And then all his crew members. And Ronald Reagan was always the lieutenant in the cavalry (makes trumpeting noise), you know? He was always lieutenant, never got to be captain. But at the end he got to be the chief of all of 'em.

Kirk Douglas, John Wayne, Oh my god, they're all here, and it says a lot of 'ems names.

DD Humphrey Bogart?

AO Yeah, Humphrey Bogart. Hedy Lamarr.

DD Now, why were they coming?

AO I didn't see 'em. I didn't ever know them.

DD Why did they come here to Gallup? So what's –

AO They did a movie – cavalry and Indian movies out in the reservation.

DD With Indian actors?

AO Yeah. That's the time that the – and John Wayne killed 20,000 Indians with his rifle, but really he never killed one in his whole life.

DD I'm sure. Let's hope so.

AO The other thing, all right. They had the Navajo guys on the horses, you know? And when they shoot, the front one that falls off got \$100. So they told them all, if you fall down off the horse running, or one time it was real fast running, so they gave them \$300. So one guy shot – one shot – (makes gunshot noise) \$300 fell off. The other one got \$300. They had to skip that part.

DD That's a good story. And were you here, twenty two years ago. When did they stop making films in Gallup? Were there any –

AO In the seventies. About the seventies. Sixties and seventies.

DD They stopped.

AO Mostly forties and fifties.

DD Do you remember any of these films? Did you ever watch them?

AO I watched several of them, but I can't really remember the names. The first one was The Bad Man. Wallace Beery was the head, the general and again, Ronald Reagan was his lieutenant in it. They made that in '39. And then they made a lot of other movies. I know the names but I can't remember –

DD Has the hotel itself changed?

AO Not one piece. Not one thing. Original. I put the pictures in different place, and I put the rugs in different, put the

beer in the head, the burrow head, and every little piece, I myself directed where it would be hung. Where the pictures would be hung. In the restaurant, in the curios shop, in the bar, in the, curious people just look around, they come on and look around and say – they're awed by this hotel.

- DD There's a lot to be awed about
- AO So I call it the pride of Gallup.
- DD The pride of Gallup. Okay. I just thought I'd mention to you that I've interviewed Hirshi Niomora, I've interviewed Sally Noe. Do you know Sally Noe, that she's a historian from this area?
- AO Oh yeah. There's three of 'em vying for that position in Gallup.
- DD Who are they?
- AO No, and the other one, I can't remember. I'm going to go ask Sally if he don't know. I joke with him, you know? And he's a good friend of ours. He really laughs, you know?
- DD What's his name?
- AO Tom.
- DD Tom. Okay.
- AO And Sally knows a lot. But you know a lot of people think they know a lot and I can catch 'em in different things that I remember that wasn't so, you know?
- DD Okay.
- AO But everybody's like that. You can write a book and somebody can say, 'no that's not right,' and prove you're not right. You know?
- DD I do know that, unfortunately. [chuckles] Okay, let me let you go, because you have some people who want to talk to you. What I would like to do is first of all make sure

that it's okay for us to process this interview, and other people can read it after I transcribe it –

AO

Sure. Sure.

DD

Okay. And I have a small form for you to sign that says exactly that. You'll have to fill in your address and –

AO

What's the date now?

DD

Today is the 28th.