

INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE AND STELLA SANCHEZ

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Interested in Williams, Route 66, Rod's Steak House, travelers – Lawrence Sanchez born Williams AZ 1945, Stella Faith Sanchez born Williams AZ 1948 – Williams Elementary – high school 1963 – change in traffic – delivering newspapers, semi-trucks – everything was huge – two-way street, logging industry, service stations – curio shops, barbershops, Soltette Theater – historic district – crossing the street – slingshot at trucks – entryway to Grand Canyon – a big Y with native rock, big pillars – separated Williams – difference between traveler and tourist – headed for California mid-fifties – work for gas – saw mills, railroad, people from Louisiana – Anglos or Hispanics? – black people staying, the Brown family – Hispanic emigration, railroads, fifties – restaurant business – no big industry – Grand Canyon and forest service – Grand Canyon Railway – 85% tourist jobs – Grand Canyon referring to Williams – Hispanic community segregated until mid-sixties – no Quinceañeros – at Rod's since '73 and '85 – “We were here on our honeymoon” – foreigners – “it's as good as it ever was” – selling water to Tusayan – hotel owner not preparing rooms – hotels emptying – '73 and '74 Williams rebounding – 1987 DOT re-did roads – “This will be the end of us” – word “bypass” – Seligman, Ash Fork, Winslow bypassed – fired shots at tractors? – 1968 Flagstaff bypassed – blocked the highway – trucks scaring tourists – celebration, Bobby Troop, on the main drag – “Where is Route 66?” – Route 66 popularity, logos, etc. – European and Japanese fixation – Williams Avenue changed to “Route 66” – could have sold the old concrete – Route 66 is like the Grand Canyon to them – Route 66 TV series – Route 66 two identities – stretch off Seligman that you can still travel on – tourists stealing Route 66 signs – logo lets them know where they are – road that wouldn't die – across the western part of the country – nostalgia – no stress in those days – The Visitor's Channel, story of Route 66 – traveling to NM through Two Guns, Twin Arrows, Rimmy Jims – metal steers to Gallup – Ash Fork railroads – Super Chief and Grand Canyon Unlimited – Tusayan – “Why do you stay here?”

DAVID DUNAWAY It's very kind of you both to make time in your busy schedule here at the restaurant to talk with us.

LAWRENCE SANCHEZ You're welcome.

DD I'm really interested to learn a little more about the history of Williams and Route 66 and of course Rod's Steak House and the stories of travelers and changes that have taken place. Now, maybe you could each introduce yourself by saying your name and where you were born.

LS My name is Lawrence Sanchez. I was born in Williams, AZ, 1945 and I've been a life-long resident here.

DD And Stella?

STELLA SANCHEZ My name is Stella Kathleen Sanchez. I was born and raised in Williams. I was born in 1948 and the building I was born in is now an insurance office. It used to be the old hospital.

DD You didn't grow up in Williams?

SS Most of my life I did. I was gone for about six or seven years. I left here when I was in the sixth grade and I returned after graduation from high school.

DD What elementary school did you go to?

SS To the local Williams Elementary School.

LS I attended Williams Elementary School and Williams High School. I graduated out of Williams High School in 1963.

DD Maybe you could each give me your thoughts, recollections, of what Williams was like back then. I imagine there have been a lot of changes in Williams over the years, and a lot of it has to do with, say, the traffic coming through. Did you notice a change in the traffic over the years from when you were in, say, school, and watching the cars go by?

LS

I can tell you that I grew up in the town selling newspapers as a child, and Route 66, which is the street right in front of us here, was a two-way street, up until 1957 or 1958, but the traffic was very heavy and constant. In 1957 or '58, they split the traffic because it was so heavy. They made one-way street east and one-way street west on Route 66, and the traffic has subsided some. During the period between 1968 through 1972, it was just an economic thing.

And then in 1983, Williams was the last town to be bypassed by Interstate 40 on October 13th. I was working for the gentleman here at Rod's. We at that time thought it was going to be a disaster for Williams, and actually it turned out to be a godsend because it took the big heavy, semi traffic out of town and people were able to drive through and kind of enjoy the town as they drove through. So it was a better situation for us.

DD

Stella, when you were growing up, did you used to watch the cars go by? I guess there were more than cars, it was cars and trucks.

SS

I think the most that I remember is when I would come downtown, of course I had to come with my sisters because I was the youngest, but when I'd come down town, everything seemed huge to me. Williams is not really a very big town, it's quite small, but if we were going to walk up the street, everything seemed – when you're a child I guess you look at it like that – everything seemed huge.

There was a lot of traffic, it seemed like to me. I always remember either riding my bike or walking by Rod's and it was always here, it seems like, ever since I can remember. A lot of buildings are the same. It looks the same to me. I can remember, for instance, the motel here across the street, I can remember it as it was, years ago, and I think it was called the Del Sue Motel. The motel across the street here, I remember it being the El Coronado motel. It had the only swimming pool in town. I remember things like that.

DD You've given me a good sense for when the road split and I was going to ask you about that, when you had two one-way streets. What do you remember of the highway, back when you were young?

LS When I was young, the highway, or the street in between, because it was a two-way street, I can remember it was a very busy street and there was a... bus from a little town, course we had the logging industry at that time, and that was one of the mainstays.

But there was a service station probably on every other corner, you know? And the old names of Texaco and Richfield and Phillips 66. Those stations used to be up and down the streets. It seemed the motels and the gas stations were the big thing, everywhere you went, you know? And the mobile stations... and the downtown area had all kinds of little stores, not so much like it is now...

SS Curio shops.

LS They had curio shops. It was traded to the tourist industry, but there was also a Western Auto... there were stores in the center of downtown, which is now the historic district, that were catering to the local people with the Western Auto, the Rexall drug, the corner drug, the newsstand.

SS The barbershops.

LS The barbershops. There were a couple of barbershops right across from each other. The old theater that was there.

DD What was the name of the theater?

LS It was named the Sultana Theater at the time. And it had a big old marquee up front, the old style marquee up front with the little changing letters, the little square letters that changed.

SS It was a big deal to get to go to the show.

LS Yes, it was.

SS I remember that.

LS The only main grocery store at that time was a Babbitt's – a local chain actually, out of Flagstaff and Williams and Grand Canyon, but that was a big store, a big department-style store. They had clothing and then –

SS I worked there.

LS Across from the corner drug... on the west of the corner drug there was a Safeway Store – and this was all centered in the middle of town, which is now the historic district – it was a very busy little traffic town.

DD Was it hard to cross the street?

LS It was.

DD What would you do? How would you get across one side to the other?

LS As a kid we used to do it. When I was a kid, being a daredevil, we used to sell newspapers and we'd have to pick them up at the bus depot, which was at Fred's Super Service, and they would throw our papers out and you'd just take off running. Just run. And luckily, I guess, I just never got run over. Everybody stopped, screeched –

SS I don't think you paid that much attention to it. You just – when the car was coming –

LS Took off

SS You ran. [chuckles]

LS I remember when I was a kid, we'd sit over in the center of town on the little edge by the Safeway Store there, and we used to have one of those cherry balls that you used to use on a –

DD Slingshot?

LS A slingshot. And we'd use a slingshot and shoot at the trucks. Pop 'em on the side of the truck, the big trucks coming through. We never got in trouble. The police

never said anything – nobody said anything to you, just a bunch of kids making noise, you know?

DD I think one of the things that makes Williams different from these route 66 towns, of which there are so many, is that you guys had the Grand Canyon. You had the entryway to the Grand Canyon.

LS Absolutely.

DD Maybe you could talk a little bit about what that was like.

LS What I remember about the Grand Canyon, of course, all the motels and the service stations, and the few restaurants that were here, Rod's Steak House being one, and some of the older ones that were around, it was all about the Grand Canyon. You used to drive through town.

The street went east to west, and when it reached the east of the town it used to go under a bridge – under the railroad and back around again and went and got to the top of the hill, to the Grand Canyon Highway 64. So it was a big Y built with native rock.

The entrance had these big pillars right about a hundred or two hundred feet below the entrance to the 64, had these giant rock pillars that said of course, "Grand Canyon Highway 64." The traffic was very heavy for those, and I remember the large cars, cars seemed to be real large in them days, you know? The big Buicks and the –

SS The junction was really attractive.

LS It was a very attractive junction.

SS It totally separated Williams. You knew you were coming from Flagstaff. It separated Williams. And you knew by seeing that big old junction out there, that you were going to the Grand Canyon, and it was like, exciting or something, because, you know, as small children, I don't think we got out that way very much. But when somebody did take you, and you saw that, I

can imagine how it was, even now. But, on our tablecloths, there is a likeness to the junction out there.

LS To the pillars, they're right there.

SS Yes, they're right there on our tablecloth, we use them.

DD You had the travelers, who were coming through east, west, for LA or back to Flag, but then you also had, which a lot of those places on route 66 didn't have, which was tourists. Genuine tourists. Now, was there a difference between the traveler and the tourist?

LS No, I think.

SS I think the traveler was the tourist.

LS The tourists that came through here... the destination of the tourists in them days, the ones that were well enough to afford to drive out to southern California, or from the east, their destination was strictly the Grand Canyon. There was a lot of travelers that were loaded down, headed to California for the Promised Land, I guess. There was lots of people that would remember, in particular my dad, or some of the older folks that would be helping people, broke down on the way to California, because they were headed to California.

I was ten or eleven, so it was mid-fifties. And there was a tremendous amount of people heading, right after the war, to California to work in the big industries that were happening and the big farms that were over there. And those came out of the – to me was far east – Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri – them people were on their way to California to make a change.

DD I imagine they weren't the same people who were going to the Grand Canyon.

LS Oh, no.

DD They weren't going to stop, in other words, and say, "Oh, we're at the Grand Canyon."

LS No. Those were people that came through. Most of them, they didn't do the hotels, they didn't do the

restaurants. As a matter of fact, it was known that some of them would come through and work for a few days to make enough money for gas to keep on going to California. And that was real common.

DD What would they do?

LS They would work restaurants, or the saw mill had a lot of heavy work that they had, and a lot of people ended up staying, a lot of people came out of Louisiana and that area, heading to California, and a lot of them would stop, or this is as far as they got, and they'd get on with the railroad, well not the railroad so much, but with the saw mill, doing the lumber work and end up staying, a lot of the people would.

DD And what kinds of people were traveling through? Did you get to know any of them? I guess you didn't live here, but you might know. But were they Anglos or Hispanics?

LS Actually, almost all the ones that I can remember that were traveling through as migrants, I always say, were Anglos. And the ones that ended up, that I noticed, probably in, it had to be the late fifties, there were some black people coming through. And that was my first view of black people. I never knew black people until probably I was thirteen or fourteen years old. And some of those people are the ones that ended up staying – working the saw mills and the logging trucks – and they ended up staying here. That's my first knowledge of the black people out of Louisiana or Arkansas, and that kind of stuff.

DD Did they go to the elementary schools?

SS Yes.

LS Yes, they did.

SS There's still several of them still here that came years ago.

LS In the old days, yes.

- SS The Brown family. And they had several daughters, several sons, and then it seemed like people that knew them, other families, moved here. There was probably three or four big families.
- LS The two brothers I remember, Olsen and Henry, are the fathers of the two big Brown families. One of their sons was my age, and he started the seventh or eighth grade with us, and like I said that was our first real knowledge of the black people. I never knew what that was, you know?
- DD And how about Hispanics? Were there a lot of Hispanics here? Had they always been here?
- LS You know...
- SS I don't think you'd say there was a lot, but I think there was, what would you say, maybe...
- LS The way I remember the Hispanics, a lot of them moved out of New Mexico, Albuquerque area, southern Albuquerque area, like my folks did, in the late thirties, early forties, and they came to work at the munitions, at the Navajo Munitions which is an idol now I think. In any case, the Hispanics came to work that. And a lot of them had moved westerly with the railroad. And that's —
- SS The Hispanic family... my family moved here. My dad was employed with Santa Fe Railroad. And he and my mother were married in New Mexico and came here. And that was in the earlier thirties, I think.
- LS Most of 'em migrated out of New Mexico, northern New Mexico. Belen.
- SS Bernalillo. Gallup. Albuquerque.
- LS And they all moved, working either the big Army depot that was supplying the war, or the railroad, and that was the biggest migrant of the Hispanics during the fifties. A lot of those kept on moving west to California, to northern California. A lot of 'em worked in the factories in northern California.

DD Did they come back?

LS Very few have come back. Very few. I've known of a few, but most of 'em had ended up staying in the California area.

DD What kinds of occupations did they have here in the fifties and sixties and seventies...?

SS In Williams?

DD Yes.

SS I would say it's pretty much like it is now, with the exception of maybe the Forest Service jobs that are held. But I think everybody that's ever lived in Williams has worked at Rod's. You worked in the restaurant business, or you worked somewhere in the motel or hotel business because it's a tourist town and the jobs that are offered...

I, in all the years I've lived here, have never remembered a big industry being here, like we said, my husband said earlier, the lumber industry was here in the late fifties, early sixties, and my stepdad had a job at the lumber mill, but to say people came here to seek certain jobs... they weren't available. All that was available was the jobs that were –

LS Tourist industry.

SS Were associated with the tourist industry, right?

LS After the saw mill, after the federal government cut off a lot of this logging, after the sawmill went away, almost everything in the town is tourist-related. It's tied directly to whatever the Grand Canyon does. If the Grand Canyon... In the mid-seventies, at the Grand Canyon, you can look at the attendance for years, and when the Grand Canyon was down, Williams was down. So it was all tied into that. The only other government jobs that are in town that are created by the Forest Service, that's the only real big employer, I think, in the town.

Now, with the Grand Canyon Railway, which has grown in the past ten years to what it is... It started 1989, and it was kind of a long shot at that point, because you were looking to bring enough people in to run the railroad like that. But, as of today right now, anybody that lives in or works out of the town, I would say more than 85 percent are tourist-related jobs tied to the town. There are some people that are using Williams as a bedroom community. They commute to Flag and there's jobs with big offices like Gore or Purina or some of the other places that are pretty large there, but most of all the people in this town, now, are working the tourist-related occupation.

- SS I also think that the Grand Canyon in turn, refers to Williams for a lot of things. Like for instance, I will have a lot of calls here from the Grand Canyon to ask what prices we're running this year for this-that-or-the-other because they want to know, I think, to keep competitive, I guess, and they'll refer to Williams a lot as well, to see what's going on here, before people travel from here to there. Because they can't accommodate everybody that comes there, so if they know that people stop here and people stop in Flagstaff. I had yearly calls from them to seek information about what and how things are going on in Williams. So...
- DD Was the Hispanic community integrated into the civic life here in Williams?
- SS I don't think so, do you?
- LS I'm sorry, I didn't hear the question.
- DD I was just wondering, was the Hispanic community integrated into the rest of the civic society here... were they on the town council?
- LS At first it was kind of... I can remember in my days of schooling, as a matter of fact I was just speaking to my sister the other day about it because she comes to the reunions and stuff, and my experiences with going through school and stuff, we weren't very well accepted.

The Hispanic community was, actually it was segregated mostly. There was a section of town that Hispanics lived in. It wasn't all over, it was a section over here, and a section on the north side of town, very small on the north side, there wasn't very much there. But, it was a segregated community. Even as late as the mid-sixties, I would guess. And about that time...

- SS I think it changed along with everything else that changed. People were more accepted: Hispanics, blacks, after a while everything got together. But I think it came along just like every other town, or every other race.
- DD Would they have Quinceañeros, and traditional Hispanic –
- LS No, I don't recall that at all.
- SS I don't either.
- LS In my days I don't recall Quinceañeros, or... the Hispanic, I think, and this is my perception of that, I don't think they wanted to do that because we were already segregated from everybody, so... I think it might have been a thing that they didn't want to do because of that. I don't know.
- DD You've been here at Rod's Steak House since 1973?
- LS Right.
- DD You've been here since, what, '85?
- SS Since 1985, yes. I'm just starting my 22nd year.
- DD That seems like such a long time.
- SS It does.
- DD I bet you have some stories about travelers that come through, or tourists, that have come in to Rod's... I'm kind of collecting travelers' stories. Anything come to mind?

- LS I know that, and this is more common than not, I've had an old couple walk in and they'll sit down and have dinner and they'll tell us "this is like we had on our honeymoon, on our way through here, fifty years ago." That's happened very many times. And we have a lot of people that come from all over actually, that were hoping to come back, and fifty years later, were surprised to see that Rod's Steak House was still operating.
- SS I especially like to hear when people come and they say, "We are from Denmark, and our friends were here twenty years ago and they told us if we came to be sure and see if the restaurant was still here. And they sent us here." And there are so many people that come in here and say, "They sent us here" or "We were here when we were just four and five years old with our parents. We are so surprised to still see the restaurant here." That kind of thing. We had a couple who came and said, "Tonight is our fiftieth anniversary, we were here the day we were married, and now we're back, fifty years later." Very nice to hear.
- LS Very nice things.
- SS And what's especially nice to hear is, "It's as good as it ever was." That's very nice to hear because the restaurant business is a hard business but to be able to hear people say that it's still good and it still looks like it used to, to them when they remember this or that, it's very, very nice to hear that.
- DD I'd like to take you back to the period when it looked like the government was going to close down Route 66. So this would be the early eighties.
- LS I remember that.
- DD You said earlier that there was a sense in town about people were worried about it. Can you talk a little bit more about that?
- LS Between 1960 or '61 'til about 1970 or '71... there's a ten year period there. Our city fathers decided, "We're going to make some money off the water we have." And the city hauled water from here to just south of

Tusayan. The first time I went through Tusayan, I used to go with my dad, and he was in the carpet-cleaning business, and we used to go to the Grand Canyon. Tusayan had a gas station and a four-seater restaurant in the early sixties.

When the city fathers decided “this is a good revenue off of selling water,” well, they sold... they kept water flowing to Tusayan and Tusayan built several thousand rooms in the first couple years. So by 1966, all the motels in town started emptying out. We’re losing. So by 1970, all the motels in town were almost shut down. There was a few that were struggling by. There was, the gentleman across the street, he would operate the place and he was by himself and when he’d rent a room, the people would drive up and he, usually he’d only rent rooms when the town was completely full, Memorial Weekend or Fourth of July, some three-day weekend, and handed the people their linens and said, “There’s your room”–

SS He didn’t keep any of the rooms ready, but he handed them everything to them when they rented their room, and nobody seemed to mind.

LS I guess it’s because that was the only room.

SS Or, if they did, I don’t know. He rented ‘em.

LS There wasn’t the big Holiday Inn that’s sitting up there, or the Best Western. Anyways, just the smaller motels in town were struggling because all these rooms opened up, and you know, you’re seven miles away from the Grand Canyon, why stop 60 miles away? So it kind of emptied us out. Up until 1973... In ’73, either they reached the limit, I know they had a little bit of a fallout about the water, but they ended up getting water from the north side of the canyon and piped it in. Anyways, they had water.

So, Williams decided to concentrate on what was going on in Williams. In ’73 and ’74, it started rebounding a little bit. Little at a time. The traffic was a little heavier. People started moving a little bit more. Although we had that gas crisis in mid ’73, I remember that real well,

because we thought that was a real dry spell for us. And then it started moving up a little bit.

A few of the motels started... but they were still running on a shoe-string. Wintertime would come and you'd see a lot of 'em pull out and leave, you know? Then it finally changed about '79, '80, the town started to spruce up a lot. It just really changed. And then in 1987, that was when the Department of Transportation re-did the streets and brought them up to date, and that spruced the whole town up altogether. Sidewalks, all the way from one end to the other. That really changed the...

DD I've talked with Doug Wells, a little bit about this, and gone through some of your local newspapers to try and get a sense for what people were saying about the end of Route 66, and how people would feel about it. So, I'd like to hear your own thoughts. Were people saying, "This is going to be the end of us?"

LS Oh, yes.

SS That's what I thought.

LS That was the consensus of the town. We still lived over there by the school, and we see the construction going on, hear the pounding of the big machines, and the consensus was, "Once that highway opens up, we're really going to have to see what's going to happen."

SS I think people just saying the word, "bypass" scared everybody. No, just hearing that word. Because we know we're a tourist town, but I don't think anybody really stopped to think, "Well, we are a tourist town, but we have the Grand Canyon." Like, when you first started to speak with us, you said that, "You have the Grand Canyon." I don't think anybody looked at it like that. All anybody could say was, "What's going to happen to Route 66?"

LS Yes, "What will we do now?"

SS What will we do? "Bypass." The word was "bypass." That scared everybody. It did me.

- LS It was a scary thing because we seen the Seligman bypass. We'd seen Ash Fork bypassed. That's almost nothing. We've seen a lot of these little towns: like Valentine and Truxton. I mean, there's nothing there anymore. There's a couple of store fronts that somebody might try to run for awhile.
- We seen the downtown area Winslow, which has gained a lot... but Winslow had the railroad base there which kept them going, but the downtown area is just absolutely... ghost town. I thought, "Oh, wow. Is that what we're going to look at now? Is that what we're going to see?" And then I remember that day that it happened, I was standing right there [points], and then the day after that, I was talking to the guy that owned it, the man I worked for, and he says, "Well, we just don't know what we're going to expect." But actually, it was completely different than what I expected even. And business was –
- SS And nobody saw a down.
- LS Did you see a down-turn?
- SS No, I didn't.
- LS I did notice though, there was a lot of service stations that were featured on "20-20" and some of them, they were oiling the shocks and all that kind of stuff. You seen them kind of operations just fold up, just dried up, just like that, almost overnight. But, you know, the legitimate operators, they were still there and everybody was operating real fine and everybody was doing good.
- DD Somebody I talked with said something that I've been trying to track down, and you may have heard of it, and that is that in the sort-of year or so before the construction was completed, that there were people that were so mad about that highway bypass that they actually fired shots at some of the tractors and heavy machinery.
- LS I don't know that, but you know, I can tell you a story that I do know about. In 1969, no 1968, when Flagstaff was bypassed, and this I seen happen because I was

working for the Department of Transportation, the morning they opened the highway pass by Flagstaff, the mayor and a bunch of people they got up and they blocked the highway and made them drive through town.

They absolutely closed the highway back up and made the people drive through town until of course a federal judge, or whoever that was, straightened that out. But they actually stopped that. I don't recall that happening here in town. But I do remember that people were very upset and scared. Very scary because –

SS How were they going to live? How were they going to survive?

LS See, I had grown up mostly in the tourist business myself, working for whoever, so you know –

SS And we had even talked about it, being newly married, “Well, maybe we'll have to move.” You know, I mean?

LS Go and find a job where it doesn't depend on strictly tourist business.

SS But even before you realized, everything was okay, you know? Nothing happened. No big tragedy. And I think everybody appreciated that that heavy amount of traffic was not coming through town anymore, those great big eighteen-wheeler trucks... Can you imagine all that going through here?

LS I remember that real well.

SS I don't hardly remember that.

LS People driving down the road, and the big truck bear on down, and they're tourists, and they look up and they see this big truck going and so they just keep going, you know? It would absolutely scare people away, but once them trucks moved out to the top. Everything flowed good.

DD Now, I know there was a sort of celebration connected with when the road was closed. Could you tell me a

little bit about what you remember about that? Bobby Troup was here?

LS Yeah, Bobby Troup.

SS The guy that sang that –

LS Yeah, he sang that song –

SS “Get your kicks on Route 66.”

LS Yes, they had quite a celebration. As a matter of fact, I remember Bobby Troup and three or four other people that were with that group came to Rod’s Steak House. I remember that because they wanted to bring everybody’s spirits up because a bypass was going through and everybody was really worried about it and they wanted to bring everybody’s spirits up because, “We’re gonna go by you and we won’t see you no more.” But it was a really big celebration. I remember that real well. They had kind of a fifties car show type thing. Quite a big deal. I remember that for sure.

SS I think we have a little music somewhere.

DD Wasn’t it out on the highway?

LS It was right on the main drag, right there at the middle interchange between – probably four or five hundred yards there, ‘cause it was still closed on that end and that end, and then they just did it all right there, and once they got all that done, they just pulled everything off and they took the barriers down and –

SS Opened it up.

LS And opened ‘er up.

DD Angel Delgadillo tells the story of the day Seligman was bypassed. And he says, “You could lie right down on the street in front of my barbershop, and nobody would” –

LS Nobody came by. [chuckles] See that’s what scared us. We knew what had happened to Seligman and Ash

Fork both, because there's nothing there for anybody to pull off into.

SS And why do you suppose that was? Because they were very far from the Canyon, I think, and Williams wasn't. You know, Williams was the closest... And I think that... towns like Seligman and Ash Fork, because they're still quite a distance.

LS Those towns are still struggling. I imagine there's a lot of 'em on the route that are –

SS People will come and they'll say, "Where is Route 66?" And I'll go –

LS "That street right there."

SS There they go and stand out in the middle of the street and take pictures.

DD There was this time that Route 66 was closed... you have trucks out on the freeway, you have the tourists coming through here, and that's good for Rod's Steak House, certainly you see people going right by your door. I'm wondering if you noticed sort of a revival on Route 66. At what point people sort of started saying, just what you said, "Is this Route 66?"

SS When did we notice it?

DD When did that begin?

SS To me, I've always heard it, since I've been at Rod's. People have the interest... because it bypassed here in '81, right?

LS '83.

SS Well, people will always come and ask, or they'll say, "Where does it start and where does it end?" A lot of people have heard of it, it's very popular. Clothes have the logo all over it, but people don't actually know where it started or where it ended, how many states it covered, or whatever, and they want to know all about history... especially the foreign people, and when you tell them that, that "it's right out there," they're just so

shocked, you know? And you give them a little history and they're just so happy to hear it. But I've always heard that, since we've owned Rod's... I've heard it all the time, people ask.

LS In 1986 or '87, might have been '88, Stella decided to put the Route 66 logo on all our stuff. She said, "Let's..." At that point, I think the last of the eighties really got big and a lot of people were... It seems to me like the Europeans had this fixation on Route 66. They come from Norway and from Germany, and they had this thing about Route 66.

In the late eighties, we started using the logo, and I think it was the early nineties when all the local businessmen decided to take a petition and change the name "Williams Avenue" back to "Route 66." And I think that was early nineties, if I remember that right.

SS That's about right, yes.

LS And that's when... because everyone was asking about it. "Well you're on Williams Avenue," "Oh, no, that's Route 66." And that's what they wanted to see, they wanted to see Route 66. My recollection of the big upturn on the Route 66 was the late eighties. The Europeans, the Germans, the Japanese, they had this great fixation on it.

SS The oriental people they are very, very Americanized, and they wanted any kind of souvenir that had Route 66 on it.

LS Or came off Route 66.

SS Or, "Can you get a piece of Route 66?" I go, "Not that I know of." [Chuckles]

LS I regret that, because in 1997 and 1998, when they re-did the street, I should have gotten some of that broken up... 'cause they had the old concrete... If you remember the old concrete was probably thirty feet wide and probably twenty-eight feet long, and there was a slab every time you hit it [makes clapping noises], and it was right here through town, it was all the way through town. Had I had them take a whole

bucketful and put it out back there and chip it out and put a little tag on it, probably would have gotten rich of those pieces of concrete. But people want that you know? And they like to –

DD Why is it, do you suppose, that the foreign tourists are so interested in Route 66?

SS I think they must just think of it as kind of like the Grand Canyon, you know? They've heard about it, they've read about it, they want to see where it is. I wonder a lot of times when you tell them, "It's just right out there." They go out there and they're going, "Well, okay... what now?" or something. I think that it's just that they've heard a lot about it.

LS They see the old movies, the old movies about Route 66, like the old Route 66 TV that went on... What was the name of it? "Route 66" I guess. And it was Martin Milner and George Maharis. And I think they equate that kind of a thing with Route 66. I'm not sure, but they have this fixation on it, I know that.

DD Route 66 runs right through my town too. It's Central Avenue.

LS I remember that very well.

SS In Albuquerque?

DD In Albuquerque. And one of the things I've always been puzzled about, with Route 66, is it seems like it has two separate identities. You know, it's the street in front of your business. You use it every single day. Yet people are traveling 2,000, 3,000 miles to get there. Kind of like their destination resort is my backyard.

LS Exactly.

DD I wondered, what does that mean? For all these people, they have this sense of mystery, and excitement...

LS The intrigue of Route 66.

SS You know, a lot of people that come will ask, "Is there a part of Route 66 that we can still travel on?" And then

we send them off Seligman, you know you can get onto it and travel so far.

LS Sixty-five miles of it. The longest stretch there is.

SS We try to tell them that there are stretches of it they can travel on, because they want to go somewhere and tell somebody, "We actually rode on Route 66." I think it's a clout thing, you've gotta tell somebody you were... And there's so many signs downtown that say Route 66, and you see people standing underneath and, boy, they're taking the pictures.

DD Angel told me that he had, he might be exaggerating, he had enormous trouble getting them to put the signs back on Route 66.

LS Well the reason they did, and they did, was they set 'em up and the tourists just take up. They put 'em up and the tourists'll take 'em. As fast as they were putting 'em up they were taking 'em down. So, this fella I know, Ervin Boren, out of Flagstaff, as a matter of fact he gave me an original sign because he was an engineer for ADUP. He said, be careful of this one because they'll steal it right from out of your door.

We used to have it right there, and then we put it there, and we've moved it a couple of times because they just take 'em. We moved it there so we can keep an eye on it. But, Angel's probably right, because as soon as they'd set 'em up, especially on a stretch like heading west out of Seligman to Peach Springs to Kingman, it's kind of isolated, and if it's sitting there, and if you can look this way and look that way and you've got a half-inch wrench, you take it and you're gone, you know?

SS It was quite innocent, I think.

LS It's a souvenir.

SS People wanted them.

LS It's a unique souvenir. It's an original.

DD And, so there is this mania that you live with. To some extent, your business profits from Route 66.

- LS Absolutely.
- SS When I told Lawrence that I wanted to put the Route 66 logo on some of our things, at first he thought, “Well...” And I said, “It will tell people for sure that they’re at the right place, on the right road, the whole deal.” And so we put it on a couple of things, and people liked it. And, you know, then, I talked to a couple of people that owned businesses up the way here, of course they no longer own them, but I said, “don’t you think it’s a little way to let people know exactly where they are and where it is?” And then after awhile it just became something that everybody did, you know? And it let people know where it is, or what they wanted to hear, really.
- DD In a funny way, Route 66 is a road that wouldn’t die. I’ve heard stories that people were coming to take down signs and there was somebody right behind them putting them back up again.
- SS I try to wonder: if there is another Route 66, what is it? You know, I don’t know there’s another one as popular, do you?
- LS I think Route 66, because it’s 2000 miles long and it was an original and you could leave Chicago and travel to L.A. and stay on the same two numbers, Route 66, and get all the way. And that was unheard of, you know? That was like... I mean there was Route 91 and there was Route 101, but there was none that came totally across the western part of the country. And I think people related to that, you know?
- DD What is it today? What does it mean? Is it all nostalgia?
- LS It’s all nostalgia.
- SS Oh, absolutely.
- LS It’s about being part of “what used to be.”
- SS You know, people want to go back to that era, especially people our age. If you will recall – and we have to think this way – everything back there was so

simple and easy, nothing was complicated. Everything was just –

LS

And it was simple to us at that time.

SS

To me it was. I know that. Everything was comfortable. There was no stress. I think, a lot of people look to that. Of course everyone was younger, and it didn't matter when you were younger, but I think people are all about nostalgia nowadays. Even young people. There's a lot of young kids that work for me that can sing all the songs – cause we play the '60s and '70's in here for music – there's a couple of them that sing right along to all those songs, because that's all they heard all the time they were being raised. I just think it's the nostalgia that pulls people here.

DD

Some people, maybe the ones that watch the TV series, also talk about a sense of freedom, and openness. Have you ever heard about that?

SS

There's a local station here – what's it called Lawrence? The visitor's channel – that has the story of Route 66 on it. And when he starts telling the story, I think his name is Paul, he talks about the open – what does he call it, I can't remember what he calls it exactly – he starts to tell this story about Route 66, it's really kind of neat to listen to the whole thing, because he has really done his homework, to be able to tell this story. And when he's talking and he's telling the story, you can actually remember some of the things he says. It's a pretty cool... If you get a chance to tune into that channel, try it.

LS

The thing about Route 66, and the openness and the nostalgia about it – I can remember traveling from here. We traveled back to New Mexico to family, in any case you'd travel on Route 66, you'd get to places like Two Guns, Twin Arrows, unique places, there ain't a McDonald's, a hundred and fifty of 'em, or Burger King or Jack in the Box, you're going down and you hit Twin Arrows and there's a little diner there, and a little curio in there, and a little place to stop and rest and get gassed up or whatever.

You go down a little further and you hit Two Guns and Two Guns is kind of sitting in its little rock house right off the edge of the Canyon Diablo, you see a little canyon over there, and it's a gas station, and there are little knick knacks and stuff around, and then you go another thirty or forty miles and you see the sign, "next gas, fifty miles" you hit what's called Rimmy Jims – which is a little Indian curio type-thing. It was right in the entrance to the meteor crater and it was called Rimmy Jims, and this kind of stuff.

SS

I think we've turned all these places into tourist attractions.

LS

The old Axel Operations that they used to have.

SS

Or when they had all the Burma Shave signs all along... You know people looked forward to traveling that to read the signs. I know Rod's had cows all –

LS

We had steers. We had steers from here to Gallup. We had steers from here to Prescott – actually south of Prescott, which is now Prescott Valley. We had steers all the way to Kingman and steers all the way to the Grand Canyon. And it was a hundred and some odd –

SS

Little metal steers. It was advertising.

LS

Actually, you can see, there's a couple of 'em out behind the building. We've got them stored in there. Up until –

SS

Lady Bird.

LS

Lady Bird changed the "Clean up America Act." So, we were out there taking these down. And we had several hundred, and they were all steel cut-outs of steers, life-size.

SS

When I was a kid, I used to wonder what the Burma Shave meant, exactly. I didn't know what it was. But I remember always reading them. And I think, small things like that made it very unique. It was a well-traveled route.

LS Everything was unique. Nothing was rubber-stamped, you know? Everything was unique. Like I said, Rod's Steak House had the signs. You went to Ash Fork, they had a nice little town there. There's a railroad depot there. And the railroad dropped people off. Like here, in the fifties, we had Super Chief and Grand Canyon Unlimited. And they always came – Super Chief, it seemed to me, was always later, I think, 9:30pm. And they stopped there. It was a stopping point. I don't know what they did, but they dropped two-three hundred people and they'd get out and mill around town, and the city, the middle of town itself was busy with the people... it was just, the uniqueness...

SS It was safe and comfortable for people too. I think, because the town was smaller.

DD You mentioned Tusayan seven miles from the Grand Canyon.

LS Tusayan, yes.

DD Could you spell that?

LS and SS T-U-S-A-Y-A-N

DD Is it still there?

SS Oh, yes.

LS It's huge. It's probably... They've got several thousand rooms there now.

SS Isn't the IMAX theater there?

LS IMAX theater, and they have several thousand rooms now.

SS Couple little restaurants.

DD Is there anything else you'd like to add? You've been very helpful.

SS I just think, had I not grown up in Williams, I often wonder. Everybody says, "Why do you stay here? There's nothing here." But there is a lot here.

Especially when people come to see you on a day-to-day basis and they go, "I was here when I was a little kid." If you can appreciate growing up here and people coming back and telling you that, sometimes it's pretty cool. You know, it's just... nice.

DD It sure is. My hope is that I will transcribe this and deposit it in an archive and let people know about your view of the history of Williams. Is that okay with you?

LS Absolutely.

SS Yes.

DD I'm going to try and stop this for a second....