

Interview with Pete Magana, March 6, 1991, Oceanside California, for Oceanside Historical Society regarding the Americanization School. Interviewer: John A. Daley. Transcribed by Archivist Kristi Hawthorne

Pete: I'll show you my First grade picture. That picture was taken 1935. This picture was taken 1938, when I was in Third grade. That was taken on the North side of the building.

John: Why don't I start off by asking you your full name?

Pete: My actual name was Pedro. We all had Spanish surnames and when we went to school, they changed it.

John: It's Pedro Magana. And your middle name?

Peter: Nares. I have my mother's maiden name. At that time, you know, we used maiden names, we didn't have middle names.

John: What year were you born?

Peter: April 14, 1928.

John: Where were you born?

Peter: Here in Oceanside, right behind the tune-up place. There's a white house there, right there on Mission Avenue. Econo Lube. I was born there in 1928, we moved in 1930, right next to El Charrito Restaurant, at 306 San Diego Street. In '59 I got married. I moved down San Diego Street, just beyond Lemon Street and then in '61 I built this house, 1233 Langford.

John: What were your parent's names?

Peter: My dad was Atenogenes Magana, and my mother's Baleria.

John: Where were they from?

Peter: They were from Mexico, they're both from the State of Michoacan. My mother's from Purepero, my dad's from Galiana, Michoacan. The state of Michoacan. My mother came in 1918. She went to Santa Ana first. She came to Oceanside, I believe, in 1922. My dad came in 1906 and then he went all the way up to Oregon and then he came back in 1906.

John: What brought your parents to Oceanside?

Peter: My mother said it was the civil war in Mexico. I don't really know why my dad came. My dad came alone. My dad came by himself when he was a teenager.

John: They came to California because of the civil war, but do you know why did they settled in Oceanside?

Peter: No, probably because of work, finding a lot of work. Because when they came, they came from El Paso. That's where they crossed. I think they paid at that time, a penny or two pennies to get across, something like that, per person.

John: They paid a coyote to cross?

Peter: No, no. That's how they crossed. You paid to come into the United States.

John: That was the form of immigration at the time?

Peter: Immigration, yes

John: So they became legal citizens?

Peter: Right.

John: When they came to Oceanside did they both work?

Peter: No, I never saw my mother work. My dad worked on farms. He worked a lot on farming ... When we grew up as kids, we used to help my dad. My dad used to farm, he told me one time he used to farm where the Bank of America is, right next to St. Mary's Church.

John: Let me back up, do you have any idea when your parents were born?

Pete: My dad was born in 1888, in July. My mother was born in April 1904, I believe it was.

John: So your dad did some farming here in town himself?

Pete: Oh yeah. We used to farm where the golf course is by the Elks Lodge.

John: When they moved to Oceanside, where did they live?

Pete: They lived in this area, like I said. When my brother was born, there was a big house right there in Sterling Homes, and one of my brothers was born there. Pretty much we lived here in this area since I can remember when, I guess when they arrived.

John: What is your older brother's name?

Pete: Steven. He lives right behind the service station right here, on the corner of Holly and Mission Avenue.

John: What was your first experience of school? Did they have a kindergarten back then?

Pete: No, there's was no kindergarten. In fact, you had to be seven years old before you enrolled.

John: Do you recall your first day of school?

Pete: I really don't recall, but I did have two older brothers that went before me. What I do recall is that I went to school but I never really understood what the teacher was saying. Especially the first year.

John: Did you speak both English and Spanish?

Pete: No. Spoke just Spanish. The entire community here was strictly Spanish. There were very few kids that had bilingual parents.

John: What do you refer to this area as? When I was a kid we called it Posole.

Pete: They still call it Posole. They got the nickname "Posole" back in about '38 or '39.

John: What does that mean?

Pete: It's hominy. It's a corn, you know, hominy corn. The reason it got named that is back around that year, which was '38 or somewhere around there ... actually the only people that lived in Posole were the people that lived between Santa Barbara and what used to be the canyon, now it's the freeway, because there were a lot of rocks in that area that looked Posole. So as far as the area was concerned, this part lived in the Barrio and that part lived in Posole. But it wasn't very long that the people on the outside just called the whole thing Posole. Now they tell me that this is Posole. Some kids are telling me that downtown is Posole! Wait a minute! More or less it was pride in your community is what it basically was at that time. Even now I feel that the name gives the community a little pride, you know. If anybody says, "I'm from Texas!", Texas is a proud state and they brag about it. To me that's what it really amounts to. I know they have overdone it now with graffiti and everything else.

John: Since you did not speak English, was it predetermined where you would attend school? Did you know where you would go to school?

Pete: Oh yeah, there was no question. Because if you were of Mexican descent, that's where you went. You could be fluent in English and they'd still put you there.

John: So there were children who spoke perfect English but they were there because they were Mexican?

Pete: Mexican descent.

John: Were there other nationalities there, too?

Pete: No. We were all American citizens.

John: You don't recall any other non-english speakers being there at all?

Pete: No, I don't. Back then, that's all there was. We didn't have any Black in Oceanside. I remember Bennie, he was Filipino, I guess. He's still around, I can't remember his last name. He said they put him there and his parents got him out.

John: So in 1935 you attended the Americanization school on Center and Division?

Pete: Right.

John: You started the First grade there?

Pete: Mmm-hmmm.

John: Who was your teacher?

Pete: Mrs. French.

John: Do you recall how many kids were in your class?

Pete: I would say that it had to be about a regular size classroom because the classroom was full. I believe the Fourth grade and Third grade was a 3rd-4th combination. It was First, then it was Second and the Second could have been 2nd-3rd, also.

John: Do you remember when school started each day?

Pete: No, I don't.

John: Was it the same time as the other schools?

Pete: Oh yes. Same length, same time.

John: When you were going to school there, the Horne Street school was across the street. Did you share a common playground?

Pete: Once in a while we used to go to the playground over there. What we did share was the assemblies. They had assemblies, I don't know for whatever reason, once a month or whatever. Like they still do now in every elementary school, they have assemblies. And we used to go to those assemblies. We had a cafeteria over there, we used to be able to go over there and eat in the cafeteria.

John: Since you didn't speak English when you first started school, what did you think?

Pete: Well, one experience I haven't been able to forget, is that I wanted to go the restroom and there was no way that I could tell the teacher. That was in First grade. Finally what I did, I waited until the teacher got to the farthest corner and then I made a dash out. You see, they didn't know why we were going out, they wanted to keep us in, so even going to the restroom was a problem.

John: Was the restroom connected to the classroom?

Pete: It's right there in the dome. Right where ... you know where the dome is? If you go into the first building, this way, next to the dome part, that was the First grade. All you had to do was go in, turn right. The boys' restroom was there and you go a little farther and the girls' restroom was there.

John: Could you go from the classroom or did you have to go out of the building?

Pete: You had to go out. You had to go physically out of the building into the other door and make a right.

John: What was in the dome part, do you remember?

Pete: Yeah, you had your boys' restroom, your girls' restroom, you had a little Principal's office there and then we had a nurse's office there, too.

John: How did you deal with not being able to understand the teacher or what was being said?

Pete: You know, I asked the same question to Beth French. I asked her, "How in the world did you teach us? You didn't know Spanish, we didn't know English. How did you teach us?" She said, "Pete, once in a while I was lucky. I would have one student that was bilingual." And she would use that student. There was years that she didn't have anybody, they were all Spanish speakers. Now, what she did that year, I don't know, but I can faintly recall that my older brothers would come and after school and he'd help me try to understand what the teacher was telling me. Well, they had been through the program earlier. See, they were two years ahead of me, four years ahead of me, the oldest. So they had a little more knowledge than I did. So what little English they had learned those years, they were able to communicate back in First grade.

John: Did you know how to read Spanish?

Pete: No.

John: As a class, how did the children deal with the situation?

Pete: I don't recall how we dealt with it as a class. As far as First grade was concerned, the students used to love that teacher. We had a lot of respect for that teacher. Plus our parents made sure we had respect for the teacher, you know! So we had double reinforcement at home.

John: Yes, I've never heard anything bad said about Mrs. French. Certainly she had the best of intentions. How did she go about teaching, did she have a set program?

Pete: That, I don't recall at all.

John: Was there playground equipment at the school?

Pete: I can recall we had soccer ball, we used to play right there in front, right there in front of the

building. At that time I thought it was a big playground! But we used to play there.

John: Were there curbs and gutters around that area there and paved streets?

Pete: Not to my knowledge.

John: So not even paved streets.

Pete: No.

John: So basically you were connected to the other school because there was no street?

Pete: Well, you still had the street, you had a dirt street. Those streets are still there, the original streets.

John: Who was your teacher in Second grade?

Pete: Mrs. Johnston.

John: Do you remember her first name?

Pete: No I don't, no I don't. Just Mrs. Johnston, I can't recall her first name.

John: Could you speak any English by then?

Pete: I don't recall. I don't recall when I really started learning the English language. I knew it by the time I was in the Third and Fourth grade. By that time, I was able to communicate. I was able to read. I remember we used to have history lessons and I was able to read a little bit.

John: Third and Fourth was a combination room?

Pete: They were a combination. I think, I believe the 2nd and 3rd was a combo also.

John: Who was your teacher when you went into the Fourth grade?

Pete: They had four teachers and I don't know the role of that floating teacher, they had a floating teacher there was only three classes. To my knowledge, there was Beth French in the First, Mrs. Johnston in the 2nd and Mrs. Carson in the 3rd. I don't recall what Mrs. Merrill used to do. Maybe she came from Horne Street and helped in certain areas.

John: Did you go four years?

Pete: Went four years.

John: At the end of your fourth year did you feel comfortable about your ability to speak English?

Pete: I don't remember.

John: So the next year you went to school --

Pete: The fifth grade.

John: Where did you go?

Pete: To Horne Street. I believe my teacher was Miss Kelly and at that time the only subject I was really strong in was mathematics. My English was very weak.

John: The English speaking children had a big advantage over you.

Pete: Well, they had to have, naturally.

John: What were your feelings, did you feel uncomfortable?

Pete: No, not too uncomfortable, I guess for the same reason that all my friends were in the same boat. I had all my friends here, we were all growing up together. Basically, we were all in the same boat. When we went out to play we were all playing together. We were all in groups, you know. So I really wasn't isolated with an English speaking person to where I would feel very uncomfortable. I myself, maybe I was uncomfortable and maybe that's why we went into our little groups, you know, but as far as feeling it, I guess not. I didn't really mix with English speakers until I started playing sports in high school.

John: When you finally became comfortable with the language did that help you with your school work?

Pete: Oh yeah, it had to. It had to help me. Like I tell my kids now, even now, you know, when the games they play, the vowels, the consonants, that kind of stuff, I said, "We didn't learn that in school." And if I did, I don't recall. If somebody told me, "What are the vowels?", you know, "What are vowels?!" Maybe we were taught. I was with the teacher at Laurel school and she told me, "Pete, you do know the vowels." I said, "No I don't." She said, "You can read this and you read them, right." I said, "Yeah, but I've done it by memory." A lot of the stuff I done it by memory. I learn to say "I read this book" and you want me to say "Yesterday I read this book". Why, I don't know? But you throw me a new word and I'm stuck again, cause I didn't learn my vowels and consonants, short vowels, long vowels.

John: How do you feel about your experience in the Americanization school? Do you remember how you felt about it when you were in school?

Pete: No, it'd be pretty hard for me to try to remember how I felt. I enjoyed school. I could tell you I enjoyed it, because all my friends were there. We all came from the same neighborhood. There was people from downtown but the majority came from this neighborhood here. We grew up together, we knew each other and at that time too, I don't think there was an age limit as far as how

old you had to be to be in the First Grade, seven years and up. I can remember some lady, I don't know what her name was, but she was a pretty good size lady compared to me! So she had to be up in her years.

John: You started in 1935 and were out in 1939, the program went to 1944?

Pete: I don't think so. I don't think it went that high, did it? I think it went only to '41, '42.

John: We found reference of it as late of '44, but that doesn't necessarily mean it went on that long.

Pete: I don't recall, because Beth French went into the service and then she came back, in World War II. She joined the service in World War II. And then she came back and I don't know because I was already up in the upper grades, 7th or 8th grade, and I don't recall that she came back and came back to the Americanization school. The ones that could probably tell you more would be my brothers, my younger brothers.

John: What are their names?

Pete: All of them that went to school there was my oldest, would be Steve, and then Refugio, then myself, then Pablo, then Ramon, then Lupe. Better yet, check with Ruben Adame at La Chiquita Market. Ruben went there. ... Well, the Gonzales' went there. We went there, the Maganas', went there. The Adames' went there. The Gonzales' went there, the Gomez', the Romeros went there... There's quite a few there, they're still living some of them, some passed away. Like Mary Vasquez, she lives right there on Bush Street, right by the corner of San Diego and Bush, the first house on the left side on Bush Street.