

We OK for sound, Rick?

Mhm.

One second. Do we stand by? Go ahead, Christine.

This is the continuation of our interview with Anthony Acevedo. This is tape four. And we're going to go back once more to before you went to-- into the army. We're going back to your time in the United States. Why did your family return to Mexico from California?

They were forced out of the United States because they were Mexican citizens, and not American citizens. And they had no-- I understood that they had no documents to permit them to live in the United States.

And describe your relationship with your father at that time.

Well, supposedly my father was [INAUDIBLE] father. He-- for my mother-- originally my mother died when I was about a year and a half old. He remarried when I was four years old. And then I grew up with my mother's other family. And it got to where I felt like I had another family.

And did you get along with your father at that point?

I didn't seem to get to know my father very well because in the first place, I don't think that he was very much a father. I hate to say it. But I feel it was an expression of feeling because I remember when I was still in Durango, Mexico that one day he said come along with me. And I want to show you part of life at your age. And I didn't quite understand what he meant. But I tagged along with him.

And how old were you at that time?

I was getting to be where I was 15 years old. And so what he did was he took me to a place where he was getting his car serviced. And he was getting his car serviced.

We stood out there on the sidewalk and he pointed me to a canteen, a bar. He says, you know who works out of there? I says no. He says how come? Or why do you ask me?

And he says well, a lot of young fellas like to get into bars. I said what makes you think that I would like to get into a bar? And he didn't like the answer or the question.

And then so he changed his mind and trying to finagle me into something else. And then him took out some pictures. And he says see, and he showed me three children.

He says well, this is-- I want to do away with you and your sister. What makes you think that type of mind-- do away with it? Kill us? Why not?

Then that led me to feel more cold. And with time, he didn't repeat that again to me. But I kept away from him, and that gave me more thoughts of almost trying to leave the country.

To leave Mexico.

And because one day, the schools in Mexico have that facility of dressing up for a parade. And it was a day of parade, Cinco de Mayo. You dress in white. And I happen to be one of the head of the parade.

I don't know why they made me that way. But they had me make. So that day I finished the parade, came home. I just got in the home.

And then my mother says, Antonio, when you have time, when you undress and change clothes, don't forget to throw the trash. I said, oh yes, I will change the clothes. Before you know it, my father had overheard.

And he got the box, a box of tomato box, empty. And he cracked it on my back, just boom. And he says get out of here. I don't want to see you again.

How old were you?

About 15 years old. And I felt I didn't insult my mother on the contrary. She knew what I said. But he took it the other way.

So things beginning to get to where I wasn't wanted. So I left the house like he said. I went to a house, a friend of mine.

And I told him the situation. And he told me, you're welcome here to stay here. And then he-- I didn't go to school the following day. I was afraid to even be at school.

So anyway, but the boy told the director what my father had done because I explained to him. So that's why I stayed with him. So I didn't want to stay in Mexico anymore. I didn't want to live there anymore.

And then before you know it, I was waiting for my friend after school. I was waiting for him about three, four blocks from there. And with him, it was the director. And my father was with him.

And they were coming over to, and my father, to apologize to me. But by that time, I didn't have that feeling. I had a stigma against him.

So that made me feel that I didn't want to be no more in Mexico. That's why. No more. And it taught me to be more-- get away totally.

And so then you came-- you came back to the States. You joined the army. And what was your father's profession when you lived in California before the family went back to Mexico? What did your father do for a living?

Well, my father's profession was-- he was studying to become an engineer. He was going there for engineering. He became an architect engineer.

In California?

In California. And then he left for Mexico and became a director of public work for the state and the chief construction of highways for the Pan American Highway, which is a 45-- comes through [INAUDIBLE] to El Paso.

So coming back now, this is after the war. And you've returned to California after leaving Mexico once again. Where did you live coming back from Mexico? Where in California were you living now in 1940?

I lived with my half cousins again. They were my cousins in Pasadena.

And what did you do for a living? What did you do to support yourself?

When I was discharged?

Yes.

Not after a-- well, see, that would be-- after I was discharged and got married, I went to work for a mannequin where I designed the mannequins for a clothing style. And then I presented the drawing to a company that was looking forward to for some designer. And I won the first prize and became assistant to designing at Howard Hughes Aircraft company.

And did you go to school at any time to study design?

I was going-- at the same time, I was going to medical school trying to see if I could get my degree that I had eight months to get to be a doctor. By that time, I had gotten married and my wife didn't want a doctor in the family.

No.

And so I became a design engineer at Hughes Aircraft Company. So I worked in aerospace for 40 something years.

And when did you retire?

I retired in '72.

And you married the woman who you met on the train?

Afterwards, I divorced my ex because there were problems that she didn't understand my situation, my traumas, which was obvious and yet she didn't comprehend. And those traumas caused the me to-- more or less, she has a fear of seeing my arms around and yell because I was having those traumas. I was a prisoner of war.

Did you ever get professional help?

It wasn't until when I met Maria, my present. She had been married before. And her husband was an air pilot. And he had trauma and told me about the VA hospital in Loma Linda.

And so when I went there I got the treatments.

And tell us about your children. How many children do you have?

I have four, three boys and a girl.

And what are their names and their ages?

Well, my older, he works for Boeing. He's a mathematical analyst designer for Boeing. And my daughter-- well, she was laid off from Rayon. So she hasn't been working at all.

She's out of work. And Fernando, he's an engineer for aerospace. And then Ernesto-- he's a chief-- he is in command, the engineer for a company, Dabaco, that does the fuel systems for underground fuel systems for aircraft and missiles.

And what is your daughter's name?

Rebecca.

Rebecca, OK.

And Anthony Francisco Acevedo is my older son, junior. And Fernando and Ernesto.

And how many-- do you have grandchildren?

From Ernesto, I have Gabrielito and Alejandra. And from my junior, Anthony Junior, is Jason. He's a psychologist. And Stephanie is a teacher, instructor.

And Fernando, two boys. One is a photographer, designer. And the other one is in marketing.

And do they all live in California?

Yes.

And going back to your experiences and your children, when-- what did you tell your children about your experiences in the war as a POW and in Berga?

Oh, they're very enthused about it because they want to know and have more experience of what I went through. And they feel that everybody should know.

And when did you tell them?

When they were able to understand their-- when conversation wise, the questions thrown at me because of this and because of that, does that affect you? Or only it affect you? Or, no, it's sometimes it's good to get it out of our system Because it does you good.

So you didn't keep anything from them?

No, no, no. It's better to let them know. Er-- good [? impressive ?] situations where it gives you better thought.

And describe your meeting with other POWs. What are those meetings? Have you met with other POWs? I know Mr. Feldman.

At the Loma Linda hospital, we have a get together the first Thursday and the third Thursday of the month from 10:30 to 12:00. And they're all from Europe. We don't mix with the Pacific or Korean because it had different thoughts. We're trying to get together.

But yet, they're different. But we bring out things-- one of them, he was near Dachau. It was one of the prison camps. And he suffered a lot.

And he has a trembling thought about--. And so we bring up the subject and then get it over with. And talking about it, it helps to relieve some of the pressure.

And how many still meet today?

Well, I do the-- a letter that I sent reminding them about the meeting, where we're going to meet. And that keeps me busy, too. And I feel relieved.

And so sometimes, either we have out of the 36, 35, 36, we have about 10, 15 of them get together, that we get together. Some others are not even able to even drive, able to coordinate any more.

And do you still continue your artwork that you're drawing?

Yeah, oh, artwork, I don't have time. With my wife being so where she needs attention, I keep busy as a medic. I'm back as a medic.

You're back as a medic. You continue-- you went to go back as being a medic. And as a Latino coming back to the United States after your experiences, did you ever feel invisible or misunderstood by members of your community, the Latino community? Or did you ever experience any prejudice, any discrimination?

No, for instance, my house, your house in [? Yucaipa. ?] I have the American flag and the POW flag flying every day. And they feel proud that I have that.

And they come and say hi. And we converse, exchange thoughts. And they're up to date with me. And they all

appreciate what I do.

And speaking of that--

And no animosity.

No animosity, no, no. So when did you begin to speak publicly about what happened to you in Berga and in [? Bador ?]?

Yeah, well, it's back in the late '90s graduate I been asked to if I can give a lecture to the public school. It would be in an auditorium or it would be any group of school class, two classes. One of them they had me for five hours.

Oh, really. This was a-- what grade level?

Junior high. And I-- yeah, because you have a little young ones. And it's hard for them to understand. But the other ones understand. And you see tears coming down. It affects them. But they all say why didn't my father tell me about this?

And why didn't my grandma didn't tell me about this? Why didn't the school tell us about this? And you see your remarks coming out of young children.

Why didn't-- why weren't they educated to learn about what happened to my grandpa back in the 40s?

So do they come forward with personal stories about their families?

Yes, oh, yes. Yes, you get a lot of-- I wish I had brought letters that I get. But that I--

And what do some of the letters-- is there any--

Thank you for giving us this space. And thank you about this and thank you because you--

Is there any one moment, one experience with students that you can share with us that really touched you that in your--

What really-- I can't believe that Martin Luther King High School-- you find some students so you get to a table. And you have five students. And they all throw questions at you and all that.

Where is this school?

Beg your pardon?

Where is Martin Luther King?

The one in Riverside.

In Riverside, California.

Yeah, it's right off near the March Air Force base.

OK.

And then I get a letter, a thank you and all that. And the other side a \$5 bill, or a \$1 bill. I says oh my God, why do they have to tell me--? That's how emotional they get. You're not asking for money. And you don't expect that.

And what do you plan to do with these letters? Do you keep all of them?

I keep them. I've kept them just for a while They-- to see what can I do.

Well, to our knowledge, you are the first Mexican-American that will be registered in our survivors registry here at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a Holocaust, as a survivor of Nazi persecution. Do you see yourself this way as a survivor, as a Holocaust survivor when you think of this?

It's an honor. It's a pleasure being part of it because I feel that what they went through, my respect to all of people, children and mothers and fathers.

When people started to talk about what they had gone through in the Holocaust, did that encourage you to begin to speak publicly?

Your emotions get to where you want to say a lot. But you can't let [INAUDIBLE]. You wish you could cover a lot of territory. And yet, it ties a knot in your throat.

And what-- as a Latino, what would you like Latinos to understand about this experience, about your experience?

Some are hard to understand. But stress out and to their surprise, they remain blah. They don't understand why it happened, why this, why that. Now that's what you could call-- it takes a coward to do the things that you weren't supposed to do.

So when you look at this large group, this large ethnic group, minority group here in the United States, it is the largest minority group. And should they learn about the Holocaust, Latinos, as much as it's part of Jewish history?

Yes, they should.

Why?

They must learn to able to love more, to understand, and to be able to get along with each other, and respect each other, and respect others.

Do they ever-- has it ever been their experience where they think it won't happen to them because they're not Jewish or--

No, it could happen.

So with that, today, you've come to the museum. And you are donating very significant and very personal belongings that you've kept for decades. You're donating them to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. And this includes your diary. What does this diary mean to you?

It was a part of my life. A few words with it, it's part of my life.

And yet you're giving with this donation.

With all my love.

And the armband that has the names of your fellow Americans.

Yes, yes, remembers of all the fellas that were with me. Although, the names are starting to dissipate. And in there is one of my buddies who is Dr. William Shapiro, which he died this Christmas, past Christmas of cancer. Otherwise, he would have been with us in this group.

So by giving us these very personal belongings, and this being the nation's Memorial to tell this history, what do you hope others, particularly younger audiences, what do you hope that they will understand when they learn about your diary and when they learn about which you've given the museum, what do you want them to understand through this

donation?

One of the important things is able to get into their hearts and their minds that feeling of that they would think that it sounded impossible. But the impossible came true to life, and able to understand and penetrate into their minds what reality did exist because some of them do not understand yet. And something has to be implemented into their lives so that it would penetrate. Otherwise, it would be a blah and not understanding what it is exactly.

And there's something that a soldier, an ethos of a soldier at war. And I want to read this to you. The soldiers war ethos.

I will always place the mission first. I will never quit. I will never accept defeat. And I will never leave a fallen comrade. So what do those words mean to you today over 60 years after all you've been through?

That penetrates because it's the truth. It's more than a prayer. And hope everyone will be able to understand the meaning of it.

And with that, with those words and your comrades, when you have talked to other survivors throughout the years, do you feel that bond with the other Berga survivors? And how do you describe that bond if you feel it?

There's words, so hard words. They mean a lot. It is a feeling of-- it means a lot, really. It's penetrating. And I hope that people would understand that.

You and others who were imprisoned in Berga, you were denied full disability. You mentioned that only for six months, you received \$150 and then it stopped. And the US army would not publicly acknowledge what happened to you. Can you put into words what that meant to you, what that means to you now, what that means to you then and now?

Well, that, to me, I got to where a lot of us fellas, buddies, when I read this material, we all came out with the expression of we've murmured it, the expression that how stupid-- pardon the expression-- of using it that way. If not, there's another word for it that there must not have been no feelings at all to think that the United States gave all those people, all those soldiers to be out there and gave their lives for other lives just to survive. Families-- there must not be no feeling.

Why they have that audacity? Yet, it doesn't penetrate into their minds the feelings of what other people have in life. And yet some go to church and pray and turn around and slap you in the face. And yet, no respect.

And here, instead of giving the 150, here because you served your country. It's a laugh. Like a lot of people said, we don't expect the money.

We expect dignity. And the truth fact of the feeling of love, not double talk.

[WHISPERING]

OK,

Beg your pardon?

I'm talking to them.

Oh.

And we are rolling.

Tony, you just spoke so eloquently just now of what it felt like when your country turned its back on you and taught you that you couldn't talk about what you'd been through and denied you the benefits. And yet, you fly your flag, the American flag, and the POW flag every day from your home. Can you talk a little bit about that sort of feeling of-- there

must be something in there that says on some level, there's a love for this country even so. Otherwise, I don't know that you'd be flying that flag. Can you talk a little bit about that?

It's very hard to express myself for that respect. But I fly the flag of the POWs because the thought of what's remaining and what's gone. The gone is God took them. The American flag is due to respect and the dignity of the United States remains a love. But yet, you would think that there's still something way back over there that they're trying to almost implement a law that there's no such thing as in God we trust or nothing like that, which I think it's nothing but a bunch of double talk that they're trying to do to implement.

We're trying to-- it's the fact give our countries more strength. If the people would open up and be more dignified to maintain the firmness, then we would show we respect that flag as the strength of the country, and in God we trust. We love. And he protect us, which they don't believe in that. But they're a bunch of atheist.

Today, you're giving, as Christina said, a set of your most precious documents that talked about what you went through to the Holocaust museum. What made you decide to make this donation to this institution?

What make me decide to do this?

Yes.

It's a wonderful thing to find out that finally there is a place where there's a resting place, dignified, that respect of what all these young people, old people, disappeared without necessity with no reason at all. It was horrible. And I think they deserve at least something, a piece of my life.

Very soon, the generation that served during that time both in the-- the forces and also were in the camps and suffered under the hands of the Nazis will pass from being a living history to being something in records. What would you hope that anyone young, old, anyone coming to this museum, seeing your life on display, what are some of the things you'd like people to take away about this history and your part in it?

It's hard to explain. You could say it in many words. But there could be one word without dignity. I do respect the lives of what was missing at least to remember of those of the past and present, which were remaining of that life that existed. And we pray for them, too.

But of course, it's the life of those that remained. I do it with a very dignified manner and love. It was a very few words in it. But it means a lot.

Pause tape.

[TALKING IN BACKGROUND]

Let's roll tape for a second.

This is the last tape, tape four, of the old history done with Anthony Acevedo on October 13, 2010.

[TONE AND COLOR BARS]

Stand by. Go ahead, Christina.

This is the Spanish language portion of the interview with Anthony Acevedo on October 13, 2010.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

[INAUDIBLE]

Hang on one second. Stand by. Tony, let me hold this for you.

[BACKGROUND TALKING]

Are we all set, everybody?

Mhm.

OK, go ahead, Tony, read.

I am a sanitary man for the [? Kronken ?] men. For a while, our men wouldn't move until all of a sudden we heard the tanks coming. The guards started taking off. The officers, the same.

Everybody was getting in the barn until one German guard came up to us and gave himself up.

That's fine, Tony. Thank you.

Pause tape.

OK, I think.