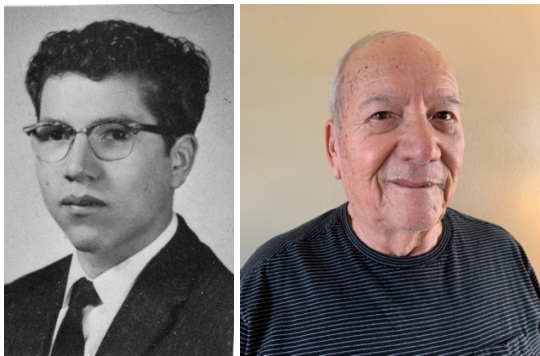




THE WAR BABIES OF WORLAND: ORAL HISTORIES FROM THE CLASS OF 1960



ALEX BRICENO-MONTOYA

Extended conversation after videotaping

Interviewers: Joan Walseth & Cathy Healy

Proofreader: Peggy Steele Porter

August 4th, 2022

This transcript expands from the video due to additional conversations.

This is **Joan Walseth Purcell**. This is Joan Walseth Purcell. On August 4, 2022 at 4:15 in the afternoon, and I'm speaking to you from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. First let me thank you for agreeing to be recorded for the Oral history collection of the Washington Museum and Cultural Center in Worland, Wyoming. Would you please give us your full name, and where you're speaking from?

Alex Briceno Montoya: Okay, my full name is Eliseo Alex Briceno. In school, I was known as Montoya and I'm speaking to you from Richmond, Texas. Presently, I'm having my cancer checkups at Houston, Texas, with the MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Joan: Did you have a nickname of any kind?

Alex: Yeah, my nickname is Alex, and my last name was Montoya at that time because I lived with my stepdad, Miguel Montoya. He crossed the border from Mexico when he was 14 years old and never went back.

RAMOSES ARRIVED WYOMING IN 1919, MOVED TO WORLAND IN 1939

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Joan: Were you born in Worland?

Alex: Yes, I was. My mother and her parents lived in Worland. From what I understand, my mother was married in Powell, Wyoming to my father, Encarción Briceno. He was in the Marine Corps, home on leave, and back then he and his buddies were doing a lot of drinking. She didn't like it, so she went back home when I was about a year old. They went through a divorce.

Joan: Was her home in Worland growing up?

Alex: My family originally came from Mexico. From what I heard from my grandmother, her grandmother was hidden in a well to keep her safe when the French invaded her village. Elvida's parents – the Jemenezes – left the Mexican side of the Rio Grande in Juarez for Texas during Mexico's civil war. Pancho Villa was one of the leaders of that war against the president. My grandfather was not too far from Juarez, which is across the river from El Paso.

They ended up north of Brownsville in Marcelos, Texas. My grandfather was a foreman of a crew laying railroad tracks in Marcelos, Texas. My aunt Carmen was born there. When a job opened up in Cheyenne, the railroad transferred my grandfather there. My mother was born in Cheyenne, then the railroad transferred her dad to Wheatland and then to Worland. His name was Miguel Ramos and my grandmother's name was Elvida. They named my mother, Refugio, but when she started school in Cheyenne, she went to a Catholic school, and the nuns couldn't pronounce her name, so they named her Ruth. They changed the names of all the Mexican kids whose names they couldn't pronounce.

My mother was better known as Cuca.

I remember going down to visit my grandmother's brother when I was about 17 years old and we crossed the bridge to Juarez from El Paso. The Jemenez family are still ranchers near Juarez.

Joan: Did your grandfather work for the railroad after it came to Worland? Did he lay tracks?

Alex: I think the railroad was there long before he transferred up to Worland. As foreman, my grandfather inspected the tracks and oversaw installation repairs, and maintenance of the rail section his crew was assigned to. It took a lot of maintenance.

CHILDHOOD: SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Joan: Was your home in town or did you live outside of town?

Alex: No, we were in town, on the other side of the tracks, 200 Big Horn Avenue was the address.

Joan: If you were to close your eyes, what do you remember about the sights, sounds, and smells in your neighborhood?

Alex: Oh, boy, one smell that's a real strong memory, was the Holy Sugar plant and how stinky it would get at certain times of the year with the wet beet pulp. We were not close to the factory, but it smelled bad all the way to where we lived.

Joan: I remember that smell too!

Alex: And the sounds – remember those big ol' steam engines that would come into town and toot their horns? Once in the morning and once in the evening and always on time. It was loud, but you got used to it.

Joan: What do you remember about downtown Worland? There was a movie theater, a couple of drug stores, and a music store. Did you spend much time there?

Alex: No, not really. When we hung out, we were pretty close to home. We weren't allowed to go to town unless our parents were with us. The only stores my parents went to were the 10-cent store, Gambles, and JC Penney's. My stepdad would pay cash. He'd save up until he had enough to buy it. He didn't want to owe any money.

Joan: Do you remember what the area surrounding Worland looked like? The hills and countryside.

Alex: Oh, yeah, I spent a lot of time in the hills. On our way to work in the beet fields, we used to do a lot of rabbit hunting out there with our rifles. We got to know the whole area pretty well. We walked there all the time.

IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II

Joan: Do you remember anything about World War II?

Alex: No, I don't. I don't remember a thing. I learned more from my three stepbrothers more recently that my biological father spent the whole time in the Marine Corps in the South Pacific. He was in communications. He was one of the guys who would go up on the telephone poles, put the wires there, and get down quickly before the snipers could kill him. But that's not really a memory.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: 1947-1954

Joan: Do you remember the elementary school you went to?

Alex: Yes, we went to the Spanish school on our side of the railroad tracks. It was right next door to my parents' home. All of us went to school there through the fifth grade and then we went up to the junior high school. I'd run to get to the junior high. In fact, I liked to run everywhere, and we did a lot of bicycle riding. Mom wanted us to come home for lunch when I was in junior high school. I'd run home and eat and then run back to school.

Joan: What do you remember about the Spanish school? Do you remember any particular teachers?

Alex: Yeah, one of them. I was trying to think of her name earlier. Miss Frances Emmett. [She was the aunt of our classmate, Rick Williams. Her father was "Pop" Emmett, the superintendent of Washakie County schools.] Miss Emmett walked around the room with a sharp pencil and would poke you if you weren't doing things right. She was pretty fast, too. You'd think she'd be on the other side of the room, and she would be behind you, and bam, you would get a poke on the head.

Joan: So do you remember the elementary school with fond memories, or were you afraid of any of the teachers?

Alex: No, I wasn't afraid of any teachers or any people in the school actually. We learned how to get along so they didn't know what we were doing. You remember spitballs? You'd write a message to a friend on a little piece of paper, get it a little slobbery in your mouth – you couldn't get it too wet – and spit it at them.

Joan: Whoa! I remember spitballs as one would land on your face or the back of your head, but I didn't know about sending messages!

JUNIOR HIGH: 1954-1956

Joan: What do you remember about junior high?

Alex: I remember it was a long building and thought – whoa, the classes are way down there?! Then you found it wasn't as big as it looked and it was okay. You just had to find your class.

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Joan: Something I remember when I went to junior high was I kept losing pencils because every time I changed classrooms I left a pencil someplace.

Alex: You'd do that. We were always in a hurry because we didn't want to get to a room late. We came from a school where you'd get poked in the head. We didn't know what might happen in junior high.

Joan: Do you remember any of the activities in the junior high?

Alex: Nothing other than band.

Joan: Band? What did you play?

Alex: Trumpet.

Joan: Trumpet. I played the French horn. Do you remember the marching band?

Alex: Yes, I do.

Joan: Do you remember the first time you got a uniform for the marching band? They were green with white shoulder braids.

Alex: Yeah, I felt pretty good wearing it too, and remember those big ol' hats?

Joan: Yeah, it was fun. It was exciting to go on the bus and travel to another town and get our band uniforms on and march in the parade. Do you remember our leader?

Alex: Let's see, what was it, Basil Broadbent's band? He was one of my favorite teachers.

Joan: He had us doing all kinds of interesting things, like doing little dances as we walked along playing.

Alex: Yeah, the marching band had to do all kinds of different steps. I think down in Casper one time, we beat a Navy band, and they were military. We were pretty good marchers.

Joan: The Worland Junior High School Marching Band was fun. Alex, did you have a teacher in junior high that you remember fondly, or somebody that you liked particularly?

Alex: You remember the math teacher, Mr. Harrison? He also was a chaperone for the band trips. One time he borrowed my horn and played us a song. He was good, oh, yeah. He told us he'd played trumpet in college. He was a good man.

WORLAND HIGH SCHOOL: 1956-1960

Joan: What do you remember about high school?

Alex: I remember changing classes, going upstairs, going all over the place, that I do remember.

Joan: Do you remember any activities in high school? Did you belong to any clubs or were you on any teams?

Alex. I just played in the band and went out for wrestling. Mr. Martin was the coach. I weighed 136 pounds. One time, Couch Martin came up to me and said, "I need you to wrestle Jerry Cook [a classmate] because he doesn't have anyone to wrestle. " I said, "You've got to be kidding me. He's a heavyweight. He'll make a pancake out of me!" Coach Martin said, "You're faster than he is, you'll be okay." "AlIIIIII right." Jerry passed out on me. He ran out of air, poor guy. I won by default.

AFTER SCHOOL JOBS: ESCAPED BEET FIELDS TO BECOME A BILINGUAL STAR SALESMAN

Joan: What did you do after school?

Alex: We had to work, period. When I was in junior high, when I got out of school, I worked for Pepsi Cola part-time. We'd mix some of the syrups, make pop, line the bottles up on the conveyor belt to get filled up, and load trucks. We rotated jobs so we knew how to do all of them.

When I was growing up – probably starting when I was about eight years old – we worked in the beet fields quite a bit because my stepfather required us to – everybody had to work. I got tired of working out there because it got too hot, and there were too many mosquitos, but I had to take it until I was ready to go to high school. I said to my stepdad, "I can find something else to do." He said, "I don't care what you do as long as you're working."

I took a walk around town looking for a job. I stopped at Ray's Department Store. Ray Coulson and Katherine owned the store. [Sydney Coulson was a classmate.] They hired me because I was bilingual. I sold a lot of clothes to the migrants. Lots and lots of clothes.

Joan: What kind of clothes did Ray's have there? Did they have clothes for everybody: women's, men's, children's?

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Alex: Yes, they had women's, men's, and children's. Ray would have me go get those little dummy things up from the basements and set them up in a window. What are those things called?

Joan: Mannequins.

Alex: Mannequins, yes. It was very embarrassing dressing the women. Guys would walk by and tap on the window and laugh at you or holler real loud, "You weirdo, what're you doing?!!!" Everybody in Worland could hear them.

Joan: Do you remember anything about the styles that people wore on that day? Since you were selling clothing then.

Alex: The styles have started to come back up again – striped shirts, the big collars — well, we wore jeans and tee shirts basically – and striped shirts.

Joan: Jeans and tee shirts are still pretty popular today.

Alex: Yes, I'd wear jeans here in Houston [at MD Anderson Cancer Center], but it's too hot for them. We wear Bermuda shorts and tee shirts here.

Joan: Okay. I was curious about styles then and now. Change of subject: Did you have a television? I didn't have television when I lived in Worland until I was 16, so I don't even know what they had for shows then.

Alex: I remember, we had a black-and-white TV for a long time. We were one of the first people to get a color TV when it came out.

PARENTS' LIFE IN WORLAND

Joan: What did your parents do while you were at school?

Alex: My mom was a stay-at-home mom. My stepdad was a coal miner at the Gebo Coal Company in Gebo, Wyoming.

Joan: How far was that from Worland?

Alex: Oh, let's see – probably about 40, 45 miles, by the time you'd get to the mine where he was.

Joan: Did he go back and forth, or did he stay every day?

Alex: He would drive back and forth every day. About 3 o'clock in the morning, he'd get up and head out at about 4 when it was still dark so that he could get to work on time.

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Joan: Wow. I can't imagine having to start work before 7.

Alex: During summer vacation, that's when my younger brother Mike and myself learned how to work and see how serious he was about working, On his way out of town to the Gebo Coal Company, he'd stop at the beet field – I don't remember whose farm it was – and he'd mark about 50 rows that he expected us to get done before he got back.

One time, two or three weeks before school started and no more rows to weed, there was a Japanese family who had some acreage up West River Road past the cemetery, and they had a whole field of watermelons that needed to be picked. I got two other guys to help. The farmer only wanted the nice round ones put in his truck. "No good, no good, no pick," he said about the others. We could see a lot of watermelons left on the ground. "Could I have?" I asked him. "You want, you have them." We loaded them up and drove up and down First Avenue offering them to everyone. People sometimes took two or three of them. That felt great, it was kind of a reward for all time in the hot sun in the beet fields. We kept several for ourselves. They sure tasted sweet and juicy. [Laughs]

Joan: When you were out in the fields, did you have water and food?

Alex: We packed lunch – *gorditas*, about twice as thick as a regular corn tortilla. You'd cook them, slice them through the middle, like pitas, and stuff them with beef or chicken. Apples and bananas to munch on. You remember a long time ago they had those big canvas pouches, we had two of those, one for my brother Mike and one for me. Working in the fields was pretty hard, so that's when I decided that I didn't want to do it anymore. My stepdad was a hard-working man. He would work for the coal company all day – they'd load the coal by hand. In the summer, when there wasn't any more coal to load, he'd come back home and it was daylight outside, so he'd join us in the beet fields until we couldn't see anymore, and we'd go home and eat. He was like an Atlas kind of guy, he was big, muscles everywhere.

IMPACT FROM GROWING UP IN A BOOM TOWN

Joan: What influence did growing up in Worland have as you grew up? What did you do for a living after you left Worland?

Alex: When I graduated from high school, a bunch of us got together and went to join the Marine Corps. I had a girlfriend and she ended up getting pregnant. When I went to try to sign up for the Marine Corps, the guy asked me, "Do you have a family?" I said, "Yes, we just had a girl born." He says, "If you have a family, you have got to go home and take care of that family." Everybody else got to go, but I had to stay home.

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Then I got into the insurance business and I also did part-time work with Rex Hamilton at the Pepsi plant on the signs. We built the signs, wired them up, and put them on a pole on buildings or put them on vending machines.

Joan: Do you have any memories of any people in town, in particular? Any neighbors or people that you ran into when you worked?

Alex: Well, I got to meet a lot of people when I was selling insurance. Truth is, I could call and sell any kind of insurance I was licensed to sell. Lots of people did that. I had a lot of clients.

CHILDHOOD: GRANDPARENTS LIVED NEXT DOOR

Joan: Did you have grandparents in town?

Alex: Yes, I got to know both of my grandparents. Miguel and Elvida Ramos lived right next door to our parents. We built two houses, one for grandma and one for my parents' house. They rented our property on 200 Big Horn Avenue, behind the Spanish school.

Joan: Were your grandparents important to your life when you were growing up?

Alex: They were very, very important to me. Yes, I spent a lot of time with them.

Joan: What did they teach you about life?

Alex: Just take care of your family.

LOOKING BACK: WHAT DO YOU WISH WE'D KNOWN THEN?

Joan: Is there any experience that you would have liked to have had growing up in Worland that wasn't available to us back then?

Alex: I would like to have had a little more of what's available now in schools. They've got anything you want to get into, like computer classes, football, taekwondo, swimming, and soccer – they do everything.

Joan: That would have been nice to have those things growing up.

Alex: The problem is that it all costs money – you have to pay and some kids can't afford it.

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Joan: In our day, you didn't have to pay to play any of the sports, but they didn't have sports like taekwondo. We had to go swimming in Thermop so that cost gas money and paying to swim — they were private pools. But you're right. My grandsons here in Philadelphia are in club sports, meaning the school is involved, but the parents have to share the costs. In some school districts, school nurses have been eliminated, and art and music — crazy isn't it. We got to have them as part of our free education.

But you're right, there are so many more things available that we never had. Things that didn't even exist, like computers and robotic clubs and sports for girls — we didn't have one sport for girls, except being a cheerleader.

IMPACT FROM GROWING UP IN A BOOM TOWN, PART 2

Joan: Looking back, can you think of anything growing up in Worland that shaped the rest of your life?

Alex: I learned how to work and be self-sufficient and to take care of my family.

Joan: I think that is an important lesson for everybody to learn growing up. — Cathy, do you want to step in? Do you have any additional questions that you might like to ask Alex?

BIG HORN BASIN: DANCING TO SAL AND THE SONS OF SOUND

Cathy Healy: Alex, I remember having such a good time dancing to Sal and the Sons of Sound. Salvador Fabella was your cousin, wasn't he?

Alex: Yes, he was indeed my cousin. His mother was my mother's sister Carmen.

Cathy: Did you ever play trumpet with Sal and the Sons of Sound?

Alex: I was the second horn. He played first and I played second horn. And I was also the band manager. I did all the bookings.

BILINGUAL SALES STAR DISCOVERS SOME BEET FIELD WORKERS HAD COLLEGE DEGREES

Cathy: Oh! More salesmanship when you were in the band. So how did you know that you had a gift as a salesman? What led you to Ray's Department store? And how did they recognize that you were good at sales, because that's become your profession?

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Alex: I guess Ray found out soon enough that I wasn't very bashful about meeting people and I was curious. He asked me if I could speak Spanish and I said, "Yes, I can." So, he says, "Okay, I am going to hire you and give you a shot here." So we tried it and it worked out well because those migrant guys, once they found out I was there, they threw out a line to the others to come to the store. We moved a lot of merchandise.

Cathy: What kinds of clothing did the migrant workers buy given that they were out in the fields doing all kinds of dirty work?

Alex: They bought jeans, underwear, and socks. But what I learned from them is that a lot of those boys that came up here to work also had a college education down there.

Cathy: What?!

Alex: One guy I got to know really well was an accountant in some big firm down there, and it got shut down. He had to work and get money for his family, so he came with the boys to work up there.

He was telling me that it was a rough time in Mexico, with all the jobs going away, and coming back, and going away. If you got hired back, you wouldn't make any money because they didn't have any – the money wasn't worth anything. Anyway, he decided to come across and work for dollars and make his work worth more. And they taught me how to measure sizes. To figure out what size of shoes they wore, they'd put a sock around their knuckles and that would be the size of the balls of their feet. From your hand to your elbow and back was the size of your waist. Isn't that amazing? Of course, it wouldn't work for fat guys.

One day, a man was over there in the room with lady's stuff, around the bras and the panties, and I walked over to see if I could help him because I thought he was in the wrong place. He said, "No, no, no." He cupped each bra with his hands until he found the size his wife was.

A lot of those guys were pretty funny. Those are pretty nice guys, hard working guys. They actually – to tell you the truth – thought that I could help them send money home. So I asked Ray, "Can I go across the street with these guys to see if we can send money home?" He said, "Sure." He would let me go to the bank with about four or five of the guys to send some money home and come back. We figured it out.

Cathy: I think Ray Coulson must have been a wonderful human being.

Alex: He was, he was a good guy.

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Cathy: Here is another question about another cousin of yours, Carlos Leyva.

Alex: Carlos Leyva, yes, his mother was my dad's older sister.

Cathy: So Carlos came to our reunion because he's married to Barbara Warfield who was in our class. Carlos was a couple of years ahead of us – and known as Charlie. He changed his name back to Spanish when he left Worland.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, PART 2 – THE SPANISH SCHOOL

Cathy: We did an activity at our reunion where we wrote “What was the best thing about growing up in Worland?” and posted our notes on a display board. Carlos' best thing was that for the first four grades he was able to go to a school where they had Anglo teachers but all the kids who spoke Spanish at home were learning English. How do you feel about that? Did you speak any English when you started school?

Alex: I did. Yes, we helped the other kids who were there and couldn't speak it. We'd teach them how to speak English, the words to use, or what not to say, that type of thing

Cathy: Did you feel like Carlos does, that was really good to separate you all for the first four grades?

Alex: It's a real good idea. I can see where Carlos would think that because he became a Spanish teacher. He knows how hard it is for kids to pick up a language. I'm sure he understands the troubles that the kids who went to the Spanish School had trying to adjust to new ways and new languages, and not to feel too bad, because there were times when they were called names or whatever. We kids that already spoke English, got better at it. The older kids would come back to our elementary school and tell us that they were kind of ashamed to be Mexican and Spanish because everybody was making fun of them because they had an accent.

When we got to junior and high school, we encouraged the younger guys and girls that the situation wasn't as bad as they thought it was – you just have to be yourself, do your studies, and learn the words that you need to learn. So you'd ask them a question, teach them how to say things and what to do and what not to do. So you would give them a little guidance.

Cathy: How do you feel about the school being closed down in 1956?

Alex: That would have been the summer I was about to go into eighth grade. I'd already been over at the junior high building since 5th grade. At first, it felt kind of like a free fall about what was going to happen to all of those little kids. But I

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

think they all made a pretty good adjustment going to “regular school on the other side” as we called it. I don’t know where those kids went. They didn’t have a chance to adjust, they just went.

Cathy: Maybe the adjustment was easier because there were more older brothers and sisters who knew English, and more parents who knew English, so more kids already knew English. Do you think that was part of it?

Alex: Yes, that was part of it. Plus, older kids like us going to school on the other side of the tracks. The little guys would see us over there, and then we’d be back at the Spanish School playing basketball with them. You might say we kind of helped guide them along because they felt a lot better knowing that we were already there, so they won’t be first-timers.

Cathy: I asked because to some of us on the other side, it seemed like the Spanish School – some of us called it the Mexican School – was a segregated school like in the South.

Alex: Yes, it was.

Cathy: Some of us were having really strong reactions that it was wrong.

Alex: It was a good idea to have a school over there. Everybody got to be together, we spoke the same language, and we learned the same way. Then, as years went by, we gradually were prepared for the other side of the tracks. The little guys seeing us – who weren’t quite there yet – they’d ask us questions, “What’s over there, how is it over there?” We’d say, “Well, it’s a little bit bigger than us and some of those guys are kind of bullies, but they aren’t bullies anymore. You can’t let bullies get too much power, just stand up and say things back to them, or do things back to them. We wouldn’t fight with them. If they wanted to fight, we’d just say, “Come on. Let’s do it.” They wouldn’t do it.

There was one kid who was such a bully to our friends who were over there before we went. I asked, “How come you guys don’t fight now?” He says, “Well, our parents told us you guys carry knives, so we carry knives.” I said, “No, we don’t do that. We don’t have to carry a knife. We can take care of ourselves with our fists and our feet. Whatever we have to do.”

Cathy: How did you learn to fight? Did you have older brothers, older cousins?

Alex: I was the oldest in my family – we had older guys, the Hernandezes and the Leyvas – like Carlos – they were older than we were. But you’d learn quick – you know – you’d say the wrong thing and get socked alongside the head and you’d go back and sock them ‘side the head when you got older.

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Cathy: What was it like for the girls? Did they have to stay home and do housekeeping and take care of the little ones?

Alex: Definitely, yes. You didn't see very many girls outside playing basketball — there was no way to be around boys all the time.

Cathy: Were the girls discouraged from going on in school, do you think? It seems like a lot of the girls got married by the time we graduated from eighth grade. There were hardly any Mexican girls in high school by the time we got to high school. Or is that just, my memory is faulty?

Alex: Well, all the girls I went to school with went to high school. All the Leyva girls

Cathy: Yes, Leyva yes.

Alex: Bea Rodriguez [Bea Leyva married Julio Rodriguez, the football star from the Class of 1959.] was one that I grew up with and went to school with. The other ones probably were, I think they were taking care of babies at home. They did a lot of babysitting, I remember that.

WORKING FOR PEPSI

Cathy: When you worked for Pepsi, where did the Pepsi signs go? Were they just local? Or did they put them all over the whole Pepsi region? And what was the Pepsi region?

Alex: We would put the signs in places up in Powell, Thermopolis, down in Riverton, in Worland. All over the Big Horn Basin. Anybody needed a sign, we had one. The little signs – people could have them for free and people had to pay for the bigger ones that we had to build.

Then as Pepsi expanded, we started buying other warehouses where we stored Pepsi products for the world. I learned how to drive a semi-truck with Leo Muñoz. He was a semi-driver and I got to ride along with him. He taught me how to drive a semi. He'd deliver down to Casper. Drivers like Leo were called the load-unload people. We'd haul what we called "the fulls" – the full bottles – down to Casper, unload the full ones, load the empty ones, and come back. We did that maybe about two or three trips a day, on to Riverton or Casper, or wherever.

Cathy: Wait, just a second, two or three trips a day? To Casper?

Alex: No. Casper was back home and then down to Riverton and back home. [Riverton is 90 miles south of Worland; Riverton is 120 miles from Casper.] I learned how to drive to help out.

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Cathy: When did you leave Worland?

Alex: 1974. I first left Worland in 1960. I went to Billings to see if I could get into school. I was in Billings for I think a year and then went back home and then back to Billings again. I ran back into Billings quite a bit. Never got to school. I had to go find jobs, had to go to work.

Cathy: Well, I think that happened to a number of people.

Alex: Yes.

Cathy: Let's see – Why did your stepfather not live in Gebo, and have you all go to school in Gebo?

Alex: We did have a house in Gebo for the winter time and then when we got older, we stayed at Worland and went to school. We had a big house in Gebo until we got old enough to go to school. We did go to school in Gebo for about a year or so, then we went to Worland schools. We came to Worland to learn, period, and my dad would drive back and forth to work.

Cathy: Whoa, what a sacrifice. And how nasty, to be out driving in the dark in the bad weather in the winter.

WORKING IN THE BEET FIELDS, PART 2: WE HAD RHYTHM

Cathy: Another question: What did you do in the beet fields? Beet thinning with stoop labor no longer exists – they have automated planting equipment and “Round-Up Ready” beets to kill the weeds. – What was it like to thin beets by hand, Alex?

Alex: Well, you spent all day long, bent over, scooch, scooch, scooching all the way up the row. You'd hold a hoe in your right hand – it was about 10 inches wide. You'd hit the dirt in front of you, which might leave two or three plants, so while you were hitting the dirt in front, your left hand would pull the extra plants behind you. You get very, very, sore. You can't lay on your back or anything, and the mosquitos sting like crazy. So then, the more you do it, you don't hurt anymore. It's a process. When you do it all day long, you go faster and faster and faster. It takes a lot of coordination. You get into a rhythm. That's one reason we have rhythm.

Joan: I always heard that the soybeans required more handwork than the sugar beets. Is that true?

The War Babies of Worland: Oral Histories from the Class of 1960

Alex: I never worked on those beans, so I don't know. I just know the beet work and I helped some of the Asian people who had farms there with their onion fields and their watermelon fields. I was never doing any beans.

Joan: Alex, were you artistic at all? I remember, I thought that you were artistic.

Alex: Well, in our class, I did get a few blue ribbons. If you want to call it artistic. But it was mostly in design, making different designs.

Joan: Do you remember working on the decorations for our high school proms?

Alex: No, I never did that.

Joan: I thought that you did, but I could be wrong—

Alex: I might have – my memory is not too good right now. [Effect of recent chemo treatments.]

WASHAKIE MUSEUM: THANK YOU FOR YOUR ORAL HISTORY

Joan: Well, thank you so much for giving us your stories and talking about your experience in Worland. I think that your addition will be a very important one to have in the archives for all of Wyoming. Thank you for coming.

Alex: Thank you for having me. It was fun seeing you.