

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
623

Interview with
JOHNNY YTURRI
February 16, 1984

Place of Interview: Brea, California

Interviewer: Jeri Echeverria

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: *Johnny Yturri*
(Signature)

Date: February 16, 1984

COPYRIGHT



1984

THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Coordinator of the Oral History Collection or the University Archivist, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203

Oral History Collection

Johnny Yturri

Interviewer: Jeri Echeverria

Date of Interview: February 16, 1984

Place of Interview: Brea, California

Ms. Echeverria: This is Jeri Echeverria interviewing Mr. Johnny Yturri concerning ranching in the early days of Orange County. The interview is taking place on February 16, 1984.

Johnny, were both of your parents Basque?

Mr. Yturri: Yes.

Ms. Echeverria: Spanish-Basques?

Mr. Yturri: Yes.

Ms. Echeverria: Where and when were you born?

Mr. Yturri: I was born in Santa Ana on August 22, 1900.

Ms. Echeverria: And your mother and father were from the Old Country. Do you know where they were from?

Mr. Yturri: Well, my mother was from Burgete in Spain, from the Basque region, and I can't remember where my father was from because he died when I was only about four years old. I don't remember anything about him. But I do remember my mother saying that she was born in Burgete, which was on the Spanish side.

Ms. Echeverria: In Navarra?

Mr. Yturri: Yes.

Echeverria: Did you speak Basque at home?

Yturri: Oh, yes.

Echeverria: Your mother remarried, didn't she?

Yturri: Remarried, yes.

Echeverria: Did she remarry a Basque?

Yturri: Yes.

Echeverria: So you spoke Basque at home?

Yturri: Yes. Oh, a little Spanish but mostly Basque.

Echeverria: Did you speak any English at that time, before you went to school?

Yturri: Very little.

Echeverria: Very little. Mostly Navarran Basque probably?

Yturri: Yes.

Echeverria: Where was your home? You were born in Santa Ana?

Yturri: On what street, you mean?

Echeverria: Well, whereabouts was it?

Yturri: It was on Walnut Street in Santa Ana.

Echeverria: Walnut Street in Santa Ana? I didn't know that.

Yturri: I think there's a schoolhouse on the property there now or something like that.

Echeverria: I didn't know that. You went to school, didn't you?

Yturri: I went to grammar school. That's as far as I ever got.

Echeverria: At what age did you start school?

Yturri: About six.

Echeverria: About six you started first grade. And then you went to

what we call junior high school now? Grammar school?

Yturri: No, I went to four different grammar schools before I finally got out (chuckle). First, here in Tonner Canyon there was a grammar school. I started in Placentia to begin with, and I was in that school for about two or three years. At that time we were farming out toward Fullerton. We moved from Fullerton to close to Placentia, so I had to go to the school here in Tonner Canyon. It was a one-room affair, one teacher, and there were some kids there seventeen, eighteen years old still trying... (chuckle) then the City of Brea built a schoolhouse on Brea Boulevard there--across from where the Chiksan was. I went there for...I don't know...two or three years, something like that. Then I went back to Placentia. They built a new schoolhouse over there in the meantime, and I finished there,

Echeverria: So you hopped a little bit. And in schools at that time, kids were all different ages?

Yturri: Oh, yes.

Echeverria: You might have been in a classroom with kids of a different age? Older than you and younger than you?

Yturri: Well, like, around here, you know, this was mostly oil fields here, and there were a lot of those kids who never even made grammar school. They were still sixteen, seventeen years old and still going to grammar school (laughter)!

Echeverria: So you didn't automatically pass in those days?

Yturri: No, lots of them didn't. They'd be kicked out of one school and out of the other. They didn't care about trying to achieve an education or anything. They just went to go, I guess, or to have a little fun. It seemed that way, anyway.

Echeverria: How did you get along with other kids?

Yturri: Oh, I got along pretty good.

Echeverria: I mean, you came into school not speaking English very much.

Yturri: Very little.

Echeverria: So how did you get along?

Yturri: Well, it wasn't easy for the first year or so, but I began to pick it up.

Echeverria: Did you have any trouble with it, like, kids teasing you or giving you a hard time?

Yturri: Well, at first, yes. It didn't take long before I began to pick up a word here and there--enough to get along.

Echeverria: Can you give me a specific of another kid giving you a hard time or razzing you, or did they call you Basque or what?

Yturri: Oh, it's pretty hard to remember that far back, Jeri (chuckle). It was a problem because when you can't speak a language, you have to mingle in with other kids. You don't know how to talk to them. Naturally, it makes it kind of hard to get along for a while until you begin

to make a few friends, even if you can't tell what he's speaking (chuckle). Gradually, you know, a kid will pick up words a lot faster than a grown-up will. I managed that way.

Echeverria: So you managed to play...like, at recess you played with other kids and stuff?

Yturri: Oh, yes.

Echeverria: Sometimes some people who come in and speak a different language have a really hard time.

Yturri: Oh, yes, they do. But I used to be crazy about baseball when I was a kid, and I'd get out there on that baseball diamond with those big guys, and, I tell you, I'd make the team with them (chuckle)! I was crazy about it, and that's the way I used to get along with them.

Echeverria: So baseball was kind of your way in--your way of getting along?

Yturri: Yes, I really loved the game in my younger days.

Echeverria: Were there any other Basque kids at your school?

Yturri: Yes, there was. There was a family that lived close by us. Their last name was Conve. They had one son just about my age, and they were in the same boat, although he had a couple sisters maybe four or five years older than him. They could speak a little English, the sisters, and they had already started school before we had. We used to play together all the time.

Echeverria: Did you get them to interpret for you a little bit?

Yturri: Oh, yes, they had to.

Echeverria: You were about six or seven years old, about 1906, 1907. Did your family go to church as a group? Or did you go to church as a kid?

Yturri: Oh, yes, I went to St. Mary's here on Sundays. We'd get together. There was a bunch like the Arroues and a few families around here. There were other family of Basque ranchers around here.

Echeverria: What other ones were there? There were the Arroues...

Yturri: Arroues, Iriarte, Uhaldes, and by LeHabra the Sansinenas and Bastanchurys, Notarys. There were lots of them. Well, the Notarys weren't actually Basque. They were, I think, French-Canadians or something.

Echeverria: And then you all went to Mass on Sunday?

Yturri: Yes.

Echeverria: Then did all your families get together afterwards? Was that your custom, or did you just visit there?

Yturri: Oh, we'd go our separate ways then--horse and buggy in those days.

Echeverria: What were some of your chores at home?

Yturri: Well, on the ranch there's always feeding stock. I know when I'd come in after school, I'd go out in the fields and work with the boys out in the field. In the summertimes, mowing hay, shocking hay, and so forth.

Echeverria: Did you folks have...your folks were mostly in farming. They weren't ranchers.

Yturri: No.

Echeverria: They didn't have sheep?

Yturri: No.

Echeverria: So you did a lot of farm chores as a kid?

Yturri: Oh, yes.

Echeverria: I bet you did. You have worked on a few Basque ranches in Southern California, haven't you?

Yturri: Well, I worked on two different ranches. I put in about fifteen years--four years in one, eleven in the other. I was four years here at this Chilibolost Ranch here in Carbon Canyon. I worked eleven years for Joe Garat. He had the sheep and had orange groves and different properties. I worked mostly hauling sheep and like that.

Echeverria: So you saw a lot of Bascos in those days?

Yturri: Oh, yes.

Echeverria: Now when you got out of grammar school, about how old were you?

Yturri: I was about fourteen, around fourteen or fifteen.

Echeverria: So that's about when you quit your schooling. Did you go to work then, or did you work for your folks?

Yturri: I was still on the ranch. I wanted to go to high school, but my step-dad was one of these oldtimers, you know, that was strict. He didn't believe in education. He figured that educated people were a bunch of crooks, you might say (chuckle). He actually believed that way.

Echeverria: Is that right?

Yturri: Oh, yes. The teacher from where I used to go to that Placentia school there made several trips up to the ranch. She tried to convince him to let me go. Nothing doing. I had to go out there and work with the rest of the boys.

Echeverria: You really wanted to go to school then?

Yturri: Oh, I did.

Echeverria: Do you think there might have been some truth in that, or do you think that was an old world superstition on your step-dad's part?

Yturri: I think he believed in it more. The higher educated they were, the more they...he was used to the old-fashioned way of making a living, you know, just like in the old Basque Country. He couldn't even write his name, that's how much education he had. I'd have to go interpret for him when he'd go to the bank there in Fullerton or in any store or anyplace that he'd want to buy something. I'd have to go with him.

Echeverria: So even though you interpreted for him, he didn't really think there was that much need in getting more education?

Yturri: That's right.

Echeverria: That was the old way, I guess.

Yturri: It made it kind of hard on me. I had to work with the rest of the boys--just the same chores they did. We'd get up at three or four o'clock in the morning and work until

dark. It was the custom in those days.

Echeverria: At that age, here you are, fourteen or fifteen. What was fun for you? You must have worked...how many days a week did you work?

Yturri: I worked six and sometimes seven.

Echeverria: So when you'd get a little time off, what would you do with it?

Yturri: I'd generally go to the first baseball game that was nearby (chuckle).

Echeverria: Was there a lot of baseball around?

Yturri: There were these semi-pro teams. In Irvine, they had a team there. There was three or four Basque kids that played on that team, too. It was a good team. I knew them well, and I used to drive from here to clear over there to Irvine to watch them play on Sundays. They played on Sundays, you know.

Echeverria: So this would be about 1915, 1916, or a little later?

Yturri: Oh, it was around 1917 or 1918 or somewhere in through there.

Echeverria: And your family had a car?

Yturri: Well, he died in 1917--my step-dad. In 1918 I bought... I was on the ranch. I still stayed on the ranch with my mother and my granddad from the age of seventeen to about twenty. Then I sold out. I moved to Olive, where I bought that little piece of property over there.

Echeverria: So you were still working there. Now after your step-dad died, were you still working six and seven days a week?

Yturri: Oh, yes, sure. We'd have to. Well, that was the old custom--the ways that they used to do in those days. They'd work from sunlight, you know, when the sun rose in the morning, until dark.

Echeverria: Then your social life, I mean, your big treat, was to go to a ball game or something like that?

Yturri: I didn't have much chance of anything else.

Echeverria: Did you go to many of the picnics and that sort of thing?

Yturri: Oh, we had picnics in the summer--on all these ranches, you know. We'd have one one Sunday, and all the ranches would come in. We'd have a barbeque. We made our own wine, and we'd have a ball for that one day during the summer. In the wintertime there wasn't anything like that.

Echeverria: When you say all the ranchers came in, were they Basque, or were they mixed?

Yturri: Mostly Basque. We'd have one one Sunday here, and next Sunday it would be over at another ranch. It would go on rotation you know.

Echeverria: So you'd switch off. Were people still speaking Basque at that time?

Yturri: Oh, yes. Sure, that's all they spoke, most of them.

Echeverria: So Basques around this area were just speaking Basque, not speaking anything else?

Yturri: Oh, yes, quite a few of them.

Echeverria: That's pretty tricky, to get around here speaking Basque (laughter)! There are not too many other people who speak it, and that's why I'm asking. Okay, so you did that, and around 1920 you sold out, and you got a little place in Olinda?

Yturri: No, it was Olive--the other side of Olive.

Echeverria: So you went into ranching for yourself for a while?

Yturri: Well, I bought this grove---seven-and-a-half acres of orange groves---just this side of Olive. Then I got into that Depression and lost all of it except a little over two acres. It was where my mother and brother lived, too. They passed away later.

Echeverria: And then the Depression came and you...

Yturri: I was actually only able to save that two acres, a little over two acres. The rest I had to sell in order to make the payments on it.

Echeverria: How did you get from doing that to working at Chilibolosts'? You worked for the Chilibolosts first, right?

Yturri: Well, to tell you the truth, I had no education to apply for anything--any better job. I had to go to these ranches.

Echeverria: That's what you knew...

Yturri: When I was at this Chilibolost Ranch, I got fifty dollars plus room and board for the four years I was there. That was it.

Echeverria: No raise? It was always fifty dollars?

Yturri: Heck, no! The only time they offered me a raise is when they found out I was going to work for _____ (laughter). Over there they offered me seventy dollars a month, in Riverside (the Garat Ranch). That's when I left here. But they were willing to raise up to seventy-five to stay, but I said, "No, I had made up my mind."

Echeverria: That was that.

Yturri: I went over there. The highest I ever got over there (Garat) was two hundred dollars a month.

Echeverria: After awhile?

Yturri: After eleven years. But in those days on farms and shepherding and all that, that was the wage.

Echeverria: What did you do for Chilibolost? What did you do there?

Yturri: Tractor work mostly and general farmwork. Hauling hay and grain, discing, plowing.

Echeverria: You did more farm work than ranch work all of your life, didn't you? You did more with crops, rather than with sheep and cattle.

Yturri: Counting from the time I started working here, oh, yes.

Echeverria: After the four years there and fifty dollars a month, you went from there to the Garats. You worked there for eleven years, and you started there at seventy bucks a month.

Yturri: Before I went to Chilibolosts'...I forgot to tell you awhile ago. The only outside job...I'd have a few outside

jobs around in Olive there, you know, two- or three-day jobs and stuff like that. Jobs were awful hard to get in those days. Finally, I got a job driving one of these tankers, you know, truck and trailer hauling crude oil. I did that nine months, and we worked twelve-hour shifts, changed every two weeks. And, boy, I'm telling you, we'd get so darn sleepy that we...we just...I don't know in the devil...my mother used to tell me to quit the job or I'd get killed sure (chuckle). We'd run off the road and everything else, all the drivers would.

Echeverria: So you'd actually be driving twelve hours? You'd get in that truck and drive...

Yturri: Absolutely, twelve hours. You'd go and load up with crude oil down at Santa Fe Springs or Venice or Huntington Beach or the refineries over here by Tonner. The company went broke. Then I went into the ranches.

Echeverria: So for you the Twenties and early Thirties were really tough?

Yturri: I spent more than one night...couldn't sleep. I had bills coming in that I couldn't pay. I had no work.

Echeverria: And you were still taking care of your mom?

Yturri: Yes. There was a grocery store in Villa Park there, and I'll never forget that guy. We couldn't find any work or anything, and I had to get something for my mother, my sister, my brother. I go and I begged that guy to give me some groceries. He was a good man. He'd tell me, "Well,

I can't give you too much," because, you know, he was just making it, too. Anyway, he'd never turn me away without giving me something. That went on for...oh, I don't know ...maybe a year or so, off and on. When I went to work in Riverside, I hadn't saved up any money. I was trying to help out what I could with my mother and brother. They didn't have anything to go on. With those small wages I was making when I got out of Chililobost, I barely had five hundred bucks on me. I went to Riverside. But, anyway, I inquired. This fellow that owned the store had sold out and moved, but he had an uncle that lived here in Olive. So I went up to his house and asked him where his address was. He told me he was up in Sierra Madre-- against the mountains there.

Echeverria: By Pasadena there.

Yturri: I went over there. I asked him...I had a bill that I hadn't paid yet. It amounted to thirty or forty dollars, something like that. I told him if he had that bill. He had the old books there, and he showed me. I gave him fifty bucks more. I couldn't anymore afford to give him that fifty bucks than the man in the moon, but I appreciated so much what he had done. He wouldn't take it, and I made him take it. I'll never forget that. But when you get down and out, and you need help like that, and it is done, you never will forget.

Echeverria: That must have been one of the most difficult times for you.

Yturri: Oh, it was. God, it was bad there for quite a few years. I did some tractor work there, and my back finally went out on that. I had to quit. The doctor told me, "If you want to keep that up, you won't last long." That's just what he told me.

Echeverria: So did you feel more secure when you started working on these ranches like the Chilibosts and the Garats?

Echeverria: Times were...

Yturri: Especially the Chilibolosts. Joe (Garat) didn't, but the Chilibolosts did. In fact, the Chilobolosts...there were three brothers on the ranch. The oldest brother and his wife got married the same day that my mother and my step-father got married. They were all four married together.

Echeverria: Oh, I see.

Yturri: So they knew me from way back.

Echeverria: Now in the times, like, when you were working on the ranches, did you drive trucks for both of them? For both Chilibolost and Garat?

Yturri: Yes, they had trucks there on the ranch, too. I did quite a bit of hauling hay and grain and stuff like that. But in the wintertime, mostly tractors.

Echeverria: Did you haul sheep ever?

Yturri: Not for this ranch here. I did over at the other.

Echeverria: Garat?

Yturri: Oh, yes. In winter, back when they'd market the lambs, they'd have a double-decker truck and trailer, and they used to haul the lambs to Swift here in _____.

Echeverria: Now this kind of sheep ranching was different from the kind that Lawrence Echanis describes, where you go up in the mountains and take the sheep up in the mountains. These herds were kept on the ranches pretty much?

Yturri: They kept them on...when the lambing season begins, when the lambs would start to come in, they'd rent these alfalfa fields around Hemet, San Jacinto, Beaumont, and in through that district. If you rented a ten-acre field, twenty-acre field, you'd have to fence it in completely all the way around on account of the traffic. You had to build the corrals for the sheep inside the fencing. Maybe you'd stay there three or four days, maybe a week. It would all depend on the acres you'd leased. By golly, it would be a heck of a job.

Echeverria: So everytime you moved a herd for better pasture, you had to put up fencing. Then you had to put corrals inside the fencing. This is when they started using the sheepherder's trailers (cookhouses). You'd have to move that, too?

Yturri: Oh, yes.

Echeverria: So setting up camp...

Yturri: Well, I'll tell you. This fellow that I worked for...when I first went there, there were two partners. Him and his

cousin had about 5,500 head of sheep. This Joe and I did practically all the fencing for about...oh, for a number of years. We had to haul hay, too. We had to haul lambs to the alfalfa fields, we had to do the fencing, and we had to move. Oh, heck, lots a times before daylight, we'd get out there and start working. We couldn't even get breakfast lots of time. But then we'd get the time.

Echeverria: Fifty-five hundred sheep.

Yturri: I don't know how in the world we did it.

Echeverria: Now when they moved the herd, they'd just take them through the streets? Or did they truck them?

Yturri: Out in the highway, in those days, yes, around Beaumont and that district. But now it would be a different story. You'd have to take them on some back roads or something. You couldn't take them on the freeways or something like that (laughter).

Echeverria: Hold on a second, I'm going to turn the tape over. (short break)

Echeverria: Okay, so here we go again. So, anyway, you would move those herds by taking them on the back roads,

Yturri: In those days, you know, there weren't any freeways or anything like that--just these--and not maybe a tenth of the traffic we have today. So we'd go right down the highway with them.

Echeverria: (Chuckle) I've also heard that one of the busiest times in sheep ranching is lambing season.

Yturri: Oh, it is.

Echeverria: Can you tell me about that?

Yturri: Well, they build special corrals, and, say, you have a thousand head of ewes or so. They probably start lambing, and before the last one comes in, it will probably be a variation of a month or more, maybe six weeks.

Echeverria: From beginning to end?

Yturri: Whatever lambs that you have in this bunch you have here (gesture) that are lambing, you haul away from them (the corrals) and put them in these alfalfa fields. You do this when they're small, when they are about a couple weeks old, so they can graze. You separate them from the other bunch, and they use the alfalfa fields.

Echeverria: Oh, now you bring the lambs and the ewes?

Yturri: Yes.

Echeverria: But during the actual lambing, I understand, most of the time the old herders would be around during the birth to help the ewes giving birth and all that.

Yturri: Oh, yes, sure.

Echeverria: So that would mean that they would be up all hours?

Yturri: Well, they'd check them at night--make one or two rounds around the corral and see how they were. But if they had difficulties lambing, the herder would take care of her.

Echeverria: But you didn't have too much to do with that part of it?

Yturri: No, just the hauling and the building the fences and moving.

- Echeverria: So you had to do the logistics.
- Yturri: I had to do the hard work (laughter)!
- Echeverria: You had to do the hard part. How about when you sheared the sheep? When you did sheep shearing, describe how that was handled.
- Yturri: Well, you have to build special corrals for them. You have to build a pen for the shearers. Then you build a shoot out to the pen where the ewes are. Then you put in so many--whatever this shearing pen can hold--into this shoot, see. The shoot was built like a corral, probably about four feet wide.
- Echeverria: That you'd run the sheep through?
- Yturri: You'd run the sheep and fill this narrow gap with sheep, see.
- Echeverria: Yes.
- Yturri: When they sheared a bunch and turned them out, and they'd have to get these others, why, they'd just open this little panel that they'd have in front. Then they'd run these in.
- Echeverria: Why didn't you leave up the same chutes every year? Why didn't you leave up the same setup? The same shearing setup?
- Yturri: Well, most of them use the same. It takes so many panels and everything to build one. They use those all through the year.
- Echeverria: Oh, I see.
- Yturri: It used to take me...I designed a lambing corral myself.

It took me about three or four days to build it. I had help--two or three guys helping me. I had it all fixed so that I had the hay and the water and everything right in the center, and the little pens divided out. Everything was perfect, right there in one spot. Before, they used to build one corral here, one over there, one over there (chuckle).

Echeverria: What would the little different things be for?

Yturri: Say, there's a pen here where the ewes are lambing. Say, there's forty or fifty lambing. You'd put them in this pen until they're a few days old. From then on, you'd put them into this other one until they get a little bit older. The other kind is when they're ready to be shipped. Your loading ramps are right there. You have a chute and a platform, a ramp, so they can walk up to get into the trucks.

Echeverria: Did the Garats sell most of their lambs?

Yturri: All of them...

Echeverria: All of them?

Yturri: ...except what they needed for their own use.

Echeverria: For their own use, to eat. I think this is true, that you don't eat the older sheep. You eat the lamb.

Yturri: They don't even eat the young lambs. Well, they're young. But you take a lamb that's five or six months old. They very seldom will butcher those. They'll take a weathered

lamb and raise it until it's about a year old--feed it in the summer with grain and stuff. You get better meat than with the young ones.

Echeverria: So they grow them for about a year?

Yturri: They generally keep about fifteen or twenty of them from each lambing. Then they move them in with the other sheep, see. Then when they need one, they catch it.

Echeverria: Did different outfits around here do all of this differently? You know, did the Garats run their sheep differently than the other ranches?

Yturri: Well, there's a lot of difference from one to the other. There's some that will actually go to the extreme in taking good care of...feeding them the way they should be. There's others that just are not so particular. They used to let them suffer more. In other words, they won't raise the lambs like the ones that take care of them.

Echeverria: So you're saying some people actually cared more for the animal?

Yturri: Cared more and took better care of them because there's more profit in it too. If you take an animal the way it's supposed to be--feed it right--you're going to have better lambs. You're going to have heavier lambs. If you neglect them and don't feed them properly, those lambs won't...you can be sure they'll outweigh them ten, fifteen pounds, maybe more.

Echeverria: Now how about the Garats? Where did they seize upon that?

Yturri: Oh, they were good.

Echeverria: They were good. They took it pretty seriously, then. Did their lambs sell for more? Did they get more for their lambs?

Yturri: They always got top price for them. This Swift Company used to buy all of them.

Echeverria: Is that right?

Yturri: There was one salesman there. He used to come out every year (chuckle). I used to get a kick out of him. He was pretty sharp. He'd come out in the morning, and he'd tell Joe and Mike--they were partners--"I'm going to give you thirty-five cents a pound," or whatever they were worth. "I'm not going over it, so there's no use in you guys trying to make me jack the price up." So they'd ride around all day because this guy would buy all the rest of the lambs around there. He'd go with Mike. Joe wouldn't go with him, but Mike would go with him all day, over to Cordureses and Laurua. Oh, there were five or six sheep owners in that district at that time. Mike would take him all over, and he'd buy the whole works. One day, I'll never forget. They came in about evening. I was servicing the pickup. You know, they had a gas pump over by the house, Ol' Mike came in the house with this buyer, and he tried to make him raise the price on it. Boy, this

guy got mad. He told him, "You know what you can do with the whole works!" I started to laugh. "Hey, come back here." Then these two called each other names and all.

Echeverria: They would go through this every year?

Yturri: Yes. But ol' Mike was pretty sharp, too. But the other guy was a little bit sharper (laughter).

Echeverria: Did the guy ever raise his price?

Yturri: No.

Echeverria: He really meant it when he started...

Yturri: He really meant it when he started out. Boy, that guy was...I've seen him look at a band of sheep and tell Mike, "Well, I'll give you \$20,000 for those lambs." He could tell just about what they were all worth.

Echeverria: He knew his business. Well, Johnny, you've been around a lot of Basques from the Old Country and Basques born here. You've been around sheep ranching and different ranches a lot. Let me start this way. Some people say that the Basques are excellent herders. Just naturally, they're excellent sheepherders. Do you think that's true?

Yturri: That is true.

Echeverria: Why?

Yturri: They are the tops.

Echeverria: Why? Why, do you think?

Yturri: Well, in the first place, it's what most of them used to do when they were from the Old Country. They probably

didn't have maybe a half-dozen sheep, but they were taught to herd there--the old ones that came from there. Now these young ones, they don't seem to care for any sheep or anything like that. They go mostly into dairies. Very few Basques can you find today that care to be sheepherders. But the old ones, that was the only thing they knew, and they made the best ones.

Echeverria: Do you think there's anything in their personality that made them good herders?

Yturri: No. They took better care because they took more interest in the animal. They did the best they could. Lots of those guys were really sharp with sheep. I've seen some of them that...I'll tell you one of that...they had one herder over there with Joe Garat. He would always have top lambs when they were ready to ship. He was a guy that would stay with the ewes, with the lambs, in the alfalfa fields until darn near dark. Other guys who didn't care so much would put them in the corrals and go to the cookhouse. But this guy...one time I went over to make his camp. There was a big potato field, and the vines were that big (raises his hands high), It was during the last war. Potatoes were high. He had his corral, his camp, and his watering trough just about two hundred feet from this twenty acres of potatoes. No fencing or nothing. It was out in stubble field. I went up there, and the sheep were all

laying on the ground just on the other side of his cookhouse. I told him, "You mean to tell me you're going to leave these sheep here all night? Aren't you afraid they'll get in that potato field there? If they get in there, they'll ruin everything." He told me, "Those sheep won't move tonight." And other nights I'd go over to make his camp, and the sheep would be in the corral. That's just about how he...

Echeverria: You mean, what you're saying is, that he just knew the sheep?

Yturri: That's it.

Echeverria: He just somehow knew that they wouldn't get into the potato field (chuckle). Do you think that's perhaps what's special about these herders, that they knew their sheep?

Yturri: Oh, there was lots of them that...yes. There's no comparison of any. I've seen Mexican herders and different nationalities, but I've never seen one compare to a Basque. Of course, you can find some Basque herders that are a little better than others. I'm not saying that they're all perfect.

Echeverria: No, no, I understand.

Yturri: But, I mean, on an average...and I've seen a lot of them in all the years that I was over there.

Echeverria: You've seen a lot of Basques, and I want to ask you a question similar to the one I asked Lorenzo. Can you

describe a Basque? What are the characteristics of a Basque? What is a Basque person like?

Yturri: I don't know. They are set in their ways, I'll tell you that (chuckle).

Echeverria: You're pretty sure about that (laughter)?

Yturri: I don't know if it's hard-headed or whatever. Once they make up their mind, they're pretty well set in their ways. They are ambitious. You know, most of them that come from there, they generally make it one way or another when they get here. I can say that for them more than I can a lot of these that were born here--a lot of Basque families. They are honest; most of them can be trusted, you know, with a loan or anything.

In the olden days, I can tell you an example of a couple that worked on this ranch. He was working out in the hay fields--in fact, he was helping us--and he keeled over--heart attack! The fellow was farming himself, you know, this guy that died. He had a hundred acres or so. There was another fellow--this was after my step-dad died--that was working for me. I noticed that he wouldn't hardly speak for a few days. So I asked him, "What seems to be the trouble?" "Well," he said, "I loaned that man \$1,200." He didn't have a note. The only thing he had was a little notebook like this little blank one here (he points to a two-by-two pad of paper). It was written,

like, "Mr. So-and-so owes me \$1,200." That's all there was to that. So I told him to give me that notebook. The attorney that went through my step-dad's estate when he died was in Fullerton...Warner? He was one of the best attorneys. In fact, he was the city attorney there for a long time. He died here a number of years ago. I took it over to him. He looked at it. "Well, I don't know," he says, "the ol' judge is going to make a you-know-what out of me, or I'm going to collect it. You come with me when I go to court." I said, "Okay." So the wills and everything were on Friday in court. I went over, and he had a good line. Boy, he could just talk as smooth...(chuckle)

Echeverria: The lawyer?

Yturri: He got up before that judge (chuckle). He told him, "That's the way the Basque people do. They never make a note; they don't need one. They just take their word." The old judge let him have the money. The lawyer told me, "Now if I collect it, I want a third of it." (laughter) I told the other guy, "Now here's the case. If he collects it, he wants a third of it." He said, "I'll be willing to give it to him." So he collected the \$1,200.

Echeverria: And that's pretty much true, isn't it, about giving people their word?

Yturri: Yes, yes. And that's just one case that I know of. In those days, your word, especially amongst us Basque people...

heck, we had very few notes or anything like that.

Echeverria: Do you see much difference, like, between the Viscayans and the Guipuzcoans and the Navarrans and the French Basques?

Yturri: I don't really know. I'm not too familiar. I've never been back there in the first place.

Echeverria: Yes, but the ones you met here?

Yturri: The ones I've met here? I don't know. The French Basques seem to be...I think the Spanish Basques seem so flightier-like, quicker tempered, than the others--the ones that I've met.

Echeverria: I don't want to agree with you now (chuckle).

Yturri: Huh?

Echeverria: I'm trying not to agree with you (chuckle).

Yturri: Well, don't you think so? On the French side, don't you think they're...I think on the Spanish side they have a temper that's a little more...

Echeverria: Yes, I understand.

Yturri: Like your dad, you know, he was a nice man and all that, but he had this temper that would flare up. French Basques...oh, I've met some of them that are that way, too, but the majority aren't. They're a little bit calmer, I'd say.

Echeverria: Now, John, I've exhausted my list of questions for you. I wonder if there's anything you can think of that I forgot

to ask you? Any memories you have that you'd like to...

Yturri: I don't know, Jeri (chuckle).

Echeverria: I know one I want to ask you. You're a first generation Basque, and you spoke Basque as a kid and all that. Do you consider yourself Basque first or American first?

Yturri: I consider myself...I'll have to say an American because I was born an American. But outside of that, I would say that I'm Basque. I'm proud of being Basque, and I'm not saying anything against it. I believe that the Basque people as a group, the majority, are nice people. I've always believed it, and I always will because I've mingled amongst them. I've had good times with them. They've all been sociable, very nice, you know, at parties and stuff like that. Whatever they had was yours--that type.

Echeverria: Well, Johnny, thank you very much.

Yturri: That's okay, Jeri.

Echeverria: It's been a pleasure talking with you. I learned a little bit about ranching today (chuckle), and I just want to thank you again.

Yturri: That's all right, Jeri.