

Hanigan-trial Mexicans: 'We had bad luck the day we crossed.'

By TOM MILLER
and MILTON JAMAIL

Since Aug. 18, 1976, when three Mexicans say they were attacked in the desert west of Douglas, the victims have maintained silence except in court. In Agua Prieta, Son., shortly after Tom and Pat Hanigan were acquitted on charges stemming from the attack, Manuel Garcia-Loya, 26, Bernabe Herrera-Mata, 22, and Eleazar Ruelas-Zavala, 26, spoke with two American journalists. Tom Miller covered the Hanigan case. Milton Jamail is a writer-teacher who specializes in Latin America. Translation assistance was provided by Margo Gutierrez.

QUESTION: Manuel, where are you from?

MANUEL: Chihuahua, the capital of Chihuahua.

Q: What do your parents do?

M: My dad is a construction worker in Chihuahua. I worked construction too, whenever I could get a job. Sometimes I'd work for two or three months at a time for my brother-in-law.

Q: How did you end up in Agua Prieta?

M: I hitchhiked from Chihuahua to Agua Prieta. I'd never been to the other side. I was thinking about crossing at Juarez, but I

read in Alarma that several people were found dead there. There are a lot of animals in the desert near there and it sounded dangerous, so I came to Agua Prieta. Here it was supposed to be very peaceful to cross.

ELEAZAR: It's really quite easy to cross wherever you want to — with a little luck you can get across. Except we had bad luck the day we crossed.

Q: Are you from Agua Prieta, Eleazar?

E: No, I'm from Sinaloa originally. I've been here about three years.

Q: Bernabe, what's your background? What jobs have you had, and what does your family do?

BERNABE: I'm from the city of Durango. The last time I saw my family they worked the fields, but I'd do little jobs around the city like sell newspapers.

Q: What happened when you first came to Agua Prieta?

B: Well, I didn't know anyone when I arrived here. I just came so I could cross to the other side. I got a job in Agua Prieta at first, and the people I worked with said I could stay with them. I worked for five or six days before coming across the first time.

Q: Manuel, what did you do when you first arrived here?

M: A good friend of my father's lives here — his name is Antonio Hernandez — he owns a junkyard here. I worked there for a little over a month. Finally I told Antonio that I'd been here a long time, and I really wanted to go to the other side. He said no, don't go — stay and help me, it's a festival day. But I decided to go anyway.

Q: Did you think it would be easy crossing into the United States?

M: No, but with a little luck I thought I could make it.

Q: Bernabe, why did the three of you come across?

B: Because there are no jobs in Mexico.

M: We didn't all know each other first. We met at Don Ramon's house where a lot of people go when they want to cross over to the other side.

Q: How long had you been planning on staying this time?

M: As long as I could — maybe a month, two months, maybe a year.

B: We wanted to go further into the country.

M: I wanted to work for a month or two in Elfrida to get some money together so I could travel further into the United States

where they pay more. I hoped to go all the way to Chicago.

Q: Did you send money home to your families?

M: Yes — I sent some to Chihuahua — it was part of the money I made in Agua Prieta.

B: I don't know where my family is.

Q: The three of you were at the courthouse (in Bisbee) almost the entire trial, and you each spent a couple of days on the witness stand. How did you feel about the court proceedings?

E: We felt pretty confident that the Hanigans would be convicted of the crimes.

M: We were a little nervous.

B: It was a strange experience.

Q: How did you learn about the verdict?

M: I read it in the paper the next day. We were quite upset — it wasn't correct!

B: Right.

Q: Why do you think they were acquitted?

E: I can't give you a good reason since they had the crime on their hands.

M: Because they had money and power and influence.

B: And because we were in the country illegally.

Q: What feelings did you get from the judge and the jury inside the courtroom?

E: Perhaps they did not like Mexicans.

M: It is as if we were the ones who were found guilty.

Q: What type of reaction have you picked up since the verdict?

M: In Agua Prieta they are angry about it.

E: We expected the people who committed the crimes against us to be punished.

Q: What are your impressions of Americans away from the border?

M: Just like in Mexico — there are good people and there are bad people.

Q: There has been a lot of reaction to the case in Tucson and elsewhere. Have you learned of that?

M: Yes, we have been told, and we read about it, too. It's real good. It feels good to have people support us.

B: I'm grateful for the help they are giving us. We'd like to see this federal investi-

gation so that justice may be brought about.

E: They should not be free of the crimes!

Q: What are your future plans other than the civil suit against the Hanigans?

E: Right now I'm not thinking about doing very much. I'll probably go back to my parents. They can give me some direction to my life.

B: I don't know. We have some things to straighten up here, like the civil suit.

Q: If you win, what change would that bring about in your lives?

E: I'd like to begin a different life.

M: Oh, maybe I'd get a *ranchito*. I would rather live in the country than the city, maybe have a few cows. I might like to open a *tortillera*.

Q: Do you think that one day you will go back to the United States?

E: No!

B: No!

M: No!