The text below is part of the Oral History of Utah Minorities, sponsored by the University of Utah. The interview below is with José Jesús Palacio, a Mexican American who started working in the mines in Carbon County in 1937, when he was 17 years old. He lived in Sego, which was a small town in Southern Utah, just north of Canyonlands National Park. Vince Mayer is the interviewer, and is listed in the document as VM. José Palacio is listed as JP.

Living in Sego

VM: Now, what year did you go to Sego?

JP: 1924, yes, in 1924

VM: Were there any other Mexicans living in Sego at that time? Do you remember any?

JP: As far as I can remember in that place, I think we were the only Mexican family there for years. And then as time went on, I think there was maybe one or two, but that's all. See, that place is pretty isolated.

VM: Were there other Mexican families in the whole county before the Second World War?

JP: No, there wasn't too many until after the war. After the war then a lot of them started coming from New Mexico, and some had migrated from Mexico to here.

Working in the Mines

VM: And when did you start working in the mines yourself?

JP: I started in Sego in September 28, 1937.

VM: How old were you then?

JP: Oh, I was about seventeen, something like that. I worked two years…no, about three years I worked up there. This was seasonal, you know, you could only work in the winter months and then you would get laid off. The rest of my time, I put my time into hoeing beets, working on farms, on railroads, whatever I could do.

Discrimination and Treatment by the Community

VM: Being the only Mexican family in Sego, how were you treated there? How were you received by the rest of the community, even though it was a small community?

JP: By the rest of the people? There were a lot of Italians and a lot of Greeks. It was mostly Italians and Greeks and Swedes and stuff like that. But as I can remember, you know what I mean, we were classified as a poor class of people and that was it. We were just looked down on all the time, because they referred to you–well, they'd say, "Them Mexicans live over there across the street in the bad part of town," because that's the way they believed.

VM: And what about when you moved to the coal mine?

JP: There wasn't too much discrimination there, on account of there being so many different nationalities. But still you could see some discrimination, but at that time you couldn't say too much about anything.

VM: What form did the discrimination take? I imagine it came in subtle form.

JP: Well, just about in anything…in jobs, in a lot of places they wouldn't have you because you was a Mexican, even if you did have the know-how and stuff like that. But I hear in salaried personnel, they say my boss didn't start putting on Mexican bosses until 1955 or '56. But now everybody has got the opportunity if you can do the job. It's the opportunity that matters.