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Guadalupe Speaks Oral History Project

Interview with: Clarence S. Minetti

Interviewed by: Adam Matschek

(affiliation) _____

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About the Guadalupe Speaks Project

Guadalupe Speaks is an oral history project that is part of California Stories, a multiyear initiative designed to strengthen communities and connect Californians by uncovering personal and community stories that help document multicultural communities in present day California. California Stories is funded by the California Council for the Humanities.

In 2003, the Guadalupe Speaks project began recording and transcribing oral histories of the residents of Guadalupe. The stories reflect the history and culture of the town, capturing the residents' impressions of their community. The stories represent the multicultural backgrounds of the residents including Swiss-Italian, Portuguese, Filipino, Chumash, Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese ancestry.

Situated approximately ten miles west of Santa Maria on historic Highway 1 on the border of Santa Barbara & San Luis Obispo counties, the City of Guadalupe was founded in 1843 as one of the earliest communities on the Central Coast. In 2003, the city has a population of 5,700, mixed with long-time and native residents, recent retirees from outside the county, and a large Latino population.

Guadalupe was once the principal agricultural center of northern Santa Barbara County, at one time providing one-third of all lettuce grown in California. Although it is still primarily an agricultural community, the crops have changed to include broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and other vegetables. However, Guadalupe is no longer the central distribution point for the area, and communities such as Santa Maria have surpassed it in growth by almost 2,000 percent. Guadalupe has remained at a standstill, much as it was 50 years ago, while the rest of the Central Coast has grown at an astounding pace.

Today, Guadalupe is a town poised between its past and its future. In 2003, the inaugural year of the Guadalupe Speaks project the small town is on the cusp of modernization and large-scale development. Through the Guadalupe Speaks project, the community will be able to document its history and unique, multicultural way of life.

Using the Guadalupe Speaks Oral Histories

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GUADALUPE SPEAKS
CLARENCE MINETTI INTERVIEW

Narrator: Clarence S. Minetti

Interviewer: Adam Matschek

Date: December 3, 2003

Place: Far Western Tavern, Guadalupe, CA

Transcribed by: Janet Crabaugh

Matschek: What is your full name?

Minetti: My name is Clarence Stanley Minetti

Matschek: Does that name have any significance...

Minetti: Yes, there's quite a few Minettis here in Guadalupe; I was born in Cayucos and there are Minettis up there. My grandparents came from Switzerland on both my mother and father's sides but my parents were both born here in California.

Matschek: About when did they come to the United States?

Minetti: My grandfather on my mother's side - oh, he was a great man - he landed in Cayucos in 1874. He was 20 years old. He had left Switzerland and went to Australia. There was a gold rush, quite a few people that went to Australia came back to Switzerland, then came to California.

Matschek: What kind of business did he get into?

Minetti: Well, he used to work in the dairies. He finally got a dairy of his own. I think he went broke a couple of times but started over again. He raised ten children, finally made enough to buy a home in Cayucos and retired there.

Matschek: One of those ten children was your father?

Minetti: My mother. I lost her - she was killed in San Luis Obispo in a freak accident when I was three years old. I lived with my grandparents about three years, until my dad remarried. That's where I learned to speak Swiss from them, because they didn't speak English.

Matschek: Do you still?

Minetti: Yes, I get by pretty good. We went to Europe a couple of times, and found relations over there. I've been here at the ranch for 63 years. We've had a lot of Mexican employees and I found myself talking about half Spanish and half Swiss over there. I had to catch myself!

Matschek: What year were you born?

Minetti: 1918. Here in Cayucos.

Matschek: Tell me a little bit about your early life. Growing up in Cayucos.

Minetti: Early life? After my dad remarried he was working for the Golden State Creamery in San Luis, which is where there is a shopping center now, isn't there? There was a creamery here in Guadalupe, and he was transferred here in 1925, made manager of this creamery. That's when we moved here, so I was about seven years old when we moved here. I went to grammar school here for awhile, went to grammar school in Betteravia -

for some reason we moved out there - and then I think my dad retired from the dairy and we went back to Cayucos. He went to work for someone up there and I lived with the grandparents again for a little while and graduated from grammar school in Cayucos. But then we moved back to Guadalupe and I went to high school in Santa Maria. I graduated from there in 1935.

Matschek: What was school like in Guadalupe?

Minetti: Oh, yes, there were Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, kind of mixed up you know. Some of those people are still living. I have a lot of friends I went to school with in those days.

Matschek: So you'd hear a lot of different languages at school?

Minetti: But everyone spoke English - tried to speak English - at the time.

Matschek: You said you spoke Swiss with your grandparents - but not with your father much?

Minetti: No, not with him. He spoke English all the time.

Matschek: Tell me about some of the friends you have here in Guadalupe, [from] high school. Do you keep contact with them, and what did you all used to do?

Minetti: I'll tell you what we used to do: there were amateur prize fights in Pismo Beach - there was a boxing arena up there - and we used to go there almost every Friday night. I always liked to ride horseback. I worked in the creamery in Guadalupe for three years from 1937 to 40 and I was riding some colts, young horses, for different people. I'd do that after school. That's how I met my wife. They lived across the river here and I

got acquainted with her and I used to take a ride over there almost every day.

One experience I had: I was riding a colt for someone and went over there, tied it to a fence securely, in front of the house. My future wife's brother had a sow with a bunch of little pigs. Here comes this sow - that mare had never seen a pig before, I guess. She started to pull back and honest to God she pulled about fifty feet of that fence down! Thank the Lord that I had had experience in building fences on the ranches. I spent the next three or four weeks rebuilding the fence, It kind of made a hit with the mother-in-law.

Matschek: What kind of work did you do when you were young?

Minetti: I worked when I got out of high school for one rancher - and then I worked for another. I graduated in '35. Then I went on to work in the Creamery in 1937. Worked there until '40 when I got married. Then I went on to work for my father in-law on the ranch at Coraletes where I still live. He passed away in 1947 and I kind of became the cattle boss and have been ever since.

Matschek: What was the last cattle ranch you had like back in the 30s and 40s?

Minetti: It's like our place now - we run about 800 cows and we've increased the carrying capacity of our ranch by upgrading the grasses and so forth...where we had 250 cows when I first went to work there we are running about seven to eight hundred now.

Matschek: That's a common size herd for around here?

Minetti: No, they vary - 200 or 300, or like the Sisquoc Ranch are running a couple thousand cattle. The Newhall Ranch out of Santa Maria - they run a couple thousand cattle.

Matschek: What kind of work did some of your friends from high school get into after graduation?

Minetti: Oh, I had a very good friend who worked here at the Creamery for a while. The Golden State. There was a lot of workers in the produce field. Driving a tractor, cultivating, things like that - mostly agricultural work.

Matschek: Tell me what things were like in the agricultural field.

Minetti: They have improved their practice so much in the produce business. We are using far less water there than years ago when we were flood irrigating. That's all been changed now into mostly drip systems. Keeps the vegetables irrigated properly and saves a lot of water, and fertilizer also.

Matschek: Cost efficient?

Minetti: Yessir.

Matschek: Tell me a little about your home life, when you were in Guadalupe, in your teen-age years.

Minetti: Well, I remember coming into this bar in 1935, about that time. It was almost the same it is now - we've made some changes since we got it. But between horseback riding and going to the fights in Pismo, maybe a football game, and so forth, that's about it.

Matschek: Did you ever tell yourself that one day you were going to own this bar?

Minetti: Never thought about it. But after we got married and the wife and I were at home there we talked about getting into it - we enjoyed people very much. We used to entertain up at the ranch. When we'd have roundups the neighbors would come help us, their wives would come. The wives would bring cakes, the most beautiful delicious cakes you ever saw. Everybody looked forward to that. We had ten, twelve, fourteen neighbors come to help us do our work, then we'd go help them. We always looked forward to the springtime and the roundups.

Matschek: Where was this ranch located?

Minetti: It's located just six miles southwest of us, near Point Sal.

Matschek: Do you still live out there?

Minetti: Yessir. Been there for sixty-three years.

Matschek: The house is still the same?

Minetti: No, we remodeled the house in 1955. It's quite comfortable. I might say I started with two daughters and a son. The son is the oldest. Now we have 27 in our family between in-laws, children, grandkids, and seven great-grandkids.

Matschek: Where are your parents buried?

Minetti: They're in Cayucos.

Matschek: When did your father pass away?

Minetti: He died in 1955. My mother died about 1920 or 21. I was just a little guy. I had a brother who was just a year older. That's when I went to live with my grandparents in Cayucos and my brother went to live with an uncle.

Matschek: Where is your brother now?

Minetti: He passed away about three years ago.

Matschek: What about your other siblings?

Minetti: I have a half-sister that's still living. And then Barbara, our kitchen manager here, is my niece. Her mother used to work for us. Her mother was manager for quite some time. She passed away a few years ago. I'm the last of the Mohicans. (Laughs)

Matschek: Tell us a little more about your childhood - you said you had all kinds of accidents -

Minetti: I worked real hard through the years. We used to grow a lot of sugar beets here in the Valley. After the beets are harvested the sugar beet tops are left in the field and we used to run our cattle in the fields. We had to fence all the fields, put in the water, really work hard at it, and then put the cattle in, and move the cattle around. I've fenced almost every field from Bonita School west out here to the ocean one time or another. We had to get the cattle out of the fields when it was raining because it would get too muddy - those were hectic times, believe me.

Matschek: That's when you sustained several injuries, maybe?

Minetti: Yeah, I got thrown off a horse one time and got hurt. Then another time just stooping over trying to join two pieces of pipe together, my back popped and I've kind of had trouble ever since.

Matschek: So pretty much you were healthy - explain how you got involved with the Far Western.

Minetti: Well, as I said, the wife and I had talked about maybe getting something like a restaurant, because we liked people, and I heard this place was for sale. I knew the old gentleman that owned it, so I came to him one morning, his name was Angelo Ferrari, and said to him "Mr. Ferrari, I understand you might want to sell the Palace Hotel. How much do you want for it?"

He gave me a price, and I said I'd go home and talk to my wife. I went home and talked to my wife, came back and bought it that afternoon. Just like that. I had my wife's cousin Dick Moretti, who's a very jovial person, and took him in as a partner. He was a partner with us until 1996 and he wanted to retire, so I formed a family limited partnership and bought him out. So the kids and I are all involved.

Matschek: So what was it like in the Far Western back in the 50s and 60s?

Minetti: Well, in the late 30s, during the Depression, when I got out of high school and was working out here in the fields, I can remember coming in here - the very same dining room that we have [now], getting a big green salad, all the fresh French bread and butter you can eat, and a big bone-in rib steak and spaghetti - very delicious spaghetti - for 65 cents. Of course we were working at that time for two dollars a day, so...a pair of Levis were about a dollar and a quarter at the time.

I got involved in rodeo. The first Elks rodeo in Santa Maria was in 1944. I got involved there as a pickup man - do you know what a pickup man is in rodeo? [Explains]. To back up a little bit, before that we had four rodeos, amateur rodeos, that were quite successful. Then I was asked to go to Santa Maria and help run the Elks Rodeo. Seemed like pressure, but I finally said yes, so I went there in 1954 as the Arena Director and worked on that until 1994. Fifty years I worked on that rodeo, 27 years was General Chairman. I made a lot of friends in the rodeo world. I've been to 21 National Finals rodeos. Started in Oklahoma. We went to Oklahoma City four times, then it was moved to Las Vegas and this will be the 22nd year. Through all those years I always met a lot of the people who used to come to Santa Maria. We're still great friends. That was a big part of my life, the Elks Rodeo. I took a lot of interest in it, and it grew and grew and grew, and finally we were very fortunate when the Santa Maria Elks were given a piece of ground by UNOCAL. 107 acres, south of Santa Maria about three miles, and there are permanent grounds out there now.

Matschek: Did you ever compete in the rodeo?

Minetti: Yes, I used to rope, and I used to ride bulls in the first rodeos. I quit that and went to just bull riding.

Matschek: Did you ever win?

Minetti: Yes, I won a little bit. Not like the big boys. You know what, you watch golf on TV? Some of these guys win maybe a million dollars in a match? Last year's World Champion Cowboy in the whole year accumulated \$325,000. That's going to 50 or 60 or maybe 80 rodeos - it's a tough racket, believe me. Now the purses are pretty good and you could go to Las Vegas and win one event - sometimes maybe once in awhile there will be somebody that's exceptional and will compete in two events and

maybe make \$150,000. Pretty good now. There is another group now - did you ever watch the Bull Riders Only on TV? Twenty cowboys, who had visions of doing something, put up \$1,000 apiece and they started the Professional Bull Riders Organization and they've all done real well. They have bull riding almost every week in different cities. They go throughout the whole United States. They're making a whole lot of money. The kid that won it this last year, Chris Shivers, he got a check for a million dollars at the end of the bull riding.

Maschek: Did you do any traveling back in those days?

Minetti: We had a couple of trips to Switzerland, we have relations over there we didn't know we had - they were so happy we would come look them up, and we were happy to know we had relations over there. Then we went to Mexico four times I think, on riding excursions. That was very interesting. Met a lot of nice people down there.

Matschek: Could you describe how the town seemed to you when you were a kid and first moved here?

Minetti: When we first moved here? Every empty lot that you see now had a business on it. In fact our parking lot beside the building here, had two businesses on it. There was a hotel up the street; another hotel across the street from us; there was a garage and a butcher shop; and a store over there where they used to slaughter cattle in back. I remember in those years there were about four or five beet dumps in the Valley and they'd haul the beets to Betteravia to the sugar mill. They'd haul the beets into the beet dumps with eight-horse teams. I remember eight-horse teams going by here in front on this street. Times have changed a whole lot.

Matschek: You see more empty lots now...what do you think is going to happen?

Minetti: Well, chain stores started coming into Santa Maria and people started moving over there. The way of harvesting produce has changed - they used to have packing houses down here and the produce was brought in and packed in the packing houses and shipping wherever by train. That all changed. Now they do the packing right in the field, the cartons are put on pallets and taken into pre-cooler, and put on the trucks...maybe something that's harvested here today will day after tomorrow be in Chicago.

Matschek: That was a loss of jobs?

Minetti: There's still as much work - people started moving to Santa Maria and it kinda went downhill - but things are picking up again in Guadalupe. I see a lot of publicity about things [that] are being done - just like what you're doing. Things that you hope will help the community.

Matschek: Try to build it back up. Do you recall when they put in the 101 Freeway?

Minetti: In Santa Maria?

Matschek: Yes. Did that change traffic patterns around here? Have less people going through here?

Minetti: No - this is Highway 1 that goes through here and that was a straighter route so there's not as many people coming through here as go down the 101. However, this has become kind of a scenic road now and if you follow 1 out here it goes right by Vandenberg Air Force Base - and you can go to Lompoc, go east from Lompoc and hit the 101 down east of Gaviota, and on to Santa Barbara.

Matschek: So a lot of the traffic through here is tourist and sightseers?

Minetti: Yes. A lot of bicycle people go through here.

Matschek: Stopping at the Far Western, maybe?

Minetti: Yes - they stop at a lot of places.

Matschek: Do you have any religious affiliations?

Minetti: I'm Catholic. In fact when I was living with my dad in San Luis after he remarried, I went to the Mission Grammar School in San Luis Obispo. Been Catholic all my life...don't go to church as much as I should, but I think right, I think. (Laughs)

Matschek: What about the other people in town?

Minetti: Mostly Catholics. Mexican people, Spanish - they all go to church - mostly all Catholics. There is another denomination, I'm ashamed of myself, I should know what it is - that has a good attendance.

Matschek: Mostly Catholic, even back about two decades ago?

Minetti: Yes. Of course, the Japanese had a Buddhist church here too. There were a lot of Japanese.

Matschek: It used to be very ethnically diverse - now it's about 80 percent Hispanic, I believe?

Minetti: Yes - it's changed.

Matschek: What about back in the 40s and 50s?

Minetti: There were more Japanese, and more Chinese. More Filipinos. Filipinos used to work in the vegetable fields. They always dressed well. I remember there used to be eight or ten little kids out here every weekend shining shoes - they had their little boxes. Filipinos always dressed well. They'd make money, a few bucks.

I remember one of my good friends who married a first cousin of my wife. His name was Bob Torres. ...in Santa Maria now. He used to shine shoes. He was a smart kid from the start. He was a captain of the shoe shiners - they always used the shady side of the street, which was the west side. Then they had the "peon" shiners across the street in the sun. Bobby was very clever. The traffic was on the shady side too.

Matschek: Let's talk a little bit more about the different clubs you were involved in.

Minetti: Oh, I belonged to the Lions Club here in Guadalupe - that was very active for a while. There was a Rotary Club here that was very active...

Matschek: What kind of things did they do?

Minetti: Lions, they worked for eyesight, glasses and so forth. Kiwanis and the Rotary clubs were service clubs. They helped anybody needed help. I joined the Elks in Santa Maria and I became the Rodeo Chairman over there - I attended the Elks and went through the chairs. That means you become an officer, eventually after seven years you become Exalted Ruler - head of the Lodge. Then you become a Trustee after that. That's five years. So I put in 12 years there between going through the chairs and then being a Trustee of the Lodge. I belong to the Vacqueros de los

Ranchos - that's a group of gentlemen who go out for a ride every spring. Go to a different ranch every year. There's about a hundred members and fifty guests. Have a big time for three, four days: riding and roping and so forth. They have an arena and do some rodeo events. Then I belong to the Rancheros (unclear) out of Santa Barbara, which is one of the largest riding groups in the United States. About 550 members and guests and about 1000 men altogether - all at one time. It starts the first week in May and goes for seven days. I did a lot of work in that, helping with the rodeo and riding and so forth. Was Trail Boss for a while. Then I was honored: they made me an honorary Life Member of that organization. As well, I was made a Life Member of the Elks in Santa Maria, so I feel very fortunate. Nice things happened to me, most things came from being devoted to the various clubs and working very hard at it.

Matschek: I know you have some stories. Is there any one you want to tell, that you think is funny or...

Minetti: I'm not as good as Harry Masatani! He can tell a lot of stories. (Laughs)

Matschek: Just a couple?

Minetti: That one about the colt I was riding and tore my mother-in-law's fence down. That was a kind of funny deal. It wasn't funny at the time, but - but I'm not too good at stories. I'm sorry.

Matschek: That's fine - any more about the early times?

Minetti: We used to go out here, when I was working in the Creamery...there were dairy cattle up here in the hills. When we got to know about it we'd sneak up there on Sundays and get those cattle out and ride them out of the chutes up there. Those cattle were big and fat - they threw us all over the

country up there. (Laughs) The dairyman who owned the cattle found out about it - he told me, "If I ever catch you guys up there I'm going to roll you in barbed wire!" He was mad. So we stayed away from there for a long time.

Matschek: So what sort of effect do you think you've had on the town?

Minetti: Oh, I don't know - I've been well respected, I can say that. I go by that old Golden Rule, "Do unto others as they should do unto you." That's been my rule. I help people if I can, just try to be a good citizen. I'm kind of getting tired, I'm 85 now and those "golden years" aren't what they're bragged up to be, I'll tell you. Up until about ten years ago I was pretty active. I've kind of slowed down.

Matschek: You've done pretty good, you have a good family...

Minetti: Yes - very happy. Just the other day we had a Thanksgiving dinner over at my daughter's beautiful home in Santa Maria, and we were all there. So we were very thankful - it makes me emotional sometimes just to think about it but it's the truth.

Matschek: What do your children do now?

Minetti: Well, I've got a son that runs the ranch for me. He has a son and a daughter and they farm produce. Then I have a daughter - I don't know if you've seen her product or not - Suzy Q's - Have you heard of Suzy Q's? I'm very proud of her, she's done a lot by herself, promoting that product and it's getting better and better for her. The other daughter is married to Steve Will, who is one of the owners of Union Asphalt Company - they have a big plant out in Agoura. They do highways - everything in the

construction, road departments. The grandkids are all working, and doing well. I'm very happy for all that.

Matschek: Tell me a little bit about the Santa Maria Barbeque.

Minetti: Well, when we have a roundup we ought to have a barbeque - we've always had a barbeque. A lot of good food, and the ladies bring the cakes and so forth. An old gentleman named Frank (unclear) that I learned how to barbeque from had a ranch down by Los Alamos - he and his whole family were good barbequers. I remember as a kid we used to dig a hole in the ground and put meat on one of those skewers - willow sticks - now they use a steel skewer and run it through a six pound piece of meat, put maybe thirty or forty pounds of meat on a rod and cook it over a pit - raise and lower it so that it doesn't burn. So I learned - at the Far West we used to barbeque - used to cater quite a lot. It was nothing for us to feed 1500 people. That's kind of slowed up some. I learned from that. In San Francisco - used to go there up to the Cow Palace and do a barbeque there during a performance. It was usually on Thursday nights. We'd cook for 3000 up there. Had twelve serving lines. We could feed them in about an hour and 15 minutes - very efficient crew. I learned from that. The serving is so important. I remember the old gentleman who was in charge up there saying "Come on now, you guys have got to get this thing cleaned up so we can start the Rodeo this evening." They'd give us about an hour and a half to get it done, and we'd have everything set up and served and be out of there in about two hours.

Matschek: I know Guadalupe had a wild reputation in the old days, gambling and drugs and all that.

Minetti: During Prohibition days there was a lot of gambling. Tell you how Guadalupe got its bad name. When I was just a kid - I hope I'm not

stepping on anybody's toes (laughs). But the attorneys and the doctors at the higher echelon of people that wanted to drink and have fun, they used to come to Guadalupe to have fun. Maybe get drunk and go home, and the wives would naturally get upset. I swear that's why Guadalupe got its bad name.

Matschek: More the housewives talking?

Minetti: Yes, sir! But that's all gone away now. Then, it was back in 1983, during the period they were building Diablo Canyon, we noticed a lot of stuff going on here, drug selling, that we didn't appreciate. There were young girls walking the streets here...I imagine trying to sell their bodies to make enough money to buy the drugs. We got the Sheriff to come in and pull a raid - some of those people are still in jail. It was pretty serious. Since then that's when our business began to fall. Before this happened, things were booming here. After we had the raid and the town got cleaned up it slowed down. It's finally gradually picking up again. That (the raid) had a lot to do with it.

Matschek: Did your business almost go out of business?

Minetti: No, no. Not that bad, but it really slowed down from what it was.

Matschek: Not so many people in town, not many wanting to have a good time?

Minetti I'll tell you a story about what happened out here. One day I happened to be out in the parking lot and I saw somebody back into the parking lot with a load of gravel in his truck, and I knew this kid. I saw him make a deal there. So I went down there and I said "You guys dealing drugs here - I own this parking lot and I won't put with - you get the hell out of here. "

The guy said, "Is it all right if we go out in the street and do it? How about that?" So I said, "That's up to you." (Laughs) True story, so help me.

I was just talking here last Sunday with some of the guys who come in here and tell stories - two or three of those guys are still in jail. I heard the other day that one of them still had another fifteen years to do. It was definitely very serious. We used to meet out here - five or six guys who'd have lunch together all the time and talk about what the heck we were going to do about it. Shall we form a Merchants Association or something? The Chamber of Commerce had almost stopped at the time, but it had a little money left in the bank. So we decided to reactivate the Chamber of Commerce and we got a petition from the business people - about fifty signatures - that we wanted the town cleaned up, and that's when we called the Sheriff.

Matschek: County Sheriff?

Minetti: Yes - he came in with a bunch of people and they really made a run on the town. They had things staked out pretty good. They picked up the ones who were responsible.

Matschek: Is it coming back now?

Minetti: Yes, it's coming back. It's clean. I think we have the least crime of any town in this county. You can come out here in the street at night about ten o'clock and shoot a firearm down the street and not hit anyone. Which is not as good business as it was before - but it's getting better.

Matschek: How long did it take to actually get the police to clean up your town - six months, or a year?

Minetti: Probably about a year. Because we had complained to the "City Dads" and the City Administrator and they didn't seem to do anything about it. That's why we went to the Sheriff - we knew him personally and he had said if we needed any help to just call him. So he came and did the job properly.

Matschek: You told me that the Far Western had a fire one year...

Minetti: 1973. We used to have fifteen rooms upstairs, a regular hotel. During the building of Vandenberg we had it full of people who worked at the base. It was a headache - keeping care of those rooms. I'll tell you a funny story about that - the poor old gentleman is gone now - he used to come over and drink quite a bit. This one morning he called for me, and I went out there and he couldn't find his shoes. He had a bottle of whiskey there - we used to have an off sale license and he bought a bottle of whiskey and he went to bed and he had drunk about a third of it. He was still about half loaded. We had a men's store down the street - I made about three trips down there to find a pair of shoes that would fit him. When I came back the third time he said, "I don't need them." He had found them. He had gone to bed with them and they were down in the sheets. He'd kicked them off down there.

The reason we took the rooms out - we had some friends who wanted to put a card room in, like those down in Gardena in southern California. Some games are legal in California. So we built it and it was pretty plush up there. These gentlemen were not good friends of mine, and had not had any experience in that kind of business. They lost \$6000 the first month. Taking bad checks and so forth. Guys were coming from Bakersfield, Santa Barbara and everywhere to play cards, but they were sharpies. Our guys didn't know that much about them. They started cashing checks. That didn't last too long.

During that time they had a fire start out in the barbeque pit in the kitchen for some reason. It practically burned the top of the building off. Fortunately it didn't, there was water about a foot deep up there. They had to chop holes in the ceiling to let the water out. This building was well constructed or it might have fallen down with all that water. So we redid it again and put in a banquet room upstairs with a private bar up there and it's a nice room for parties. We have a lot of parties up there during the Christmas season. We have a small kitchen up there, and a dumbwaiter to take the food up.

I was at home that day, listening to the radio, when it said there was a fire at the Far Western. I rushed there and sure enough it was a big one, smoke going every direction. A funny thing: our Fire Department wasn't too good in those days - they couldn't start the fire engine. They had to push it down the street to get hooked up to a fire plug, then the mutual aid agreement with the other cities in the county came over, so fortunately they got the fire out before it burned the whole building.

Matschek: Did you have insurance?

Minetti: Yes. I didn't have sprinkler systems at the time. I had two very good friends in the business. They told me I should put in sprinklers [when rebuilding] but I found out how much they cost so I thought "The heck with it." The insurance man came around and said, "Are you putting in a sprinkler system?" I said no and he said, "You better stop right now and do it!" So I got a bid from a company in Fresno - we put the sprinkler system in, and by golly, it paid for itself in five years from what it saved us in insurance. Best thing we ever did. Fortunately it hasn't been used, but it's tested every once in awhile to make sure it's ready to go. I recommend that to any businessman.

Matschek: Tell us a little bit about how things were here in Guadalupe in World War II.

Minetti: Things slowed down - I can remember five Greyhound buses lined up in the street out here. They had gone out to all the ranches and picked up all these Japanese. I felt so sorry for them. They took them - left their various businesses behind. They went to the various camps. After that these big companies came in and kind of picked up where the Japanese were - they had made a deal of some sort to take over the businesses and run them. It was pretty hectic for a while.

I went for an examination to go into the Army. The only ones left on the ranch were my father-in-law and myself. I didn't pass the physical so I went back to the ranch and we ran it by ourselves for three or four years during the war.

Matschek: All the other men were in the service?

Minetti: Oh, yes. It was hard to get help. In fact, they had a German war prisoner camp at the Vandenberg base, and it was Camp Cook at the time. We signed with someone and were allowed to go out there and pick up fellows to work in the hay. I'd go pick them up every morning and they'd work bailing hay for us. Then take them back in the evening.

Matschek: These were German prisoners?

Minetti: Yes. Real nice boys, you know. They used to talk about Hitler quite a bit - I couldn't understand them but I could hear the word mentioned. I think we used German war prisoners for about three years, to help us do our harvesting. They were well taken care of. They'd stop about ten o'clock

in the morning to have a bite to eat, then they'd stop at noon and they'd have a little snack in the afternoon about three o'clock. The same customs they had over in Germany.

Matschek: Did you ever have any problems with them?

Minetti: No. Only problem I had, I had an old German fellow who worked for us for years. We called him Dutch. He was from Germany. I took Dutch with me one night to take these fellows back. Dutch started talking about Hitler - he had no use for Hitler - I thought I was going to have a free-for-all right there in the car for a while.

Matschek: So did things pick back up after the war and the boys were home?

Minetti: Yes - the produce business went on and there was still all the work out here on the farms for the people. That's probably when the Mexican braceros started coming in.

Matschek: Tell me a little about that. How that affected the community, from your point of view?

Minetti: Oh, at one time when Caesar Chavez was real active - they had plays here and they carried the red flags and so forth, which we didn't think too much of. But there were a lot of people who thought they had been cheated...not taken proper care of...and I think maybe they were right. Wages were low - if I'd have been a bracero at the time I'd have been darn sure I was in favor of what Caesar Chavez did. He helped them a whole lot, because the standards are up now to where they make a decent wage and so forth. It was good for the people.

Matschek: Good for the people, good for the town?

Minetti: Yes, you bet. There's a lot of them here - I have a Mexican family up at the ranch that has been working for me for 45 years. Great people. They like to go home, back to Mexico, at Christmas. They're planning to go back on the 20th. I've got the airplane tickets. They'll be gone about a month. Things are slow at this time. There are a lot of them that go back to Mexico on the holidays. Very good people.

Matschek: What are some of the other ethnic groups in the town right now? I know there are some Native Americans and some Filipinos - are there any Japanese?

Minetti: There are a few Japanese, yes. I think someone interviewed Mr. Masatani. When I was a kid, about eight years old, his dad had a vegetable store right across the street. They've been in business all these years and they've done very well. Their prices are a little bit higher than when you go to Santa Maria to the chain store groceries but they have a great selection of groceries and meats - I think they have a butcher shop equal to any butcher shop in the country - all kinds of meats. The Mexicans make a lot of tamales and enchiladas during the Christmas holidays, and they sell all varieties of meat and are really busy during that time. There is a Mexican lady who comes in here about once a week, and she makes tamales at home, to sell. She's got an order for two thousand tamales for Christmas. She's started to make them now - of course she freezes them. Comes Christmas time she's got them all listed: calls the people up and tells them to come get their tamales.

Matschek: You have an order put in with her?

Minetti: Yes, I do. I certainly do.

Matschek: You serve them on the menu here?

Minetti: No - that's just for home.

Matschek: What do you think was the most life-changing event here in Guadalupe?

Minetti: Oh, just the modernizing of things - in farming, when I was going to high school, I drove horses out here on the farm. There weren't any tractors then - you don't see a horse in the fields any more. Used to do all the cultivating, mowing hay and raking hay, pulling the sugar beets to the beet dumps. It's all changed. On our trips to Mexico I remember around Guadalajara. They have good ground down there, seeing all the modern equipment we have here. So they come up here and they learn, and go back there and take their customs down there.

Matschek: Do you miss the old times at all?

Minetti: Yes, I like the old times. Doing everything by hand -

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

Minetti: I had an experience one time - in the field out here, the cattle had the feed cleaned up - we were moving to another field but we had to go down along the railroad tracks - I used to check with the depot down there to see when the train was coming. Then we'd arrange our time so we'd move the cattle when there was no train. We were coming down along the railroad track when here comes an engine, all by itself, when we were crossing the track. That engine hit the herd of cattle - fortunately it only killed three. But I saw animals fly, probably seventy-five yards through the air.

Matschek: Was the train O.K.?

Minetti: It didn't bother the train - it was just an engine. I don't know how come they didn't know it was coming. I felt so helpless, for those three cattle. It was their (railroad's) fault.

Matschek: (Unclear)

Minetti: No, by golly. They were hardly fit to eat. That was an experience, believe me.

Matschek: (Unclear)...watching that train come...

Minetti: No, there was nothing you could do. Fortunately it only hit three. It could have hit a lot more, but it just slid them.

Matschek: Tell me about the Dunes...(unclear)...how did the Dunes affect your life. Did you ever go out there?

Minetti: We ran cattle out on what is now UNOCAL. There's five thousand acres there. We ran cattle in there. My wife's grandfather first rented that in 1911 from the Leroy family. We ran cattle out there all those years until lately and now the property has changed hands from the Leroy family to UNOCAL and they don't allow us to have the cattle there anymore. So we've slowed down there but on the south side of the Santa Maria River

we have some dunes out there where our cattle still run. We've got a grass that comes from Australia, and I don't want anybody to get mad at me, but it's the truth...it's called Veldt grass - Australian Veldt grass - it went from Africa to Australia. Then we got it over here and it'll - I call this brush "brush" - the environmentalists call it "shrubs" - what we plant is grass, they call it "weeds". We don't quite agree on some things. But you'll notice this stuff, when it rains, going up Highway One, it makes a red flower in the springtime. It's a beautiful grass, and the cows do well on it. But it's not a natural habitat so they [environmentalists] don't like it. It's a shame because it would make all that ground productive.

We've got about 2000 acres on the ranch at Point Sal where it's taken all the brush and it's all grass now. So we like it. As cattle people, we like it. I'm sorry that some of the other people can't see it our way. I just saw this morning on TV where the President has just signed a bill to clean the forests up - (unclear) -because if those forests were cleaned up the way they should be that wouldn't happen. Now they allowed those diseased trees to grow in there that had that thistle or some bug or something - there's hundreds and hundreds of dead trees that they're cutting out now. I've been to Mexico in the spring times when it's dry, and they have controlled burns down there all the time and they never have any problems. It just burns the underbrush and doesn't bother the trees. We used to do that years ago here, in fact we still do. We have

what's called the Santa Barbara County Range Improvement Association, made up of ranchers. Somebody brings water trucks, with sprayers and water hoses and so forth, and we take tractors – there are about forty of us that work together - the Forest Service of California has agreed that's it's the thing to do. Santa Barbara County Fire Department is the same way. I think they're doing the same thing in San Luis County. We have controlled burns each year on certain ranches. We don't have problems - we get rid of that brush, and the good grass comes and makes good forage for the cattle. I guess this bill the President signed will give the people authority to continue... I had the opportunity to visit a large lumber company up in northern California several years ago and they had nurseries. They cut these trees for lumber - cut strips out - and they are replanting them. They told us that in 2020 there would be more trees for lumber than there was ten years ago. They are doing their part, but some of these people are trying to stop them. They should be real happy now. They replant what they take out, and there's no problem with fire. That's a real asset.

Matschek: Have you had any other disputes, from a cattle ranching [unclear], with the environmentalists or other people?

Minetti: Oh, yes. I hate to say it. We own 600 acres down near the mouth of the Santa Maria River. Good cattle country, for years - since 1911!

Some of these people see the cattle down there, in the river, eating water cress that grows there - they don't like it, they give us a lot of criticism. But I think we're right. If we didn't have the cattle in there it would simply just go wild. They [the cattle] keep that stuff eaten down . If it wasn't for the cattle it would just go wild. When I say wild I mean all the bad brush would grow. I think what we're doing is right.

Matschek: Had you had any lawsuits brought against you that have to deal with...

Minetti: No, no, thank the Lord.

Matschek: [unclear]....like four wheel drive. Do you take part in that?

Minetti: I don't take a part in that but I have a belief - when we were younger before the four wheel drive, we used to have stripped down model A Fords - put big tires on them and go up and down the beach. And I've always said but nobody agreed with me who could do anything about it, "What would be greater than" - there's a road to the ocean from here on West Main Street goes right to the ocean. You could go down there - if you've got a four wheel drive vehicle - you've got a family - you drive up to Pismo on the beach. The kids could get out and play. I think that would be great. But they wouldn't even think about it. All that natural resource just going to waste. You could have three or four security people going up and down the beach and if somebody goes off, into the

dunes or somewhere, they could be caught and reprimanded. I think the word would get around quick and they'd stay where they belong. But they won't consider that. You can drive from Oceano down the beach aways, I guess. But you can't do like we used to do, go all the way from here to Pismo.

Matschek: About when did that stop?

Minetti: Oh, it's probably about 25 years ago when it stopped. Now you can't drive on the beach at all down here. Just that area about four or five miles south of Oceano, I guess.

Matschek: Too many people out there?

Minetti: Yes, I guess. That's what they say. If you make tracks down on the beach when high tide comes and covers everything up. If you did that on Sunday, by Wednesday everything would be smooth again. You'd be ready for the next week.

Matschek: About Guadalupe - what is one thing you'd like to change in this town?

Minetti: I'd like to see business - I'd like to see these lots downtown filled up with some businesses that would draw people. Our Far Western was successful, it's become known pretty well. We've received some awards and we've had some good write-ups in some of the leading

restaurant magazines. I've always thought an international restaurant would work. We have some good Mexican restaurants here, two or three that are outstanding. We could get a good Japanese restaurant, maybe a Filipino...that's a different group of people it would be great to draw in. We do need a hotel or a motel. We have so many people who come here in the evening to eat and would like a place to stay. They have to drive back to Pismo or Santa Maria or whatever. If we ever get that going it would be great.

Matschek: Would you like to get involved in any of that?

Minetti: Too old! If it was twenty years ago I'd get after it, I'll tell you. I was forty years old when - a little under forty - when we bought the Far Western. At the time I was full of vigor and go-power. My wife and I built about 17 apartments here about that time also. We've sold them since then just because it was a hassle to run them, collect rents and everything. Today you get people - professionals - to do that for you and it would be easier. I think, personally, this is as far as I want to go in my lifetime. I hope the kids would want to go farther in the future. They're all pretty ambitious.

Matschek: Maybe a "Minetti Enterprises"?

Minetti: (Laughs) No, no! We're just plain simple people. We enjoy good

friends, good food and so forth.

Matschek: You've won an award...?

Minetti: Last year - a promotion by the California Youth Council - different restaurants are nominated. Three years ago we were second - there were 26 restaurants throughout the state, mostly steak houses - that were nominated. And in 2002 we won the award for first. "Beef Backers Award" is what it's called. We were judged by a lot of people, and the reason we won was because of all the beef dishes we feature – all the beef cuts, stews and cheaper cuts, plus the good steaks.

Matschek: Probably helps the town out some?

Minetti: A little bit, yes. We're still using it in our publicity. The fact that we won the Beef Backers Award.

Matschek: Do you (unclear) from McClintocks?

Minetti: No, no - in fact they sent me a complimentary card awhile back. I knew Bruce when he was a little busboy over in Santa Maria. He worked at the Hunter's Inn. I've always known him, and he's a great friend, both he and Tony Artalli, his partner. They're good young people, good people. They're very successful. They've got the vigor and the will to go on. Good boys.

Matschek: You've got a lot of friends in the community out here? Been here most of your life...

Minetti: Yes, yes. I don't know of any enemies, I hope I don't have any!
(Laughs) Go back to the Golden Rule, "Do unto others like you would they should do unto you.":

Matschek: You've done good for yourself - by it [the golden rule]. What is one thing in the past of this town, that you think is a blemish, that you wish you could change in the history of this town?

Minetti: Well, I wouldn't want to see the gambling or the drugs or any of that stuff come back. It's clean now, let's keep it that way. We have a really good Police Department, in fact I understand - I don't go to Council meetings because I don't live in town - as a business person I should go, I guess. But I've gone to so many meetings here. I was twenty years on the school board, twenty years on the Fair Board, and fifty years with the Elks, and there were a lot of nights out believe me! I went to a lot of meetings. I just kind of got burnt out. Now there's some talk about the boys on the police force here would like a raise, and I think they deserve a raise because they're doing a good job. Most of the people who come here get some experience and then they move on. Naturally they get a better job with more pay. We could all pay a

little more tax so that we could give them a raise and maybe keep some of those people here. They were talking about turning it over to the County Sheriff's Department. I'd rather see it kept local. We get acquainted with the officers, and they watch our businesses and they know everybody, and you know them, so it's working real well. I think I'll go to the next Council meeting and just give them my two bits' worth.

Matschek: You build a relationship with the officers? Help each other out?

Minetti: Certainly, yes. You bet.

Matschek: What do you think has been the hardest thing for you living in this town?

Minetti: Well, I can't say that there has been any hard thing. Everything, we just roll with the punches, and go along with it. When we were having all those druggies around here, boy that was a mess. That was the worst time. It was bad, real bad.

Matschek: Changed the whole mood of the town?

Minetti: Yes.

Matschek: What is your wish for the future of this town? Say in thirty years when your great-grandchildren come here?

Minetti: I'd like to see these lots filled up with businesses. And the town is going

to grow...it's grown west out here - I forget how many new homes there are, and they're all full. They're probably the most moderately-priced homes in the area. Pretty nice homes. The city has just annexed 200 acres south of West Main Street, where you go down past the train tracks, to go to Santa Maria. They hope to develop. There's going to be some building down there pretty shortly. I think it's a shame to take that good vegetable ground because they don't make any more of that! Cover it with houses when we have all this marginal stuff around us, like up on the Nipomo Mesa. We have a mesa out here that we farm that could be in houses - and stay out of this good produce ground, because there just isn't any more. If you cover it with houses we'll be like Los Angeles or Orange County or Ventura.

Matschek: We don't need any more of that.

Minetti: No, no. I'll say not. We're short of schools - Santa Maria needs two more high schools - they're working on one. There's so much building going on over there right now that they're going to need another high school before too long.

Matschek: So do you think development is going too fast and...

Minetti: It's growing pretty fast, yes. Of course, you can't blame people for wanting to come here. We have a mild climate, it's nice. Never gets

really too cold or too hot. There's still a lot of room to move around - but it's building up pretty fast.

Matschek: Central coast is a beautiful place...

Minetti: Yes. Take Cayucos, Morro Bay, San Luis Obispo, Los Osos, Pismo Beach - (it's about filled up to the hills there). California is a great place to live and I feel pretty good about what our new governor is doing - he's got a tough job on his hands but he's got a lot of support.

Matschek: [unclear] brings us to politics in this town. How is the city government working?

Minetti: I've got to be careful of what I say - they're not getting along too well. I don't know why not. A couple of factions. They saw the recall of our [preceding] governor - and I see now they're trying to recall some of the City Council, and another group is trying to recall the Mayor. As I say, I don't live in the city so I haven't been going to the council meetings, but I think they're getting a lot of support over there...I think they'll get it straightened out eventually.

Matschek: It would be better for the town?

Minetti: Yes, that's right. Sometimes, to use the expression, they're acting like a bunch of kids. They can't get along for some reason. It's bad. Creates

good reading in the newspaper but that's not good.

Matschek: If you were allowed personally to do one thing for this town, what would you do?

Minetti: I'd build a motel first and get a hotel going, maybe. I think that would [help] get an international restaurant rolling. It would be great, because poeple do come here to eat.

Matschek: You think tourism could be the new life blood of this town?

Minetti: Yes, you bet.

Matschek: And increased housing, more permanent residents, more people coming in would make it more like in the old days?

Minetti: Yes. Stores - food here is quite a bit higher than you can get at Food For Less or Von's or whatever, the big stores. I think the little stores, with a few more people, would be in competition. Probably be able to lower their prices a little bit.

Matschek: The Central Coast has treated you very well.

Minetti: I certainly couldn't complain. We've worked hard, but it's been good to us.

Matschek: Could you have done what you've done in a different city, elsewhere?

Minetti: I doubt here. This is probably the worst place in the country to have a steak house, because we have to get all of our business from out of town, either Pismo or San Luis or Santa Maria, Lompoc, Santa Barbara...

Matschek: Do you get to travel out much anymore?

Minetti: Yes, we do. I have a friend that married in Sisters [?] a couple of years ago and he chose me to be his best man. We went up there - I'd never been there before but I certainly enjoyed it.

Matschek: What are some of your hobbies these days?

Minetti: I'm equestrian-oriented and I like to watch the rodeos on television, bull riding and all that. I enjoy watching the news every day. The last thing at night is to watch the news on Channel 5 in Los Angeles. I feel very fortunate to be living here because there's always somebody getting murdered or run over down there, or a car running away down the freeway. I feel sorry for the people who have to live there. Watching the other night, the freeway was just loaded - a steady stream of cars going north. There was no room for anybody else. I imagine there were just as many going south, too.

Matschek: Is there anything else you'd [like to comment on]?

Minetti: No. I'm very appreciative of what you're doing for us - appreciate it very much. I think it's going to help the town. I don't know if you've picked up one of the new brochures on Guadalupe?

Matschek: No, I haven't.

Minetti: There are some over there on the counter. Pick one up on the way out. It's very interesting. I hope for the good of Guadalupe, I hope things keep progressing, and I think they will.

Matschek: Anything you'd like to tell the people?

Minetti: Just like to invite them to come here to the Far Western and have dinner, by golly. We have a brunch on Sunday that's equal to none I think. Features ranch style breakfast with steak and eggs. Moderately priced. Good lunches. Like to invite everybody to come here. I appreciate what you're doing for us, very much.

Matschek: Thank you. I hope it [Guadalupe Project] helps out everybody in Guadalupe.

TAPE ENDS