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**Guadalupe Speaks Oral History Project**

Interview with: John Perry, Guadalupe resident

Interviewed by: Ariana Zamora, Student

(affiliation) Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

With Comments by: Tom Neuman

Date: January 31, 2004

Location: Dunes Center

City/State: Guadalupe, CA

Project: Guadalupe Speaks

**Subjects discussed:**

Portuguese / Azore Islands

Agriculture / Farming

Japanese Internment

Guadalupe, CA

San Luis Obispo Regional History

Central Coast California

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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**

**Interview with: John Perry**

**Interviewed by: Ariana Zamora**

**Comments by: Tom Neuman**

**Date: January 31, 2004**

**Location: Dunes Center Guadalupe, CA**

Zamora: This interview is being conducted by Ariana Zamora. I am interviewing Mr. John Perry on Saturday, January 31 2004 at 4:30 pm at the Dunes Center in Guadalupe, CA. Your name is John Perry, can you tell me a little bit about how you got that name?

Perry: [Laughs] I didn't have much choice, my folks named me after my father John Perry, Sr.

Zamora: Do you have any siblings?

Perry: One little brother Wayne. We're seven years apart.

Zamora: Is that connected with your name, John Wayne?

Perry: My mother liked John Wayne. So I was John and he was Wayne.

Zamora: I want to talk a little about your grandparents. Where did your grandmother Rose Silva originate from?

Perry: From the Pico Island in the Azores.

Zamora: And your grandfather [was] Antone Perry?

Perry: No, that was my great-grandfather. My grandfather was Manuel. His son.

Zamora: When did Rose come over?

Perry: I have no idea.

Zamora: Do you know why she left?

Perry: To come to sunny California, I guess.

Zamora: Do you know how your grandparents met?

Perry: No, but I can tell you when they got married. They got married here in the Guadalupe area and they honeymooned in Oceano. In a horse and buggy, it took almost a day to get to Oceano. There was no roads, just a wagon trail, and they stayed at the Oceano hotel.

Zamora: And how many children did they have?

Perry: They had five. All boys.

Zamora: What was your grandfather's professional and educational background? Do you know much about that?

Perry: No, probably just grammar school and went into farming.

Zamora: Where did he farm?

Perry: On Oso Flaco, three miles north of town, on Highway 1 and Oso Flaco Lake Road. Right at the intersection.

Zamora: Any specific produce?

Perry: It was always beans, sugar beets and broccoli, cauliflower and some lettuce.

Zamora: And what about your grandmother, what did she do?

Perry: She just was a housewife. Just a housewife - that's a lot of work, to raise children.

Zamora: You told me something about your, was it Manuel? How he died? Or was that your great-grandfather?

Perry: That was Antone that drowned at Point [unclear].

Zamora: What about your parents? Did they actually live in Guadalupe at all times?

Perry: Mostly out on the ranch.

Zamora: Where was the ranch?

Perry: Right at Oso Flaco Lake Road and Highway 1, the southeast corner.

Zamora: When did they move to Guadalupe?

Perry: In '53. The house on the ranch was an old granary so they fixed it up and made it our home. We lived there till '53 and had the house built in Guadalupe. During the change, after dinner at the ranch

we'd come to watch TV till 9 o'clock at night at the new house, and then I had to go back.

Zamora: Do you know any stories about what life was like before they moved to this area?

Perry: No, they always lived in this area.

Zamora: Well, before they moved to Guadalupe.

Perry: My mother lived with her mom and step-dad up in Lopez Canyon, which is partly covered by the lake up there now. My mother said that the county doctor would like come to out to the ranches maybe once or twice at the most and there was one doctor [who] had an old Model T Ford. It had a Cadillac horn on it, she said, so he'd hit that horn and that old Model T would just about sputter dead. It was just that the horn was too powerful for the Model T. Another time: the old school that was, I think, Santa [Mantauela] School that's right in Arroyo Grande now - was out there then. From there they moved to the lake and then they moved from the lake back into Arroyo Grande. But that's the school she went to and she said one time they got to school late because on the way down to school there was an old swayback horse just doing this teetering - I guess they got to school late. When they came back to go home the horse had passed away.

Zamora: Was your father from this area as well?

Perry: Oso Flaco, yes.

Zamora: What kind of schooling did your parents have?

Perry: Just high school.

Zamora: What did your father do?

Perry: He had his own small produce trucking. He had three old trucks, they were ton-and-a-half trucks. He did his own hauling and then hauled for the different ranchers into the packing sheds here. My grandfather and uncle talked him into going with them into the ranch thing. He didn't want to, but they talked him into it. He did the cultivating and plowing and this and that. My other uncle drove the tractor, the crawler tractor, but when he finished his job he'd put the tractor in the barn and come up town to the saloons and my dad would be there all day. So finally after a few years, quite a few years, my dad just got mad and told him, "Buy me out or I'll buy you out." My uncle bought him out but never paid him. At least my dad got a job with Best Fertilizer in town in '57 and he liked it. Ever since they tried to get him back on the ranch. After a year the ranch belonged to Union Sugar Company, and after [another] year they kicked my uncle off the ranch because all the crops that my dad had put in were harvested and my uncle didn't know how to actually farm. He just drove the tractor and so they kicked him off the ranch and rented it to another farmer.

Zamora: And what did your mother do?

Perry: She was the housewife, and it wasn't easy. I always thought that every Friday my dad would pay the bills and write her out a fifteen dollar check for her own needs. But fifteen dollars in that time was

like a lot of bucks and I said, "Wow, that's nice." When I got in the fourth grade, in those days in Guadalupe that's when you had music, and I always wanted to play the saxophone. At Alex Apodaca's ranch, one of the workhand's sons played saxophone and I liked the saxophone. I told my mom, "I gotta play saxophone" and she said okay. I told her about it and she was all happy, and she asked my dad. My new saxophone was like three hundred and something dollars and he wouldn't go for it. He said, "No no no, darn kids, after three months the saxophone will be over in that corner." Which is mostly true. So she said, "Okay, John. I'll go borrow from my mom." She borrowed it from my grandmother and she told me, "John, I'm going to do this for you, but don't give up because your dad's going to laugh at me."

Then she got a job at the packing shed, [Point Sal] Packing Shed out here in Guadalupe and I never did [give up]... I had two or three bands. She worked in the shed till they closed that shed down. They used to do all the packing in the shed and her job was the labeler, she labeled the crates with the little packing shed label you see around and they said, "We can put you out on the machine out in the fields." She didn't want to go out in the fields, so she [left] when the shed closed.

Zammora: Were those rather common jobs at the time for men and women?

Perry: Yes, I worked there in the summers. It was bad Saturday nights, you know your friends are out at the show or cruising the drag and you're working - because sometimes you worked until midnight with the broccoli and the cauliflower, celery.

Zamora: How did your parents meet?



Perry: My mother was selling little raffle tickets or something with her older brother, and they came into town here. Right next to where King [Flaus] is now, there was a pretty well known restaurant at that time. She went in there to sell tickets. It was an afternoon maybe like today, and my father and his friends were having lunch there. She asked him and he said, "Sure, I'll buy the whole book if you have lunch with us." She didn't know what to say. She had lunch with them and my poor uncle is out in the old Star. He had a car called the Star. He came in and wanted to know what was happening. My mom introduced my dad to him, so my dad asked my Uncle Gene to have lunch too. That's how they got together.

Zamora: Who made the decisions in your family?

Perry: We used to have a '39 Chevy two-door sedan and it would be parked out across the street in the lean-to in the ranch here. One time in '47, late '47 or early '48, he built a new garage, a tin garage. It was like Hearst Castle, that garage. "Daddy, what are you doing?" "Oh, I'm building a garage so your mom won't have to walk so far." "Oh, that's neat." Then, one Saturday he comes with a brand new 1948 Oldsmobile 98, the big sedan, two-tone green with hydromatic transmission, and he didn't even tell my mom. He just bought it. He did get her what color she wanted. Body style, no, he just went... They had their own, I guess, [unclear].

I remember we had the wood stove. When we got propane, wow, you just turned that knob and... The wood stove had the big round plates and folks would make the toast [on them]. You'd flip it over. One day my dad went to the hardware store and bought a toaster. Wow. It was a round plate that you put over that metal plate and it

just had four square brackets like heavy wire and you lean the toast like a pyramid and you flip them over so that was... that was like going to the moon I guess. Things like that...

Zamora: About your childhood, when and where were you born?

Perry: I was born at the old hospital there in Santa Maria, which they called the Airport Hospital on South College. Hancock still uses part of the building. I forgot the name of the hospital, that was in 1938.

Zamora: What language did your grandmother speak?

Perry: My grandmother, Portuguese. My dad spoke it but I never learned it.

Zamora: Did any of your siblings speak it?

Perry: No.

Zamora: What was your family like growing up?

Perry: We had a really good family life. We lived in the ranch in the old granary house. When you're a kid it was just as nice as this house to us. Owls lived in the belfry up there, the old barn owls, things like that. When you're out on the ranch people would drop off dogs, and I always had a soft heart so I always got those dogs. My dad would say, "Why do you want another dog?"

People would stop, run out of gas, knock on the door at 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock at night and my dad would get up and go to the pump

and give them a gallon of gas. They wanted to pay him and he would never charge them.

Finally he got tired of that so every night he would fill up a gallon of gas and put it underneath the porch. When they came to the door he'd just tell them, "It's right there underneath the porch." He wouldn't have to go out there.

But another time this black family came in and they had an old Model A Ford, about a '30 Model A Ford Sedan Delivery with two little rear doors that opened up in the back. They were having trouble with it and they asked if they could leave it here and he'll come back and pick it up, my dad said, yeah, we'll push it over here. We pushed it over there and they never came back for that Ford, so my dad made it his lube-room, open the doors and he kept the grease and stuff for the tractor and the filters there. When we left the ranch it was still there, wish I could've had that old Model A Ford.

Zamora: Speaking of dogs, what kind of pets did you have growing up?

Perry: Dogs, just dogs - mongrels. We used to have Rex and Whitey and Shep. Rex was a good one. I belonged to 4-H so I raised pigs. I always made the mistake of giving the pig a name, then that's your pet and when we went to the fairgrounds to sell them I always cried because I know they're going to kill the pig. [Laughs] My dad said, "Darn it, I told you never give it a name."

On Sundays we'd always go for rides. Get in the Oldsmobile and go for rides - mostly up the coast to Cayucos, Morro Bay, Cambria and that area. A lot of nice rides. He used to like surf fish. He

didn't fish lakes or streams, he just liked surf fishing. He wouldn't go deep-sea fishing and clamming. Before I came along he always had nice cars. He had a really nice '32 Chevy three-window Coupe with the dual wheels and dual horn and the whole bit. They would go down to the car races in Los Angeles. They were there all the time so the race people gave him - he had dual spare tires out in the front on the fender - so they gave him the tire covers. It said some motor, so it had the racetracks' advertisement. My mother wanted children and my dad didn't want children, so she said, "Okay, goodbye. She left and went to my aunt's east of Santa Maria. There he comes about two, three days later and then I came by a year later [both laugh].

Zamora: What kind of chores and responsibilities did you have when you were younger?

Perry: We didn't have chores because it wasn't the type of ranch where you had animals or cows to feed, or give pigs their water. In the summer time we had to work in the fields shooting birds. [Laughs] I hope they weren't [Plovers]. He gave me an old single-gauge shotgun, .22. That thing was all loose, single shot - I'll be here and here are some birds. [Gestures] I'd shoot at them and they would fly to the end of the field. By the time I get there and shot [at] them again, they'd come back, so all day we just went back around. I never found a bird that I had shot, but I kept them exercised.

In the early forties we had two Japanese families that lived on the ranch and then they took them to camp. When they left there, my dad watched, and put everything in one little house for them. Their belongings, you know. One of the families had a '36 Ford they left with us, so we parked it right by our house and I would put white-

walls on it with chalk. When they came back we dragged that Ford around the ranch with the 37-inch Chevrolet truck. The motor had frozen. You popped the clutch and the wheel would just lock up. That was the [Oyaba] family.

As kids we'd run down to the closest reservoir, about a mile east down Oso Flaco Lake Road. "Boy, wouldn't it be nice if they had a reservoir right here at the intersection?" The best time to swim in a reservoir is nighttime because the water is warm. Then we'd go down to Oso Flaco Lake Road to the lake - they had a wood pier - the wood bridge one. But already it was unusable. You couldn't drive a car so we'd just walk from stump to piling and sometimes slip and fall in the water and that's how we used to get across the lake. In the early fifties they filled it in with the dirt and put the drain pipes into the lake.

Zamora: Around what time did you move to Guadalupe?

Perry: 1953.

Zamora: What was the neighborhood like that you lived in?

Perry: It was one [unclear] Tognazzini Street, the last street on the west part of town. It was a really nice street. My brother lives in the family house now and I had built a house next to it and next to that is my grandparents' house. My uncle ended up with that, my dad didn't want it because my grandmother passed away before they were able to move into it. My grandfather was always sick when he lived in it, so my dad was, I guess, kind of superstitious. A bad luck house and he didn't want to move into it.

Zamora: What was your school life like?

Perry: School life...started in Kindergarten, just an average class. I remember George Delgado throwing up in class. The things you remember, good things like that. They used to have those long wooden blocks and you'd make little forts. Where the police station is now is where my kindergarten class was. I went there all the way through eighth grade, and I had a band in high school and grammar school. We'd play here at the Vet's Hall for the school dances and it was a lot of fun. In high school we had another band and we played in the juniors, what they call it. They had a yearly deal - all the classes would have – and we played, I don't know if you remember. Do you remember Pres Prado?

Zamora: Uh uh.

Perry: Oh, young kids [both laugh] – well, he had a famous song called “Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White”, [with] a terrific trumpet solo on it and David [Pangito] my trumpet player just had it pegged. Here's this big auditorium, Ethel Pool Auditorium in Santa Maria at the high school. We were there and we heard “boo, boo.” I think we were sophomores or freshmen. He just hit that trumpet and you could hear a pin drop in that auditorium. There were the high school dances there and stuff like that.

I had a Model A Ford and it was a lot of fun. We used to cruise the drag Saturday night, Friday nights...go to Leo's Drive-In and then from there to Rick's which was three blocks down. But the cruise is from Broadway, on Broadway from Stowell to Donovan. Either side of that there was country again. Then it was really cool, I had this really nice '52 Chevy customized hardtop and put a rear speaker in

it with the chrome grill and oh man! You have your honey on your side and flip the switch and the rear speaker comes on and the front one goes off. That was it. You were highclass in those days. But now these kids have their big boom boxes and diskettes and whatever they call them now.

Zamora: Besides the band did you have any other hobbies?

Perry: No.

Zamora: Just the band. Did all of the social and ethnic groups mix together very well?

Perry: That's where Guadalupe was really great. You had Japanese people, Chinese people, Mexican people, black families, Swiss-Italian, Portuguese. There was never fights - oh, yeah, fights, but that wasn't really any racial deal. In those days you had a fight and then you end up the best of friends after the fight.

One time a bunch of us had Model-A Fords and we would race from Guadalupe to the Union Sugar company out there, I guess it's probably three and a half miles. Get out and the manifolds would be orange-red they were so hot. We were going 40-46 miles an hour, barely passing each other.

Then in town here, one fourth of July, on a Model-A Ford you could put up the advance and it would backfire, Poom, Poom. Finally the cops came and we had the Model-A loaded. "I don't know what's wrong with this darn Model-A, Earl." He said, "I know what's wrong with it, leave that advance alone." Another time we were in the same Model-A, going almost by the cemetery there. They had a

roadblock there, the border patrol. I pulled a quick Uee [U-turn] and boy they jumped in their cars and chased us. They finally stopped us on Campodonico Street. They really got mad at us. We're just little kids and they said, "Why'd you guys run from us?" "We didn't run we just turned around."

There was no trouble in Guadalupe. People say Guadalupe is a rough town, maybe if you're from out of town it might be. But a lot of people see the farm workers. Mostly in those days we had a lot of Filipino farm workers and they had the big broccoli knives and lettuce cutting knives and they would stand out in front of the street visiting after dinner. People would see that and they were afraid. Guadalupe in the fifties was a better, I don't know about better, but I'm trying to say we had more commerce in town. We had eighteen hundred, fifteen hundred maybe, total population including the farm/ranch houses. We had ten grocery stores, little ones, eight gas stations, three body shops and a Chevrolet dealer. The bowling alley ran every night and the theatre ran every night. Skating rink, where my store is now, two soda fountains, four beauty shops for the ladies, there was about six barbershops for the men. Clothing stores for the ladies and men separate, and a lot of restaurants, cantinas.

Saturday nights, Friday nights, the town was bustling. They had music here at the Commercial Hotel: then you go to the center of the town at the Mocambo Club [where] they had light rhythm and blues. You went to the Far Western and had western music, then went to the Lantern Hotel and had western music, then you went to Simpatia to Pancho's Hideaway and they had the Mariachis there. All that was in three blocks. And then at one o'clock all the bars



closed and everybody went to the restaurants till two, three o'clock in the morning and be eating breakfast.

Then our little jail, I think it was closed in the sixties because they passed a law where you had to have a jailer in case somebody got sick. There were a lot of stories there, about guys they forgot about and they'd come and get them a few days later. It mostly was [if] a guy came drunk out of the bar, they'd just put him in jail and let him out in the morning. The really hard criminals, that they'd give a week in jail, they'd put coveralls on them with City Prisoner on it and they'd go along and clean the gutters - the weeds and the gutters - and they would take them to the restaurants and feed them.

One time one of the merchants got a speeding ticket going out of town after the Rotary Club [meeting]. He had an old El Camino. It was when we had the judge here. They got him like going 76 miles an hour. So he told the judge (he and judge belonged to the same Rotary club), "I wasn't doing the 76 miles an hour. If you can get my El Camino to go 76 miles an hour, I'm guilty." So the judge says "Okay." That's the kind of judge he was, he took off his robe and got him and they both got in the El Camino and he got it up to 76 miles an hour. So the guy couldn't say nothing and paid his \$20 fine or whatever it was.

Zamora: What do you think about the ethnic groups now, do they mix well together now? Or how is it different?

Perry: I don't think so. Well, maybe I'm out of the circuit now. But it seems like the Hispanic people of today, they're from the old country and they don't seem to get involved. Maybe among their

people they do. Say the Dunes Center has something [going on], you don't see too many of them here. Maybe because of the language deal. Over at the senior citizens Historical Society they have, I don't see them too much. Just more of the old timers show up. It's too bad. [In] the old days for a long time we had the most queens in the Elks Queen Contest. We had nine or eleven total, I think finally Solvang finally beat us. At the Vets Hall [they had] what they called International Night and all the restaurants would make their foods and just donate the food. We had Chinese food and Mexican food and Steak and Ravioli from the Italian restaurant. They're just different times. All the ranchers would come, all the farmers would come, into town that night. It was a good gathering. The only thing left now is the American Legion Black Mallard Feed, which really was Mud Hen, sounds better black mallard. Now they have chicken but it's still called black mallard and it's going to be on the 20th of February next month.

Zamora: What was your happiest memory that you can remember growing up?

Perry: We were having dinner one night, it must have been Christmas Eve. The four of us having dinner and my dad said, "Boy, I was up at the store and I saw this beautiful bicycle. Pretty red with gold trim and it had a big old gold speedometer on it and the chrome chain, big guard and the whole headlight. Wow, it's a Monarch." It was called Monarch. So we got through dinner and we were going to open up presents at, I don't know, eight o'clock. I went out to play with all the ranch kids. So I ran out the front door and there the bike was, right there. He had it right there on the front porch, bottom of the steps. That was a pretty bike.

Zamora: What was the saddest childhood memory?

Perty: Saddest, well...Probably when my grandfather passed away, my dad's dad. That was the first time [I had] seen a body and [I] was probably seven or eight years old.

Oso Flaco used to have floods before they had the dam up there. One night in the forties, Mr. Cedillas came from, he lived on the neighboring ranch and he came up at four in the morning knocking on the door, "Johnny, Johnny" hollering at my dad. "Johnny, Johnny, the river's coming, the river's coming." I got up, so my dad went through the rest of the house and the ranch. We all ended up on the mesa up there, waited and waited. Then it got lighter and lighter and lighter and the river came to, you know where the underpass is over here? That was called Oso Flaco Creek, that's as far as it got to and the river hadn't overflowed.

Manuel [Matruga], my father's uncle, I mean cousin, excuse me. On Division Road he had the strawberry farm, he was about the first strawberry rancher and he got wiped out, he went bankrupt. And as kids we'd sit along the road in the early evening and play cars. While we're playing cars the first car is yours, second car is his and the third is mine. And here comes an old junker, "Oh look at this old junk car he's got" and laugh. It was just, you make up your own games, hide and go seek. Then they had that old f-12 tractor with spike wheels and he'd be going by in a low gear in the field and we'd run up to wheel and grab the wheel. Grab it here and your feet down here and just hang on [Both laugh]. Man, OSHA today would sue my father! Then you just get back up and get off and the other kid gets on. Yeah, the things we do. We had a big bean harvester, like four of the five ranchers out there -

they'd buy this bean harvester and when it was at our ranch that was the battleship. We got hit by a submarine, so you'd jump and slide down the bean chute, like you'd jump into the ocean. It was nice. We didn't even know stupid electronic crap like they have now.

Zamora: You said your first job was working in the fields, do you remember about how much money you made?

Perry: Seventy-five cents an hour was the first. Wow, seventy-five cents an hour. Hoeing weeds, sowing sugar beets. I remember they used to bring the cattle to the fields to eat the sugar beet tops. That was like a round up and they'd cover the whole highway. Cars would have to stop and the cows go around them. That was neat.

The last pheasant I saw in the valley was along the railroad track, this side of Oso Flaco Lake Road. That's the last pheasant I've ever seen. There's no more feed for them, I guess because then they used to have, each rancher would have this piece of land set aside for their barley and hay to feed the horses, that's where the pheasants and quail would be. We had two horses, one was part, what's those big beer horses?

Zamora: Clydesdales?

Perry: Clydesdales, yes. One was part, she was a big horse and about six o'clock, the hours used to be for a ranch was six to six. My grandfather would be coming, I knew when he'd be coming. He drove the horses and he'd stop and put me on his lap and pretend I was driving the horses, even though I really wasn't. The things I remember.

Zamora: Do you think Guadalupe was a good place to grow up?

Perry: Yeah, yeah.

Zamora: Are you married?

Perry: Not now, no.

Zamora: But you were married?

Perry: Yeah, twice, yeah. Maybe the third will be the charm. [Both laugh]

Zamora: What was your early marriage life like?

Perry: Let's see, fine ... it was good. A bunch of us had a car club, we'd go in these old clunkers to Monterey on Highway 1 and think nothing about it. One time in our Model-A, we were going and I smelled smoke, so I pulled over. The spring in the seat was hitting the top of the battery and was starting to smell like acid smoke, so I put a piece of cardboard on it and took care of that. It was things like that we'd do. And then in October where they used to have the Oakland roadster show - they still have it but it's in the Cow Palace now in San Francisco. We'd go there every year, that was really something. When we were kids, before I got married, in high school we'd go to see the bands at the Rose Garden in Pismo Beach, Earl [Bostik], [AJ MacNeely], Nat King Cole. I ended up playing for dances at the Rose Garden when I had my band. We played with Jan and Dean in Pismo Beach and then we played with the Beach Boys in Santa Barbara at the Wine Gardens. Never made no money, but we can say we played with the Beach Boys.

Zamora: Do you have any children?

Perry: Yes.

Zamora: Where do they live now?

Perry: One boy lives in Santa Maria. He's the Postmaster for Grover Beach. The other boy lives in Arroyo Grande.

Zamora: And what are their names?

Perry: Johnny and Eric.

Zamora: You've been involved in the city with a couple of different ways, can you tell me about the various positions that you've held?

Perry: I was on the Planning Commission for about four years I think. In '64, I ran for City Council and I got in, so I was on City Council for two terms.

Zamora: Can you tell me a little bit about what you did with the Planning Commission and the City Council?

Perry: My job on the Planning Commission was not as technical as it is now. Say Mr. Garcia or Mr. Jones wanted to put a sidewalk or a driveway in. I would just make sure it had to be a certain width, thickness. Now they have all these engineers that you have to pay hundreds of dollars to, to come and look at the driveway. That was enjoyable. On the City Council, I remember one time they used to get these police cars every few years and, "John just see if you can

talk to the other guys, I need backup lights,” because backup lights were optional. They were like \$12.50 and I argued with those other guys for about a half hour, forty-five minutes then finally we got the backup lights.

Our council was right where the Historical Society is. We didn't have no money, so we were always in the black. They would tell us how much tax money we're getting and then we would figure out [how to] just spend as much as we could of that tax money. Of course the police department today gets the majority of the money because it is twenty-four hours. Then, right over here by my store in front of the old Shell station they had the police phones, so the police car would park there because there was no radios in the cars. The police car would park there. You'd be home and your husband comes and knocks you down if you didn't have his supper ready for him. You'd call and the police officer would get the phone and he'd drive to your house and take care of business.

Another thing: Guadalupe was quaint [because] all the cantinas and bars had a red light. If there was a fight in the bar or cantina the bartender would flip the switch and the police officers would know there was trouble in there. A lot of people thought it was a house of prostitution [both laugh]. You'll see here at the Commercial Hotel, the little pole and the brackets are there but the little red light has fallen off. So of course everybody'd see a red light so everybody runs to that bar to see.

Zamora: And what did you do on the City Council?

Perry: I was the Street Commissioner. Each councilman was a commissioner for the police, the sanitation, the water or stuff like

that. I just had one employee who was [Al Lane] and he did everything. He painted the street signs, he painted the crosswalk, he paved, he had a little asphalt trailer with an oil tank on it and a shovel and a broom. He'd tow with a pickup to a pothole and clean it. A few years back the city got a bunch of money when they went into the Major D money stuff so they spent almost \$80,000 for a new asphalt truck. Even a big city never had a big truck like that, it just was useless. You could do a street with the darn thing, they never used it. Lane would sweep the streets everyday. He had an old sweeper and every Friday he'd maintain all the equipment. He was a very good worker and he would maintain all his equipment, and the sweeper ran and ran and ran. And so far, we must have four or five brand new ones. The one we bought at first was [an] old Wayne and I think we bought it from the airport in Santa Maria used. But it ran for twenty-seven years, and he kept it up. We would get [inaudible], I'd give him a P.O. to get a load of asphalt and sometime the asphalt load would come back hard, it wouldn't be good. So they'd bring him another load and wouldn't charge us. We used the bad part for the base of the hole so we still got a little asphalt out of it.

The Commissioner deal they don't have now, but what was good about it as a councilman, was that you could bring up a problem for the streets or for the water or the police. Today they don't because they don't know anything about the streets or water. An administrator takes care of that, so [if] the administrator has something go wrong now, he can forget about it somehow. Before, everyone had to bring up his own little problem, and we'd vote: "Okay, let's give them another \$800 to buy that little motor for his compressor or something." They could still do it today. I think it would help the administrator, relieve the administrator of those



extra duties, especially today now they have all this money for grants and more paperwork.

But Guadalupe was always the whipping dog for Santa Barbara county. They would have raids during election time. The Sheriff would come here and raid the place and that one big raid they had helicopters and S.W.A.T. teams and police dogs. They brought the cops in and busted us and they raided the hotel, two hotels. The sad part, one of the hotels had two gentleman who were in their eighties, that was their home, and they took them to jail too. They found about an ounce of marijuana in one of the hotels, and I told them, "Yeah you could find more than that in a high school locker, right now." But they let [everyone go], there were no charges, nothing was pressed. But it was election time.

Zamora: Where were you during that raid?

Perry: In the store, the Napa Store. Yes, I saw this car go by really fast and then another one. "What the hell is going on? They better watch it, gonna get a ticket. Pretty soon there comes a cop car. "Ah, they're going after them." Then another cop car. So I went out the front door and right at the intersection there, by the Far Western, were all these cars. Man it just looked like you see on TV. S.W.A.T. Team and the helicopter and guys holding dogs, and it was nothing, there was just nothing.

Zamora: What made you get involved with the city and the positions that you had?

Perry: Because of the way [chuckles] Guadalupe was always picked on. Like Nipomo is for San Luis County, we're like the stepchild they

don't care about. We're always picked on and the one year we had the little two-acre park down here, Leroy Park and the grand jury gave the Park Commission a bad rap because they couldn't take care of a two-acre park. And then they said, "We'll give the park to the city, and I never wanted that because for the taxes Guadalupe paid we can always have a little two-acre park. Every place else they've got nice parks with rangers that lived there. The guy that took care of this park had to take care of the health clinic, and he had to take care of the Vets Hall. This one guy, Mr. Rojas. But he kept the park really nice. He was one of these guys that was like a natural craftsman artist. He was very good at stuff like that.

Zamora: What do you do for a living now?

Perry: I have the Napa Auto Parts store, I bought it in '66. I started at the Napa in Santa Maria in '60 and I started as delivery boy and check-in the freight. One thing good at Napa is [if] you sell one filter you get it back the next day, stuff like that, you didn't have to wait a week or a month. I said if I ever get my own store I'm going to Napa. Mr. Diamond owned this store here, Diamond Auto Supply, they were going to put a store in Santa Maria so they hired me here, then I would've managed this store then they would put the store in Santa Maria. Then they were going to put a store in Lompoc so they sold me this store. I bought it in '66, I've been there since '66.

Zamora: What aspect of the community would you consider strong?

Perry: Aspects?

Zamora: Yes, what things in the community do you think are really strong?

Perry: [Pauses] I think our new city council is trying to work hard to improve the community. They are always trying to pick things to stall, the old administrator is coming back now complaining about this and that. When he was administrator we complained on the same thing I guess. Mr. Lawrence was the city administrator - our ex-fire chief's son - and he was raised here and went to school here. So he had his heart, really, for the town. That group finally ran him out of town because he knew that once they got in office they were just going to be picky, picky, picky. But before they got into office, he had formed what they call a Downtown Design Committee. He had a couple, one or two, professors from Cal Poly, landscaping people, people from Santa Barbara that were into plays and stuff like that, involved. So we had engineers and architects. We worked over a year and a half on this Downtown Design Committee and presented it to the council. It was never approved by the council. The new council got in, and it was never approved.

Say this was a city block here: at each first car parking spot would be what was going to be a [bulgeout], a landscape [parcel] there, just for one. That way when you're coming out of the side street you don't have to pull out into the middle of the street because of the car parked there. So that's what we had, if possible. Sometimes you couldn't, but if possible, and then for sure one bulgeout planted area around the old city clock to protect it from trucks or a car hitting it.

Well, when Caltrans and the new council did the street here

they put in these bulgeouts, big long bulgeouts like in front of the Cultural Center next door and [people] can't park. In front of my store they put one from the clock all the way to my store and there's just one parking place and they could have shortened it ten feet and there would have been two parking places. Then they put a fireplug over here when they could have put a fireplug inside the landscaping deal there. When they painted, we figure they painted too much red.

A lot of people are disgusted with it, and we told them [the Council]. Now they're thinking about trying to shorten them or maybe take one out here and redo it but now we have to go back to Caltrans. They're nice but they just took too much space and they didn't set them right. Down across over there by the Tapatia Café they could have moved it back ten feet and he would have had another parking spot. But they brought it in from the corner about eight, ten feet and painted that red so a car can't park there. If they had brought it all the way back to the crosswalk then there would have been more parking. They didn't even go by any of our suggestions, so we're trying to get it going again. It'll work out for the best I hope.

Zamora: Do you think there are any weak aspects of the community?

Perry: Well, I'm sure there's not enough money... In grammar school we had a lot of middle league baseball teams and I'm not athletic whatsoever, but like a dummy I played baseball to be with my friends. I was a lefty so I got first base. The ball comes at you at 300 miles an hour and every day they'd go to a game I always had butterflies the whole time. I just hated it. That was the first year that I actually ever played baseball. But then you had coaches and umpires that were all volunteers, fathers and uncles and cousins. Now they all want to get paid, and the best of everything, and there's just not enough money. A lighting district pays for lighting and wires. I don't know if they could have a recreation district or a policemen and firemen district where [you] pay a little taxes on that, that would work out.

Zamora: Do you think Guadalupe was a good place to live in?

Perry: Yeah.

Zamora: If someone was to move here, what would you tell them about the community?

Perry: Well, I'd tell them about the crime is the lowest in the tri-counties, percentage-wise. Years ago one of the boys robbed Al-Rey Liquors where Margie and Joe's Café is today. The owner called up the Police Department and says, "Hey, Joe just robbed me." Okay, the police got to Joe's house [laughs] and they're parked in front of Joe's house and here comes Joe. "Joe, did you just rob Everett?" "Yeah." "Okay, let's go back." So he gave Everett the money back and they brought him to the judge and the judge fined him a few dollars and that's all. That's how it was...

And this block across the street there from me was the first block that was cement sidewalk around. Boy, that was our skating rink. Every place else was just half a block and then we'd have to cross the street. Then the Vet's Hall here, we used to have water gun fights. Just had the little pistol. The drinking fountain was the only place that they couldn't shoot you. Once you got beside that drinking fountain, [they'd] give you a chance to refill. Things like that.

Zamora: You told me that you have a sign-in book at your store, what made you do something like that?

Perry: People would come in and I thought that'd be neat if I had one. If you're ever in town come look at it. A lot of German people, they're on holiday - it's not vacation, it's holiday. I say, "You people get me mad – you see more of my country than I do. I just see California."

They just love it, but they didn't like San Francisco because there was too many beggars and stuff. I had a couple come from Italy. The mother was probably late eighties, early nineties and the daughter was like sixty-five or something like that. The mother's father had come to Guadalupe way back and had a house here and they wanted to know if I knew where the house was. I didn't know where the house was, I never even knew the name of the man.

They're from all over the world, Australia, New Zealand, Nipomo.  
[Both laugh].

Zamora: Do you think that an increase in tourism would be able to help out the community?

Perry: I think so, yes.

Zamora: What do you think needs to be done?

Perry: They're going to try to put an R.V. park down here. I think that'll help a little bit. I had one farmer ask me the other day at breakfast, "Why don't you guys have a nine-hole golf course?" A lot of guys play the golf during their lunch hour. Then they come in and have their coffee and lunch. So I talked to the city council about it and I said, "Why don't you put a nine-hole golf course along the riverbank and build a little berm. That way it'll be another protection for the R.V. park. The R.V. Park is supposed to be a combination, for bicyclists that have just tents and then a place for the campers and the guys with the motor homes. So that'll be nice. It's not just going to be for R.V.'s. A lot of bicycles come through town, especially in the summertime, and if we had a place for them that would [unclear] ... people would come in from the Bay Area. Guadalupe kind of falls in the timetable right [about] four, five o'clock for a place to stay. Otherwise they have to stop early in Oceano or Pismo, or get in late to Lompoc. If we get something like that that might help.

Zamora: Do you think that there's a very strong standing Portuguese community?

Perry: No, no more.

Zamora: There was before, though?

Perry: Over here at the park we had Portuguese celebrations and Swiss celebrations, Italian and Mexican celebrations, Latino celebrations, Chinese. Where King [unclear] restaurant is now, that belonged to the Hop Song Chinese organization from the Bay area. They owned the building, they used to. Guadalupe used to have a really big Chinese community but not any more. But they kept this lodge here, This temple I guess you would call it, and they would come once a year. You'd see all these Chinese people walking around town with their suits and it was nice. But they sold it ten, fifteen years ago.

Zamora: What had diminished the...

Perry: I think the only one we have now is the Mexican, September 16<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, celebration. Which is another thing, the oldest celebration in Santa Barbara county, even longer than the mission in Santa Barbara, the Mission Days. But it's not as big as it used to be, we used to have parades and everybody got involved, a lot of floats. I guess the young generation doesn't want to go into it anymore.

Zamora: In your lifetime, what are you most proud of?

Perry: Probably my children.

Zamora: What about them, anything in particular?



Perry: No, just they were born healthy.

Zamora: If you were able to relive your life, would you do anything differently?

Perry: I think I would go to more schooling. In my time it was get a high school diploma. Hancock was there and I never really thought of going to Hancock. My parents never said to me, "You should go to Hancock, John." I just graduated from high school and went to work at a butcher shop. I would deliver food to the labor camps, I would cut up ox tails, make hamburger patties and all this stuff. I even cut the corner of my thumb off, slicing the cheese or something and I told the boss, "That's it, I'm not coming back" and he laughed. He said, "You're going to get worse cuts than that." I said, "Not me." So I never went back. He called me about 10 o'clock that morning and I said no and he couldn't believe it. "I'm not going to cut my fingers off for stupid meat." Then I got a job at the auto parts store in Santa Maria and I'm still selling spark plugs.

Zamora: What kind of collectibles have you collected over the years?

Perry: My store used to be the Post Office. In the 1950s they moved across the street here and they took with them all the postal cages that were stamp windows and parcel post windows. Then in '79 they remodeled and I bought it back from the government and put in my store and made it my office. I like it because the windows are frosted. You can roll them down or slide them down and can't see the mess. Then I have a lot of old display cases from different stores that closed down. I got the player piano from upstairs when I bought the building. I brought it downstairs and the old heater

that was in the third story. Got a produce scale there. Funny, all the girls say it shows too heavy. You get on there and say, "Oh, it shows too heavy," but it's perfect. And then people would clean out their closets or garages and they'd bring me [things]. The only mistake I did on that, I should've put it in the book, "Tom Jones brought me this in '58." I didn't do that, so to this day I'll look at something and I'll remember, "Oh yeah, Fred brought that" or, "Where'd I get that?" That was one of my mistakes, I guess like a historical museum where they write all that stuff down, I should have done that.

Zamora: What made you want to collect these pieces you have?

Perry: Again, because Guadalupe was always picked on and I just tried to do my duty. It's been in the papers a lot of times so people have come over, and they really liked it. Then the Dunes Center is doing very good for the community and it's going to do better especially now that they're getting more into their line of magazines and getting more advertising. It's going to help more. The old timers say "Oh, Guadalupe is never going to be a tourist attraction," and I say, "Well maybe not but if you get 20,000 that's 20,000 more than you had before. The people like the old town, that's where mostly we're trying to redo the buildings like when they were new, but keep them old. A friend of mine owned the building next door to me which used to be Prona's newsstand. He had clothing, magazines and gum. Generations later kids would say, "Mom I'm going to Pete Prona's, and Pete had been dead like twenty-five years but they still called it Pete Prona's because his son ran it.

Zamora: A month ago there was an earthquake. Were you affected at all?

Perry: I had a twelve-ounce bottle break and it looked like there were five gallons in there. That was it. I was standing right underneath my lights and I, dummy, didn't think of getting out of the way in case the fluorescent lights fell. A big Napa cap fell off, the big plastic Napa cap fell on the floor and tool board fell and that was it. When I was going out front I saw in the southbound bike lane, I saw two bricks there and I says, "Damn," but when I saw the brick from across the street that was a kind of relief.

Then when Cruz Bustamante came in - the Lieutenant Governor - they used my store for their gathering. So it was Cruz and I, the highway patrolmen and just five of us and I had locked everybody else out. So we got talking, Cruz and I, and I asked where's he's from and he said San Joaquin Valley, but he lived in the town of San Joaquin and I says, "My friend's aunt and uncle live there and she says they been there a long time. They're both in school, both were teachers and then become principals and superintendents and her name is Mary, I forgot what her uncle's name is." So he started thinking, "Oh you mean Mary and Joe Ramos." "Yeah that's it," then we got closer then. Oh, yeah, they baptized my brother's son and they helped me, with campaigning. So that brought him a little more close to Guadalupe. So he looked around and he saw this Napa hat, "Hey John, I'll buy this from you," "No, you can have it." So all the pictures you see of him in the paper there he's wearing that Napa hat proudly [laughs]. He's a very nice guy, more close to him, you know more friendly with him, but when he's on TV he looks too starchy you know, he's got his suit on and all that. That was interesting.

Zamora: What do you see for Guadalupe in the future?

Perry: If we can keep Santa Maria away from us I think it'll be fine. Santa Maria is fine but they're just so damn greedy, they just want everything. I got an old postcard there at the store to show you that shows [Mussel] Rock at Point [Sal], beautiful color picture in the back says "Rugged Santa Maria Coastline." Stuff like that, even with the sand dunes out here, the Guadalupe and Nipomo sand dunes. Nipomo sand dunes are underneath the houses, underneath eucalyptus trees. It's Guadalupe, Oso Flaco, sand dunes... I said "How would it be if we got a group together in Guadalupe and said that's the Nipomo/Guadalupe Dana Adobe, you wouldn't like that would you?" "Well, that's not Guadalupe's." I said, "The sand dunes aren't Nipomo's, either." People just try to get a little thing here, but they always try to get stepped on. I'm not a good speaker. I go to city council meetings and I always thought maybe I'll go to school and learn how to talk better. I write all this stuff down and I don't read eighty percent of it. I just sit down quick before I really mess up. I got my heart for Guadalupe, I guess always.

Zamora: Do you think change is in the future?

Perry: I think it'll be change for the better. It has cleaned up a lot, there's not that many bars anymore. Of course business is down. Fridays - used to be these beer trucks in town unloading and had to go back and get more beer, that's how they used to really have a good time in town here. Now they just bring the little trucks down. But Guadalupe's going to be better, especially with the Dunes Center project and the Oso Flaco Lake. Train stops there, they're supposed to have a train now that stops here to go north, we just go to San Luis now, but we're supposed to have one that goes all the way, I

guess up the coast. So that'll be good for Nipomo people, Santa Maria people. The city got a letter from Caltrans, the railroad division, that there was more passengers than they thought there would be, so it's working out good.

Zamora: That's all for the day.

Neuman: I just have one real quick question. If we made you King for the day, What would you do to Guadalupe? If you could do anything you want, money is no object, you're just King, you could do whatever you want.

Perry: Well, I'd paint the Napa store, that's one thing. I would redo all from the corner here. I'd redo all the downtown area as far I could go to like [things] were when they were new. [In] Prona's store twenty-five years ago, thirty years ago, they had the two little wooden doors - they wore out so they put in two aluminum doors. At one of our first downtown design committees I had a photo of it and I said what's wrong with this picture. And they were looking at it and said "Oh, the tile's the wrong color, this or that," and I said, "No, it's right there in front of you, aluminum doors, you didn't have aluminum doors in 1912." But my partner and I own them [and] we had a wood door put in there. It cost \$2,200 but it looks nice, it's more original. I made a mistake. The door handles are too modern, so we're going to put a more antique type. That's what I would do, I would put more landscaping - Caltrans did a bad job on this, bad job. Thank you.

[Interview ends]