From the Faculty Editor

If you work while on vacation, is it “vacation”? Yes, if your view out the window consists of green rolling hills and tall cedars, and the temperature never goes above the low 60s and it rains every day. I mean real rain for four days straight and counting. Two nights ago, an electrical storm sent lightning into my daughter’s apartment and fried the motor in her aquarium. Nothing else was touched. I’m in Colorado, where 90-degree temperatures are gone, air conditioners aren’t needed, you need real shoes if you’re going out, not mesh sneakers or flip-flops, and a bowl of hot zucchini soup sounds perfect for lunch.

My student editor is working in Canutillo (after visiting Brazil last summer), another editor was working in the New Mexico mountains and another edits from wherever he finds himself, so maybe it depends on your attitude what “vacation” is. For me, it means I can work in my pajamas or sweatshirts, enjoy a cup of coffee or tea anytime I want, munch on local delicacies on the dining table I have commandeered for my desk and gaze at the fat raindrops which I don’t get to see that often at home. So yes, it’s vacation!

The articles in Borderlands are based on research papers completed in my English 1302 classes at EPCC which concentrate on local history. As students learn research and writing skills, they also learn about people, events and culture of our El Paso Southwest, including Northern Mexico and Southern New Mexico.

We last printed Borderlands in 2012. In 2013, we presented our readers with a special Web Only issue on the Northwest Campus Library website. Since websites come and go, some of our “fans” suggested that we print the articles for those who prefer not to read Borderlands online and so that we would have an official print record of the articles. We offer two from the online issue: one on Jake Erlich, the tallest man in the world, and another on the history of El Paso's Holocaust Museum and Study Center. Thanks to Joe Old, English & History Disciplines, Valle Verde Campus, for his help with this.

We hope you find these articles interesting and informative. A pdf version of this issue will be available online and on the EPCC website. Please let us know how we can improve this issue.

Ruth E. Vise, Faculty Advisor & Editor

From The Student Editor

As many of you may know, our previous issue was online and consisted of articles about noteworthy men and women from our beautiful Border City. In this publication, we will be featuring two of the stories from the web issue. Along with these two articles, you will be reading about mysteries, about tolerance and intolerance, and about how one can change El Paso with perseverance and faith.

I have had the pleasure of working with a great person, Ms. Vise. After having been a student in her English 1302 class two years ago, I was asked to be a part of Borderlands. I was very excited that I would become a student editor. I will forever remember the people I worked with and the stories of those who contributed to our city. Thank you, Ms. Vise, I will miss you.

I would also like to thank everyone who makes Borderlands possible. Special thanks to the staff at the El Paso Public Library, Downtown Branch, especially the Border Heritage Center. Thanks also to the Special Collections Department at the University of Texas at El Paso Library.

One of our stories is about Father Harold J. Rahm, who spent several years in El Paso and is still working in Brazil. I would like to thank him for his cooperation and generosity during my research. As I read his e-mails and his books, it was as if we were conversing in person. He is such an amazing person — thank you, Father Rahm.

In Brazil, Father Rahm continues his work with the youth. Speaking of youth and Brazil, I went to Brazil for World Youth Day last July. I did not even know Father Rahm existed, and that is another reason why I love Borderlands: I learn about people.

World Youth Day, initiated by Pope John Paul II, is an international event organized by the Catholic Church where youth of all ages, countries and beliefs can have a spiritual encounter with Christ.

My favorite place in Brazil is the Iguaçu Falls in the state of Paraná. Even though the waterfalls were very beautiful, my favorite place felt the most spiritual through the distance. Aside from the beauty of the waterfalls, the abundance of plants and trees produced a sensational scent. Another of my favorite places is Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, where I went to see the sunrise. The ocean water may not be clear, but the views from the beach were incredible. It was really strange to see nature’s beauty right across from Rio, a city filled with millions of people.

The joy I feel travelling is the same one I feel when I learn about the remarkable people we feature in this issue. Even though Henry Kellen passed away recently, he will always be remembered for having survived the Holocaust and the persistence he had to establish the Holocaust Museum in El Paso.

If you are into mysteries, we have two for you. Bobby Fuller, a musician, died inexplicably after becoming famous. Tom Ogle, an inventor of a fuel-saving device, also died under strange circumstances. If you are into mysteries, we have two for you. Bobby Fuller, a musician, died inexplicably after becoming famous. Tom Ogle, an inventor of a fuel-saving device, also died under strange circumstances. If you are into mysteries, we have two for you. Bobby Fuller, a musician, died inexplicably after becoming famous. Tom Ogle, an inventor of a fuel-saving device, also died under strange circumstances.
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n August 2013, the popular host of the Dr. Oz television show interviewed a 33-year-old woman standing 7 feet tall and weighing 400 pounds. She suffered acromegaly, or “gigantism.” In this condition, the pituitary gland produces more of the growth hormone than normal and individuals grow rapidly and often suffer from some facial distortion. If a tumor is causing the gland to produce abnormal amounts of the hormone, surgery or radiation may help. Even in 2013, there was no “cure,” but there is medication to stop the growth and more information for the patient and the family as they try to adjust to society. One hundred years ago, an El Pasoan suffered from this same condition but rose above the difficulties and became a movie star, a circus performer, an artist, a poet and the tallest man in the world at one time. His name was Jacob, or Jake Erlich.

The story of Jake Erlich is inspirational. He was a man who managed to survive for a long time and live life fully. He did this by discovering hidden talents that eventually led him to have unique and successful experiences. Jake Erlich was timid as a child, but he was able to overcome his fears and doubts as he took chances and tried new things. He took advantage of his unique body, starring in silent films in Hollywood and becoming “the tallest man in the world” as part of the Ringling Brothers Circus. Jake Erlich not only left behind beautiful artwork, he also left an extraordinary reputation as a brilliant and unique citizen of El Paso.

Jacob Reuben Ehrlich, who would eventually weigh 370 pounds, ironically was born prematurely in Denver, Colo. on June 29, 1906, weighing 3 pounds and 11 ounces, according to the book Incredible People: Five Stories of Incredible Lives by Frederick Drimmer. For his first few years, Jacob seemed to always be shorter than the other kids, and his parents compared him to the other children of apparent “normal” height.

However, when Jacob was seven, the tables turned. Jacob shot up like a rocket and seemed to be growing an inch every month! Now his parents began to fear for his life. Doctors could not explain the sudden and continuous growth. By age 10, Jacob was more than six feet tall. Three years later, he was seven feet tall. Little did he know that his height would bring him success in the future.

Isadore Erlich and Dora (Slonimsky) Erlich were a Jewish couple from Poland who arrived in the U. S. on March 4, 1904. They had three sons: Benjamin, Jacob and Myer. Living briefly in New York City, they headed for Pueblo, Colo., where Isadore’s sister lived. Soon, Isadore saw a better opportunity in Denver and moved there, only to be disappointed. In 1912, Isadore decided to travel to Los Angeles, Calif., to look for better opportunities. Because the railroad tracks in his route were washed out, the train he had boarded headed for Albuquerque, N.M., and eventually ended up here in El Paso.

Exhausted from such a long journey, Isadore decided to stay at the Ormsdorf Hotel, and he found a job as a watchmaker at Silverberg’s Jewelers. He was paid $35 a week, good money for the time. The rest of the family followed along and established a residence in the Old San Francisco District on Missouri Street.

Being a sensitive child, Jacob had to learn to get used to the constant teasing. He was nicknamed “Ichabod Crane,” “Old High Pockets,” “Giraffe,” and many other cruel names, according to his friend Dean Jennings. Jake told a reporter for the El Paso Herald in 1930 that as a child, “Instead of going down the main streets, I would walk down alleys or side streets. I don’t believe anybody can understand the agony I went through.” Despite his shyness, Jake decided he would join the band and ROTC when he got to El Paso High School. He even started leading some of the parades held downtown.

Nevertheless, Jake had a hard time accepting his condition and did not welcome the attention of strangers. His parents noticed his bouts of hopelessness and always tried to reassure their unique son that things were going to be all right. Life not only turned out all right, it changed dramatically and wonderfully.

To cheer up his son, Isadore decided to take Jacob on a fishing excursion to Santa Monica. During the ride train to California, people stared at the unusually tall boy. When father and son went to buy fishing tackle, people stared at him there as well. Drimmer wrote that after a long day fishing, father and son saw two men waiting for them as they pulled up to the dock: Zion Meyers and Jerry Ash of Century Studios.

Century Studios was a Hollywood movie company that had heard about Jacob and his incredible size. The men offered Jacob a contract to work as an actor in motion pictures. This turn of events was surreal: Jacob and his father could not believe what was happening. Jacob was enthusiastic. For the first time in his life, somebody admired his condition and would pay him for who he was.

For the first half of the 20th century, Hollywood studios changed the names of actors if they sounded too ethnic. From then on, the young Erlich would be known as “Jack Earle.” (The young Jacob Erlich would be known as Jake Erlich by family and friends and Jack Earle professionally. This article will use Jake Erlich referring to Erlich’s “real” name and Jack Earle when referring to the professional known by this name.)

The people with whom Jack Earle worked at Century Studios admired him. They not only looked up to Jack physically, they respected him for who he was. His life had changed so rapidly, and even though Hollywood was not an easy place in which to live, he managed to adapt.

As Jack Earle, he had the opportunity to meet famous actors and even co-star with the lovely child actress Peggy Montgomery, also known as “Baby Peggy.” At age 16, Jack played the giant in Jack in the Beanstalk with Baby Peggy, according to Drimmer. A photograph in the El Paso Times titled “Young El Paso Giant a Movie Star” shows the two of them in their costumes in a scene from the film. All the films in which Jack starred were comedies. Some of the films include Hansel and Gretel (1922), Jack Earle and the Beanstalk (1924), Keep Going (1924) and Stop, Look and Listen (1926). According to local historian Fred Morales, Sting ‘Em Sweet was the only film that was shown at the El Paso Ellanay Theater.

In his four-year acting career, Jack completed 48 short films. At age 17, Jack was filming his 49th comedy when he fell, “standing atop of a lofty scaffolding when he felt it tremble,” wrote Drimmer. Jack had broken his nose and was in the hospital. Little by little, he started to lose his eyesight. X-rays revealed an abnormal shape on his pituitary gland.

Apparently, the cause of his blindness was a tumor on his pituitary gland. The tumor was creating pressure on his optic nerve, causing Jack to lose his vision.

At that time, many in the medical world did not know that the pituitary gland secreted the growth hormone and in Jack’s case, the tumor had increased production of the growth hormone, causing him to be a pathological giant.

Joe Nickell, the author of the book Secrets of the Sideshow, wrote that Jack received X-ray treatment, assisting in the reduction of the tumor. Fortunately, his vision was restored. What was not fortunate was that he was unemployed. At age 17, Jack Earle decided it was time to go back home and be Jake Erlich.

A few years later, in 1926, the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus came to El Paso. This circus had originated in Wisconsin and had members with unique characteristics from all over the world. Jake attended a performance and noticed the tallest man of the circus, Jim Tarver, in fact was not as tall as he was. Management noticed this anomaly, too. The circus offered Jim Tarver’s job to Jake. Even though he was not thrilled with his new employment, he wanted and needed to make a living. By the age of 20, he had apparently stopped growing after attaining the height of 8 feet, 6 inches.

According to the book Incredible People, the Ringling Brothers Circus had its own train that carried its animals, workers and performers in special cars. Jake was in Car 96 along with others such as the little people, two fat ladies, an albino lady, two other albinos who were African American, a really thin man who looked skeletal, a woman covered in tattoos, a sword-swallow, a fire-eater, a bearded lady and some others. For hundreds of years, individuals with obvious physical differences or distortions were put on display in sideshows or freak shows, often in connection with the circus.

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Harvey Girls Changed the West

By Melody C. Whitener Smith

Fred Harvey was the founder of a chain of restaurants and hotels that stretched across the American West. Researchers disagree about when Frederick Henry Harvey, born in London in 1835, came to the U.S. Some say it was 1850 when he was 15, but Stephen Fried, author of Appetite for America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built a Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized the West, wrote that a London census listed Harvey as living with his aunt in 1851. Fried said that Harvey landed in America at age 17 with just two British pounds in his pocket. Harvey became an American citizen in 1858 and married a year later.

Southwest historian Lesley Foster and Weiglin wrote that in the late 19th century, Fred Harvey convinced well over 5,000 families of his vision of offering fine dining to rail passengers at announced stops, he first approached his employer, but the Burlington Railroad turned him down.

Harvey House restaurants and hotels were born when Fred Harvey opened Santa Fe Railroad executives with his idea of making dining a more pleasurable and sanitary experience for both the traveler and local diners. With no formal contract, but simply a handshake, he had a deal, wrote Poling-Kempes.

In 1876, he opened his first dining room in Topeka, Kan., with many more to come further west. At one time, a Harvey House lunch counter and/or dining room was located about every 100 miles on the Santa Fe routes. Fred Harvey and his servers, called the Harvey Girls, changed the West by revolutionizing how food was served while maintaining classy places to eat, including in El Paso.

The establishment of female waitresses in Harvey Houses came about because the male staff Fred Harvey first hired often got drunk and became enmeshed in brawls, wrote Juddi Morris, author of The Harvey Girls: The Women Who Civilized the West. Fred Harvey’s friend and new manager of his Raton, N. M. restaurant, Tom Gable, gave him the idea of hiring women as waitresses not only to tame the cowboys and relieve racial animosities (many waiters were African-American), but also to populate the West with more women, according to Foster and Weiglin. Thus, the first Harvey Girls were hired in Raton. Harvey could not hire just any woman, however; his standards would be set high.

Harvey ran an ad in newspapers on the East Coast and in the Midwest and waited for responses. The ad in the newspaper read, “WANTED Young women, 18 to 30 years of age, of good moral character, attractive and intelligent, as waitresses in Harvey House Eating Houses.” Poling-Kempes said that women who answered the ads were “promised their status as ladies would be protected by their employer.” These women came out West to seek greater economic opportunities, to look for a spouse, to alleviate boredom and to seek adventure, wrote Morris.

Foster and Weiglin noted that being a Harvey Girl was considered a more prominent position than a waitress. Poling-Kempes wrote that in the last quarter of the 19th century, waitressing was seen below nursing and teaching when it came to jobs for women, and Harvey was able to change how waitressing was viewed much as he changed railroad dining.

So many young women and girls decided to join the Harvey Girls in the West because “most likely [they] had never traveled more than 20 miles from home, and had met few strangers of either sex in [their] entire life.” Many had to “overcome their parents’ disapproval to become Harvey Girls,” wrote Morris. Before the Harvey Girls, the women in the East earned money through “sewing, raising chickens and selling eggs … [or] butter,” said Johnson.

Foster and Weiglin noted that in the late 19th century, Fred Harvey convinced well over 5,000 women to move west, and they ultimately helped change the area. Morris wrote that those who came soon learned to love the West even though they missed the green and the trees of the East. But when they had a chance to go home, they found those same trees made them feel boxed in. Tens of thousands of young women would move west during the first half of the 20th century to become Harvey Girls.

Foster and Weiglin wrote that only those young women who passed an extensive background check into their private lives were allowed into the training program. Because of the racial climate of the country at the time, mostly whites were hired for many years, according to Morris. However, as times changed, so did the color of Harvey House personnel, as a 1940s era photo of staff in El Paso shows. Poling-Kempes wrote that local women, including Hispanics and Native Americans, were hired in New Mexico, Arizona and El Paso, especially during World War II. Some Harvey Girls were also married with families as many women worked in war-related occupations.

Most training occurred in Harvey Houses in Kansas, especially the one in Topeka. The women worked full time for 30 days without pay as they learned the “Harvey Way.” Upon completion of training, the girls were usually sent to small houses in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, where tips were poor and social life scarce. After a year in such a position, a Harvey Girl could request a transfer.

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Training to be a Harvey Girl was akin to serving in the military. Fried wrote that the girls were put “through a kind of culinary boot camp,” and some claimed “training was more difficult than army boot camp,” according to Morris. If they could not handle the stress of the training, they were “discharged” to go home. One Harvey Girl interviewed, after being discharged, claimed, “I always felt that training as a Harvey Girl was as important as my college education. I learned about getting along with people, about hard work and carrying my share of the load.”

Morris said the new employees got a feel for what it would be like to be a Harvey Girl when they placed their own food order with the train conductor in advance of their arrival in Chicago or Kansas City, the two employment centers of the Harvey empire. Upon arrival, the first part of their meal was already on the table, and they were served by the current Harvey Girls on staff.

Lenore Dils, special correspondent for the El Paso Times, wrote that because of the prestige of the job, many girls who were not trained as Harvey Girls tried to pass off fraudulent credentials. But it was apparent within minutes that they had not served at a Harvey House because they did not know serving techniques, such as “serve from the right, take away from the left.”

Fried noted that if the girls made it through their contracts, they were awarded a service badge worn on the uniform to show the number of years of service. The girls received room and board, so they had few bills to pay and could pocket the extra money or send it home to their family. The pay in the 1890s consisted of $17.50 per month (plus tips), room and board and travel passes.

For decades, many Harvey Girls lived two to a room above the restaurant, dormitory style. They had a house mother who enforced rules, which included no men in the dorms, according to Poling-Kempes. They were expected to adhere to a strict code of conduct (including no “expectorating” on the floors of their room!) and curfew was 10 p.m., regardless of their age. Over the decades, these rules relaxed a little, and some Harvey Girls lived out in the community.

A Harvey Girl worked “six and seven day weeks, usually twelve hour days,” according to Poling-Kempes. Sheila Wood Foard wrote that Harvey’s dress code included “long-sleeved black dresses hemmed exactly eight inches off the floor and covered by a starched white pinafore,” along with black shoes, black opaque stockings and hairnets. Foster and Weiglin noted that this uniform was meant to de-emphasize a girl’s feminine features. As the years passed, this uniform changed some, and in Santa Fe at the La Fonda Hotel, the Harvey Girls wore brightly colored Mexican blouses and long skirts.

Harvey Girl contracts were anywhere from six to nine to 12 months long. Morris wrote that under their contract, young women consented to learn the “Harvey Way” of working and behaving. They “agreed to follow all instructions, obey employee rules, go wherever [they were] assigned to work, and not to marry during the term of the contract.” After the contract was up, they could take a break to go home by train anywhere they traveled, although they could commence working again. If they happened to marry during the terms of their contract, they would lose their pay and would not receive the free pass home on the train.

The rules were considered “necessary guidelines that assured the public that these single women, hundreds of miles from home, were upstanding and respectable citizens,” according to Poling-Kempes. Even their uniforms had to be spotless: if a girl got just the slightest stain on her uniform, she was expected to change, since each girl had several uniforms. Harvey laundered the uniforms for the girls, but they were responsible for the ironing and starching.

Harvey Girls could wear no jewelry or makeup and could not chew gum. Poling-Kempes told the story that “management would take a damp cloth and run it over a girl’s face to make sure she had absolutely no makeup on.” Morris said if a girl was caught chewing gum on the job, more than likely she would be “fired on the spot.”

Harvey Girls were expected to perform their job to Fred Harvey’s high expectations. He was meticulous about the appearance and management of his restaurants. He would sometimes inspect the premises with the fabled “white glove.” Often the train staff would telegraph ahead that the boss was to be expected. One example of his expectations concerned the water served to customers. Water pitchers had to contain ice to chill water for diners. Morris said Harvey was known to dump a pitcher on the floor if it was not up to his expectation. If a Harvey Girl did her job, she was a good boss and he would compliment her. Harvey set his standards high, and those who did not meet his expectations were let go.

Each Harvey House restaurant usually employed about 30 girls. Between customers they were to polish silver, fold cloth napkins and prepare for future meals and customers. They were not to be seen sitting down or slacking on the job. If a girl left her work unfinished or it was not up to standards, she would be retrieved from her quarters to complete her job to perfection, dressed in her uniform, according to Poling-Kempes. An ordinary waitress did not have the “skill to serve sixteen people in twenty-five minutes” as the Harvey Girls could, wrote Foster and Weiglin.

A person eating at a Harvey House had to meet some expectations as well. For example, in an Arizona Highways Magazine article, Charles Herbert said all male customers had to wear coats in order to eat in the dining room. If a man did not have one, he would be loaned one. However, no such clothing requirements existed at the more informal lunch counters. All customers were treated with respect, even the rude ones, according to Marie Evans, writing for the Deming Highlight.

Modern diners would have loved the coffee at Harvey Houses. Dils tells us whether a traveler was in El Paso or in another Harvey House, “a cup of coffee … was always the same,” which was so because the water at each restaurant was analyzed and an exact brewing formula was determined so that quality could be maintained. If water did not meet Harvey standards, it was brought in by train.

Harvey Girls took beverage orders orally and arranged cups in a type of code:

Coffee – Cup upright in the saucer
Hot Tea – Cup flipped upside down in saucer
Iced Tea – Cup flipped upside down, leaned against the right side of saucer
Milk – Cup flipped upside down, set an inch apart from right side of saucer

Of course, if diners changed the position of the cup after the waitress left, they might be drinking milk instead of iced tea.

According to a food service brochure obtained from Patricia Kiddney of the El Paso Harvey Girls Association, orange juice had to be freshly squeezed as it was ordered, and coffee was emptied every two hours and a fresh pot made. Bread was baked daily and pies cut only into fourths. No six to eight servings from a pie here!

Fresh food was shipped from various areas of the country via refrigerated cars, and the cost of shipping was not as important as the quality of the food. Thus, food like fresh fish, oysters, and the finest beef and freshest vegetables were served in every Harvey House. Harvey had his own ranch producing beef and owned several dairies along the route from Chicago to Los Angeles, the source of milk, cream and ice cream served in his restaurants and dining cars. While a train was miles away from a station, a brakeman took orders from passengers and wired them to the restaurant. Notified by the sound of a gong, servers had the first course ready as passengers walked in.

Sue Tester of the Santa Fe New Mexican said that most of the stops lasted only about 20 to 30 minutes, but the Harvey Girls made the meal seem luxurious and no passenger was rushed. The food was not only classy and delicious, but affordable to all classes of riders. Evans stated that prices for dinner in 1914 ranged from $1 to $1.25 in the Deming-El Paso region. She also said that entrees cost as little as 75 cents for a gourmet dish and the menus were prepared daily. Dils wrote that El Paso Harvey tables were set with imported fine linens and silverware, just as they were at all the other Harvey Houses.

Menus included such things as oysters, sirloin steak, broiled sole or salmon, ham, lamb, roasted capon and turkey, veal, sweetbreads, and even plover (a small wading bird) on toast. Potatoes were served mashed, French fried, au gratin, Lyonnaise and other ways; other vegetables might include sweet potatoes, asparagus, beets, artichokes, peas and spinach.

Lighter fare such as chicken salad, lobster salad, coleslaw and goose liver sandwiches were served, as were desserts such as fruit pies, cheesecake, strawberry shortcake, fresh fruit and berries and ice cream. Diners could also enjoy Edam and Roquefort cheeses at the end of a meal. Tenderloin of trout with potatoes and toast for breakfast? Sure! In the 1890s, a continued on page 6
Harvey Girls continued from page 5

The El Paso Harvey House was in existence from March 1906 until 1948. It was located inside the Union Depot Station. The El Paso Harvey House had not only a spacious lunch counter, but it also housed a large dining room, which it was used as a residence for the gentlemen they dated because of the high moral character they were expected to uphold. The girls were “self-assured and poised,” and being “treated politely” was expected, according to Ruby Douglas Kuntz, a former Harvey Girl Morris interviewed. Part of that respect was generated by Harvey who would not allow foul language around the girls.

Although male employees were not permitted to date the staff, Tester said “as many as 20,000 Harvey Girls married prominent ranchers, cowboys, miners, merchants” and railroad employees from engineers to station agents, and attorneys and salesmen, men in almost all walks of life in the West. Of the couples who married, it was rumored that more than “four thousand boys born to these couples were named Fred, or Harvey, or both,” according to Foster and Weiglin. A popular MGM musical, starring Judy Garland and Angela Lansbury, was made in 1946 that showed the life of the Harvey Girls.

Prince McKenzie, director of the Railroad and Transportation Museum of El Paso, said in an interview that after working as Harvey Girls, many young women decided to work in predominantly male-dominated jobs in retail shops. They already knew how to work with the public and had learned about finance, economics and grooming from their Harvey employees. They fared well when it came to find other jobs. Many even went into their own business after being Harvey Girls. McKenzie said that their training as Harvey Girls left them “capable to find other jobs. Many even went into their own business after being Harvey Girls. McKenzie said that their training as Harvey Girls left them “capable of advancing,” a type of job security.

After more than a decade of being ill and not knowing what was wrong, Fred Harvey died in 1901 from what was believed to be colon cancer, wrote Fried. Fred Harvey had two sons, Ford and Byron, who ran the business after their father died. Various grandchildren also worked in the business. Fried said that Fred Harvey’s will requested that the business be run the same for 10 years after his death. No disbursements were to be made to anyone in the family, and his son Ford was to continue to run the business as his father had. The elder Harvey would have been gratified to see that even 50 years after his death, the business was still basically run the way it was when he was alive.

Along with the Santa Fe Railroad as a partner, Fred Harvey and his progenitors ran the “most famous and successful restaurant and hotel chain in America,” according to Foster and Weiglin. Of note is that his empire was incorporated simply as “Fred Harvey” without accompanying tags such as Inc., Company, Sons and so on, perpetuating the illusion that he was still at the helm many decades after his death.
In fall 1926, Jake would appear in his first show as a circus giant with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus in Madison Square Garden in New York City. Advertisements would add almost a foot to Jake's actual height. And he often wore a 10-gallon hat and high-heeled cowboy boots, adding or exceeding the extra advertised height.

His first performance was intimidating. Jake was very nervous and started feeling uncomfortable at the stares, but he was rescued. Harry Doll, a little person also working for the circus, assured him everything was going to be okay. Soon Jake became close friends with Harry and with his three dwarf sisters — Daisy, Tiny and Grace. According to a website by James G. Mundie, the four siblings originally were from Germany, born to Gustav and Emma Schneider. They worked in circuses and sideshows from the 1920s through the late 1950s and appeared as Munchkins in the 1939 film The Wizard of Oz.

When the siblings came to the U.S., they took the surname of their manager, Bert W. Earees, and after he died, they took the last name of Doll. That Jake's showbiz last name was Earle could not have been lost on them. Although he had many other friends, Jake's closest ones were always the little people. They visited Jake in El Paso, where his mother cooked for them and enjoyed their company.

Many photographs of Jake while he worked in the circus show him carrying a little person. Circus photographers loved the contrast: the giant carrying a dwarf in his hand. Photographs were taken of Jake with Harry Doll, with Major Mite, who was only 2 feet, 2 inches tall, and with Lia Graf, another attractive little person from Germany.

Lia Graf also became well known when a shot was taken of her with financier J. P. Morgan, according to Drimmer. Sometime later, Lia decided to go back home to Germany in 1933 and discovered that Hitler was in power. Although Hitler is known for exterminating millions of Jews, he also tried to rid Germany of human oddities, and Lia was both. In 1941, she and her parents perished in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. If Jake were to have been in Germany, he too would have been risking his life for being different and for being a Jew. Fortunately, he was safe from being hurt, at least physically.

Nonetheless, Jake was hurt emotionally on a daily basis. An article in the El Paso Herald-Post in 1952 revealed Jake's thoughts: “I hated the curious crowd that stared at me and asked: ‘How’s the weather up there?”

Another source revealed that Jake hated being asked this question all the time. People thought it was funny, but not Jake. “I used to swear I’d murder the next man who asked me that,” he said.

Even though he hated being ridiculed in the circus, he made a living during the Great Depression, and that was one of the reasons he remained a performer. He also had the opportunity to travel across the world, meet different people and build great friendships. Jake even met Robert Wadlow from Alton, Ill., the only man who was taller than he was. Robert was 8 feet, 9.75 inches tall, according to a 1950 El Paso Times article. Some sources say he was as tall as 8 feet, 11 inches.

Now that he had met somebody taller than he was, Jake decided to ask Wadlow the same question about the height. Wadlow said he was not bothered because he had learned to accept and love the way he was, something Jake would accomplish later.

With time and patience, Jake was able to get used to the stares and the questions. “What good would it do me to mind? They’re going to stare, anyhow, so I might as well cash in and be a show ….”, he stated in the El Paso Herald article, “Jake Erlich Fails to Find Many Advantages for Giants.”

Drimmer also described in his book how Jake made extra money in the circus. He sold photographs of himself as well as copies of one of his personal rings. The rings he wore on his fingers were almost two inches in diameter and became very popular. Eventually, he began to have them manufactured and he sold many for 25 cents each. Jake said they were “lucky rings” and told those who bought them that if they did not have good luck, he would return their money. Most people rejected the offer even if the ring tarnished quickly; they simply loved the fact they were so big!

Accommodations were always an issue for Jake because of his height. When traveling, Jake found it difficult to find comfortable beds, baths, chairs or even food in sufficient portions because he was so large. Although life in the circus did not fully please him, Jake knew he had shelter, food and financial security. “He travelled the world and developed a keen sense of humor to counteract his sensitive feeling of being a ‘sideshow freak,’” wrote Dorothea M. Fox in an El Paso Times article.

On one particular trip to New York City, Jake discovered yet another talent. Dr. Andrew Erlich explained in his book about his uncle, The Long Shadows: The Story of Jake Erlich, that one day an art student from New York University was working on a gorilla sculpture while visiting the circus backstage. Jake was intrigued by Valerie McPherson's work and asked if he could use some clay. In a short time, Jake made a sculpture of a giraffe. Jake had found his artistic side.

In 1931, the Ringling Art School opened, offering a diversity of classes in Sarasota, Fla. John Ringling encouraged Jake to enroll at this art school. He did so and took sculpture classes. A photograph of Jake in one of his classes was published in the Sarasota Herald in 1932 with instructor Adrian C. Pillars. Even though Jake enjoyed sculpting, he discovered that painting — in both oil and watercolors — was his true passion.

The tallest man in the world had a way of combining the circus and his love of art. He explored a new way of expressing his thoughts and experiences by painting the different aspects of circus life. When on vacation or at the art school, he painted the vibrant life of the circus. “He painted circus scenes, moods, personages — the elephants, the clowns, the midgets, the circus on the move,” wrote Drimmer. In an El Paso Herald-Post article, Betty Luther said that Jake was so inspired by painting that he decided to transform one of the rooms in his parents' home into a special place to display his finished paintings. He did much of his painting in the winter when the circus was on hiatus and he would return to El Paso.

As Jake continued to study art, he met other artists. Cindy Graff Cohen in an article for El Paso Inc. wrote that he had two instructors: the Mexican artist Emilio Cahero, who worked with Diego Rivera, and El Paso Modernist Hari Kidd. Kidd persuaded Jake to discover and explore different techniques for his art, such as how to use the bold colors that are found in his circus paintings. In his short biography of Erlich, Fred Morales wrote that he had an exhibition of his paintings at the El Paso Art School in 1936. Two months later, his first exhibit with other artists was in 1936 at the Delphic Studios in New York City. Some of the other artists included Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and Ansel Adams.

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According to a 1936 El Paso Herald-Post article, Betty Luther wrote that Jake always tried “to express the moods of the circus in his pictures.” Jake said to her, “I have so many ideas they are crowding in on my sleep at night.” In Incredible People, Drimmer quoted Jake explaining how he was able to overcome his worries. Jake said, “When I feel low, I can go to my room and lock the door, and I can read, or paint, or write,” something that many people are urged to do today to lessen stress.

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Henry Kellen Created El Paso Holocaust Museum

By Tabatha Lynn Fuson, Yvanna Vargas, Hilda Delgado and Isabel Hernandez

In 1939, World War II began with Germany invading Poland. However, Jews in Germany had been restricted in many ways several years before. In 1934, Adolf Hitler had combined the offices of president and chancellor and had taken control of both state and military operations. In his quest to rid Germany of every Jew, Hitler would be responsible for a horrific event that some would later deny ever occurred: the Holocaust, as it became known, ended the lives of six million Jews and five million non-Jews. Some survived to tell the tale.

Hitler’s target populations lived miserably in districts known as ghettos. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, these ghettos were enclosed communities where Jews were sent to be separated from non-Jews during World War II. The Germans created thousands of ghettos across Europe; the first was established in Poland in 1939. While the Jews were being held in ghettos, Hitler and his army were planning the “final solution” to exterminate the Jewish population.

Camps were built for two purposes: forced labor and ultimately the extinction of the Jews. The first concentration camps that were established were in Germany after Hitler was appointed chancellor in 1933. More than 20,000 of these camps were established during the war.

Others that were sent to these camps were homosexuals, gypsies, Christians, the mentally and physically disabled, prisoners of war, political and religious dissidents and others whom Hitler considered as sub-human or non-Aryan. Millions would die from starvation, exhaustion, physical abuse and execution in camps.

Survivors of the camps had vivid memories of this event, but many maintained silence for years in order to try to find peace. Most suffered sleepless nights, nightmares and other physical and psychological manifestations caused by their unspeakable experiences.

Henry Kellen, founder of the El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center in El Paso, Texas, was one of the few who managed to escape from a camp and later migrate to America. Kellen, his wife and nephew were the only survivors in his family. His father, mother, sister, brother, uncles and cousins perished during the Holocaust.

Henry Kellen made it his moral obligation to let the world know about the Holocaust. He changed the hearts of El Pasans and others through his experience and determination to survive by educating us about some of the horrors of World War II produced in Europe.

According to the El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, Kellen was born in Lodz, Poland, on July 5, 1915, as Heniek Kacenelenbogen. He had an older sister Sonia and brother Moniek. He received a mechanical and textile engineering degree from a French university in 1938. While he was in school, his family returned to Lithuania, where his parents had been born and where Kellen settled after graduation. Lithuania would be occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940 and overrun by the German Army in June 1941.

The Soviet Union began the destruction of normal Jewish life in Kovno (also known as Kaunas), the capital of Lithuania and the largest city, which had a highly intellectual Jewish community of 35,000 to 40,000, including one of Europe’s leading yeshivas. Jewish culture had flourished in Kovno with many organizations, schools, businesses and 40 synagogues. The Soviets abolished most of these institutions, arresting many Jews and sending others to Siberia, according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum site.

When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, violating their non-aggression pact, Soviet forces fled to the east and pro-German Lithuanians began attacking and killing Jews, whom they blamed for the Soviet invasion. When the Nazis arrived in Kovno in June 1941, they greatly increased the restrictions limiting the freedom of Jews by forcing them to wear a yellow Star of David and to keep a 7 p.m. curfew. They were also prevented from attending their schools. The Germans began killing Jews in July 1941 in the forts that were built to defend the city. Kellen’s father was picked up on the street and shot. Things would get much worse within a few weeks, however.

In August 1941, the Nazis created the Kovno Ghetto, where about 30,000 Jews were transported from their homes and packed into crude houses with dirt floors and no running water or electricity. The Kacenelenbogen family was sent here, including Henry’s sister and nephew, who at that time were only visiting from Poland. It was in the ghetto that Henry Kellen married his wife Julia in 1941.

The entire family and other inmates became forced laborers. Everybody had a job. For example, Kellen’s mother and sister made uniforms for German soldiers at a factory while the males, including Kellen, built an airport.

“There was no gas installation in our camp. People were just shot. Or they died from malnutrition or disease. Of 30,000 inmates … only 2,500 survived,” Kellen told Becky Powers in the El Paso Times article “Surviving the Holocaust.”

According to Kellen, one day, posters were put up in the camp asking for male college graduates to assemble at a certain place one morning to select books from the city library. For some reason, Kellen decided not to attend. “My brother went and never came back. After the war we learned they were all taken out and shot,” said Kellen in a video on the El Paso Holocaust Museum website.

On Oct. 28, 1941, Kellen and the rest of the camp were told to assemble at a certain point in the camp. About 10,000 people were selected, and the next day Kellen watched as they marched uphill. All day long Kellen heard machine guns. In this “selection,” Kellen lost all of his cousins and uncles, as he explained in his interview with Powers.

In an El Paso Times article by Doug Pullen, Kellen explained that on March 27, 1944, the Nazis ordered all the children and the sick to be disposed of in the ghetto. He watched as German soldiers yanked babies from their mothers’ arms and tossed them into a truck. Kellen’s nephew, Jerry, was only eight years old, but because of malnutrition, he resembled a two-year-old child. Kellen’s sister hid Jerry behind a large pillow.

This “Kinder-Action” (Children’s Action) was one of the most brutal murders of hundreds of infants and
children Kellen would see. His nephew survived, however. At this point, Kellen realized it was time to try to escape that horrendous place.

While Kellen planned for a way to escape, his main concern was to hide his nephew and keep him alive. Meanwhile, a fellow prisoner, Yerachmiel Siniuk, had lost his arm working as a slave laborer at the same camp. Now disabled and unable to work, Siniuk knew the Germans would soon kill him. According to the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous website, while working outside the ghetto, Yerachmiel’s brother-in-law came upon a poor Lithuanian farmer, Andrius Urbonas, and begged him to hide Yerachmiel.

Urbonas agreed only if Yerachmiel was able to reach the farm, 10 miles away from the camp. Yerachmiel managed to escape and reached the farm where he was warmly welcomed by Andrius, his wife, Maria, his 20-year-old daughter, Ona, and Juozas, his 14-year-old son.

The family made a place for Yerachmiel and fed him, even though they were extremely poor. When Yerachmiel returned to the ghetto, he came upon Kellen, whom he had known before the war. He then led Kellen, Julia and Jerry and another Jewish family of four to the Urbonas farm.

“Ona brought food each day to the now eight Jews in hiding. She also washed their clothes. Juozas and Andrius would bring them news from the front lines. At first the Jews hid in the barn, and then they moved to the house and were hidden in an earthen hole under a piece of furniture,” according to the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous website. Kellen, his wife and nephew and the others remained with the Urbonas family until they were liberated by the Soviet army on July 31, 1944.

Even though Kellen, Julia and Jerry managed to escape and hide, most were not so fortunate. Kellen’s mother and sister stayed at the camp and were later sent to another camp where they died of typhus and starvation, according to the article by Powers.

Eventually, Kellen returned to Kovno in search of his family, only to find that the camp had been burned down. Everyone had been killed or sent elsewhere in order to hide evidence. A source indicates that Henry was able to find a letter from his sister that she had left for him at the camp. In the letter, his sister asked Kellen and Julia to watch over her son.

According to The Jewish Voice, newsletter for the Jewish Federation of El Paso, Henry Kellen was among the first Holocaust survivors to arrive in the United States on July 4, 1946, thanks to the work of Eleanor Roosevelt and President Harry Truman, who issued the first affidavits for displaced survivors. “El Paso was our destination because Julia had a sister, Olga Rosenberg, who arrived with her husband, Sam, to this country in 1929.” Kellen told Grace B. Ellowitz. “While being a witness of the most shameful and tragic history of mankind, I never shared with anybody the tragic history of the Holocaust. The Holocaust to me and Julia was a nightmare.”

Thus began a journey in a new country. Kellen and his small family now had a fresh start, a new life, all in another country. Even though things were tough emotionally, Kellen managed to move on and make his life as a Jewish citizen of El Paso. It was not easy to find a job, as he mentioned in The Jewish Voice. In fact, even his engineering diploma and the five European languages he spoke were of no use here in the Sun City. With the help of Emil Reisel, Kellen was able to establish himself.

Emil Reisel, a man who had foreseen Hitler’s rise to power in the late 1930s, arrived in the United States in 1935 with his wife Regina. By 1945, he was living in El Paso operating a wholesale warehouse, according to the book El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center: El Paso—The Wild West Welcomes Holocaust Survivors by Dr. Mimi R. Gladstein and Sylvia D. Cohen. Holocaust survivors that arrived in El Paso were directed to Emil Reisel. “Reisel’s main task was to find employment for the men among the refugees,” stated Gladstein, Reisel’s daughter.

In a personal interview with Isabel Hernandez, Gladstein stated that her father tried to help all Holocaust survivors. Most of the people he helped stayed in El Paso; the few that did not left mainly because they had made contacts with family and decided to move with them. Gladstein also mentioned that she met Kellen when she was a young girl. Her father helped Kellen by offering him a job.

According to Gladstein and Cohen’s book, Reisel gave Kellen “two sample cases, a car, and a sales route that sent him out to remote towns such as Lovington, New Mexico, and Safford, Arizona.” Within some years, Kellen began to run his own business called the Hollywood Store for Men, a fashion store in downtown El Paso.

In the interview with Hernandez, Gladstein said that at the age of 14, she had begun to work for Kellen. Even though her father and Kellen had different businesses and had gone different ways, the two families remained good friends.

Gladstein said that she knew Kellen’s nephew, and they both attended El Paso High School, being about the same age. She added that Jerry was a “very sweet guy and smart, too.” He graduated in the top ten of his class, according to Gladstein, and he later attended San Diego University. Tragically, after surviving the Holocaust, he unexpectedly died in his sleep of a brain condition at the age of 27.

Gladstein recounted that her mother Regina was asked to help the women Holocaust survivors who came to El Paso without the slightest idea of how to function in America, such as how to buy groceries. Meanwhile, Gladstein and her sister were often asked to teach survivors how to read and write English. Gladstein said the irony of her life is that from teaching others English at such a young age, she became an English professor at the University of Texas at El Paso.

The death of Emil Reisel took a toll on his family and on all of those who had received help from him. He had lived a very prosperous life, always wanting to help others. Gladstein added that upon her father’s death, the Kellen family was always there for Regina by accompanying her in her sorrow as well as attempting to lift up her spirits. The couple often visited Regina and took her out for lunch, always keeping an eye on her. Thus began a close relationship between the three individuals.

As great friends as they were, Gladstein noted that it was difficult for Kellen to talk about his past. El Paso had yet to discover the entire story of Kellen as a survivor of the Holocaust.

“For 33 years no one wanted to know what Henry Kellen had to tell them,” wrote El Paso Timer writer Craig Phelon in a 1979 article. Some people began to believe that the Holocaust was all a lie. In fact, such denials in the form of pamphlets and books began occurring in the 1960s. In the mid-1970s, the number of these publications greatly increased. Two such examples were The Hoax of the Twentieth Century: The Case against the Presumed Extermination of European Jewry in 1976 by Arthur Butz and David Irving’s Hitler’s War in 1977. These denials broke Kellen’s silence.

He made it his duty to speak up, to let the world know, to educate everyone that this tragic event did happen and he was living proof of it. According to Phelon, Kellen’s story was not told publicly until he was interviewed for an El Paso Times story about the 1978 television series entitled Holocaust.

Holocaust survivors Benjamin Kandel, Z. Anthony Kruszewski and Henry Kellen each had a different story to tell the Times. The survivors had witnessed many atrocities during the Holocaust, even though they lived in different parts of Eastern Europe.

Kellen revealed in this article how he and the rest of the residents of Kaunas, Lithuania, were treated by the German soldiers who had invaded their home. “They told us we had 48 hours to bring everything of value from our houses … They were going to search the houses after continued on page 10
48 hours and if they found anything of value, the whole family would be shot.” One of Kellen’s neighbors was shot for forgetting one silver spoon in his house.

Most of the experiences Kellen described are gruesome and graphic; however, he made it his obligation to inform the younger generations that the Holocaust was an event that happened and must not be repeated.

Kellen and his wife had suffered from the Holocaust but also suffered remembering it. Another tragedy was the passing of their nephew. Even though they did not have any children of their own, they raised Jerry as their son. Gladstein mentioned in her interview that the Kellens had adopted a troubled child named Shaul Yannai from Israel. Kellen raised him and led him to attend the University of Texas at Austin. Shaul was later deported back to Israel, where he lives with his wife.

In 1983, Kellen retired from his business, the same year his wife Julia died. According to Gladstein and Cohen, Kellen asked the El Paso Jewish Federation for space in the Jewish Community Center to display some of the books and personal effects related to the Holocaust that he had collected. Soon his collection spilled over from one wall of the conference room to other areas of the room. Word got out and the numbers of visitors grew as Kellen began inviting schools, churches and the military to learn about the Holocaust. Thus, the first Holocaust museum was born in 1984.

Kellen decided he would search for more evidence of the Holocaust. In 1989, he flew to Poland to find memorabilia from the camps in Europe. Most of the camps were burned down by the Germans in order to erase all evidence, but “the most notorious camps, Auschwitz and Maidanek, survived,” he told Ellowitz. Kellen returned with “important memorabilia.”

Little by little, Kellen’s collection grew and the room gained more visitors each time he added something. By coincidence, as Kellen mentioned to Ellowitz, he came upon a Torah that was hidden by a Polish farmer. Apparently, a Jewish family in Warsaw asked the farmer in order to take care of it while they were in the camps, but they never went back for it. The same Torah is currently at the El Paso Holocaust Museum.

Such were the contributions Kellen was given that helped him in the creation of his first museum, which lasted for about 10 years. In those years, Kellen was surprised to have so many visitors in the limited space. People had to sit on the floor and on the conference table.

Kellen called upon Sylvia Deener Cohen, the senior adult director at the Jewish Community Center. Cohen and Kellen had known each other before since both of them had worked at Emil Reisel’s Rio Grande Sales Company, according to the book El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center. “By the time the El Paso Museum and Holocaust Center moved from its single conference room into a freestanding building in 1994, Sylvia Cohen had become its executive director.”

In the spring of 1994, the second museum was opened thanks to the generous donation of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Rosenbaum. Located at 401 Wallenberg Street, next door to the Jewish Community Center, this museum had a variety of daily visitors and grew quickly.

In an El Paso Times article titled “Holocaust Museum Continues to Expand,” Erika Witzke wrote that there was “additional audio expansion to the gassing area and oven-sight displays, replicas of the ‘showers’ and ovens in which millions of ‘undesirables’ were exterminated.” The museum even had a model of a train car used to transport camp prisoners from one place to another. And now it had realistic sound effects. Among the items Kellen had collected in his two trips to Poland were children’s shoes, human hair and shower heads.

The museum also contained many donated items from El Paso Holocaust survivors such as photos, clothing and the Torah that had been preserved by the farmer. Over 4,000 students visited the museum in the first year it opened, according to Witzke. By the end of 2001, more than 25,000 students were visiting the museum annually and there was still a waiting list. The new museum had its share of volunteers, some of whom were Holocaust survivors, and others who were recruited by Cohen to be docents of the museum.

An interesting feature of the second El Paso Holocaust Museum was that it was designed to resemble a bunker. An image of the museum is shown in the book by Gladstein and Cohen. Another unique characteristic of the original building was that there was a small outdoor garden of cypress trees in honor of the Righteous Among the Nations, referring to a title bestowed by the state of Israel on non-Jews who rescued or helped Jews survive during the Holocaust, despite the danger to their own lives.

In her interview with Hernandez, Gladstein explained that she had joined the Jewish Community Committee in order to help Kellen, who wanted to place the Urbonas family in the Righteous Among the Nations. Gladstein and her sister put together the extensive documentation necessary to have the family registered in the Righteous Among the Nations.

As Kellen became more involved with the museum, he was asked to make presentations at several schools. According to an article in the March 2008 issue of The Jewish Voice, Kellen made presentations at Cochise College in Douglas, Ariz., New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, Western University in Silver City and also at the University of Texas at El Paso. “I was even invited once to be a guest speaker of Remembrance Day to the Jewish Community of Albuquerque,” added Kellen.

Even though he was doing great things with the museum, Kellen still had sleepless nights. “My mind was constantly occupied with the question which has no answer, How [did] the perpetrators murder one and a half million precious Jewish children? Our children who might have been the future of the Jewish people …” Kellen said to Ellowitz. A question that indeed did not have an answer and at times caused him to question God in a way resulted in being one of his motivations to educate the public, especially children.

The museum was a remarkable place for local El Pasoans and out-of-towners to visit. But seven years after its opening the second museum burned down. “An electrical fire … wiped out 80 percent of the collection, forcing the collection to go mobile, traveling to area schools with mobile classrooms.”

It was not the time to give up, though. Kellen and supporters of the museum made it their ultimate goal to raise funds for another museum. Thanks to the efforts put forth by the community of El Paso and Henry Kellen’s determination, a new 5,000-square foot Holocaust Museum was built and opened on Jan. 27, 2008, in downtown El Paso. With its new location at 715 North Oregon Street, the museum was ready to bring in more visitors than ever.

Many of the displays were damaged or destroyed in the aforementioned fire, so a new museum had to be designed. However, there are a few items that survived the fire and can be seen at the present museum. The museum’s purpose is to teach the “Lessons of the Holocaust.” The museum’s tour is “a continuing effort to combat the ignorance, hatred, fear and the malevolent attitudes that made the horrors of the Holocaust possible,” according to Gladstein and Cohen.

With a new building and 4,100-square feet of exhibit space, the museum has a modern twist to its designs. The new galleries, videos and exhibits were developed by Mireles Creative, Inc., directed by Victor Mireles, the lead designer of the museum. Topics of permanent exhibits range from “Life in Europe Before the Nazis” to “Kristallnacht” to “Life in the Ghettos” to “Transportation of Railcars to Camps” to “Liberation by Allied Forces,” and several others. All materials in the museum’s galleries are in both English and Spanish.

In addition to exhibit space, the building consists of staff offices, a gift shop, a more spacious and welcoming entrance and space for future exhibits. Unfortunately, there is not enough space on the property for the garden the second museum had. However, a mural honors the Righteous Among the Nations. It includes pictures and brief descriptions of experiences from people of many countries against a background of cypress trees.

Kellen said in an article that the main purpose for creating the museum was to commemorate his family and the rest who were not as fortunate as he to have survived the Holocaust. He also wanted to fight the claims that the Holocaust never occurred.

Kellen and his wife had suffered from the Holocaust and to have had the privilege to teach others about his story and the historic catastrophe. Another auspicious event for Kellen was to have found the Urbonas family. He described in an El Paso Times article how he had for years been looking for the Urbonas family to thank them. According to the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous website, Andrius Urbonas and his wife died in 1973. Jozuca died in 2009. However, Kellen was able to meet with Oma, along with fellow survivor Yerachmiel Siniuk. Later, Kellen also met a granddaughter of the couple who saved him, Virginia, who married El Pasoan Barry Mann.

Survivors of the Holocaust were liberated by Allied military troops. These “Liberators” were the soldiers who freed those in the concentration camps and they are honored as well with a mural in the El Paso Holocaust Museum. According to Gladstein and Cohen, the Museum’s first president, Albert Schwartz, former mayor Peter de Wetter and local artist Ernesto Martinez were local Liberators and are commemorated on a museum wall.

The final gallery includes a sanctuary and an area for meditation. This includes the Tree of Life sculpture, a photomontage of Anne Frank and memorial plaques. The memorial plaques contain words of wisdom from
at the University of Texas at El Paso, Dr. Garry Hawkins and John Whitacre, inspected and analyzed the vapor system in the test car. Hawkins said that Ogle’s system was “sound and feasible,” according to a May 4, 1977 *El Paso Times* article by Jones.

The engineers made sure there were no hidden fuel compartments. Hawkins further said that Ogle’s fuel system, “has achieved what was intended for the stem evaporator, to operate on fumes.” He added that problems with stalling-out could be fixed with “engineering refinement.” In response to the question why the system had not been developed before, Whitacre said, “Everybody’s been trying to make the carburetor work better.” A by-product of the system was clean emissions, an environmental concern that became important in the 1970s.

Jones wrote in the *El Paso Times* on Aug. 2, 1977, that Ogle had obtained a patent pending number on his system. While waiting for the patent, Ogle continued to refine the system and resumed independent testing. A computer test at Casa Ford showed that the device produced emissions cleaner than El Paso’s air, according to Jones. Ogle and Peck became partners and several other individuals, including two local automobile dealers, also provided funds for Ogle’s research and testing. Attorneys began work on an agreement between Ogle and his backers regarding possible royalties if the device were to reach the market.

The U.S. was in the middle of an energy crisis when the Oglemobile appeared, and many corporations, including at least one oil company and two car manufacturers, and even the U.S. Air Force expressed interest in buying Ogle’s device. On June 22, 1978, the *El Paso Herald-Post* announced “Ogle Sells Rights to a Gas-Saving Device.” According to the article, Advanced Fuel Systems Inc. (AFS), a company in Washington state, had bought the manufacturing and marketing rights. The contract specified Ogle would receive an unspecified amount of advance money, 100,000 shares of AFS stock, six percent royalty on sales of each device, a monthly salary and the right to visit AFS, stated reporter Doug Lenzini.

About two months later, the Securities Exchange Commission filed a complaint against AFS as speculation. AFS’s “claims of inventing ‘Ogle’” also by Lenzini. The SEC charged that the Seattle company had violated provisions of the federal securities laws. Ogle and his backers became further entangled with legalities. Meanwhile, Ogle went ahead with plans to open a chain of computerized diagnostic centers and opened the first (and only) one in Northeast El Paso in April 1979. Before the end of the year, Ogle apparently had closed the site and the phone had been disconnected, according to a Feb. 24, 1980 *El Paso Times* article by Laura Hlavach. Ogle was hard to find.

In May 1980, the IRS came looking for Ogle, claiming that he owed more than $20,000 in back taxes. Ogle apparently had begun living the high life soon after selling the rights to his invention, including riding around in a custom-made limousine with all the perks. In April 1981, news about Ogle began to surface once more. *Times* writers Laura Hlavach and Patricia Tatum reported that Ogle had suffered a gunshot wound in his stomach near a bar in Northeast El Paso. No one was ever charged in the shooting, but police for some reason had officers guarding his hospital room.

Hlavach and Tatum reported that in other incidents, Ogle was arrested for reckless driving and for having an illegal firearm. In addition, he had sued a man to whom Ogle said he had been forced to sign over 22% of his royalties in order to pay debts acquired in losing a string of pool games, according to a June 20, 1981 *El Paso Times* article by Jeannie Kever. Ogle’s lawyer, Bobby Perel, described his client as a “26-year-old kid, a free target for anybody. … He’s scared of … a whole group of gamblers and others, just fleecing Ogle, getting him drunk and taking advantage of him,” according to Kever.

On Aug. 19, 1981, the 26-year-old Tom Ogle died of what medical examiners said was an alcohol and tranquilizer overdose. After his death, Ogle and his wife Monika won the right to oversee AFS, stated reporter Doug Lenzini.

*Note: Drimmer and one Missouri doctor, who never met Jake, claimed Jake was only 7 feet, 7½ inches tall. Dozens of other sources agree that Jake was 8 feet, 6 inches tall.*
Mysterious Deaths:

Bobby Fuller, Rock Icon
By Rubi Luna, Isabel Hernandez and Ruth Vise

Over the years, the public has seen numerous deaths of those in their prime in the music industry. Artists and musicians are no strangers to addiction, suicide or murder. It has happened to hundreds like Janis Joplin who overdosed on heroin and John Lennon who was shot to death by a crazed fan.

But there is one among other famous individuals whose death has proved enigmatic. Bobby Fuller was a young El Paso musician whose life and career were cut short. Whether it was suicide or murder, the cause of Bobby Fuller’s death remains a mystery.

Robert Gaston Fuller was born on Oct. 22, 1942, in Goose Creek, Texas, according to the Handbook of Texas Online. Shortly after his birth, the family moved to Utah. His parents, Lawson and Loraine Fuller, had a younger son named Randy and Loraine’s son from her previous marriage, Jack Leftlar. During his childhood, Bobby Fuller learned to play the drums, piano and the trumpet while his brother Randy learned the guitar and trombone.

When Bobby was 14, his father was offered a job with the El Paso Natural Gas Company. Taking advantage of the opportunity, the family moved to El Paso and lived on 9509 Album Street. After graduating from Burges High School, Fuller enrolled in college. Randy was sent to military school, “in an attempt to steer him away from the path taken by brother Jack” who had some criminal history, according to a detailed web article on Bobby Fuller by writer and musician Aaron Poehler.

Dave Marsh, a music critic, notes that Bobby Fuller wished to major in music; however, he realized that “school wasn’t for him and stopped going to his classes before mid-terms.” According to Marsh, Bobby’s parents attempted to persuade their son to continue his education, but Fuller was determined to succeed with his music.

Poehler wrote that Bobby’s half-brother, Jack Leftlar, was murdered. His body was found on Feb. 22, 1961. It is believed his death was due to the criminal connections he had.

The death of his half-brother hit Bobby hard; however, this is what led Bobby to pursue his musical career with greater intensity. “He had already attracted attention around El Paso as a drummer, but was working diligently on his songwriting, striking up a collaborative partnership with lyricist Mary Stone, a friend’s mother,” wrote Poehler.

Fuller decided he wanted to start recording music and with his family’s financial support, he was able to start his own record label, Exeter Records. In addition, he started a local club for all ages to hang out called “Bobby Fuller’s Teen Rendezvous” on Dyer Street, according to Bernadette Self in a 1996 El Paso Times article.

With Randy gone, Bobby taught himself to play the guitar in order to increase his musicality. When his brother Randy came back from military school, he was impressed with Bobby’s work. With Randy back, the brothers were able to record two tracks which aired on local radio on Thanksgiving 1961. The all-ages club increased activity with his record label. In 1964, Exeter Records recorded three singles including “I Fought the Law,” first recorded by the Crickets, the late Buddy Holly’s band (Holly died in February 1959) and written by Cricket Sonny Curtis. Although the Crickets’ own version was not a hit and was rarely, if ever, played in public, the cover by Bobby Fuller and his band established Fuller as a regional star.

According to Poehler’s article “The Strange Case of Bobby Fuller,” Bobby was never satisfied and on one of his tours to California to promote his music, he met Bob Keane of Del-Fi Records. Keane was famous for discovering Ritchie Valens in the late 1950s (Valens, whose real name was Richard Steven Valenzuela, died in the same plane crash as Holly). Fuller made an impression on Bob Keane at the time, but he did not feel the group was ready for the big time.

In 1964, the Teen Rendezvous in El Paso burned down, according to the Handbook of Texas Online, and the band decided to move to Los Angeles in November. The Bobby Fuller Four, as the band was now known, consisted of Jim Reese as the rhythm guitarist, Dewayne Quirico on drums (replacing Dalton Powell), Randy Fuller playing the bass guitar and Bobby as the lead singer and guitarist.

This time, Bob Keane signed the group, and they were soon playing in clubs around Southern California. Rapidly, the band became known by young people who frequented the clubs and music scouts like Phil Spector.

The Bobby Fuller Four began recording tracks which established them as more than a regional success. The first hit was “Let Her Dance” in 1965. Then the group re-recorded “I Fought the Law” also in 1965 for Mustang

Tom Ogle, Inventor
By Cynthia Cuevas, Isabel Hernandez and Ruth Vise

Technology used in the automobile has advanced tremendously over the century, allowing vehicles not only to provide a comfortable and relaxing drive but also to save on gasoline. Today, many automobiles are run by electricity or other alternative fuel sources.

About 40 years ago, a young El Pasoan developed an astounding system for fuel efficiency to be used in any automobile. Even though Tom Ogle was not the first to think of the basic idea, his device did have unique differences that simplified his invention. Tom Ogle created a vaporized fuel system which allowed a car to travel over 200 miles on two gallons of gas. He decided to follow through with his invention, even though it led to many conflicts, and perhaps even his untimely death.

Thomas Venor Wolfgang Peter Dinglestaedt Ogle, like many other inventors, started his invention by being curious. According to the article “Auto Gas Fume Invention May Save US” in The El Paso Journal by William C. McGaw, Ogle was born in Pirmasens, Germany. His parents, Hans and Helga Venor Dinglestaedt, had three children: Tom, Kurt and Ralph. Hans, an electrical engineer who was described as “a brilliant, inventive man—a near genius” by his mother-in-law, left Helga while the boys were still young and the couple divorced.

According to McGaw, Helga met Lieutenant Clarence Ogle, an American soldier stationed in Pirmasens, Clarence proposed and Helga agreed to marry the soldier only if he adopted her children, which he did. Returning to the United States, the military family was stationed in Oklahoma and then El Paso.

Ogle earned a graduate equivalency degree at Irving High School, according to El Paso Times article “Tom Ogle Wants His Invention to Help People” by Gregory Jones, who wrote extensively on the inventor for the Times. Ogle explained to Jones that he had constantly been repairing home appliances, fiddling with combustion engines and even fixing a truck at the age of 10. He also attended an automotive trade school for three years in Morgantown, W. Va., according to McGaw.

In the El Paso Times article “EP Fuel Systems Inventor Claims 160 Miles a Gallon,” Jones reported that Ogle had attempted to replace windshield wipers with pressurized air but failed. In 1971, Ogle moved on to a four stroke lawn mower. That is when he discovered something incredible. Ogle stated in the article that while working with the mower, he accidently punctured the fuel tank.

According to Jones, Ogle removed the carburetor from the mower, out of curiosity, and placed a hose that connected the fuel tank to the carburetor intake jet, allowing the mower to run off gasoline vapors. He claimed that the mower ran for 96 hours.

Ogle began to experiment with the same process in a car, failing in several attempts to convert the basic idea into a device that would work in ordinary cars. Jones wrote that Ogle finally succeeded in converting one of his own cars, a 1972 Thunderbird, and racked continued on page 14
El Paso Connections

Ambroise Bierce, Writer
By Robert Yarbrough

One of the most famous American disappearances, as noted by Time magazine, concerns the American author Ambroise Bierce, an author of exceeding popularity between 1880 and 1910. Bierce supposedly disappeared into Mexico and the Mexican Revolution during the end of 1913 or the beginning of 1914. According to the experts writing his biography after his disappearance, he was last seen in the United States in El Paso, Texas.

He was born in a log cabin in rural Ohio (he would later describe his parents as “unwashed savages”). At the age of 15, he became a printer’s apprentice on a small newspaper. He enlisted in the Union Army very early in the Civil War and was quickly promoted to the rank of lieutenant. His experiences in the Civil War would later provide material for his many war and horror stories. According to various sources, he eventually became either a captain or a major in the army.

The army sent him to the West on a military assignment, and he remained in San Francisco. There he started writing for various newspapers, including William Randolph Hearst’s San Francisco Examiner. During his career as a writer, many considered him to be a master of the English language.

Ambroise Bierce was one of the most famous journalists of the 1880s, a short story writer of war and other horror stories, a literary critic, and a bitter cynic and misanthropist. He kept a human skull and a cigar box of (supposedly) an enemy’s ashes on his desk. His contemporaries named him Bitter Bierce with his constant motto, “Nothing matters.” He wrote the often anthologized short story “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” He also wrote the well-known book The Devil’s Dictionary, the entries for some of which were accompanied by humorous pseudonyms.

His definition for DEAD, adj., reads:

Done with the work of breathing; done
With all the world; the mad race run
Though to the end; the golden goal
Attained and found to be a hole!
—Squatol Johnes

Many movies came from both Bierce’s stories and his life. Several versions of “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” were produced, a French version winning both an award from the Cannes Film Festival and an Academy Award and later appearing in the United States as an episode of Twilight Zone.

Several more of his stories became short videos. Bierce himself also provided the principal character of two movies set in Mexico — Carlos Fuentes’ Old Gringo and Robert Rodriguez’s From Dusk till Dawn 3: The Hangman’s Daughter.

Bierce’s statement to the journalists in El Paso, however, is entirely consistent with his characteristic doublespeak throughout his Mexican venture. First he announces that he is going into Mexico, then he qualifies his statement with an ominous reference to his likely fate. When he told the porch sitters at El Paso that he was either going to join Villa’s army or else crawl off into the mountains and die, he might well have been telling the truth.

Ambroise Bierce disappeared during the Mexican Revolution. (File Image)

Nobody ever received any communication from Bierce after that. In 1914, the U. S. State Department searched for Bierce in Mexico. Several articles appeared in American newspapers about Bierce being executed by firing squad in Mexico, but a body was never found.

Eventually, theories grew about Ambroise Bierce. One article in a newspaper placed him in France fighting for the Allies. There was the story of Bierce and a crystal skull. Another story placed him in a South American jungle dressed in animal skins. The possibility of alien abduction was mentioned. Some Bierce biographers suggested a more practical way to disappear — suicide.

Various writers soon after Bierce’s disappearance and even into contemporary times have linked Bierce and El Paso, Texas. Most of the accounts of Bierce’s disappearance mention El Paso. According to the experts nearly a century ago, El Paso was Bierce’s departure place for Mexico and the Mexican Revolution.

Carrey McWilliams wrote in Ambroise Bierce: A Biography, “He proceeded on to El Paso and passed across the line into Juárez.” Paul Fatout, a Bierce scholar of the 1950s, noted, “Later in November the traveler moved on to El Paso, where international relations were so friendly that crossing the border was relatively simple.” Richard O’Connor stated in his Ambrose Bierce biography, “Late in November he finally crossed the border at Ciudad Juárez, across from El Paso.” Roy Morris, in his Bierce biography Alone in Bad Company, observed:

Bierce’s statement to the journalists in El Paso, however, is entirely consistent with his characteristic doublespeak throughout his Mexican venture. First he announces that he is going into Mexico, then he qualifies his statement with an ominous reference to his likely fate. When he told the porch sitters at El Paso that he was either going to join Villa’s army or else crawl off into the mountains and die, he might well have been telling the truth.

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up 60,000 miles powered by the system, getting more than 100 miles to the gallon. This early success motivated Ogle to seek help in further developing his invention which omitted the carburetor and the fuel pump and replaced them with a complicated system of hoses and filters.

Ogle met El Paso businessman James Peck, then owner of Peck’s Automotive Service in Northeast El Paso. Peck granted Ogle access to his shop and provided the necessary equipment for Ogle’s vaporized fuel system experiments, including a 1970 Ford Galaxie.

On April 30, 1977, a Times reporter, the young inventor and his assistant drove the experimental car equipped with the vaporized fuel system to Deming, N.M. The goal: to prove that with his system, a car could travel 200 miles on just two gallons of gas. On that Saturday, the 24-year-old did just that.

In an article entitled “Ogle Fuel System No Hoax,” Jones wrote that before the test drive, “reporters and onlookers witnessed a mechanic at Peck’s empty the special, pressurized gas tank, and pour two gallons of fuel into the tank after it was empty.” The car was also inspected for any hidden fuel but none was found. The inventor had succeeded in taking the 1970 Ford Galaxie, weighing almost 5,000 pounds, on a 205-mile drive on two gallons of gas! The “Oglemobile,” as it was dubbed, put Tom Ogle in the public eye.

On May 18, 1977, The El Paso Journal announced in the article “Ogle’s Gas System Rejected by ERDA Expert, R.W. Hurn” by Burns A. Paca, that the young inventor would get no support from the governmental agency Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) because Hurn reported that Ogle’s system was “not practical.”

Despite Hurn’s report, Ogle continued his research and testing with confidence. Meanwhile, critics consistently surfaced. Robert Levy, an unemployed El Pasoan with a Ph.D. in physics, challenged Ogle based on the laws of thermodynamics. However, two engineers in the mechanical engineering department confirmed Ogle’s claim.

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Records, a Del-Fi label, and the song hit Billboard’s Top 10 music chart soon after its release.

In 1965, the group recorded their first album entitled KRLA King of the Wheels. Poehler wrote, “1966 finally saw the release of a solo Bobby Fuller Four album” called The Law. Del-Fi picked the best songs they thought the group had recorded, and the result was a bombshell with back-to-back songs that surprised and pleased fans and Keane.

According to writer, rock music historian and former Spin magazine editor, Legs McNeil, Nancy Sinatra and Sally Field were often seen at the Bobby Fuller Four’s concerts. The band was even in a movie in 1966 called the Ghost in the Invisible Bikini according to the Handbook of Texas Online.

The success and new music was such a gold mine that Bob Keane booked six weeks of concerts for the band. Not everything went smoothly, however. Poehler quoted Randy Fuller who said, “It was a roller coaster ride . . . once a minute we’d be playing a really great show where everyone loved us and loved our music, and the next would be a total disaster.”

Despite the recognition and popularity being achieved by the young El Pasonos, the tour set up by Bob Keane was not the most pleasant. According to road manager Rick Stone, Bobby had thought of breaking up the band to launch a solo career. After the tour, the band flew back to their apartments in Los Angeles. On July 10, 1966, the Bobby Fuller Four played what would be their last show together, a gig at Casy Kasem’s teen dance show.

On July 18, 1966, the band was to have a meeting, but Bobby never showed up. Dan Epstein wrote in liner notes for the CD entitled The Bobby Fuller Four: Never To Be Forgotten that his brother Randy recalled that Bobby had received a phone call around one or two in the morning. “He still had on his lounging clothes. Always a sharp dresser, Bobby would simply have headed out without sprucing himself up a bit.”

Nobody knew where the young singer went or whom he had gone to see. The only thing the band and his mother Loraine knew was that Bobby was not home. About 5 p.m. on July 18, Loraine went outside to collect the mail and saw something peculiar. She spotted the vehicle Bobby had used when he left at 3 a.m. When she approached the car, she found her son dead lying across the seat. “Gasoline was boiling up in the front seat. A gas hose was nearby. She knew he was dead,” wrote McNeil.

Bobby’s death shocked everyone, not just his mother. In spite of such a tragedy, the family and the public demanded an answer, a person accountable for the situation.

Los Angeles Police concluded that Fuller had committed suicide by asphyxiation. However, close friends and family knew Bobby too well to believe it was suicide.

Bobby’s body was in full rigor mortis, indicating he had been dead for hours. However, no one had seen the car until it was discovered by Fuller’s mother. The official autopsy report read, “deceased, found lying face down in front seat of car—a gas can, 1/3 full, windows rolled up and doors shut—locked—keys in ignition.”

Strangely, Fuller’s skin, hair and clothes were all drenched in gasoline. The body had excessive bruising on the chest and shoulders and the right index finger was broken. Yet the Los Angeles police report read “no evidence of foul play.”

Bobby Fuller was buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Hollywood Hills on July 22, 1966. He was only 23.

There are different theories of Fuller’s cause of death. The theory of alleged murder arose when a Hollywood police officer had, for some inconceivable reason, destroyed crucial evidence at the scene such as the gasoline canister. It was claimed that Bobby Fuller was murdered by a gangster and had a side thing going on with Bobby Fuller. According to this theory, her boyfriend found out about their relationship and Fuller were more than friends and sent people to kill Fuller.

The next theory involves a mysterious woman named Melody. It is said that Melody was dating a low-level gangster and had a side thing going on with Bobby Fuller. According to this theory, her boyfriend found out about their relationship and Fuller were more than friends and sent people to kill Fuller.

Another theory regarding Bobby Fuller’s death involves the drug LSD. The theory is that Fuller had gone to a nearby LSD party and had fallen. Bob Keane told music critic Dan Epstein that someone might have wanted to cover up Fuller’s death so “they poured gasoline down his throat, saturated his hair, and made it look like suicide.”

Bobby Fuller is one of the most prolific and listOf famous people to have died from a drug overdose.

The Bobby Fuller Four’s version of “I Fought the Law” has been covered by the Clash, the British punk rock band, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers and numerous others. Ironically, if Fuller’s version had never been recorded or had not become popular, the song might never have been discovered in the Cricketers’ recordings. Fuller’s song “Let Her Dance” is played at the end of the movie Fantastic Mr. Fox. Another one of Bobby Fuller’s songs called “A New Shade of Blue was used in the 1996 movie Boys Don’t Cry featuring Hilary Swank. Several albums of Fuller’s music have been released over the years following his death and are available in various forms, including vinyl, at Amazon and other sites.

Whether Bobby Fuller’s death was suicide, murder or an accident, no one probably will ever know since the case is sealed under California law. His mother Loraine did not knowing what really happened to her son, while his brother Randy has lived for nearly 50 years wondering about the death of his younger brother.
underprivileged teens and pre-teens on a daily basis,” according to Rahm.

Our Lady’s Youth Center became the core of the South Side and supervisors began to perform social work aggressively out in the neighborhood with the various gangs, attempting to gain their confidence, and turn the gangs into social clubs.

Soon, however, gang-related deaths hit home with a young man dying in Father Rahm’s arms from a stabbing in November 1957. Rahm and OLYC leaders were determined to put a stop to this before the deadly game continued. Father Rahm went public and spoke about the tragic event on local television and newspapers and in personal visits told the gangs that the young man had forgiven his enemies before he had died. This heartbreaking incident led to a way to settle problems among rival gangs.

In a 1957 issue of the Federal Probation Journal, Elizabeth Zinn wrote about Father Rahm’s “Night Court,” established so that gang problems could be settled within the neighborhood between two individuals and not in the jail or the mortuary. Each gang was represented on a council, and gang members themselves became “judges.” Individual warring gang members fought in the boxing ring, with or without gloves, in five three-minute rounds to settle disputes. “He once told gang members that if they were tough, they should fight it out in the ring.” Bernardo Villegas wrote in the El Paso Times.

Lesser punishments were meted out for other infractions. No one could enter Our Lady’s Center if intoxicated, and the entire staff worked to make the plan succeed. It took time, lots of hard work and money, but Father Rahm was able to communicate with the “rejected” and reduce gang violence.

To further teach and bring joy to neighborhood children, Rahm established Camp Juan Diego in the Lower Valley on land donated by the Ivey family. It offered a camp experience for 30 to 50 children weekly, offering arts and crafts and nature activities. At first, the camp consisted only of a “small adobe structure but expanded to included barracks, a recreation room, classrooms and a swimming pool by 1964,” according to the Diocese of El Paso Centennial History.

Rahm was a pilot, and regularly flew to Mexico, bringing food and supplies to the Tarahumaras, even surviving a plane crash. This and the others discussed here are but a few tangible projects and services that Father Rahm, the leaders he trained and the community that helped them brought to fruition in the 12 years he spent in El Paso. His work here was influential, and in 1964, he was transferred to South America and asked to repeat his success in Brazil. Before leaving El Paso, Rahm was told he could ask any priest to take his place; he chose a former student from Florida, Father Richard Thomas. Today the center is located on Paisano and Kansas Streets and is now known as Las Alas, led by Father Jack Vessels.

Father Rahm’s work did not go unnoticed. Religious, political and business leaders as well as El Pasoans from other walks of life participated in a farewell dinner to say good-bye at El Paso County Coliseum on June 20, 1964. The headline in the El Paso Herald-Post said it best: the function was a “King-Size Thank You for King-Size Job.” More than 1,000 attendees paid tribute to the “bicycle priest” according to the Times article “Speakers Pay High Tribute to Father Rahm and Others.”

Federal Judge R. E. Thomason said, “I have never known a man who has contributed more to the youth of this community than Father Rahm … [His] departure will be a great loss to the city and to the cause of reducing juvenile delinquency.”

Since his departure, Father Rahm has returned to visit El Paso several times, where he has been welcomed with love and respect. In 1992, because of his work with gang members, drug addicts and his parishioners in South El Paso, El Paso County renamed Fifth Street, now known as Father Rahm Avenue. City Council proclaimed January 9 Father Harold J. Rahm Day.

“In Brazil I primarily work in the drug world, including, ‘Tough Love.’ I serve on many commissions, both national and international. Our Center is internationally known and considered one of the best in South America,” said Rahm in a recent email interview with Isabel Hernandez. Tough Love is a family rehabilitation program for those who are chemically dependent.

Rahm has been in Brazil for 50 years, working with addicts and the poor. One of his main projects is the center which rehabilitates drug and alcohol addicts in Campinas, São Paolo. He co-founded the Brazilian Father Jack Vessels Foundation in 1990, for alcoholics and drug addicts, and Casa Aberta, a home for street kids. In addition, he developed “Centro Kennedy,” a center similar to Our Lady’s Youth Center, where more than 50,000 teens have been helped.

In the interview, the 95-year-old priest said he wakes up at 4:30 a.m., practices Christian yoga, and holds mass and lectures, along with other activities. He eats dinner with different families, and on weekends teaches various courses in spiritual training or relaxation. It does not appear that this charismatic priest has slowed down.

The Jesuit priest mentioned that he has not visited El Paso recently but has not forgotten the Border City. He said in the interview, “I always try to help the poor and neglected. My story is that it is easy to write about poverty, to live the same requires much grace from God. At times we do not cooperate.”

Father Harold Rahm, S.J. will remain in the hearts and lives of the people of El Paso. He said that the happiest memories he has of El Paso are the result of Our Lady’s Youth Center. Jose Aguilar commented in his interview that “Father Rahm was very charismatic. He would always get his way. Father Rahm at Dinner” by Ramon Villalobos.

EPCC BORDERLANDS

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A young Father Rahm ministered in many ways in South El Paso. Image taken from Office in the Alley. (Courtesy of the Hogg Foundation of the Mental Health)
Bicycle Padre Still Working

By Angelica Nunnery, Ricardo Oseguera, Fernanda Ivonne Orpineda Lugo, Isabel Hernandez and Ruth Vise

Harold Joseph Rahm was born in Tyler, Texas, a small town near San Antonio on Feb. 22, 1919, the third child of Dr. Robert E. and Minnie A. Rahm. In his book This Terrible Jesuit (2009), Rahm explained that his mother consecrated his life to the Virgin Mary when she suffered from diphtheria while pregnant and promised Mary that if the Rahms were blessed with a healthy son, he would become a priest.

When his parents divorced, Minnie became the sole provider for her six children. Harold Rahm would see his alcoholic father again only on his death bed. His father would become the future priest’s “patron of alcohol.”

His mother taught him to love nature, and he spent nights in a little log cabin she had built in the backyard. Rahm grew up like other boys, playing, riding horses, participating in sports. In high school, he took the tough classes while he and his friends went to parties, roller-skated, danced, took girls out for rides. His plan was to become a doctor.

He went to church mainly because his mother made him, but during one Christmas midnight mass, he “sensed the glory of God.” Later, in his log cabin he was inspired to consider the priesthood one night while he gazed at the moon.

Although underage, he joined the Texas National Guard, and during a short break on maneuvers, his truck parked in front of a bookstore in a small town, Harold ran in asking for a book “about God.” The saleslady brought him a book by a Jesuit priest and when he asked the price, he was informed it was part of a set. He bought the set, and a new plan for his life began to take hold. A short time later, he was at Saint John’s Seminary in San Antonio, where he realized he wanted to become a Jesuit. Jesuits are well known for education and the social apostolate. On Sept. 27, 1540, Pope Adrian VI appointed Ignatius of Loyola and others to preach the social apostolate. On Sept. 27, 1540, Pope Adrian VI appointed Ignatius of Loyola and others to preach

just before midnight on July 12, 1952, Father Rahm arrived in El Paso as the assistant pastor at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, located at 602 South Oregon St. No one met him at the train, and he took a cab to the rectory. There he met Father Robert Gafford who welcomed him warmly, yet the young priest was sad in his new home. Father Rahm wrote in This Terrible Jesuit that he found it hard to thank God that night. “My room and mattress were not only worn, but very hot. There was no fan. I had studied Spanish, … yet as a result of hearing loss, I had not made much progress.”

The next morning he began to explore his new home, where many people lived in dilapidated apartment buildings with no hot water or electricity and few bathrooms. During his first week, Rahm began to meet the residents. The second week he decided to purchase a bicycle in order to meet more families in the neighborhood. In This Terrible Jesuit, Rahm explained, “By walking I could contact some fifty people daily. On a bicycle I could visit a hundred.”

He soon recognized that the area, including a large immigrant population, had many social and economic problems, resulting from dire poverty and neglect. When Father Robert Gafford was later appointed Superior, he told Father Rahm that he would be responsible for work in the streets while Gafford would take care of duties inside church walls. Thus, Father Rahm spent his days in the Segundo Barrio, known in English as the Second Ward, an electoral division, attempting to help his parishioners with their needs. Their difficulties became his. He joined in street football games, attended weddings and birthday gatherings and became part of the daily lives of Segundo Barrio residents. Sometimes he celebrated mass in backyards in order to reach those who were unable to attend church.

Noting there was little for young people to do on the streets besides get into trouble, Father Rahm worked with others in the community to develop a club for teens, which became Our Lady’s Youth Center, opening on Oct. 1, 1953, in the Sacred Heart School yard. The organization was devoted to providing youth of any age a safe haven from the physical and moral dangers around them. Father Rahm realized that his parish was divided in half by different ruling gangs, and violence and drugs threatened to destroy the youth.

As he rode his bicycle one day, he stopped to ask a teenager where to find a man that could help with athletics. The boy mentioned Ventura Irobali, known as Tula, celebrated locally for his basketball career at Texas Western College. Tula began helping the priest one Saturday morning a week but soon joined Father Rahm in his work after seeing the large number of children who showed up to play various sports. City Recreation Director Robert Shipp helped furnish the sports equipment the programs needed and hired Tula as an evening recreation director, in addition to his day job with Southern Pacific.

According to a personal interview by Isabel Hernandez with Jose Aguilar, who worked closely with Father Rahm for 10 or 12 years and went on to become a community leader and Director of Project Bravo in El Paso, the hard working priest had noticed an old deserted building owned by the Knights of Columbus. The group gave him use of the first floor and basement, but because the building had not been used for 20 years, it had no window panes or electricity, floors were rotted out, plumbing needed replacing and there was trash everywhere.

Father Rahm had learned to use his considerable skills of persuasion to get businessmen, Catholic or