

Paul Hinojosa

Layton, UT

An Interview by

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LAYTON HISTORY COLLECTION

Verdeland Park Oral History Project

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**Layton City
and
Heritage Museum of Layton**

**GOOD MORNING, MY NAME IS TORI FAIRBANKS, AND TODAY IS WEDNESDAY,
NOVEMBER 20TH, 2024. JOINING ME TODAY IS PAUL HINOJOSA, AND I'M
INTERVIEWING HIM FOR THE VERDELAND PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.
AND WE ARE AT THE LAYTON HERITAGE MUSEUM IN LAYTON, UTAH**

TF: Before we begin, I just want to be sure I have your okay to record.

PH: Yes.

TF: Okay. You've written some notes you want to share, so I'll let you take it away.

PH: Well, I've been working on my history, and looking at your questions, I think I answered almost everything you needed. I hope to publish my history for my family soon, and it'll cover my entire life; but right now, I'm just going to talk about my life through my time Verdeland Park.

TF: Great, that sounds good.

PH: My name is Paul Hinojosa Jr. I have an alias—it's Paul, middle initial "A", Hinojosa, and there's a long story behind that. In the Hispanic culture, people assume the maiden name of the mother as their middle name. So, that's what I did. My mother's maiden name was Aguayo, so that's where my middle name comes from.

I was born on May 25th, 1952, in San Antonio, Texas. I was born there because my mother and father—who started out living in Sunnyside, Utah, where my father was a coal miner—lost two children before me, so they were very apprehensive about my mom's pregnancy with me. So, they decided to move to San Antonio, where my mother could have me in a bigger city, with a larger hospital than Sunnyside. There wasn't really a clinic there, although I think there was a smaller clinic in the adjacent town called Dragerton.

TF: Was Sunnyside in Emery County, close to Price?

PH: Yeah, it was close to Price.

TF: What were your parents' full names?

PH: My father's name was Paul DeLeon Hinojosa, and my mother's name was Lupe Aguayo.

They got married early. My mom was 14, and my father was maybe 22. But anyway, they returned to Sunnyside maybe six months after I was born, and they lived there for a couple more years. I also had a sister named Alice who was born in Dragerton, UT, in September 1953. And sometime after she was born—I'm not really sure when—we moved to Layton, where my dad got a job at Hill Air Force Base.

My family told me that my father moved up first, and he started working at Hill, then my mom and I moved here afterwards and lived in Sahara Village. We moved there temporarily until we moved to Verdeland Park. I'm not exactly sure when that happened, but it had to have been sometime between September 1953 and May 1954, so I was about two years old. And my youngest sister, Helen, was born November 3rd, 1954, in St. Benedict's Hospital in Ogden.

In those days, the nearest hospital to Layton was in Ogden, so it was quite a [distance] to go to have a baby. But my mother passed away two years later in 1957, when I was four and a half. But going back a little bit, my father worked at Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio when my mom was pregnant with me. He had dropped out of high school early and joined the Army when he was 18. He served from 1945 until he was discharged in February 1947. I think he was discharged in Campbell, California after he served as a supply clerk in Tokigawa, Japan, and I think his experience with supply helped him get a job at Hill; but I know that without a high school education, he pretty much started at the bottom, as a GS-4 or something. However, he eventually retire from Hill Air Force Base in 1988 as a GS-12.

But some things I remember about Verdeland Park: I vaguely remember moving there. Again, I was only about two years old; but we lived in H-3, and it was a two-bedroom unit. I think all of the units were equipped very similarly, and they all looked like trailers. But my dad had one bedroom, and my sisters and I had the other bedroom. My dad was a single father, so my aunts on my mother's side came up quite a bit to help. And I lived in Verdeland Park from the time I was three until I was in sixth grade. Then we moved to Vae View. My father remarried Marlene Hinchcliff in December 1962.

My father had a near-death car accident at the overpass at Lagoon. He had owned a restaurant in Salt Lake City—I think it was called La Casa Grande—so he was working all the time. But he was coming home one afternoon—I think it was, like, five o'clock—and he hit the overpass going about 55 miles an hour. So, he was in a full body cast for about nine months, and I think that was the main reason he married my step mom, so she could help care for my sisters and I. She had three boys of her own, whom my father adopted: John, Monty, and Bruce. That was in 1962, and we left in 1964; so, they had a couple of years in Verdeland Park.

TF: Was it difficult when you combined your two families?

PH: It was easier for the younger boys. They were, like, four, but the older one was just a year younger than me, like my sister Alice, so that was a little harder adjustment for him. But we made it work. But we needed a bigger place, obviously. So, we moved from H-3 to J-7, which was a three bedroom unit, but it wasn't much bigger. They were mostly the same size houses—I think they just made the master bedroom smaller and added another bedroom. So, us four boys were in a really small bedroom with two bunk beds, my sisters were sharing a room, and then my stepmom and dad were in the other room.

I can't remember how small our room was, but I think with the two bunk beds in there, there was barely enough room to walk in the middle. I'm still not sure how we did that, but we did.

I remember not having a refrigerator when we first moved in. We had an icebox, and I remember when an ice man would deliver blocks of ice. And I remember my mom's washing machine. It had a roller on it, and my mom would bring out the clothes, wash them, then hang them up on the clothesline. And everybody did that—everybody in the neighborhood had their clothes hanging on clotheslines. We had no electric driers, obviously, and we didn't have a TV. Life was pretty simple.

Being as young as I was, I didn't know much about my neighbors. Later, as I got older and was in school, I made some friends; but what I do remember is that each court in Verdeland Park was like a horseshoe, and it seemed like the space in the middle of each court was huge. And those central areas were places for us to play. And the other big thing for us was playing down at the end of the court in Kays Creek. We called it The Hollow. I didn't even know it was Kays Creek until I was an adult. But playing in The Hollow was another focal point for us in our growing up years.

The next category I have written down is going to school. I attended Layton Elementary School first through fourth grade, and it was just a very small, cinder block building. In fact, I think first through third was in the main building, and then in fourth grade, we were in, like, the end part of the city hall building. Then for fifth grade, we crossed The Hollow. There was a trail that went up and over to Central Davis Junior High, and we had our class down in the basement of the junior high.

We would have recess just like the elementary school, but we would go to Crestview Elementary across the field. And then for sixth grade, they moved us over to Whitesides Elementary. I believe for kindergarten and first grade, my teacher was Mrs. Dorothy Adams, and my second-grade teacher was Mrs. Booth. I don't remember my third-grade teacher; it might have been Mrs. Booth. But for fourth grade, I had Mr. Mollinette, and my fifth-grade teacher was Mr. Bates. I don't remember my sixth-grade teacher.

TF: If you look on our website, we have some elementary school pictures—mostly from Verdeland Park Elementary, but also some from Layton Elementary.

PH: I have my grade school pictures, I just haven't digitized them. But one of the memories that sticks out to me from elementary school is looking forward to May Day celebrations. We had a May pole that we went around, and we had a May Day where we had races, and prizes, and all that kind of stuff. That was something we always looked forward to.

But I remember that growing up, I always felt like I had a disadvantage to other kids, because I didn't have a mother. Maybe that's my adult self talking, but I realized that there were a lot of things I didn't know growing up in school that forced me to focus a lot more, because everything was new to me. So when people say they grew up in a disadvantaged home, I think that's what they're talking about. I didn't have a parent who read bedtime stories to me, or anything like that. I had no idea what children's fairy tales were.

And to contrast that with my daughter, I read to her constantly at night, and her mom would read to her during the day. So, it was quite different for her growing up. And then there were things like going out to dinner. We never went out when I was growing up, and we never went to anything cultural. A lot of that had to do with the fact that we didn't have a lot of money, and that's just the way things were. We didn't go a lot of places, and my world was really small.

I have another memory of fifth or sixth grade—somewhere around there. That time frame was really pivotal for me, because I started to become interested in science and computers, and I started to read a lot more. I started spending a lot of time at the little library here in Layton. It was down at the end of Wasatch and Gentile. I think now you'd have to cross over the freeway, and it would be off to the right-hand side. I don't know what that white building is now, but it was right there where that white building is.

But I would spend a lot of time there just looking at books and reading. And a couple other important things happened at that time: I discovered the importance of education, and I knew that, given my family background, the only way for me to remove myself out of that situation was to get an education. So, that made me work a little harder at school, and that's when I began to focus on science. Lasers really fascinated me, along with computers. And as it turned out, I went to Weber State and got my undergraduate degree in systems engineering. So, that was an important time in my life.

Another memory that sticks out to me was doing bomb drills in sixth grade. We did two different drills: one was diving under our desks at the ring of the bell, and the other was when the bell rang, we'd see how fast we could run home. So that was an interesting time. At the time, we didn't really understand the impact of those drills, or the reasons why we were doing them.

And then in November 1963, John Kennedy was assassinated, and there was a collective sadness that just came over everybody. I think we were in recess when we learned that he was assassinated, and they dismissed us from school.

TF: So, you were ten or eleven when that happened.

PH: Yeah. It was 1963, so I must have been eleven.

TF: It sounds like there were a lot of really pivotal moments for you during those years when you were ten, eleven, and twelve, like discovering your love of reading and education, then JFK's assassination.

PH: Yeah, and I think growing up in Verdeland Park was pretty special. At that time, Layton was pretty rural. It's hard for some people to imagine that now, because of how much Layton has grown, but this was before they put the freeway in. When I tell people that, it's hard for them to imagine no freeway. Well, when I grew up, we also had no computers. And when I went to college in 1970 and started studying computer science, we had to do punch cards in our programs. We ran them on a computer called an IBM 360, which was 360K. There's nothing like that anymore. So, it was quite different from today, when everybody basically has a computer on their phone.

But as children, I think we all felt very safe. Layton was still big enough that you could explore, and we did. We went to the orchards that were close by. On the other side of the seminary, there was a big orchard, and we'd sneak in there and pick plums, or apples, or whatever. And on the other side of The Hollow, there were just different places to go and explore. But we pretty much kept to the neighborhood and played with the children there. There was Fort Lane, Gentile, and Main Street. We pretty much stayed in that area.

Every once in a while, we would go to Kowley Drug, but most of our times was spent in the neighborhood. And I think it was the same for adults, in the sense that they felt safe, and they felt that their children were safe. They had no hesitation letting us go out to play all day. They didn't have to worry about us. We would play, we would come home for dinner, and then we would go right back outside and stay there until it got dark, and it was time to go home.

My closest friend growing up was Jake Trujillo, and he has since passed. He was one year younger than me, and I think his family lived over in G-Court. But we played together almost all the time. He had an older brother named Floyd, a younger brother named Jesse, and a sister named Chris. Chris would babysit for my father sometimes at night, and after school every once in a while.

But anyway, The Hollow was one of our favorite places to play. I haven't been there in a long time, so I don't know if it's the same, but when I was young, it was pretty thick with trees and things like that, so you could get lost in there. You could hide from other kids, and we often tried to build little hideaways in there. As we got older, some kids got BB guns, and some of the meaner ones would come hunting for us. So, it kind of necessary to find a hiding place in there.

(laughs)

Another thing we did in the summer was we took cardboard boxes and made sleds that we used to slide down the June grass. And there was a nice area to do that right at the end of the H-Court. A bunch of us kids were doing that on one occasion, and I remember feeling my leg being wet. I just assumed it was sweat, so I took a couple more runs, but then I felt it again. It was kind of tickling my leg. So I touched it, and my hand head came up bloody.

So, I made it home and told my dad. He lifted my pant leg, and his facial expression was pretty horrified. So, we went to Tanner Clinic, and they stitched me up. I knew it was pretty serious, because they had to put in internal stitches; the cut went all the way to the bone. Then they put in external stitches to close up the wound. (recording stops, then resumes)

PH: [When I was in the Army], I volunteered to go to Germany. I spent four years there on my first tour, and I retired later.

TF: And what did you retire as?

PH: I retired as a Major.

TF: Is that O4?

PH: Yeah. So, I had a good academic career, I got my degree at Weber State, then I joined the Army and got three master's degrees. I graduated from the Naval War College with a master's degree, and then when I was in Germany, I got another master's degree taking classes at night. For two years, I drove about 100 miles to Heidelberg. And then after I retired from the Army, I got a doctorate degree.

TF: Did the GI Bill cover all of those degrees?

PH: It covered the first three, and my employer covered the last one.

TF: That's good. You mentioned earlier about working on the Lopez farm, and I'm wondering if it's the same farm I've heard about. I heard about a man with the last name of Lopez who raised, like, eighteen different varieties of chiles or peppers.

PH: I wouldn't be surprised.

TF: Do you remember his first name?

PH: I don't.

TF: I want to say his name was Ralph, but his nickname was Rancho.

PH: No, this would have been a different person.

TF: Okay. Well, tell me about the diversity you saw in Layton when you were growing up. That's one of the reasons we're interested in Verdeland Park, because other surrounding areas like Kaysville were pretty homogenous; but certain areas closer to Base, like Clearfield and Layton, were more diverse. Do you remember anything about that?

PH: Yeah, I remember that it was pretty diverse. There were a lot of Hispanic families, and a lot of Black families; but when I went to junior high and my "universe" got bigger, there were

also more white people. And an interesting dynamic for me, and probably the other folks who were non-white, was the LDS church's influence. Most people we got to know as we got older were members of the Church, and that created a different [environment], because they had their own activities, and different things they were involved in. And I just wasn't part of that.

Although going through high school, I dated girls from the church, and I even sang in a choir. And I went to some church services; but it was just different.

But Verdeland Park was interesting, because you're right here, you go to elementary school with the same kids, and you all grow up together. Then you go to junior high and high school together. I still have a lot of friends from that time period, from elementary to high school. But in my mind, I can separate those friendships from others I made later in life. Like in elementary school, I remember meeting a friend, Mike Martinez. He lives up east. And there was Gordon Eckersley, who I think became a school superintendent around here. And I remember Dick Strong from my elementary days. And there was Howard Adams from high school. He and I are still very close friends.

So it's interesting to have those lifelong friends. Those friendships are different than the ones I have with other friends I've met along the way, and that's because I can't replicate some of the memories that I share with other lifelong friends. But I also knew the Nelson kids. They were a Black family we knew from the neighborhood, and they were really good athletes.

TF: Did you grow up with a church background?

PH: I was Catholic.

TF: Did you attend St. Rose of Lima?

PH: I did.

TF: We just talked to a few parish members last week, and they have an entire collection of photos and archives that they have wanted to get digitized. So, we're hoping to make a connection with the Utah Historical Society or Weber State Special Collections, so that we can get all of that digitized for them.

PH: That's interesting. My dad wasn't very religious, but he would go to church on the big days, like Easter Christmas. I was a spiritual as a kid, and I would go to catechism every Wednesday at St. Rose. I would always stop at Kowley Drug to get a Coke and cinnamon sticks. We'd actually soak them in cinnamon. (laughs)

But it was interesting because kids from Clearfield would come down to attend catechism at St. Rose on Wednesdays; but when I was twelve or thirteen, I started playing Babe Ruth baseball, and I played on the St. Rose team. And when I was fourteen, we won the county championship. But I haven't been able to find a news article about that. I've searched newspapers, but I can't find any record of it.

TF: Kristine Murdock, the one who does the Layton History Face Book page, combs through newspapers for everything, so maybe she's found something about it. She knows everything about everything.

Another question I had is whether or not you saw a division between East Layton and West Layton when you were growing up. Or was Layton all pretty cohesive?

PH: You know, we had our own little world here in Verdeland Park, and I really didn't even know about other places in Layton. My world was all here. Every once in a while, we'd venture past Gentile, but not very often, until we lived in Vae View. Then I went to junior high and got to know some people from West Layton. Jamie Alex is a really good friend of mine, [Stacey?] Roberts, and Stella Mann. I think they all lived out in that direction. I think Jamie's father owns a

big property with farmland out there. But she moved to Sacramento. I know Howard was trying to get her to come in for an interview.

TF: That would be great. Well, in terms of diversity, it seems like a lot of people I've talked to said there was a pretty good sense of equality—that most people were pretty equal, and the community was pretty cohesive.

PH: I don't know—I didn't really concern myself with those kinds of things. They didn't really come to mind.

TF: How do you think growing up here in Verdeland Park shaped you as a person?

PH: I don't know. I've never really thought about it. I think it gave me some experiences that I don't think I would have had, living in another place. I think the sense of freedom and security I enjoyed there maybe shaped my ability to set longer-term goals. I know I was driven to succeed because of some of the things that were happening in family. My father's influence actually played a part in that. He was an alcoholic, and experiences like that can drive you away.

So, I was driven to succeed because of that, but my sisters didn't have that experience, so they didn't develop the same drive that I did. So their lives turned out completely different than mine. But also the experience of being able to play outdoors freely, and those types of things—I think that shaped how I interact with my grandkids, for example, and how I think about things. I see them as grandkids. They're not my kids, so I can't parent them like I would if I was their parent.

But I think those things also helped me in the way I parented. I have one daughter, and we have a special relationship. We try to do a lot of things together, and when she was growing up, I tried to give her the same feeling of security and open play that I enjoyed here when I was growing up in Verdeland Park..

TF: That makes sense. What are some of the changes you saw in Layton when you were growing up here?

PH: Well, the biggest one was when they put the freeway in. We were playing in The Hollow one time, and all of a sudden, they started cutting down a humongous oak tree, and it just broke my heart. Even as a kid, it was like, "What's going on here? Why are they cutting down this this humongous tree?" And then with all the construction going on, it was like, "What's happening?" It was really disruptive, and we didn't really understand what was going on.

Of course, they didn't finish the freeway all at once. I think they finished the part from South Layton and down in that direction before they connected it through. But that was probably the biggest change, and I think once that happened, and all the different development came in, and all the commercial stuff starting taking off ... all of that just changed everything. And then when Layton Hills Mall came in with all that traffic ... all of that made the city so much bigger and busier.

Of course, I started feeling that when I moved from Verdeland Park to Vae View, and I saw that there was a bigger world out there. It was interesting coming from Verdeland Park, because like I said, we kept close to home, and our world was really small. Everything was right here, and we didn't really think too much about the outside world. And we lived here during a time when there wasn't a lot of technology; so we were protected that way as well. We were very insulated from a lot of things.

TF: Yeah. And like you said, growing up with that sense of freedom was a big deal. Well, is there anything that we haven't talked about in this interview that you would like to include?

PH: Well, I've given it a lot of thought. I'm glad that the city bought the land Verdeland Park was on from the government—that they were able to save this portion and make it into a full

park. It makes it feel special when I come here to concerts. When I'm waiting in line, and I look over in that direction, I try to picture where H-Court was. I think J-Court was right here. But it's just kind of interesting to remember how life was back then. It's nice. (recording stops)