**Transcription of Interview with Verne**

Place: Popular Community Centre

Date and time: 03 February 2023, starting at 16:30 hrs

Duration: 1:00:38

Additional observation notes: The interview is conducted on the terrace of the popular community centre. I am conducting the interview with Verne because I had an interview with his sister, who told me about the possibility of talking to her brother. At the end of the interview, I walk with him to his house, because he wants to show me that there are flats inside, and also to show me a big bougainvillea in front of his house. After that he gives me a lift to the metro in his taxi. He tells me that he can't walk very well, but he can drive without a problem. He chose his pseudonym because he is an admirer of literature.

Participants: Interviewer [A] ; Verne [V]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: For the record, I thank you again for taking the time to be here with me.

V: Of course, I've wanted to support you for days, but the puppy thing and all that happened to me. I used to throw them away, because I worked in a company, I was a professional graphic arts teacher for 34 years. But I arrived here when I was 16, and I started working when I was 20. I was here in the neighbourhood for four years working hard. And I was, not the eldest, but I was the brother who was in charge of the house. Seeing about the electricity, because before there was no electricity, there was nothing, and we had to suffer.

A: So let's talk a bit about that, if you want to introduce yourself more or less in general, well you already gave me your name, but tell me your age, you told me a bit about what you do, a bit about all that, to introduce yourself in general.

V: Sure, and well, can I give you my full name or just Verne?

A: Well, we already have the name Verne

V: Well, I actually came to the neighbourhood when I was 16 years old, I arrived here when I was 16.

A: And how old are you now?

V: 68. And here I am, I've been moving around and so on.

A: So you arrived more than 50 years ago

V: Yes, I mean the neighbourhood is about 50 years old, 51 years old, but I arrived 6 months earlier.

A: Yes, you were telling me about that, how was it that you arrived earlier?

V: Look, what happened is that we rented, there in Los Reyes, we rented and it happened that, well, my mother had always wanted to have a little house, a little piece of land. And she couldn't pay rent for the rest of her life. And my mother is also alive, she is 92 years old, my blessed mother, who has always been a fighter, an industrious person. She managed to get us ahead, we were 6 siblings and she managed to see how to do it. She was a single mother, she got married, but it didn't work out, and her second husband, my stepfather, wasn't what he should have been, but that helped me because I made the most of it. My eldest brother has passed away, but he also supported me a lot. He was like my father. And I never told him, he passed away, and that pain still remained with me. But in itself, I took care of a lot of things.

A: So from a very young age you took charge of many activities.

V: Of course, yes, well, my three younger brothers. I was the second but because of my height, because I'm a bit short, I'm only 1.60 on my toes, they wouldn't give me a job. So they told me "stay and look after your little brothers, and you take care of everything". And yes, thank God I represented the house, the family.

A: And then you did go to work, you told me that you worked.

V: Until I was 19 or 20, but before that I was here in the neighbourhood, even, what do you call it, suffering because there was nothing. There was nothing, here, how can I tell you? here, in the invasion project and all this. I don't know if you've heard of Avándaro, because that's what they called it, the neighbourhood of Avándaro because they were almost all little houses made of corrugated iron sheeting with cardboard, the famous sheeting of those days.

A: When you arrived before the invasion, were there more people here too?

V: No, no, no, no, here in the whole rocky area (pedregal), if there were 8 families, it was a lot. But you could see it from here, you could see it from far away because there were no houses, there was nothing.

A: You told me that no one wanted to live in these wastelands, that they were useless...

V: They were useless, because there was no water, no electricity, no drainage, there was nothing. But it was nice, it was nice because it was a pedregal. It was a rocky area, just like Ciudad Universitaria, but it was a rough area. That's how it was. When it rained it smelled very nice, like adobe, like wet earth, it was all very nice, all that was part of Santo Domingo in its beginnings.

A: But you say that there were no water or electricity services.

V: No water, no electricity, no drainage, nothing.

A: How were you organised for water back then?

V: Look, for water, here we started to bring it to and from the Ajusco, through the school. Because there were no services, honestly, there were no services at all. Here those who worked would go to Ajusco, there they would pass a truck that would go down there. And all the people walked there, well, my mother and my brothers walked there to catch the truck. And not here, from here you walked to Ajusco, because what is now Aztecas Avenue didn't exist. You walked to Copilco, but on that side because there was nothing, not even a metro. And I tell you, it was beautiful. There is part of the University that is protected as an ecological reserve, that's how it was here. But there was the Pirul tree, the Pirul dominated everything.

A: So those memories are nice memories for you?

V: Yes, because when it rained, it smelled nice when you walked around. And another detail, when there was a match at the CU stadium, it was lit up here, because there were no houses, there was nothing.

A: And then the time came when you say you had to carry water, how did you bring it in, in cans?

V: In cans, with water holders, at the beginning it was with the cans and water holders. The water holder, I don't know if you've heard about it, it's a stick. There was a little tree, the teposal, which had a branch that was strong and the stick was roasted so that it would cook and have more strength. It was peeled and the ends were made like locks so that the little bow would get stuck there.

A: That's where you carried it,

V: Yes, on those branches that were strong.

A: And then with two, like two ropes to tie it up.

V: Two ropes that hung down to tie up the boats, or to have the rope at the height of each person and you held them and carried them on your shoulder.

A: And that was your role?

V: Yes, yes I had to do that

A: And you did it every day?

V: Well, you see, we tried to measure the water, even during the rainy season we collected the water, and how did we collect the rainwater? We would put the slope on one side, and there we would put a pipe or something so that it would fall into a water tank. One of those iron water tanks. And in the rainy season, we filled two or three water tanks. They were for bathing. And the other one we used to carry was for eating, boiling and eating.

A: So the rainy season was more for other activities.

V: Yes, but many times, out of necessity, by boiling it, the water would settle and then it would be very clear upstairs.

A: So you saw when the invasion happened?

V: In fact yes, the invasion, how can I tell you, at that time it was like an anthill, it didn't rest. Especially at night, people hammering, you could see hammering everywhere. Or the people who came by and who were in one place, all that was part of the invasion.

A: What else do you remember from those times of the invasion?

V: Well, how can I tell you, there were, above all, any little place that hadn't been occupied, it was occupied and entire families, possibly entire families arrived. Well, the ones that were very bad, two, three, four, five would arrive. And those who had families but didn't want to live in them, only the couple or the older children would arrive.

A: And then the others arrived?

V: After they started to stabilise a bit, the rest of the family arrived. But first the couple or the older siblings who were apart and looking after the land.

A: So you went from having very few neighbours to having a lot of neighbours overnight?

V: Yes, I even had two thousand five hundred metres by the simple fact that I got in through my mother's compadres. And I had some dogs that helped me look after them. Because before, the dogs were, well, tough. They would jump on anyone they didn't know. So they respected us to a certain extent. And you have your house here, a few streets away, there's a bougainvillea. Well, it's my mother's house. But I tell you, I like my mum's house because it's the result of a lot of effort and hard work. And her house is beautiful, she built it the way she wanted, she didn't look for an architect, she designed it according to her own thoughts. We were the first brick houses here, because to a certain extent we had the advantage that we were not invaders, so we could put in the material. With the permission of the communal land owner who lent us his land, he made us the owner of the little piece of land.

A: And that's the house you still live in?

V: Yes, but then when they got organised, there were those who invaded and all that. I see it as normal, I don't see them as invaders, but as people who needed somewhere to live. So I see it as normal. And others say "oh no, they are invaders". Well, they organised themselves and started to create streets and all that. But they were purely passages, not so much like streets but like pavements, in fact paths to be able to carry water. And I liked all that because there were no divisions. You could cross a piece of land and there was no problem, because everyone respected each other. You passed through the middle of what was going to be that person's land because you know what the fences were like, you could see that with the same stone they were raised about a metre high, like this [he makes a hand gesture to indicate the height], as if to mark their land. But they had an entrance and there you could go to the other side, there was no problem, you could go through. And now that I did it like that, I remember that there was a house that was already made of earthenware, that belonged to the communal land owner.

A: So you say that the neighbours respected each other, was there generally good coexistence?

V: Yes, above all, we all looked after each other. It was very difficult for someone to steal something, why? because we all looked after each other. You would even say to someone, hey, lend me your cans or lend me your water holder because mine broke, and they would say "yes, take it away".

A: Did you ever need to ask for water holders or boats?

V: No, no, because where my mother worked she was the head of an area. There, what do you think, they used cans and drums a lot for everything. So my mother would say to the boss, "Hey, sir, can you sell me those? They would say "how many do you need? one, three, four? I'll give them to you, I'll give you the cans".

And in those days they were alcohol cans. There were hardly any plastic ones. They were alcohol cans, it was a square can that was covered and had an opening in the middle. Then we would uncover it and put a stick in the middle, and with two cork ties we would put one in the middle, which was what was going to be the water holder to hold it together.

A: But any other kind of favour, did you need it from the neighbours?

V: Water. Now that I remember, water, because when we started building we didn't have water or anything like that, so we would ask the communal land owner. We were going to ask her if she would give us some water to drink. And yes, they left us a little jug of water to drink while we were starting here.

A: So how did this water thing progress? First there was the issue of the water holders, but then how did it progress?

V: Well, like everything else, things start to move. But it took us years to get water anyway. My mother told me "oh son, make a cart". And my mother said "oh mother, what do you mean a cart?" "yes look, for my children or my grandchildren". I had bought them a cart and using those big wheels we put it on a board. And there my mother would come carrying her cart, but what could you bring? it moved with all the stones and all that. It jumped and all that. And no, it dumped more than you could bring. But anyway, we carried less and that way we helped ourselves.

A: So the cart was used to fetch the water?

V: But, I'm telling you, actually, but first there were the famous water holders and the water tanks to collect the water.

A: And then later, I imagine, the pipes entered the houses.

V: Well, yes, with time some pipes were put in. But we put these pipes in ourselves, in what way? We cooperated so that we had water pipes, and not so big. I think they brought it from here from the Ajusco neighbourhood, which was a little older than us, and I also remember that I think there was a pipe that ran along Avenida de las Torres. I don't remember very well if there was a pipe and from there I think the government connected us so that we could have water. And everyone here paid for those pipes, we cooperated 50, 100 pesos to buy sections of pipe to put them in here.

A: Yes, it was like you put in part of it and the government put in part of it.

V: Well, yes, or we bought everything.

A: Or you bought everything

V: They already put in the labour, so to speak. Because we can't say, "ah, we stole the water from there". No, that was, in a manner of speaking, legal because the government connected us. We were already going to buy a pipe, the pipe so we could have water. I don't know if you've noticed that where the well was made, there's a tap right next to it. And I think it goes on forever because there is always water in that pipe, there is always water there. So, just like that pipe, all the streets had our pipes.

A: There were taps

V: There were taps, but not inside the houses, outside. I mean, this one, here in the street. In this street or the other street there were four taps. And there wasn't always water, but when there was, we were there. We were there bringing water for the boats, we didn't carry water.

A: And the tap that's next to the well has been there for many years.

V: Yes, yes, that tap has been there for years too. I mean, it's the eternal one because it never runs out of water. There's always water there, I mean, it's eternal because it never runs out. They even wanted to remove it now that the well was put in. They were going to wash a lot of cars and all that. And well, to a certain extent, I mean, they are wasting water. But who doesn't wash their cart? Who doesn't clean?

So, but, like that tap, all the streets had their two or three taps. We were even enemies of someone connecting up to hose it into their house. No, no, no, no, to carry it from here, to carry it. It was already less than going all the way to the school in Ajusco.

And before all this, the government put in water tanks. From this street to the next they put in water tanks. They were about 10,000 litres per water tank, with taps all around them. From there you had to go and carry it, but it was already inside the neighbourhood.

A: It was just from the water tank to here.

V: Yes, but a water truck came to fill it, to fill the water tank.

A: And was it one water tank for everyone or did each family have their own?

V: No, no, no, no, one water tank for the whole neighbourhood. Well, here it was especially close by. Instead of going to Ajusco, to the school, there was a place closer to go to get your water. Even there in the Ajusco, from the ascent to the Ajusco, there were taps that had water. So we would go to fill up closer.

A: So I imagine that as neighbours you also had to more or less come to an agreement about the water, so that you didn't take someone's water.

V: No, well, as always, there are always thugs, unfortunately. But we did respect each other, even so. There were about 10 of us with our cans, waiting for our turn to bring the water. Water is something very, how can I say, very basic in life. We can't live without water.

To be honest, I remember when my little boy, who is now a mechanic, used to cry for water. He would say to my wife "mum, the water has run out", and he would scream and scream because he would say "the water has run out, there is no more water". I mean, my poor son has been suffering for water since he was a little boy. And he was a little boy, now he's 42, 43 years old. But he must have been about 5 years old, when he would cry and say "mum, the water's finished, the water's finished". And I'd say "Oh boy". So you have to work hard because the fact that they've been suffering for water since they were little is a bit hard. Now we have had water, but before the well, water was also very scarce.

A: What was it like when the pipes were already in place, I imagine, but then the water stopped coming?

V: It didn't come. So then if there was, then there wasn't. Like now, just a little while ago. Like now, just a little while ago when we were getting organised, we had water and then we didn't have water, not even by tandeo. Now it was the last thing before the well. And I was alarmed, for fear that they would take away our water. We have to be careful with the well. Because two days ago the water pressure dropped. And I said, "Oh, man, is it going to be the tandeo again? Because the water supply was not very good.

A: Before the well, you were still on the tandeo?

V: Yes, we were in the tandeo.

A: But wasn't that a guarantee that the water would arrive?

V: No, it wasn't very good, because honestly it didn't arrive well sometimes. At a certain time the water level would drop, because the Cutzamala would shut down or they would do maintenance. I hope, and I hope I'm not wrong, that the well is not maintained by Cutzamala, this well is from here. Because a lot of water is born here. And right now I forgot to tell you at the beginning, that there where the street is where those towers are, there is a lot of water. There is even a well called the marsh. And there was always water there in the marsh. And further down there was a quarry, which is now a residential area. I used to go there to fish for little fish. I don't know if they planted them, because it was rare for there to be little fish here in this area. But there was a little lake. It was a quarry, but it had a lake. In other words, there was always water here in the rocky areas. That was one, and the other one is on this side, where in those days the material was supplied and where the asphalt plant is.

There was also a pond there, now there is a market, but there was a lot of water there, that's where I used to go swimming or try to swim. But I liked it there because there were frogs, salamanders, they even say there were snakes. But I was one of those who hung out there. I always liked being lazy, but I wasn't bad at it, exploring, seeing what's here, what's there. I really liked the axolotls, or the toads, seeing their metamorphosis. First they were like little fish, then they had little legs, their tails disappeared and they became toads.

A: even still in Flores Park, you can see where a team trains and there is a lake underneath.

V: Yes, that's how it was in what used to be the quarry and where the assault plant was, there was a lot of water there. Now it is even a market

A: So you say that the well will be taking water from here, from the rocky areas?

V: Yes, I feel that it is from here. Because down here there is a lot of water, here in the rocky areas, a lot of water.

All our water in this area comes from the forests in the hills. That's why I'm worried that people are destroying all that. With deforestation now there are houses instead of forests. And water is an important thing, for me, it is life. Without water we have nothing.

And all that water comes from the forests in the hills. That's why I'm worried that they are destroying all that. With deforestation and all that, now there are already houses instead of forests. And water is an important thing, for me, it is life. Without water we have nothing.

A: Was the lack of water before the well always the same or did it get worse?

V: Well, we always suffered from the water, we always suffered from the water, we never had to say "no, now we are happy". Like now, one of the things that bothered me the most was not having water.

And then if you wanted a water truck you had to wait for who knows what. And they would tell you "there are about two hundred water trucks before you". That's why Waldo organised everyone.

I joined them in 2019, I joined the group. And that was through my sister Monica and my other sister who were the ones who had been contacted first. And my sister told me "come on, it's a struggle for the neighbourhood, let's support it". What bothered me was that at the time, if there were about 100 of us, we would go 20 or 30, more or less. Unfortunately, as I said to Don Beni, the fights are fought by some and benefit everyone.

And that's from now, it's something that has always been in the revolutions and the fights. Always those who are at the front, those who always fight for the people, always benefit those who are behind. And I say, it's not bad, but it's part of things. In the revolution, Pancho Villa and that, they didn't see. Hidalgo, he didn't see who he was going to benefit either. He started his struggle and he died and everything. But now we are all beneficiaries because thanks to them and their struggle we are free.

A: And now he mentions that the struggle for the well benefits the whole neighbourhood.

V: Everyone, those who cooperated and those who didn't cooperate, and supported us. That's precisely why I'm saying that, because there are some of us who fight, as always, and those who benefit are others. But well, they are all the people, the community, that's what I was referring to.

A: So you joined the group because your family told you to?

V: My sister Monica and my other sister invited me.

A: And what did you think about participating in the group?

V: Look, I like all of this, why do I like being like this, always supporting them? Because they are really honest. Mr. Waldo, Mr. Beni, Mrs. Tita, more than anything else it's from the heart, it's a struggle, without any interest. It's not that they want to grab a vote and pull everyone. No, they, don Beni, Raúl, Waldo, and all of them, I have never seen that. There are a lot of people who say "give me money, we have to make a contribution because we are going to go to such and such a place and we need to raise money to be able to transport us". They never asked us for that. And all of that, to me, I feel is clean. And on the day that they ask for a penny to support, they ask them to bring in kind. They ask them to bring rice to support the students of Ayotzinapa, the ones who are coming. And we are cooperating with what we can, with beans, tortillas, water.

And we have to support them, because honestly, I say, how much would a water truck cost us? One thousand, two thousand pesos, one thousand five hundred, a ten thousand litre water truck. Here, just by supporting us, we are benefiting. When we had to give up to one hundred, two hundred pesos, really, if you are paying for a water truck of one thousand five hundred, one thousand three hundred pesos, can't you give one hundred pesos? And there are people who don't want what Waldo said, if there are ten people, one hundred pesos, if there are fifteen, twenty, then ten pesos each. Some say "no, there are only two of us, we'll give twenty". Well, how bad they look, honestly.

A: But have you seen that being in the group has helped you to make achievements or improvements in the water issue?

V: Yes, I am happy. Happy on the one hand and annoyed on the other. Because those who didn't fight, those who didn't struggle, benefit and waste it. I didn't want to fight with them and tell them "do you know why you have water? Because of us".

Because I'm not looking for trouble. And I say, well, well, in the end, the water is perfect, I have my water so that my mother, my sister, who lives with her, and I live next door with my family, can benefit from it. But in itself the benefit is for everyone. At the end of the day, it was a struggle and it was achieved. All the neighbours, Waldo, Martina, Tita. Look, there are women who are very active, who know how to talk and know what they are fighting for. There is also Mrs Sandra who is a fighter. She is a fighter. And I appreciate and support her. These women often know more than I do, and they are brave, they take the plunge without fear. They know a lot, they move, they talk and everything.

A: And did you meet all these people through being in the group or did you know them before?

V: No, and being neighbours. Well, I've been living here for years. And one day I told a neighbour that I've been locked up for 34 years. And she got scared, but I told her, "but working in a company". And she said to me, oh sir, I was about to get out of your taxi.

A: What company did you work for?

V: In a printing company

A: And you were there for 34 years? My mother also worked there for about 38 years. And my sister Bertha was there for about 45 years, she started working there when she was very young, 15 years old. That's why she knows everything about it, and she supported us, she and my mother. I was the one who looked after the house. And I didn't worry about working or anything like that, because I was covered by them, my mum and my sister.

A: Were you able to go to school?

V: Yes, I finished high school, but I've always been like I don't care about anything. I finished high school almost by force. I tell my mum that I have my three diplomas, which are my three children. Because when I was going to get together with my wife to get married, my mother told me, "no, you don't have a job, you don't have anything, and when she has a baby she's going to be chubbier and she won't love you". And I told her "mother, I want a partner, I don't want a woman for Miss Universe or anything like that". And yes, I got married, and I started in the company as a sweeper, because I didn't know anything else, and I didn't like it very much, but my mother was the head of packing. And my mother told the owner, who said "if he's like you, don't even ask me, bring him to me". And we all went to work there. My brother who died, the eldest, also. Monica was the boss of more than 60 people.

A: So you say that because you were there you didn't know so many people here in the neighbourhood?

V: No, no, because I was there. But on the other hand, at the beginning of the neighbourhood, when it was hard, yes, I was here.

A: And in this Water Committee, is this the first group, like a neighbourhood group, that you've been involved in, or had you been in a group like that before?

V: No, look, here with the teacher, [the activist who founded the popular community centre and the Union of Settlers] he represented us. Because I mean, among other things, he represented us because the whole community trusted him and we supported him. We supported them because I know that because of him we have the fixed water quota to a certain extent. Even now I've been saying for one or two years, how am I going to pay if I don't have water? But I'm going to pay because now that there is, now we have to give it.

A: Because you tell me that with the well you feel that the water has already arrived.

V: Yes, there is already change. Not having water always makes me tense. Waiting for a water truck all day long. Hearing the engine of something and saying "here comes the water truck" and no, it's something else.

Now that everything has been paved, right, because before it hardly ever used to happen. Oh, and then add that there were people who used to bring water on donkeys and sell it.

A: Before the water trucks.

V: Much earlier, I'm talking about the beginnings of the neighbourhood, there were people with their donkeys.

A: And it was your turn then, before the well was there, to ask for a water truck when they ran out?

V: Yes, but with the group, to a certain extent you had preference. Up to a certain point, but after that it still didn't arrive, because according to them, they didn't always have water trucks, they were out of order and all that. But honestly, I think that even the Delegation found the well convenient because they don't ask for water trucks anymore. In Ajusco I've seen some that go around delivering water.

A: And before the well, you used to see a lot more of them.

V: No, of course, here you could see them every day on one side or the other.

A: They used to be seen a lot, yes, and now they're seen less often.

V: Yes, there must not be any more, because we all have to have water. It can go away one afternoon, or one night, but in theory not.

A: Because you say that you still have the buckets, like you got into the habit of saving water.

V: Yes, I have. In fact, I take a bath and I have a bucket that I use for the toilet. And I've already connected my bowl, but I still can't get used to it. And it's been years, and it wasn't one or two, it was ten or fifteen years of always saving water. And now in less than two months I can't get out of the habit.

A: And you tell me that when you ran out of water, it made you worry.

V: Not having water always generated nervous tension. That always had me thinking "And now what am I going to do without water?" Thinking about the water truck and waiting until it comes, and in the meantime thinking “what can I do?”

A: And how do you feel when you do have water?

V: I'm relaxed, I'm calm. With the well done, I even say to my wife, "now I think that we're going to have a calmer life". Because something that always worried me was not having water. And now we're going to rest a bit, and not be so nervous. I would even be upset and in a bad mood because there was no water and because I was waiting for the water truck.

And thank God I got a loan from INVI (the city's housing institute) to build. And it's a credit that you pay as rent, however you can pay it. But because I was a good payer, they gave me my solar heater and everything, even a bathroom. Then with the PRD they gave me a water tank, which I complained to the people who were handing out water tanks but not to me. And they gave it to me, thank God they installed the water tank with the pump and everything, but without water, there was no water [laughs].

A: What does water mean to you?

V: Water honestly, for me, is life. It is everything, because without water we are going to succumb. Water is life for me. I feel that if we have water we have everything. We sow, we take care of the plants, it's a beautiful thing.

A: You were telling me a while ago that you also like nature very much.

V: Yes, I have been able to go to the countryside to live, but I haven't done it. I always say "no, I have to work the taxi, I have to be here". And financially, thank God, I'm not too bad because I have my insurance pension.

A: And for you, is caring for water related to caring for nature?

A: Yes, of course, it's all together. I feel that if we don't have nature, we don't have water, why? Because trees attract a lot of humidity, they attract a lot of water. Many years ago I used to go here to Contreras for the dynamos, so how beautiful it was. There was never a lack of water, you could always see the water running beautifully. And I always say that trees pull all that, that's why nature is related to water.

A: And you say that you have seen that deforestation has occurred.

V: A lot, a lot, Cerro del Judío used to look green, now it looks white. Before, you could see everything from here, everything, really. But now everything has been lost. Everything has been changing. But mainly because we don't take care of the water.

A: Do you think that the lack of water is related to the lack of trees?

V: Yes, I repeat, nature and water go hand in hand. Where there is nature, there is water because the plants are there to bring it together. Here, for example, there is a lot of humidity, but for the same reason, because there is water. The stones store a lot of water. Here I had to open the streets and everything. And I used to say, "the stones are crying", but no, they were splitting them and water was coming out of the stones. There was a lot of humidity and it came out. And I said "they're crying because we're breaking them now".

A: It's kept in the little holes in the volcanic stone.

V: Yes, in fact, everything here is volcanic rock, and they form holes, like bubbles in the rocks. I remember that in those days there was a well. It belonged to some neighbours, but they dug to collect the water all the way down. And the water was clean, very pure. Now it was an artisanal well, something small like that, it was the kind of well that you could see with a stick and a bucket. They would lower their bucket and bring it up with water. I don't know if they still have it, I haven't seen the people for a while now. But when they invited me to their house they would show it to me, and it was fresh water, it was pure.

A: Now when there was the issue of the pandemic, were you affected by lack of water?

V: Of course, because they asked for a lot of cleanliness, you have to wash your hands, but if we don't have water, how do you want us to maintain our hygiene? It did affect us. How could it not? Well, we were like this for almost two years without water.

We even saved my sister, thank God, she was dying of COVID. She was dying of COVID. I don't think she was oxygenating more than 40%. And my daughter died, she was a doctor, but she is going to be two years old this May, and she lived in Villahermosa. That's why I don't feel a hundred percent that I'm missing her. She died of a heart attack, but she also had the COVID in Villahermosa.

When I tested myself, it was because I was feeling very tired.

And my granddaughter said to me "hey grandfather, you're not like that, what's wrong with you? do you have money? I said "why?" And she said "they are going to send you for a test, they will come here to the house" and they went and in less than three hours they told me that I had COVID. But in the company where I worked I handled a lot of chemical solvents.

A: The one where you worked for 34 years?

V: There, I started as a sweeper and worked my way up, until I became a master of graphic arts. But I never realised it and I got addicted to ink.

A: It's like your body had already taken to it.

V: It's just that I used ink every day, I had 3 or 4 carafes there. They fired me from there in 2008, because they changed the boss and wanted to move me somewhere else. It wasn't that I was doing my job badly, because I always had the machine well oiled and at 100 per cent. Very little, if anything, broke down. But well, and I put myself on oxygen for 10 years, because when I had tests, I had no oxygen in my blood, I lacked it. And when I underwent tests, they sent me on oxygen for 10 years. Big tanks, every month I had to change it. They took it away two years before I was given COVID. And that helped me a lot, that they put me on oxygen.

A: And you tell me that at that time, apart from all that, they didn't have any water.

V: There wasn't any, the water supply sometimes came and sometimes it didn't. And so we said, "Well, how do you do that? And so we said, "Well, how do they want us to have a lot of hygiene if there's no water?" That was one of the protests we did, we went there to ask for water.

A: You were already with the committee

V: Yes, I was already in the committee. Even when we started to go there, they always said to me "what is going on, don Verne? And I would say "what happened, neighbour", because I'm a senior citizen now. I can't walk 100 per cent now, and I was always very fast, when I was a kid. And life, you take it all, I was a drinker, a womaniser, a night owl, and everything, but I mean, thank God I didn't leave the family or anything like that, I'm here with the family, and I'm setting a good example.

A: And so there you are, in the committee, right, which I imagine has motivated you?

V: Yes, because one time when I had too many drinks and forgot about the meeting, my sister said to me, "You're not going to go? We have a meeting, what haven't you seen on your mobile phone... well, I'm going to tell them that you were sick". "Yes, yes, don't say that I was drunk". But always, when my sister told me to go, I said "come on, come on, it's a social struggle". Or my mum would say "go, mijo, go because if it's good for everyone, you have to put your heart into it". And she is 93 years old

A: And she's also attentive to the meetings.

V: About everything, she's always looking out for them. And I said to her, "Mother, I think we've done it now", and she said "that's good".

A: And now that you have achieved the well, what do you feel is next for the committee, or what would you like to see next?

V: Well, look, I'm still involved in the water group, and we have to go to whatever they ask us to support.

Especially now. Look, before I probably said that I didn't have time, because of work, because I would come in at 7:30 in the morning and leave at 5 or 6 o'clock. But by the time I joined the Committee I was no longer working, they had already fired me. Ah, but my sister was dying, Monica. And I adore her and love her very much. We are five siblings, one is in the United States, he came about three months ago, the animal because I told him "hey, come and see my mother, don't wait until she's in her grave". And yes, he came about 15 days ago. I live next door to my mother, but she gave me 100 metres of land. And my sister Monica, she acts as another mother for us. Out of respect, because thanks to her and my mother we all got ahead. We are good people, more good people than bad people.

A: She was the one who got you involved in the committee as well.

V: She, she, yes, she is the one who pulled me. She would take me to the meetings, or she would tell me when there were meetings too, and she would say "come on mate, let's go".

A: Well, now there haven't been any meetings, since the well has been there.

V: There haven't been any meetings, but we do pay attention. We have to be attentive. As Waldo says, "be attentive" because this can change at any moment. And let's not say that just because Claudia Sheinbaum is here, we won't go, because she is the one who represents the government and if we have to support her, let her see that we have already benefited from the well. The well has not been inaugurated, but it is already working. And many people have said that it was thanks to them that it was done. But it's not true, and we never saw them, they were never fighting with us, and now the politicians want to hang themselves. Many of the politicians say "if you don't support me we don't send you water trucks". It was a political plunder. If you didn't support them, there was no water.

A: So this water issue is also a justice issue?

V: Well, it's a question of not being taken hostage, that if you don't vote for them, there is no water, or if you don't support them there are no water trucks. No, that's all behind us now.

A: To conclude, what has this group meant to you?

V: Well, this group is not really for profit. They have never asked for money for themselves. They ask for money for causes like supporting students. And they don't ask for money, they ask for products. Or that we go and support the man who comes from Guerrero, who is one of the parents of the 43 students.

A: Well, thank you very much, it's very valuable.

V: Of course, and I can talk about those memories and say wow, that's nice.

A: Yes, as you say, you have seen the changes that have taken place here in the neighbourhood.

V: Yes, of course, I honestly never thought that in less than 20 years we would have a house. Close to my house, in the little downhill, there was a cave. And when people came here they would go down there. And I asked myself, when are we going to fill this in? And no, in five years all this had been filled in. That's when the cars started coming in.

A: And now what do you expect for the future?

A: Well, if we don't take care of it, it's going to be hard. We have to take care above all of the water, which is elementary because when there starts to be light, when everything else starts to be in order, there also starts to be a lot of evil. Before, you crossed a piece of land and there was no problem, but you didn't take anything with you either. Now, the houses have just been built and there is crime. It's not like it used to be. Before, they were cardboard houses, you could open them with a knife and get in, but not anymore.

Another thing I tell you about the beginning, well, there were a lot of fires and there was no water to put them out. At the beginning there were many fires, because as there was no electricity, they lit candles, candles and many houses were lit. And many people died, especially children, because they were the ones who couldn't run away, or they fell asleep in the houses. And there was no water to put it out, so we waited for everything to be consumed. And to take out what we could, or the children, there were people who were more concerned about their own things, they didn't want to do anything for the children. But yes, because of the lack of water there were many fires.

A: And in the dry season I imagine it was worse, because there was no water, and in the rainy season even worse.

V: No, and not even the houses have been any good, because before there were dust storms, winds that blew everything up. But they lifted everything, really hard, the sheets, pants and everything, everything flew around in the winds. All that was during the dry season. In my memory I say "wow, those were the days". Nowadays you hardly ever see a windstorm, because the houses help to prevent them. There is wind and all that, but not as disastrous as before. Before there were even whirlwinds, they would kick up all the dust and blow away the houses, the sheets, everything. A roof would blow off and fall about 2 or 3 blocks that way.

But look, I liked the beginning of the neighbourhood because, yes, honestly, we fought hard and worked hard. I tell my children that now it would be difficult for me to start a neighbourhood, I don't have the strength, and I suffer a lot, not anymore. We are talking about water, but electricity was also another problem. And services are needed. But for the electricity, we put up our poles, we bought our wood and we put them in a little cross. But at the end of the day, we have a house to live in. It's been hard work. It took effort and work. But you have to be upbeat and proud and say "we did the best we could". And we did, thanks to everyone, thanks to the unity. We made the streets, not the government. Obviously, we opened everything up, we levelled them and they just came to pave them.

The drainage. There was no drainage, and we did that too. We did that with them because machinery was needed to install it.

A: But the money, as you told me, was also for the pipes.

V: Ah yes, for the water pipes. And they were small pipes, not very big. Many of them we left buried and many of them were removed to sell them. But it was their part, according to them.

A: Well, thank you very much for taking the time for the interview.

V: Sure, you take what you need.