

To: DeLuna Investigation Team
From: Susan Montez
Re: Meeting with Toni Conejo PeZa
Date: July 25, 2004

Antonia Conejo PeZa

[Material that is irrelevant to *Los Tocayos Carlos* and contains sensitive personal information about one or more persons has been removed.]

[material removed]

I met with Toni Conejo PeZa in her home at [material removed], Corpus Christi, TX, on July 20, 2004. Toni is the oldest sister of Carlos DeLuna. These are my impressions.

Toni PeZa is 60 years old but looks younger. She is brown-skinned, and her hair and eyes are very dark brown. Toni's home is a very large, two-story white wood frame house on a large corner lot. The living room is a long rectangle that runs the width of the house. The floor was bare of any rugs and very polished. There were a couple of couches, several chairs, a very large screen TV, and built-in bookcases full of books. Toni's daughter, Belinda, who is 35 and expecting her second child, was present, as well as Belinda's two-year-old daughter and another girl who was five or six years old and is the daughter of Toni's other daughter Diana. [material removed] The little girls were, however, really cute and they made us laugh quite a bit.

Toni's father, who was the father of "the six," (Margarita's first six children) was Francisco Conejo. He was born in Mexico, but Toni did not know where or what year he was born. He worked in construction. Margarita, Toni's mother, and mother of all the

Conejo and DeLuna children, was born on August 1, 1922 in Aransas Pass, Texas. Toni does not know where or when Margarita and Francisco got married. Toni was the second child, born on January 6, 1944. Toni remembered she was three or four years old when her parents divorced. Margarita was pregnant with Becky, the youngest of the six. Toni remembered that Francisco was very loving with the children, but he was abusive to Margarita. She did not think it was because he drank, and she knew her mother did not drink.

Toni remembered her mother worked for HEB, a grocery store chain, and also cleaned houses. She was very strict with the children. Toni said that Margarita was more strict with her original six children than with the three she had later on (Manuel, Carlos and Rose). Toni then said that Rose would probably disagree with that.

Toni thought her mother must have been on her own, after her divorce, for over 10 years. That was from 1947 or 1948 until 1961, when she began living with Joe DeLuna. I asked her what Joe DeLuna was like, and she replied that she did not know him. In 1961, she dropped out of Ray High School in the eleventh grade and got married. Toni and Jose PeZa got married in Holy Family Church. Toni was the only one of the family to get married in church, and Margarita was very happy about it, although it was her dream that all her children would do so. Toni said she later got a GED and went on to attend DelMar Junior College, where she got associate degrees in early childhood development and cosmetology. When she said "cosmetology," Toni covered her face and laughed. Belinda said that Toni had done all the hours of training necessary to get the cosmetology degree, and then never used it. She does, however, know how to cut hair.

The oldest child of Margarita and Francisco Conejo was Vincent. He was a good student who won awards and then graduated from Miller High School. He went into the army at 17 or 18 years old and went to Vietnam. He might have stayed in the army as a career. No one has seen or heard of him in ten years. Toni thought he might be in El Paso. She heard that he had two kids. She was not sure about whether he had changed his name. Danny, the third child of Margarita and Francisco, would know.

Toni said that Mary (Arredondo), Becky (Gutierrez) and Vicky Marquez could tell me more about Carlos growing up, because they took care of him. Toni remembered Carlos as very loveable. He liked football, basketball and riding bikes. She thought he had played on the school football team, but Belinda said it was Manuel who had been on the football team.

Toni remembered when Carlos and Manuel started getting into trouble. Margarita would worry about them and go looking for them when they did not come home. Toni did not remember Carlos using drugs or alcohol. Toni pointed out that she heard about this from Margarita; she did not see it.

Belinda, who was about eight years younger than Carlos, remembered all the cousins getting together at holidays and visits. She remembered Carlos being nice to her but she really didn't play with him because he was so much older. She never saw Carlos using drugs or drinking.

Toni did not remember exactly when Margarita married Blas Avalos. He was three years younger than Margarita, and worked in construction. He was an alcoholic.

Toni found out about Carlos when he called her and told her he had been arrested, and they were not going to let him go. **He did not seem to understand what had**

happened to him. Toni remembered that Carlos had called Margarita and Blas and asked them to pick him up that night, [the night of the Lopez murder] but they were old and did not want to go out at that time of night. It happened after that.

Toni did not attend the trial, but her sister Mary went every day. A couple of times, Mary took Belinda with her. Belinda did not remember much about the trial because she was “just a kid, looking around” [she was 13 or 14]. She only remembered the prosecutor was really mean.

Toni said there was a woman who attended the trial, and whom Toni thought might have dated Carlos before he got in trouble. Her name was Eliza Chavarria. Carlos apparently sent Eliza a snapshot of himself from prison. Toni showed it to me. On the front was written “To Eliza.” I asked Toni how she came to have the photo. She said maybe Eliza had a jealous husband and she did not want him to know about Carlos, so she gave the photo to Toni. **[JSL: We need to get a copy of this photo if we can. Suze talked to Eliza but she denied having visited the trial, saying she had gone over to the courthouse only once to pick someone up.]**

Belinda said there was a man named Roland PeZa (no relation to Toni’s husband Joe) who lived on Niagra Street and had been in prison with Carlos. Belinda saw him recently, and thought he had gotten released some time ago.

I asked about Blas Avalos, Toni and Carlos’s stepfather. Toni did not know where he was living now. He is in very bad shape. He has organic brain syndrome from alcoholism. Toni said Blas was a good provider, but he drank too much. The last time she saw him, he could not remember what he had just eaten, or that he had just eaten. His mind is gone. Neither Toni nor Belinda knew who was taking care of Blas.

Toni told me about the phone call from Carlos the night of his execution. Manuel was not at her house that night, so Carlos could not have spoken to him during that phone call. **Carlos told Toni he loved her. At this point, tears welled up in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. It was a very painful and sad moment.**

Toni had gotten her box of pictures out to try and find more pictures of Carlos. While we were talking, the little girls were either climbing the curtains or trying to get into the picture box. I suggested that Toni take some time when she could be alone, to go through the pictures, and I would come back. She agreed.

On July 22, I returned to Toni's house and picked up four pictures. I took them to Kinko's, made prints and scanned them onto a CD. I returned to Toni's house and we talked some more. She did not recall anything more than she had already told me, but she would call me if anything occurred to her. I told her I was on my way to see her sister Mary in Austin. She asked me to tell Mary hi and that she loved her.