

Viva Zapata

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Part of *Viva Zapata* was filmed in Roma, Texas, about 85 miles south of Laredo and about 14 miles from Rio Grande City, where we lived at the time. It was the summer of 1950 and it was really exciting to have Hollywood come to within 14 miles of where I lived.

Especially with big name stars like Marlon Brando, Jean Peters and Anthony Quinn. What was even more exciting to me was that they were hiring extras and paying \$10.00 a day for the smallest part. More than just the money (which was nice) I wanted to be in a movie. I was 10 at the time and this was a big deal to me.

So on the first day of production, my cousin and I went to Roma to see if could be hired as extras. I was rejected because I didn't look Mexican like Marlon Brando or Jean Peters, I guess. (I have green eyes and fair skin.) At the time I was quite disappointed, but actually, it turned out better for me. Extras were corralled in a restricted area to be available when needed. They spent a lot of time just waiting. Since I wasn't hired, I was free to roam around as the production was being made. A lot of the scenes were filmed outside so that summer I saw a lot of scenes being filmed. There quite a few scenes that did not make it to the final cut.

During one of the breaks, I came across Anthony Quinn. He was seating on the floor by the open side door of a utility van. The van was parked in the shade of a large ebony tree. It early in the afternoon in July. It was hot, in fact, if you looked on the street at a distance, you could see the background wavering as the heat rose off the ground. He was in costume

which was black and looked heavy and had two ammo belts crisscrossing his chest. He looked hot. I got within 10 feet of him. I said "Hi." He looked up and said "Hi." There was no one else around, I could have easily walked up to him, but he looked so mean, I left him alone.

Quite a few of the people from Rio got to be extra. One of the got a major part, for extras, you get to see her face in the movie and thus became our local celebrity. If you see the movie, which I highly recommend, the woman who is killed as she reaches out to light the gunpowder fuse with a torch is Tonina Saenz. She later became a very popular teacher in Rio. She passed away a few years ago. The movie presents a romanticized story of the revolution and Emiliano Zapata, but it is still very good and it is my favorite movie not because of historical accuracy, but because I saw it being filmed.

By the way, Emiliano Zapata was not illiterate nor was he a peasant. He had limited education, but he could read and write and a landowner. Not rich, but not a peasant.